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P14-0924/PUD-106, John Gutknecht for Habitec Architecture

Work Session to review and receive comments on applications for: (1) an amendment to the Stoneridge Drive Specific Plan Amendment/ Staples Ranch (P14-0924) to allow vehicular ingress to the subject site from El Charro Road; and (2) PUD Development Plan (PUD-106) for construction of an automobile dealership consisting of an approximately 31,792-square-foot building with a 2,175-square-foot service canopy and 1,250-square-foot car wash, and related site improvements on the Auto Mall site at Staples Ranch. Zoning for the property is PUD-C (Planned Unit Development – Commercial) District.

Shweta Bonn presented the staff report and described the scope, layout, and key elements of the proposal.

THE PUBLIC HEARING WAS OPENED.

John Gutknecht, Habitec Architecture, Applicant, stated that staff did a good job of explaining the project in its staff report. He indicated that he did not plan to say anything and was present to listen to what the Commission had to say as far as suggestions and things they are doing well with the project and things they can improve on.

David Preiss, representing Vulcan Materials Company (Vulcan), referred to Ms. Bonn's statement that Vulcan had contacted the City when it learned of this proposal. He indicated that he had no issue with the auto dealership but wanted to provide some background about the Pre-Development and Cooperation Agreement which was entered into by the Cities of Pleasanton and Livermore, the Alameda County Surplus Property Authority, and Vulcan Materials Company in 2007 after years of negotiation. He stated that Vulcan owns El Charro Road as its private access road to reach its mining operations on Stanley Boulevard, some owned by Vulcan and others essentially leased through Pleasanton Gravel and the Jamieson Company. He noted that the Agreement was a very successful effort to open up these entire quadrants for development by reaching an accord as to how consumer and regular traffic could be mixed with the heavy truck traffic that accesses the quarry. He further noted that the Agreement included, in part, very specific details on how El Charro Road and the new improvements to Stoneridge Drive and on the Livermore side would be designed and constructed with no additional access taken on or off of El Charro Road other than the intersections, with one exception that dealt with the southern end of this property in the event there was a commercial portion much farther south on El Charro Road. He added that the Agreement also discussed one emergency vehicle access (EVA).

Mr. Preiss stated that basically, he would like to make sure that the Commission understands that under the Agreement, additional access off of El Charro Road requires not only the consent of all the parties to the Agreement but also an amendment to the Agreement. He pointed out that is not about putting one party's interests over the other but for safety concerns.

Mr. Preiss stated that Vulcan had some concerns regarding exactly why this additional access is being requested, what the need for it is, and why the City of Pleasanton would go

to an amendment of its Specific Plan even before this had been worked out among all the parties to the Pre-Development and Cooperation Agreement. He indicated that this is why Vulcan has requested an opportunity to sit down with staff and the applicant to really understand what is being proposed here in terms of design and safety and making sure it works, and to have full information and disclosure prior to the City of Pleasanton taking any action on the proposal.

Mr. Preiss thanked staff for its response to his email. He indicated that he has worked with a lot of Pleasanton staff over the years and noted that Pleasanton has an excellent staff. He added that he would be glad to answer any questions and that Vulcan is looking forward to responding to this proposal in a proper manner.

THE PUBLIC HEARING WAS CLOSED.

Commissioner Piper stated that she drove down El Charro Road today and noted that it is a short distance between the freeway off-ramp and the right turn into the Auto Mall from Stoneridge Drive. She indicated that there must have been some pretty compelling reasons why it was not approved the first time around and requested some background on that. She added that it seems like it made a whole lot of sense to have an access there so the dealership can be accessed more quickly.

Mr. Dolan stated that the applicants talked to staff about the project and expressed an interest in having an access there, and staff's first reaction was that, first, the Specific Plan did not allow it; and second, there is a private agreement that was put into place, as accurately described by Mr. Preiss. Mr. Dolan continued that the applicants then inquired what they would have to do if they wanted that access, and staff replied that they would have to get a Specific Plan Amendment and an amendment to the Pre-Development and Cooperation Agreement; and the applicants included this in the application they submitted.

Mr. Dolan stated that the City cannot approve this proposal without a Specific Plan Amendment and without the approval of all parties to the Agreement. He added that staff is not necessarily in favor of the additional access, and Mike Tassano, City Traffic Engineer, actually expressed some concerns about it, particularly as originally proposed. He requested Mr. Tassano to explain his concerns about safety and how the access is designed to at least minimize safety concerns.

Mike Tassano added a third reason that the General Plan discourages arterials from having new driveways. He stated that when the applicants brought this request forward, his initial reaction was a straight-forward "No." He indicated that it just does not make sense because this section of El Charro Road is very short from the freeway to the free-flowing right-turn lane that goes all the way up to the signal onto Stoneridge Drive. He noted that the applicants were pretty adamant that the access would help their business to have some sort of quick access there, and Mr. Tassano replied that the City would contemplate an "in-only" access as long as there was a design that moved the right-turn vehicles out of the southbound right-turn lane, giving them another additional pocket. He stated that he did not want to limit the applicants' business plan, and the "in" is what they are looking for; they

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want to get people in there and buy a car, and it is probably fine with them if it takes longer for the customers to get out. He added that the design still looks strange and is not one that he has really seen before; however, there are several locations where vehicles come off the freeway and make a right turn into a property.

Mr. Tassano stated that one of the things he wanted to stay away from was a "right-turn out." He indicated that a lot of auto dealerships most likely have a regional draw, so if the customers want to leave the property to get back to the freeway, what they would do is go across all those lanes to get into that triple left-turn lane, which is illegal but would probably still be done. He noted that the City does have a traffic study moving forward to see how that changes some of the circulation and what some of the safety elements are. He added that staff has asked the consultant to do additional study on a right-turn lane with another right-turn pocket, and he will look at other locations where this may have worked well.

Mr. Dolan added that the access is not necessarily only for the benefit of the current applicants. He noted that there are two other sites in the area that are not yet taken, and the applicant will be initially developing five acres in the back that would make the future acquisition and development of those other two locations more attractive to a future dealership or some other use that might want similar access. He stated that staff will figure out, following the traffic study, what its ultimate recommendation will be, but in the meantime, this is part of the application, and it cannot be ignored.

THE PUBLIC HEARING WAS REOPENED.

Massoud Modjtchedi, ASE Construction Management, in response to Commissioner Piper's earlier question why the access was not originally approved, stated that, to the best of his knowledge, the previous applicants had never asked for access from El Charro Road. He indicated that staff should know that better than he would.

Commissioner Piper clarified that she was not implying that it was rejected but was asking why it was not originally planned for.

Mr. Modjtchedi stated that nobody had requested that before and that this is the first time that request was made. He noted that they were looking at the 16-acre lot with having only one access from a side street, so for obvious reasons, it was very important in terms of marketing to have that access from El Charro Road. He continued that with that being said, they made sure that the public safety is well thought-out, and that is the reason why they are hiring this consultant to make sure that they can take care of any issues as soon as possible. He emphasized that this is for ingress only; there are no exits. He added that they are dedicating some of their land to make the exit line wider so there is no through-traffic that would be obstructed by slowing down the cars at that intersection.

THE PUBLIC HEARING WAS CLOSED.

Commissioner Balch referred to the site plan and noted that the proposed ingress off of El Charro Road would bisect Lot 3. He inquired if the parking lot to the south of Lot 3, on

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the corner of Stoneridge Drive and El Charro Road, would be part of the Lot 3 property and not of Lot 2.

Ms. Bonn replied that the applicant can correct her if she is mistaken, but she believes it is intended for Lot 3 in the future.

Commissioner Balch inquired if there is any way to have an ingress into the property off of Stoneridge Drive approximately where the property line between Lot 2 and Lot 3 is.

Mr. Dolan replied that the applicant asked for that too. He referred the question to Mr. Tassano.

Mr. Tassano confirmed that the applicants did ask for that ingress as well and that it was part of his concession to give them at least one, which he thought is probably not a good place either but would be the lesser of the two evils. He explained that upon exiting the freeway heading towards Pleasanton, vehicles would make a southbound right turn onto El Charro Road and start to accelerate and change lanes. He pointed out that those who do not want to go to the Auto Mall would then be looking over their left shoulders for bikes and other vehicles and would not necessarily be looking for some other vehicle in front of them heading toward the Auto Mall to slow down to make a right turn into a driveway right before the actual signal. He added that someone coming from Livermore would be in the same position with vehicles driving across right after they pass the island to get in and turn right into the driveway off of El Charro Road as opposed to going right up to the signal where everyone expects the movements to be. He indicated that he was more concerned with this ingress off of El Charro Road, and there was no amount of convincing for him on that one.

Commissioner Balch asked Mr. Tassano if, in his opinion, the ingress from Stoneridge Drive referred to as the lesser of two evils could be designed as a safe ingress into the property.

Mr. Tassano replied that he thinks it is possible. He explained that the design speeds are lower there, and there is a traffic signal. He continued that a lot of vehicles coming off of the freeway would be traveling at normal speeds and getting into that right-turn lane; if they just want to go to Pleasanton, it should not cause so much of an issue if the car in front of them slows down and moves over to the additional right-turn lane that would clearly be an Auto Mall entrance.

Commissioner Balch stated that he does not recall seeing on the bike/pedestrian plan that this is an area that has a trail connection point to Dublin, as Stoneridge Drive has to Livermore.

Mr. Tassano replied that one of the difficulties with any overcrossing is that Caltrans has some restriction on what it will and will not allow. He noted that, for example, Pleasanton tried to design a bike lane going northbound up over El Charro Road; however, because Caltrans has a right-turn lane that gets onto the freeway and another one that has an option

to turn right, a vehicle in the far right-turn lane can get on the freeway, but a vehicle on the second lane in can either go right or straight through. He added that Caltrans prohibits any bicycle markings with that type of design.

Mr. Tassano continued that the southbound direction has its own kind of constraints: coming over the freeway, there is a right-turn trap where that bicyclist will be, so there is nothing identified there for a bike/pedestrian. He noted that tackling those difficult intersections or interchanges is one of those things that the bike/pedestrian master plan will have to address.

Commissioner Balch then referred to the East Pleasanton Specific Plan process and noted that there is some type of plan being proposed there, with additional vehicular traffic theoretically on El Charro Road and only one lane currently, a dedicated southbound lane.

Mr. Tassano said that was correct.

Commissioner Balch asked Mr. Tassano if, in his opinion, this would become a two-lane southbound through intersection and if there is enough room for that even with this ingress into Lot 3.

Mr. Tassano said yes. He stated that the intersection is fully constructed and there are some striped-out areas which can be ground out into two southbound through lanes and a right-turn trap lane. He added that where there is not enough room for the additional right-turn pocket off of the freeway, and the applicants have indicated that they are donating that extra space to the City to get out of the actual southbound right-turn lane.

Mr. Dolan reminded the Commission that even if the City decides it is a good idea, there is still the private agreement plus other people to convince that it is a good idea.

Noting that the private agreement dealt originally with truck safety, Acting Chair Allen asked Mr. Tassano if he knew roughly how many trucks come through this area per hour.

Mr. Tassano replied that he does not have that off the top of his head but that it is several hundred. He indicated that there are people from the gravel sites in the audience, and they could probably tell. He stated that the problem he has with counting them with hoses is that the trucks are a lot stronger than the hoses. He added that they now have cameras up there counting vehicles, but his staff has not yet discriminated between trucks and cars.

Commissioner Piper noted that the staff report states on page 10 that the service areas would face Stoneridge Drive and would be visible until the landscaping to the south of the building matures; and on page 7 that the conceptual landscaping plans shows views of the landscaping at initial planting and with ten years of growth. She inquired if these two statements are related and that it would take ten years for the landscaping to mature.

Ms. Bonn replied that these are two distinct things. She explained that the renderings show what the planting would look like immediately after planting and then after ten years of

growth. She displayed the slide showing the view from the freeway off-ramp of the rollup doors on the south façade facing Stoneridge Drive and pointed out that the area behind those rollup doors would be visible from Stoneridge Drive until the landscaping proposed along the southern boundary of that five-acre lot matures or until a future building to the south is constructed.

Commissioner Piper inquired how long it would take for those trees to mature so the roll-up doors would not be visible.

Ms. Bonn replied that 24-inch box trees are proposed. She stated that she does not remember the tree species but that the landscape architect who is present tonight may be able to give a more precise answer.

Mr. Dolan stated that a new dealership or some other use will ultimately come in in front of the proposed building and will block it, but in the interim, at least some of the trees will have to be selected for their fast-growing capability.

The Commission then proceeded to discuss the Work Session topics.

A. Are the on-site circulation, parking layout, and positioning of the building acceptable?

Commissioner Balch inquired if the on-site circulation will include the entire 16 acres and not just the applicants' Lot 1.

Mr. Dolan said yes. He explained that the first one will be built exactly as proposed, but staff wants to make sure that the City is approving a site plan for Lot 1 that would work with the development of the rest of the site. He noted that the applicants designed the entire area with the anticipation of future users, and they have come up with a plan that staff agrees works for all three users. He added that when some individual user comes forward and has its own sort of corporate idea of which way it wants to face and things like that, the City might end up having to amend the more conceptual portion to accommodate a specific user.

Commissioner Balch stated that in terms of specifically Lot 1 and the building being proposed, his primary comment about the circulation is he thinks it is generally good; the one comment he has is in looking at one of the plans of the path of travel where a vehicle would go on a 90-degree right turn and then an immediate 90-degree left turn to get into the dealership. He expressed concern that it would mean rotating the steering wheel both ways quite far right at the entry. He indicated that he understood it is probably designed to slow vehicles down and give them direction as to where to go, but he considers that a pretty significant direction change. He added that the applicants might find that they do not like it after they build it, and it could be addressed by lopping off that corner.

Commissioner Balch stated that in terms of the building placement and the rest of the circulation, the design looks like a car dealership so it makes sense and he has no

problems with it. He noted that it has pretty good ingress and egress and that he is comfortable with that. With respect to Lot 2 and Lot 3, he indicated that he is a little concerned that the parking lot at the corner of Stoneridge Drive and El Charro Road is given to Lot 3, as people will be parking at Lot 3 and then walking to see cars across the primary ingress off of El Charro Road. He stated that it might be something to be looked at to make sure it is safe or to mitigate.

Regarding Lot 2, Commissioner Balch stated that he thinks it is well placed on the corner and that the applicants have done a fair job looking at that. He concluded that looking at all three, he thinks the difficulty would be getting to Lot 3 from the CarMax shared line. He noted that looking at the southern portion of Lot 1 which is also the northern portion of Lot 2, going to Lot 3 seems tight if that is going to become the primary entry for Lot 3 if there were no ingress from El Charro Road.

Commissioner Piper stated that it looked good and that she has no additional comments as she has a very limited knowledge of car dealerships.

Acting Chair Allen stated that it looked good and that Commissioner Balch raised some good questions. She agreed that people who go to an auto lot generally park and then walk to all the places. She asked what the pedestrian route is and if there is some kind of overlay circulation for pedestrians, and what that flow would look like in a way that would be safe.

Commissioner Balch commented that the applicants have done a good job between Lot 1 and Lot 2, where the parking for Lot 1 is designed so people specifically go to the Lot 1 dealer and not to another dealer; however, getting to Lot 3 through the CarMax entry off of Stoneridge Drive is a concern or something that needs to be looked at.

B. Does the Planning Commission support the Specific Plan Amendment to allow vehicular ingress from El Charro Road, subject to agreement by parties of the Pre-Development and Cooperation Agreement?

Commissioner Piper stated that she has mostly shared her thoughts on this and that it sounds like making those decisions are a bit far anyway. She indicated that she is very curious as to see how that traffic study goes.

Commissioner Balch asked Commissioner Piper if she would support the applicants' request for the ingress if they wanted it.

Commissioner Piper noted that the applicants want it.

Acting Chair Allen asked Commissioner Piper if she would support it if the parties agreed to it.

Commissioner Piper replied that she certainly would support it if everyone agreed and the traffic study stated it was safe. She stated that it makes sense why the applicants would

want that as it would be a lot to turn and then turn again to get into their car dealership. She pointed out that the whole idea of having a dealership right on the freeway is so people who drive by can get off the freeway and right into it; she just wants to ensure the safety of other vehicles.

Acting Chair Allen inquired where the exit would be.

Commissioner Balch stated that after hearing Mr. Tassano about how it could be designed safely, he is tentatively fine with it coming to fruition. He indicated that he also drove it and remembers it being a short distance between getting off the freeway and already being at Stoneridge Drive. He added that the other thing that threw him off a little bit when he drove it was that there was a lot of trucks traveling it at the time and a lot of people getting over to those left-turn lanes to get into the outlets. He noted that it is a little busier for all of this to come together, so he tentatively could see going forward with it. He indicated that he fully understands the desire for it, but it has to be safe to get there.

Acting Chair Allen stated that she agrees it makes sense from the applicants' perspective, and the key is to have a safe design that Mr. Tassano approves of and that all parties to the agreement support. She indicated that if all that happened, she would be in support of it unless a surprise came up somewhere else.

Commissioner Balch stated that Mr. Preiss' concern is valid. He agreed that Vulcan travels that road quite extensively, so it needs to not be hindered and to have safe access. He noted that he is sure Mr. Tassano would address that.

C. Are the building design, colors and materials, and height acceptable?

Commissioner Balch stated that he knows branding plays a big factor in the color, design, and materials and that he is quite fine with these in general and finds them pretty standard compared to similar dealerships. He added that his only comment, and that is because he has been blinded by it before, is that he noticed this aluminum which is only on the northern, eastern, and western facades of the building, and with that not being on the southern side is good as it will not be blinding people walking towards the building with the sunlight. In terms of the height, he stated that staff has probably worked through what they find is acceptable and that he has no further comments on that.

Commissioner Piper stated that the design looks very nice, and the building itself looks sharp and clean. She indicated that she is happy to have this in Pleasanton and added that she is good with it as long as they do not put a gorilla on top of the building.

Acting Chair Allen stated that the building looked clean and like a professional car dealership, and the only area she would like to see softened a little bit is on the Stoneridge Drive side. She noted no one knows how long it will take to have another building there, and the south side looked very, very stark with all the service bays. She added that Stoneridge Drive is traveled a lot by both cars and bicyclists, so she would like to see more

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trees and landscaping or something that makes the building look more interesting versus so institutional on that side.

Acting Chair Allen then stated that given the current water situation, she would like to see, as this building is designed, a water plan that will use recyclable water as much as possible.

Ms. Bonn stated that the landscaping is being designed with recycled water in mind. She added that the car wash would be required to re-circulate the water that it uses and also be designed to accept recycled water at the time the City's recycled water permit can accept recycled water specifically for car washes.

Commissioner Balch noted that neighbor to the west is on recycled water, and the City of Livermore is providing recycled water. He inquired if the applicants are starting with potable water and then switch to recycled water mid-way.

Mr. Dolan said no; the applicant will be using all recycled water.

Commissioner Balch inquired if water usage will be standard recycled irrigation and potable domestic.

Mr. Dolan replied that was correct.

Acting Chair Allen stated that she is not as knowledgeable as Commissioner Balch on recycled water and inquired whether or not water used for spraying down the asphalt and things like that is recyclable.

Mr. Dolan replied that the hope is that they are not spraying down the asphalt in this day and age, but obviously there will be potable water inside the building to drink, and then the landscaping will be recyclable. He added that all commercial-type car washes now have to recycle their own water.

Commissioner Balch noted that landscaping designs have to be Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance-compliant and inquired if that applies to recycled water as well as potable water.

Mr. Dolan replied that he does not know the answer to that question and will have to look into it. He noted that it is a State law and has to be done, but he is not certain if there is something different for recycled water. He added that this just further limits the landscape species to be used to meet the State requirements because not all species love recycled water.

Acting Chair Allen asked the Commissioners if they have any additional comments.

Commissioner Piper stated she had none.

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Commissioner Balch stated that he appreciated the applicants doing a nice job designing their project and thanked them for working with City staff well. He then thanked staff for their hard work on a nice addition to Pleasanton.

No action was taken.