



The proposal promises to transform a run-down section of the city and comes as a marked shift from the walled-off corporate tech campuses that have dominated the South Bay for decades.

"It's not your grandfather's tilt-up suburban Silicon Valley office building," said Mayor Sam Liccardo.

Google chose this part of San Jose in large part because of Diridon Station, which in the coming years is set to become one of the largest transit hubs on the west coast — with BART, Caltrain, bus service and perhaps even high-speed rail all servicing the terminal.

But in Google's vision, riders will emerge from the station not into the current drab expanse of flat parking lots but into a bustling plaza lined with new office buildings anchored by cafes and shops on the ground floor to draw people in. While the company has not yet released renderings of the project, the images released Thursday provide the clearest picture yet of what Google is imagining.

Across from the southwest corner of the SAP Center, Google wants to create some housing — an apparent nod to advocates who called for homes to be located near the station. Northwest of the Shark Tank, Google has plans for a hotel. That, in part, is meant to counter a major conversion of housing in the area into short-term rentals through something like Airbnb.

Alexa Arena, Google's director of real estate development, likened Google's vision to the company's modern, pedestrian-friendly King's Cross project in central London, adjacent to the famed St. Pancras train station that whisks riders across the English Channel to Paris and beyond. Both Google workers and San Jose residents alike, she said, want to emerge from the station directly into a vibrant city. And, she insisted, Google wants to build a space that retains a diverse, unique San Jose feel.

To the north, the company wants to preserve some industrial character, with space for artists to be creative. To the south, Google's design focuses more on local retail and connecting with nature — creating and updating pathways near Los Gatos Creek. Housing and office space would be incorporated on both sides.

The space shouldn't have "any hard edges," Arena told this news organization, noting that while San Jose recently voted to allow [much taller buildings](#) near Diridon Station, Google doesn't plan to build high in the sky everywhere. In some spots, Arena said, shorter structures might be more appealing than towers — near residential neighborhoods with single-family homes, for instance.

"They have designed a district that meets their office needs but that is going to feel like an extension of the downtown," said Kim Welsh, the city's director of economic development, "and like a very high-quality, regular urban area, and I think that must be a first."

Overall, the company plans to create an estimated 6.5 million square feet of office space and 3,000 to 5,000 homes, well beyond what the city had anticipated for the area. Google also wants to set aside 500,000 square feet for retail, restaurants, culture, arts, education and other uses to help create an active place that would attract people at night and on weekends.

"San Jose has a serious housing crisis and also a serious jobs deficit," Welsh said, "so I'm really excited about Google taking significant steps to address both of those twin challenges."

The proposal also would create 15 acres of parks, plazas and green spaces — in many cases as ways to link parts of the transit village to the rest of the downtown as well as to nearby Los Gatos Creek and the Guadalupe River.

Google anticipates it could employ 20,000 to 25,000 people within the transit-oriented neighborhood.

"Here is an opportunity to be part of a city," said Ricardo Benavidez, manager of community development with Google.

While the company is still in what San Jose's transportation director, John Ristow, dubbed the "cartoon" phase, it plans to work with Heatherwick Studio, the British company Google turned to for its King's Cross space and its tent-like Mountain View headquarters.

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To head off lengthy legal battles, Google will ask the governor's office to work through AB 900, a 2011 measure that sends California Environmental Quality Act challenges directly to appellate courts to be resolved in nine months. Such projects must be at least \$100 million, pay construction workers prevailing wages and not make greenhouse gases worse. If Google is granted AB 900 permission, it will be a first for both the company and San Jose — and good news for Liccardo's legacy.

Even before construction — which could stretch for more than a decade — begins, Google wants to convert the former Orchard Supply Hardware site near Highway 280 into job training space, where unions and others could help San Jose residents learn construction techniques and other skills to take advantage of job opportunities offered by the Google project.

"We need to start on job readiness today," Arena said.

Perhaps the most difficult piece of the project to work through is also what makes it so appealing for Google: transportation.

To build the modern train station the city and tech giant envision, Google will need to work not only with San Jose but also with BART, the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority, Caltrain and other bureaucratic entities.

And as Google builds, they will want to close some streets to public traffic and extend others, a process that will involve working with the city's transportation department on everything from the dimensions of roadways and bikeways to where shuttles can drop off employees.

"We're just dying for more details," said Ristow.

Google plans to put parking in the area underground and focus on people, not cars, Arena said. But part of Ristow's task will be making sure that the Sharks have enough parking for fans, especially during the construction process.

If everything goes according to the [current plan](#), Google will get feedback from San Jose residents on the initial framework, refine the plans and file an application with the city in October. That will kick-start a formal review process, and then the City Council will take a final vote in fall 2020. The first buildings could open sometime around 2024.

Protesters interrupted the proceedings for a few minutes but soon left the City Council chambers, the site of the meeting, under the watchful eye of some police officers.

"We have an incredible opportunity here," Arena said during her presentation Thursday night. "We can do something really different here."



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How would the size of Google's planned San Jose transit village compare with other well-known sites in the Bay Area and U.S.? Click on to take a look. (Map images from Google Earth)



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The development must be more than yet another suburban office complex in Silicon Valley, said Laura Cressimano, co-founder and principal executive with Sitalah Urban Studio, the

said Laura Crescimano, co-founder and principal executive with Skidell Urban Studio, the primary designer of Google's transit-oriented community.

"This is not going to be an office park," Crescimano said during the Google village presentation. "No one wants this to just be an office park."

Some real estate executives embraced the first look at Google's transit village plans.

"This is a great first step into the Google process," said Mark Ritchie, president of Ritchie Commercial, a real estate firm. "We all need to keep in perspective the amount of economic benefit their presence will be in the relatively unused portion of downtown San Jose."

Bob Staedler, principal executive with Silicon Valley Synergy, a land-use and planning consultancy, also liked the initial details of the Google proposal.

"Google comes out of the blocks in a very strong fashion, showing their serious desire to develop this area thoughtfully," Staedler said.

The proposal suggests the tech titan has crafted a long-range vision for the west side of San Jose's urban core, downtown observers believe.

"Google's San Jose plan demonstrates their commitment to helping create a future city where open spaces, diversity, mixed uses, and transportation all work together," said Scott Knies, executive director of the San Jose Downtown Association.

Within the 240-acre Diridon Station planning area, Google is eyeing development on roughly 60 acres, company representatives estimated as part of the presentation Thursday night.

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"None of this is going to be easy," Mayor Liccardo said. "All of this is going to require a lot of coordination and collaboration, and fortunately we have people at the table who rolled up their sleeves ready to collaborate."

Still, Liccardo, who terms out in 2022, is confident that a vibrant transit village with Google as a key anchor will become a reality.

"I won't be cutting the ribbon," said the mayor, before referencing a famous Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. speech, "but even if I can't enter the promised land, the view from the mountain top is extraordinarily promising for San Jose and its future."

*Have questions about the Google San Jose project? Send them our way at [googlesj@bayareanewsgroup.com](mailto:googlesj@bayareanewsgroup.com)*

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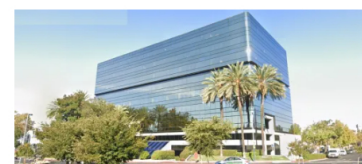
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