

IV. PUBLIC PROCESS

4.1 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PROCESS

The purpose of the public involvement process was to gain information and “buy-in” from the community. This promotes a well-informed design strategy that creates a mutual education process through which all parties become aware of the various complex elements of the project, including transportation, economics, program, urban design, and community needs.

Public outreach for the Pleasant Hill BART Charrette started prior to the January 16, 2001 kickoff meeting, and then it continued before and after the February 22-27 Charrette, and up to the April 9-10 follow up meetings. The goal of the outreach activities was to successfully involve as many people in the Charrette process as possible, reaching out to local organizations and individuals, as well as people who might not have participated in public events in the past. The basic philosophy was to try to promote awareness and understanding about the Charrette process by developing contacts and disseminating information. A key element of the approach was to continue to contact people throughout the process, using a variety of different means, to promote attendance throughout the course of the Charrette. The outreach component involved a combination of the following:

- Mailings: letters of invitation, background information, flyers, reminder postcards
- Phone calls: personal calls to key stakeholders, residents, and business contacts
- Faxes: fliers and announcements to key stakeholders, residents, and business contacts
- Emails: announcements and updates to key stakeholders, residents, business contacts; and Charrette event participants
- Handbills: posted at the Community Bulletin Board at the BART station and in local office buildings
- Signs: posted around the Pleasant Hill BART station
- Banners: Displayed at the Pleasant Hill BART station prior to the Charrette
- Newsletter announcements: BART newsletter, League of Women Voters, Walden Newsletter, and others
- Passenger Notices: meeting announcements available at



The Charrette included many community meetings of various sizes.



Experts challenged each other, generating new ideas.



Local residents generated and presented their own design concepts.



Small group presentations allowed the everyone to critique the work.



Large evening meetings allowed community members to give input.



Various aspects of the project were examined, from parking to architecture to trails and safety.

the fare gates of the Pleasant Hill BART station

- Cable TV announcements: meeting dates and times posted on local cable channels; later rebroadcasts of the Charrette meetings played on local cable channel
- Press releases: to local newspapers, TV and radio stations
- Website: invitations, announcements, meeting notes, comments received, sketches and site plans via the project website; a user-friendly domain name secured and used; there was also a response area on the website where people could request to be added to the Pleasant Hill BART mailing list

Accurate and comprehensive database creation and maintenance was another key aspect of the outreach component. Communities By Design used the County mailing list as a starting point, and contacted other key organizations for their mailing lists. In January (prior to any Charrette activities), these combined lists totaled approximately 1200 names. New names were added to the database throughout the Charrette process as people requested to be added through the website, or as participant lists were developed at the individual meetings. The Pleasant Hill BART Charrette database now contains approximately 1700 names.

Prior to the Charrette, Communities By Design conducted one-on-one briefings with key project participants and stakeholders, including: Jay Lutz of Supervisor Donna Gerber's office, Lynette Tanner-Busby of the Contra Costa Centre Association, and Kris Hunt of the Walden District Improvement Organization, to gather background information and obtain input for best ways to reach out and involve the community. Kristen Paulsen of Communities By Design also participated in several regular meetings of community groups, including the Pleasant Hill BART Steering Committee and the Countrywood Homeowners Association (at the request of Marjorie McWee) to promote the Charrette.

More than 522 individuals participated in one or more of the scheduled public meetings and Charrette events, or dropped in during the more than 80 hours of open door studio time. We believe that the actual number of participants was much higher, as not everyone signed in at the public meetings.

4.2 SUMMARY OF STAKEHOLDER ISSUES

The following is a summary of the citizen comments made throughout the extensive public involvement process from January 16th, 2001 to April 10th, 2001.

SCALE OF BUILDINGS

- The area around the BART station should provide a local sense of place, and it should not look like “Anywhere, USA.”
- The blocks should be small and walkable.
- Buildings should front on streets, not parking lots. The architecture should have variety, but also appear compatible and complementary.
- Create a village center or town square where residents could gather for events and belong to a community.
- Provide places to “meet your neighbors.”
- Buildings should be “human-scaled.”
- High-rise buildings should be avoided when possible.
- Towers should be clustered close to the station, with buildings stepping down toward the edges of the site.

PROGRAMMING

- The station area should contain mostly local serving uses and should not become a regional retail destination.
- Provide a mixture of uses (similar to downtown Walnut Creek) that would generate activities throughout the day and evening.
- Provide a community center or public space that could be used for community events.
- Possible public uses include: a concert hall, a community theater, a library, a post office, a new swim club/exercise facility, small science observatory, a fountain, a bowling alley, a playground (with a dog park), and a roller rink.
- Provide small retail shops such as coffee shops, book stores, bike shops, dry cleaners, florists: uses that would appeal to locals and not generate large quantities of additional traffic. Additional potential commercial uses include a grocery store, a bank (with ATM machines), restaurants, delis, bakeries, a day care center, and a clinic. Local serving, affordable office space.
- Provide a variety of housing including some affordable housing near the station, and senior facilities with housing and meeting space.
- Possible Business Conference Center.



Participants were encouraged to roll up their sleeves and draw their suggestions and ideas.



The design studio was almost a non-stop flurry of activity.



Ample time was allowed for communication between participants and the design consultants.



Many local residents became quite enthusiastic, returning for multiple meetings.



The Charrette process is about education, community input, and design brainstorming.



Small groups enabled everyone to give input.

TRAFFIC & PARKING

- Parking should be designed so as not to detract from the pedestrian environment.
- Address short-term parking during the construction phase of the project.
- Address the traffic on already congested streets in the area. Look holistically at the regional transportation system, in particular the traffic flow from Bancroft to the BART Station via Mayhew and Las Juntas.
- Encourage nonresidents to use the arterials to relieve congestion on local roads.
- Increase connectivity, too many dead end streets.
- Of particular concern was the impact of new development on Treat Boulevard, which many described as “very congested” and a “neighborhood divider.”
- The intersections at Treat Boulevard and Oak Road and at Treat Boulevard and I-680 are overloaded.
- It is impossible to merge left and avoid being forced onto I-680 when turning right from Oak Road onto Treat Boulevard. Connect Jones to Treat versus realign Jones south of Treat.
- Concern for pedestrian access and movement in the area.
- The interaction between pedestrians and traffic is currently very poor.
- The bus lanes are difficult to walk over, and Oak Road is too wide for pedestrians.
- Consider pedestrian connections to the surrounding neighborhoods, to make the walk into the station safe, interesting and convenient.

SAFETY

- Provide activity and “eyes on the street” so that the area around the station will be safe and have low crime rates. The station is currently a nighttime wasteland.
- Accommodate all modes of transportation safely, including bicycling and walking.
- Concern that the development could increase crime by bringing in people from other areas, including thieves.

ALTERNATIVES TO THE CAR

- Alternatives to the automobile should be encouraged and emphasized on site; this includes increased educational efforts, incentives for public transit use, more frequent late night bus service, airport shuttles, a light rail system as a complement to

BART, better bike/pedestrian connections to the site, and improved bike facilities.

- Promote increased use of the current public transit system to alleviate the parking demand.
- Create off-site parking structures (conversions of the old Montgomery-Wards shopping center and the old Co-op building, for example) that would provide free parking for BART riders.
- Connect to the station via free shuttle buses. This program would be in conjunction with charging patrons for parking on-site, thus rewarding those who were willing to take the shuttle bus. Many supported the idea of charging for on-site parking at the station as a way to encourage more BART patrons to arrive by bus or via carpool.
- Make the connections to the station walkable and interesting, encouraging pedestrian activity as much as possible.
- Create a clear, safe route through the area connecting nearby housing, retail, and office uses with the station and parking garages.
- Recommended physical upgrades: softer trails (not concrete), better lighting and light color (white not yellow), handicapped accessible sidewalks and pedestrian bridges, intersection improvements on Treat Boulevard and other dangerous crossing areas, bridge or tunnel access across the 1-680 Freeway toward North Main and across Treat at Jones and Oak.
- Provide bicycle access separated from automobile traffic and pedestrian areas, with dedicated bicycle lanes on Treat Boulevard and Oak Street.
- Develop linkages to other existing transit systems, including connecting to neighboring communities in Walnut Creek, Concord, and Pleasant Hill, as well as surrounding residential areas.

IRON HORSE TRAIL

- Integrate the Iron Horse Trail into the project, consistent with the Regional Trail System such as Colony Park.
- Connected uses together by the trail (e.g. Swim club, buses, BART, hotel, fitness center, etc.).
- Provide a possible refuge area along the East side of the Trail just North of Treat Boulevard that could be named for Del Hombre. Consider a community garden. Integrate the proposed pedestrian/bike overpass over Treat Boulevard into the project.



Between meetings, there was time for one-on-one discussions of the ideas.



During the evening meetings, participants were able to talk publicly about particular concerns.



Displays of the work were set up to allow "drop-ins" to see the design progress.



Large meetings offered a forum for a wide range of community concerns to be aired.



Small topic-based sessions allowed local residents to participate in the details of the design solutions.



Photo-realistic digital imaging helped participants visualize what locations around the station might look like.

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

- Some residents had strong feelings about preserving the natural environment.
- Concern over the safety of the large oak trees on the corner of Oak and Treat Boulevard.
- Preserve views of Mount Diablo to the East.
- Concern that development on the East side of the site could block the views of those on the West side of the site.
- Support for increased public space and parks
- Concern about the timing issues involved with implementing “green space” along the trail.
- Mitigate the strong Southwest winds, and freeway noise from the adjacent I-680 freeway.

4.3 THE CHARRETTE DESIGN PROCESS

The Design process for the Pleasant Hill BART Station was based on the principle that “the best plan is made by many hands.”

In order to avoid rework and to make the best use of everyone’s time, the consultant team conducted an opportunity and constraints analysis before starting design work. The consultants used short feedback loops in order to insure that the design stayed on track. Each design iteration was tested by a round of review by interested parties. During the Charrette, the design advanced from a set of conceptual alternatives to a preferred alternative through a series of reviews. Feedback was collected during continuous ad hoc meetings with drop-ins, scheduled stakeholder meetings, in-studio daily pinups reviews, and large evening public meetings. After the Charrette, the consultant team performed technical feasibility studies and incorporated further comments from the public and relevant agencies. The refined alternative was then presented at the Charrette follow-up session, a set of two evening meetings where further changes were incorporated into plan and a final preferred alternative was presented at the end of the second day.