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CITY OF SAUSALITO

June 9, 2014

Sausalito Planning Commission
420 Litho Street
Sausalito, CA 94965

Dear Chair Cox and Commissioners:

Below is a summary of my comments at the Planning Commission meeting of May 28, 2014 regarding the Robert L. Harrison Transportation Planning letter dated May 5, 2014 for the proposed Valhalla condominium project, as well as comments I would have made had I more time.

While no one doubts that Mr. Harrison is a skilled traffic analyst, his letter does not fully address all of the specific issues pertinent to this project. For example, the second paragraph of Mr. Harrison's letter states:

“While the turnout is intended to enhance transit operations, it may actually slow service because the bus driver, after serving passengers, has to wait for a gap in traffic before returning to the through traffic lane. There is no need to wait if the bus stops in the through lane.”

This is true but meaningless in this context. This requested bus turnout is not for the purpose of “enhanc[ing] transit operations,” it is intended to enhance Sausalito automobile and bicycle safety and traffic flow on Second Street. Our concern as Sausalito residents is to keep traffic flowing smoothly on Second Street, not how to optimize bus transit operations. That is the point of requiring of the developer a northbound bus turnout – one vehicle, the bus, moves out of the traffic lane to load and unload passengers while all the other northbound traffic (auto and bicycle) continues to flow unobstructed and without increased danger. That's all traffic – local resident traffic, tourist auto traffic, tourist bus traffic, tourist bicycle traffic, and hyper-hormonal spandex warrior bicycle traffic. For a traffic analyst to ignore this major safety issue or to say that it is better to restrict or stop all traffic flow rather than one vehicle is an embarrassment, particularly given the regular unlawful passing of the stopped buses by both automobiles and bicycles.

Bus Stop Turnout Guidelines. Under “Bus Stop Turnout Guidelines,” [“Turnout Guidelines”] Mr. Harrison states that “...turnouts are generally recommended for ... high volume streets...” and that signalized intersections are preferable to allow the bus to reenter traffic. Mr. Harrison's subsequent analysis appears to be inaccurate and could mislead the Planning Commission. First, Mr. Harrison claims that Second Street is not a high volume street, all the while stating that there are 744 vehicles per hour. And second, there is no traffic signal at Second and Main. But if you don't have the ability to install a turnout in a “signalized intersection”, you work with what exists, i.e., the non-signalized intersection fronting the Valhalla property.

Turnout Guidelines are developed by transit companies and used to plan and develop their routes and schedules. They are guidelines for transit companies, not cities or city public works departments with a pressing need to facilitate traffic movement on a highly traveled street. They are inapplicable to city development approvals.

Mr. Harrison's letter states that a traffic count was done in May 2012. May is not a peak traffic month in Sausalito, and further this survey is two years old and the numbers have been increasing

exponentially each year for the past five years. The survey showed “366 vehicles¹” per hour midday, which is 146% higher than Golden Gate Transit’s turnout guideline. But Mr. Harrison’s letter ignores the bicycle traffic which he later states was “378 bicycles” per hour midday. Combined, this yields $366+378=744$ vehicles, or 297.6% of the trigger number for a bus turnout. Bicycles have all of the duties and responsibilities of vehicles, and they create all of the dangers of motorized vehicles when they are moving at almost 30 mph.

Mr. Harrison goes on to say that he *assumes* “an average 30 second dwell time² for the bus”, but he doesn’t state how or where he got that number. He doesn’t refer to the extra time required to load or unload bicycles from the bus, nor wheelchairs³. He then spins that unrealistically low dwell time and goes on to try to build a case claiming minimal delay and inconvenience for vehicles on Second Street. He discusses danger not at all. As anyone who spends any time on Second Street can say, Second Street (and Alexander and South Streets) is an accident waiting to happen, particularly at the Main Street intersection when the northbound bus stops in the middle of the road. But he finally does say in the last paragraph of the Turnout Guidelines section that “The provision of a bus turnout would eliminate most of the existing nominal delay” However, it would appear to most observers that it would eliminate virtually *all* delay, and that the delay is typically not *nominal*, and that it would increase safety significantly.

When bicycles have to be loaded or unloaded or ADA passengers assisted on the bus the “dwell time” is greater than 40 seconds and thus falls within the scope of the transit agency Turnout Guidelines for a turnout as shown in the chart on page two of Mr. Harrison’s letter under Criteria – Traffic Speed.

Impact on Sight Distance. Although Mr. Harrison claims that Main Street “sight distance” to and from westbound vehicles on Main Street would be “degraded” by a bus turnout, the negative change would be minimal. In fact, when there is no bus present the sight distance would be increased significantly for a net positive change. Otherwise the turnout would not impact the intersection safety any more than the existing turnout on the southwest corner of eastbound Main Street does. Eastbound Main Street traffic there shows no greater danger or impediment due to the existing turnout.

Unstated in Mr. Harrison’s letter is the danger to pedestrians crossing at Main Street when the downhill high speed northbound spandex warriors veer into oncoming traffic to pass stopped cars and the bus. Bus passengers who have disembarked the bus and are trying to cross westbound onto Main Street and pedestrians crossing eastbound often do not look carefully to the south because they can see that the traffic northbound is stopped in front of them – except for the adrenalin fueled spandex bicycle riders and the automobiles whose drivers become understandably impatient and move out onto the wrong side of the road. In this area bicyclists are often trying to beat the speeds of other riders getting through Sausalito that are posted on the internet. This is the same intersection that has flag holders strapped to the signposts on the sidewalk to hold flags for pedestrians to carry so that they can safely cross Second Street at Main.

¹ Apparently does not include bicycles

² Undefined but essentially the time it takes for the bus to stop and restart after unloading and loading passengers

³ If he can count all of the vehicles and bicycles, he had a duty to note the exact dwell time

It is up to the local community to balance the movement of *all* vehicles, not just buses. Turnout Guidelines are written for the transit agencies, and primarily their operational efficiency. Included considerations are pedestrian and other vehicle safety, efficiency, and convenience. In particular, it is up to the Sausalito Planning Commission to protect the pedestrians, riders, and drivers that use Sausalito sidewalks and streets.

I have reviewed the Omnitrans (San Bernadino County) and the Riverside (Cal.) Transit Agency and the Chicago PACE Transit Agency Guidelines, in addition to the GGT Guidelines and what is clear is that the transit agencies are presuming a roadway with at least one travel lane in each direction and parking at each curb, thus allowing the buses to pull to the curb at bus stops, out of the traffic flow in the vacated parking lane.

Mr. Harrison states that the stop line on westbound Main Street would have to be moved 10 feet east and claims that a driver's available sight distance would be reduced by 50 feet to just 50 feet to the south and 150 feet to the north. But a westbound motorist on Main Street now has to cautiously edge out past the stop line into the crosswalk until his/her line of sight is sufficient to ensure a safe vehicle movement. As long as there is no vehicle in it, "...drivers on Main Street [pulling] forward across both the crosswalk and the bus turnout approach lane in order to achieve adequate sight distance..." would neither create nor be in any more danger than without the bus turnout being installed.

Mr. Harrison's last paragraph on the Impact on Traffic Delay is clear:

"The provision of a bus turnout would eliminate most of the existing nominal⁴ delay caused for either motorized or bicycle vehicles by a bus stopped in the northbound through traffic lane on 2nd Street." [emphasis added]

Impact on Bicycle Safety. Mr. Harrison states that "most bicyclists try to avoid conflicts with motor vehicles and currently stop...behind a bus stopped in the traffic lane," but he gives no support for this statement. My experience, living a block from that intersection and walking and driving it daily, is different – most bicyclists and many autos will try to go around a stopped bus. The spandex racers will pull into oncoming traffic, and the tourist bicyclists will gently and slowly try to scoot around the bus without going completely into the southbound lane of oncoming traffic on Second Street. Some autos if there is no oncoming traffic will cross the double yellow lines and pass the stopped bus. All of this is very dangerous given the blind corner ahead at Richardson Street, a short half block away.

If a bus turnout were required of the property developer, the automobiles and bicyclists would both pass together in the northbound traffic lane, bicycles grouped between the autos as they now do coming down Second Street all the time. Mr. Harrison's "specific conflict" – a bicyclist attempting to pass a bus attempting to pull out of the turnout – is no more likely than an automobile doing so. It is a bus company issue, not a Sausalito planning issue. It happens day after day up and down Bridgeway, and throughout Marin County and the State – including immediately across the street. It would no more arise if there were a bus turnout than it does now – when the bus begins to pull out the bicycles stop passing along with the autos. Or the bus stops.

⁴ Mr. Harrison's use of "nominal" to describe delay is only his subjective opinion. He didn't even measure dwell times.

S U M M A R Y

Clearly, a standard sized bus turnout with similar amenities to the one on the opposite corner should be provided by the developer of the Valhalla property, as was provided by the developer of 123 Second Street. The facilities would have to be ADA compliant.

It appears that the problem may be that Dr. Kashef overpaid for the property and he is now trying to make a profit based on what he paid, rather than the fair market value, what the property is currently worth. However, it is not the responsibility of the City of Sausalito and its residents to guaranty a speculative developer a profit by allowing that developer to over-develop the property by building too many units. During the course of the hearings for this property I spoke to another potential developer about the property and the project. That person was talking about only four units, the required parking for which could easily accommodate the bus pullout. If Dr. Kashef were to build fewer units there would be less need for owner parking and more space to include the bus turnout. It may well be that seven units and associated parking is too many units for the size of the parcel.

The fact that Dr. Kashef has not been able to get approval of a development project is the fault of Dr. Kashef and his development team, not the City. Their responsibility is to bring to the City a project plan that can be approved that meets City needs, standards, and requirements with the least number of variances and waivers of code requirements.

If the owner overpaid for the property, it is the same as if he bought a piece of property in the wrong location. The City has no obligation to approve an out of place or too large project application. If it were otherwise the City would have no need for a zoning code or boards of review: developers would simply come in, demonstrate the return on their investment that would satisfy them, get their permits, and then build whatever they needed to justify their property purchase price – whether that price or that property is appropriate or inappropriate.

Finally, when an applicant comes before the City requesting discretionary approvals (as opposed to submitting an application for a principally permitted use with no variances), the City has a right to and should on behalf of the residents of Sausalito require some reciprocity from that applicant in exchange for the approvals. It is important to remember that all of the neighboring residents – and in fact all of the residents of Sausalito – moved here with certain expectations of the City, not the least of which being that the City would not sell out to whichever developer overpaid for his property or created the best public relations campaign to get his development approved.

Respectfully,



Bob Mitchell