

February 25, 2013

Darin Raneletti, Planner III  
City of Oakland  
Department of Planning, Building, and  
Neighborhood Preservation  
Planning and Zoning Division  
BY HAND



Re: Safeway/Rockridge Shopping Center redevelopment  
Case File Numbers CMDV09-135, CP009-090, ER09-007

Dear Mr. Ranelletti,

We are submitting these comments on behalf of the Piedmont Avenue Neighborhood Improvement League (PANIL). While we do not oppose the project, our reaction is mixed. We do recognize that the project is significantly improved from Safeway's original proposal and responds to many of the community's concerns. The mixed reaction reflects the reality that our community will bear the biggest brunt of the negative impacts of the increased density—essentially paying a higher price in order to meet citywide goals and ambitions. For that reason, it is imperative that the City and Safeway address the concerns we enumerate below.

Before the specific comments, however, we wish to say that we still advocate housing at the site, as ULTRA so eloquently made the case for at the Commission's meeting this week. We realize that Safeway is not interested in that and would not want to see the project delayed to develop a housing option; nevertheless, we fervently hope that the City will follow up on Commissioner Coleman's desire to bring the landowner into the mix and see if housing can be made an option, or the site plan leave the option open for the future. This is too precious an opportunity to squander.

As you will see, the bulk of our comments focus on traffic related issues. There is a gaping hole in the DEIR—the failure to evaluate the impacts on streets south of Pleasant Valley and to explore mitigation options for them. Given our familiarity with local traffic patterns and concerns about neighborhood safety, PANIL needs to be directly involved with the City/Safeway in the efforts to address our comments.

## I. TRANSPORTATION AND CIRCULATION ISSUES

### A. TRAFFIC INFUSION INTO SIDE STREETS

Besides discussing the difficulties of making left hand turns onto Pleasant Valley from Montgomery and Howe, Impact Trans-26 and many other sections of the DEIR fail to address the impact of increased traffic infusion onto Gilbert, Montgomery, Howe, Mather, John and Ridgeway Streets south of Pleasant Valley. One of the reasons the City concluded that a signal at Howe and Pleasant Valley was not viable was because it would increase cut-through traffic in a residential neighborhood. However, the City failed to consider that—with or without traffic lights—neighborhood streets will be used as short cuts to avoid the increased traffic on the main streets. Additionally, neighbor observation says that the two eastbound lanes on Pleasant Valley between Broadway and Gilbert (and beyond) are often at full capacity during evening rush hour. Reducing this to one through lane can be anticipated to create a severe backup. As explained below, PANIL believes there will be a significant increase in congestion that must be modeled and mitigated.

## 1. MONTGOMERY, HOWE, AND JOHN SOUTH OF PLEASANT VALLEY

As the DEIR indicates, the intersections at Pleasant Valley/Montgomery/Howe will be LOS E/F much of the time. Thus, it seems quite probable that drivers on Pleasant Valley will start traveling south on Montgomery and/or Howe more frequently to avoid the backups/delay of turning right on Pleasant Valley onto Piedmont Avenue. Similarly, in the northbound direction on Piedmont Avenue, drivers may start to turn left on John and right onto Gilbert to avoid the Piedmont Ave/Pleasant Valley intersection. (Maybe wrongly, but we are assuming that drivers will not see making a left from Montgomery or Howe without a light to be an improvement on using Piedmont Avenue.)

## 2. MATHER/GILBERT

Increased traffic can be anticipated at both ends of Mather from the project. While neither Mather nor Gilbert would appear to be desirable through streets given their meandering paths, neighbors report that Mather is already used as a shortcut between Broadway and Pleasant Valley. Cars frequently speed by and cut across lane dividers. Even trucks have gone that way. The winding layout of Mather makes it unsuited for handling additional traffic, but drivers will be on it before they realize that.

From Broadway, more cars may turn right on Mather in order to enter the site from the Gilbert intersection. From the Pleasant Valley end, we expect that more drivers who would have made a left turn from Montgomery to Pleasant Valley will choose to detour to Mather and come north on Gilbert during rush hours. This already happens.

For these reasons, it is imperative that the DEIR be revised to study the increased congestion from cut through traffic and the efficacy of various traffic calming measures. Based on that study and community discussion of the appropriate type and location of traffic calming measures (speed bumps, roundabouts, etc) on our street, Safeway must be required to do traffic calming as mitigation.

## 3. RIDGEWAY

With greater congestion on Piedmont, Pleasant Valley, and Broadway, Ridgeway becomes the next through route south of Pleasant Valley to Piedmont Ave. Cut through traffic should be studied here and mitigations considered.

### B. TRAFFIC LIGHTS AND LANES

#### 1. GILBERT AND PLEASANT VALLEY

This intersection already poses a number of issues that will be aggravated with the increased traffic. We describe the problems we've observed and potential remedies but this needs expert modeling and analysis.

- Currently, traffic coming out of Gilbert north into the Center has the right of way over traffic leaving the project and turning east onto Pleasant Valley but these left turners rarely yield to oncoming traffic. A shared Left/Through lane coming out the Project makes determining the southbound cars' intentions unclear—and games of "Chicken" often result. Through traffic uses both lanes in the absence of clear markings/dividers to direct the right lane to the right. Additionally, traffic coming right out the project onto Pleasant Valley west has priority and is often unceasing - leading to frustration for drivers exiting Gilbert and also trying to go west. Hence, careful evaluation needs to be made about whether the new exit should be right turn only and shared straight/left lanes or shared right turn/straight and left turn only. Pedestrian safety also needs to be a major factor, especially with a retirement community on this corner.

- Given the increased traffic we expect on Gilbert going north and the greatly increased traffic coming from the project, it will be very difficult for cars exiting north from Gilbert to Pleasant Valley to turn left, posing both a traffic hazard and longer backups on Gilbert, a street unable to handle that. We believe a left turn lane signal to allow traffic to proceed from Gilbert to Pleasant Valley is essential.

- A new left turn lane from Pleasant Valley onto Gilbert is proposed. Many of us do not see the need for it as relatively few cars make that left. Moreover, the light might encourage more people to use Gilbert as a cut through street. On the other hand, neighbors north of Pleasant Valley on Montgomery and Howe might be using that intersection to make U-turns to go west on Pleasant Valley because they will not be able to fight the traffic to make a left from their streets onto Pleasant Valley. Hence, further modeling and assessment is needed on this as well.

## 2. EAST ENTRANCE ON PLEASANT VALLEY

The driveway entrance from Pleasant Valley to the center is not obvious and has dangerous visibility conflicts if vehicles are entering and exiting the driveway at the same time. This entrance/exit will receive increased use after build-out, particularly since cars will not have to wait for a traffic light. And, if a shopper is coming from the east to shop at Safeway or the proposed garden center, the east entrance will be the most direct route to those stores. Signage and visibility improvements need to be studied and mitigations proposed.

## 3. BROADWAY BY CORONADO

- If there are left turn signals for drivers coming south on Broadway/College to enter the site at Coronado, why is there a need to add a second exclusive left turn lane from Broadway onto Pleasant Valley? Presumably the cars entering on Pleasant Valley will be from the east, west, and south—not the north. Is that the best approach to the intersection?

- We're confused about whether there is a separate left turn lane into Wendy's. We think that is the plan—which is unfortunate, given all the delays Wendy's already causes for the northbound College traffic. While it is critical to consult with Coronado residents, we wonder whether it might make sense to make Coronado two way ONLY for the brief distance to the Wendy's driveway. A barrier could be added after the driveway to prevent cars from going further. This arrangement would allow a left turn into Wendy's at the Coronado light and seemingly avoid another hotspot for delays.

## 4. BROADWAY/PLEASANT VALLEY/51ST

We believe a more detailed analysis of the westbound Pleasant Valley/northbound Broadway intersection is necessary, taking the relocated transit stop, bicyclist, and pedestrians into account. Will the intersection be safe enough with the increased numbers of right turns from Pleasant Valley. Secondly, will the proposed changes be consistent with/support development of the western side of Broadway?

## C. PEDESTRIAN/BUS RIDER SAFETY ON PLEASANT VALLEY

We believe it will be impossible for pedestrians to cross safely to the north side of Pleasant Valley at the intersection of Montgomery—to catch the #12 bus and for other purposes. It is already a supreme challenge to cross at Montgomery because of the limited visibility and the speed of cars coming up the hill from Piedmont Avenue. Adding to the visibility problems is the difficulty drivers have seeing pedestrians and the failure of many drivers to slow down or stop at the pedestrian crossing. With added traffic (the intersection is/will be LOS E/F) crossing at Montgomery will be untenable.

Walking to either Gilbert or Piedmont, the nearest intersections with traffic controls, is not the answer because both involve climbing steep inclines—a challenge for many pedestrians. The City must evaluate solutions for this intersection to protect pedestrians and bus riders. Some neighbors have suggested median islands with the crosswalk or a HAWK light. The latter solution seems particularly useful because of the added safety. It may slow down vehicle traffic at times but pedestrian safety has to be the priority and (2) a pedestrian-activated signal would only function as needed. (For example, the #12 bus runs every 30 minutes most of the time; every 20 minutes during rush hour.)

#### D. PEDESTRIAN/BICYCLIST SAFETY ON THE SITE

The current plan doesn't provide complete bike pathways; consequently, it will be dangerous and inconvenient for pedestrians to negotiate space with bikes, and for bikes to negotiate space with cars. For the safety of all, pedestrians, bikes, and cars need separate pathways through the entire development.

Clear separation of bikers is particularly important because bike travel through the site is bound to soar for reasons unrelated to the new retail opportunities. According to the EIR, at least 11-33 cyclists currently pass through the parking lot each hour. More bicyclists will be attracted to the paths through the development, both to avoid the increased traffic on Pleasant Valley / Broadway and because routing through the project avoids the need to pedal the grade changes down and up again along Pleasant Valley and Broadway en route to College or upper Broadway.

#### E. TRAFFIC VOLUME

As we read the DEIR, evening commute traffic will only increase by 29%. That seems surprisingly low to us, given the 73% increase over the current development. We are very concerned that this is a low-ball number, masking the true impacts.

#### F. TRANSIT

To alleviate traffic congestion, we believe Safeway should be required to establish shuttle service to BART. And, given the distance pedestrians, particularly disabled and elderly people, have to walk from either Broadway or Pleasant Valley, we strongly recommend a shuttle bus to circulate around the center.

#### G. RESIDENTIAL PARKING

A survey of parking spillover into the neighborhood should be done after retail occupancy is complete—either after a year or six months after the holiday season, whichever comes first. If parking on neighborhood streets becomes more difficult because of the project, the City must place a condition of approval that would require Safeway to pay for a residential parking program where needed.

#### H. CITY CAR SHARE

Given the project's central location, we recommend that space be allocated to City Car Share and similar companies.

### II. STORMWATER CONCERNS

Page 4.8.-19 states that Safeway will construct a number of bio-retention stormwater treatment areas and will reduce impervious surfaces to reduce site runoff. We urge that the City, County, and Regional Water Quality Control Board require Safeway to use the maximum amount of impervious surfaces technically feasible for the site. As one of the largest commercial sites around the area, if not the largest, the project presents the opportunity for maximum reduc-

tion of surface runoff and incorporating the best of "green" technology.

III. LIGHTING

The City must assure that the lighting/signage design for the project minimizes light pollution/intrusion into the neighborhood and into the night sky. This is a particular concern for the residences along Pleasant Valley and above the quarry pond.

V. CONSTRUCTION IMPACTS

Safeway must be required to accommodate all construction workers' vehicles on-site during construction or to have satellite parking and a shuttle for construction workers, as Kaiser has done for its huge project. Contrary to the DEIR, which is necessarily out of date, parking on side streets is already difficult during the day as post-recession business on Piedmont Avenue has picked up.

VI. THE QUARRY POND

We support the comments of the Clareview Homeowner's Association about bio-resources. In contrast, we do favor the scenic overlooks, but do agree that improvements are needed to make this a real amenity.

VII. INPUT INTO RETAIL TENANTS

The community should have the type of input into Safeway's choice of tenants that was negotiated for the College Avenue Safeway. Among other things, we are concerned about the proliferation of fast food establishments and their impacts such as litter spilling over into the neighborhood.

VIII. REQUEST

Finally, our ability to comment meaningfully on transportation impacts has been severely hampered by the small size and poorly differentiated colors of the diagrams in the DEIR. Thus, we request that, as soon as possible, PANIL receive poster size blowups of figures 4.11-11 to 4-11-13 for use in community meetings.

Thank you for your consideration of these concerns.

Very Truly Yours,

Piedmont Avenue Neighborhood Improvement League (PANIL)  
by Valerie Winemiller, Steering Committee member