

May 10, 2006

Jeff Beiswenger
Planning Department
City of Rancho Cordova
2729 Prospect Park Drive
Rancho Cordova, CA 95670

Re: Design Review and Special Planning Amendment for Capital Village Retail Center (Project RC-05-193)

Dear Mr. Beiswenger:

WALKSacramento offers comments on the Design Review and Special Planning Area Amendment for Capital Villages Retail Center proposal to build 270,000 square feet of commercial development on 32 gross acres.

WALKSacramento is a member of the Partnership for Active Communities, an Active Living by Design project funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The Partnership is working to support increased physical activity, such as walking and bicycling in local neighborhoods, as well as helping to create community environments that support walking and bicycling. One way that we are doing this is through the review of proposed development projects in Natomas and Rancho Cordova. The benefits of such active environments include improved physical fitness, less motor vehicle traffic congestion, better air quality, and a stronger sense of cohesion and safety in local neighborhoods.

Shifting from an older suburban setting to one that is more urban is a challenge for any jurisdiction. For the City of Rancho Cordova, this project is an important catalyst for such a change. WALKSacramento is disappointed by the withdrawal of the previous plan in exchange for one that doesn't seem to fit Rancho Cordova's citywide goals. We urge the City to reject the location of a Lowe's, a major regional commercial use, within Capital Village's neighborhood commercial center. A grocery store is a more appropriate fit.

The project description states that the move to include a Lowe's will benefit the City and the Capital Village community by providing commercial uses at the same time as residential components. An alternative scenario is suggested where years

pass before the commercial components are developed, forcing the residents to commute by vehicle to commercial uses outside the area. WALKSacramento encourages the City to look beyond the short term benefits of the proposed project and instead push for a design that will support the neighborhood and the City's goals in the long run.

A 270,000 square foot hardware store in the heart of an otherwise walkable neighborhood near the center of the City does not make sense. Commercial uses within Capital Village should remain true to the intent of the plan - to serve the types of trips frequently made by the residents, such as grocery shopping. Neighborhood-serving commercial development will minimize external trips, maximize internal trips, encourage a walk and bike friendly environment, and also minimize traffic and air quality impacts around Capital Village.

We would like to see the City reject this proposal, regroup, and clearly spell out to the developer what is needed to move Rancho Cordova towards its vision for Capital Village and the City itself. Toward this end we offer the following comments and recommendations:

1. Create a more inviting environment for residents: Many of Capital Village's residents will be entering the commercial area from the east. In order to encourage people to walk to the area, the east end of the main street should be as inviting to the pedestrian as possible. With the proposed design, this is not the case.

The north side of the Lowe's that faces onto the main street presents a long, entry-less wall, which is not a pedestrian friendly design. The elevation shows that the wall is designed to be more attractive, but the fact that it is a long walk past non-active space remains. This situation is repeated on the east and south faces. A better alternative would be to provide small and inviting retail space that engages people on foot and helps draw people out of their cars, especially on the north side, as was in the previous site plan.

We also recommend that the developers improve the east elevation design for Majors 2 and 3. The design is car-oriented, with the most attractive faces along the parking lots, and least desirable face is across from CMU A and the travel way to the east. People to the east will have garbage and truck traffic as their views. It is shown that the trash areas will be screened which would help, but the overall impression is the same – it's the back of the building. In order to make it an inviting place for residents we recommend an attractive design with entryways and activity on the east side, and relocating trash and loading to one of the three sides that face parking lots.

2. Return to a less chaotic parking lot and building layout: In the previous site plan, the parking lots and buildings in the northern portion of the project were well laid out in a simple manner that supported walking and with clear flow for

people trying to park cars. This was accomplished by having retail along the outside and parking in the center, with the parking stalls all oriented in the same direction. The new design is jumbled and more confusing to the driver and the pedestrian. We recommend a design more in line with the previous site plan.

3. Detail “Main Street” design: The design of the east/west road that travels through the center of the commercial section has been referred to as a Main Street, but it is not labeled as a road at all on the current drawings. We recommend that this be treated as a street with a strong, articulated sidewalk system with benches and trees.
4. Include separated sidewalks: WALKSacramento believes that Zinfandel Drive, Data Drive, and International Drive are streets where separated sidewalks are appropriate. The sidewalks would be setback from the roadway with a landscape buffer. WALKSacramento supports 5 foot sidewalk width only if separated from the roadway by a landscaped buffer. If the sidewalk is attached, we strongly recommend a 6 foot width minimum. We prefer separated sidewalks and vertical curbs to help create a safe, enjoyable walking environment. Wider sidewalks are appropriate for locations with storefronts.
5. Include safe crossings for pedestrian traffic from adjacent offices: It is very likely and desirable that people working in the existing offices along Zinfandel Drive and Data Drive will want to access the businesses in Capital Village. Based on the map scale, the block length along Zinfandel is approximately 1280 feet between Data Drive and International Drive, which is too long for a pedestrian friendly environment. A crossing near the project’s main street is also needed. If the proposed signal at the main street does not get built, then we strongly recommend at least one mid-block crossing of Zinfandel near this location to prevent office workers from getting into their cars to travel to the businesses in Capitol Village. Safe pedestrian crossings are also needed at the intersections of Data and Disk, Data and Zinfandel, and Zinfandel and International.
6. Include bicycle and pedestrian circulation plans: It would be helpful to everyone involved to see a circulation plan for pedestrian and bicycle use. The plan would include internal routes and connections to adjacent pedestrian and bicycle facilities.
7. Include visible, accessible, convenient bicycle parking: Bicycle parking was not clearly marked in the site plan. Bicycle parking is critical for allowing Capital Village residents from the furthest sections to reach the businesses without getting in their cars, as well as make it possible for other bicyclists to frequent the businesses.

The most effective way to ensure that dedicated space for bicycle parking is used is for it to be visible, accessible, convenient, and easy to use. It needs to be out of the way of pedestrians and motor vehicles. If any of these aspects are not met, there is a good chance cyclists won't use what is provided and park wherever they think their bike will be safe.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments and recommendations. If you have questions or need additional information, please contact Scott Clark or me at (916) 446-9255 or via email at sclark@walksacramento.org or ageraghty@walksacramento.org.

Sincerely,

Anne Geraghty
Executive Director

Cc: Rich Bell, Active Living by Design
Jeane Borkenhagen, Sacramento Metro Air Quality Management District
Traci Canfield, Sacramento Regional Transit
Teri Duarte, Sacramento County Department of Health
Rebecca Garrison, 50 Corridor TMA
Walt Seifert, Sacramento Area Bicycle Advocates (SABA)
Sharon Sprows, Odyssey
Paul Zykofsky, Local Government Commission