



The City of San José Neighborhood Services and Education Committee:
Sylvia Arenas (Chair), Magdalena Carrasco (Vice Chair),
Maya Esparza, David Cohen, and Sergio Jimenez, Members
200 E Santa Clara St., San José, CA 95113
via email, sent June 8, 2022

Subject: June 9th NSE Meeting, agenda item (d)1: “Urban Confluence Silicon Valley Project Quarterly Status Report”

Dear Chair Arenas, Vice Chair Carrasco, and NSE Committee Members,

We in the District 6 Neighborhood Leaders Group (D6NLG), a decades-old association of involved community representatives of the numerous District 6 neighborhoods and associations, are very interested in preserving and enhancing the parks of our city, and thus are concerned by the potential impacts of the proposed “Breeze of Innovation” project.

We appreciate the honor of the San Jose Light Tower Corporation offering this gift to the residents of San José, but we have long had many reservations regarding its proposed location:

- Arena Green is an environmentally sensitive site at the confluence of the Los Gatos Creek and Guadalupe River, with riparian (“streamside”) habitat that supports native birds and wildlife, and even spawning salmon.
- Arena Green is one of the few “destination open spaces” in the city, conducive to both planned urban festivals (e.g., it’s an “Activity Hub” for next week’s VivaCalle) and spontaneous civic political events (e.g., as a site for public speeches, community outreach, and personal reflection following marches and parades from City Hall).
- Arena Green is one of the few large green outdoor locations in what soon will be a quite densely developed residential and commercial district, “Downtown West” (aka, “Diridon Station Area” and Google’s future home): this land needs to remain public parkland for all of our soon-to-be-arriving new residents and workers.
- And Arena Green is not well suited for the proposed project, either – a fact that the donors now apparently are acknowledging:
 - it’s directly in the flight path of the airport, so arriving and departing passengers wouldn’t be able to see it when looking out their windows; and
 - the flight path limits the project’s height, so it can be no taller than the nearby buildings, and about all one would be able to see from the project’s “observation deck” will be the windows of the adjacent condos or the blank face of the Arena.

The project sponsors are now studying a new potential site: Plaza de Cesar Chavez. The Plaza does not have an environmentally sensitive riparian habitat. Also, as it’s not in the direct flight path of the airport, the project could be redesigned to be taller and should be visible to arriving passengers. However, the Plaza de Cesar Chavez site has its own drawbacks:



- While the project could be taller, the neighboring buildings are also taller, and so again the view from the observation deck would be of adjacent windows.
- And the Plaza de Cesar Chavez has long been the very *heart* of the city – not something that should lightly be parted with. The Plaza is host to numerous concerts in the summer and home to “Christmas in the Park” in the winter. It also is the year-round “front door” for the Tech Museum, the Civic Center, and the Convention Center, and they may have some say as to what happens at that site. And what are the economic impacts of trading this well-established treasure for an unproven project?

Other sites for the project might be considered. For example, “Coyote Meadows” (just west of Little Saigon) has a hill (a capped former landfill) that offers spectacular views of Downtown and also of both Mount Hamilton and the Santa Cruz Mountains, and it’s prominently visible by plane and by car. But regardless of where the project is situated, some issues still remain:

- Who’s going to pay for it? The hope is to raise \$100 to \$200 million from various donors. But even deep-pocketed donors don’t have unlimited funds, and money given for this project likely means less money available to give to other, arguably more worthwhile and equitable projects – projects like funding daycare centers in poorer neighborhoods, sponsoring community events, improving neighborhood facilities in underserved areas, sustainable parkland improvements, libraries, the arts, and more.
- And who’s going to maintain the project? Another name for “an amazing gift that’s not all that useful but still needs a lot of care and tending” is “white elephant.”

San José doesn’t need to build a landmark: we’re already known worldwide as “Silicon Valley, the Hub of Innovation.” We already have the oldest city park in California and soon a world-class trail network, and, if we really need an instantly recognizable iconic building unique to San José, we also already have our own famous City Hall Rotunda and Plaza.

Please thank Steve Borkenhagen and the San Jose Light Tower Corporation, and say “we’re deeply honored, but we would prefer to keep both Arena Green and Plaza de Cesar Chavez Parks as public open spaces.”

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Dr. Lawrence Ames". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Dr. Lawrence Ames, Chair, D6NLG

cc: Gina Espejo, Clerk to NSE Committee
Steve Borkenhagen, Executive Director, San Jose Light Tower Corporation
Nicolle Burnham, Deputy Director, Parks Recreation and Neighborhood Services