

City Planning Commission  
Sacramento, California

Honorable Members in Session:

SUBJECT: Conformity of the Sacramento Community Convention Center Expansion  
With the Sacramento General Plan

SUMMARY

The Final Environmental Impact Report for the proposed Sacramento Convention Center Expansion has been certified by the City Council. The decision as to project's conformity with the General Plan can now be addressed.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The existing Community Convention Center is located on two blocks bounded on the west and east by 13th and 14th Streets, and on the north and south by J and L Streets.

The proposed project, which is the expansion of the existing facility, recommends adding approximately 170,000 square feet of new construction by expanding eastward from the existing exhibit hall building. This eastward expansion is intended to use the majority of the block bounded by 14th to 15th Streets and J to K Streets.

As a public facility with visitor serving and entertainment functions, the use of the proposed Convention Center Expansion would be compatible with the existing Convention Center and the Memorial Auditorium. The scale of the building would be similar to the existing Convention Center and compatible with the Pacific Bell building across J Street. Uses to the south of the east block, on K Street, are primarily office and commercial and would not be adversely affected by the expansion.

As proposed, the Convention Center Expansion would be adjacent to the western and southern boundaries of St. Paul's Church. The building would be approximately 35 feet in height which is slightly taller than the church. Although the height of the two structures would be similar, the Convention Center would be more massive, spanning about two-thirds of the J Street frontage of the block.

The City's policy is to encourage reuse as a means of developing more dense, efficient land uses in areas where adequate infrastructure is available and where such uses would not conflict with established land uses.

The Community Center expansion project meets the following applicable goal and policy of the Sacramento General Plan. Goal A for Downtown Sacramento in the Commerce and Industrial Land Use Element states: "Maintain and strengthen downtown's role as a major regional office, retail commercial, governmental, and cultural/entertainment center." Policy 3 of Goal A states: "Actively support efforts to develop visitor and convention facilities in the downtown area." The action item for the policy states: "Continue public funding and support of the Community Center and other downtown convention facilities."

Areas of Controversy on Consistency Findings:

The General Plan and the Urban Design Plan contain many goals for the downtown area; some of these goals can, given a certain type of project, conflict with one another. Both plans advocate the preservation and protection of historical structures through use of the existing preservation program. At the same time, both plans encourage and promote both the development and implementation of specific projects which are in conflict with the preservation goals. The Community/Convention Center Expansion is one such project. The project will cause the loss of the historic Merrium Apartments.

This conflict has been recognized since 1983 when the Sanger Study analyzed downtown revitalization needs and recommended specific projects to promote revitali. The proposed Community/Convention Center Expansion was recommended as a project that would provide substantial benefits, promote the revitali effort, and encourage further investment in the downtown area.

The Sanger Study contains a summary of the continued revitalization efforts for the downtown area and also a general discussion regarding the need to demolish historical structures when the presence of such structures is counterbalanced by the City's objectives of enhancing and revitalizing the downtown with key starter projects, of which the Community/Convention Center Expansion is one.

Policy 7 of the City's General Plan sets forth the policy goal of protecting and preserving historical structures through the existing preservation program. The City's existing preservation program is set forth in Section 32 of the Sacramento City Codes. That chapter insures that private projects involving possible destruction of historical structures comply with the City's preservation program. Chapter 32 provides the only feasible mitigation for impacts involved with protecting and preserving historical structures.

The historical structures considered in conjunction with the Merrium are those listed on page 9.1 of the Draft EIR. Since the listed historical structures on page 9.1 were not anticipated to be destroyed or demolished in connection with the proposed or anticipated projects involving those listed structures, the City's consideration of preserving the Merrium did not consider, nor was there any need to consider, the cumulative impacts of those listed structures.

The impacts which the destruction of the Merrium may have with respect to past, present and future projects in the downtown area can be discerned from a review of page 9-2 of the Draft EIR and the Sanger Study which is attached as a reference on page 11-3 of the Draft EIR. The Gallion and the Merrium Apartment buildings are the only buildings to be destroyed to make way the projects considered under the EIR.

The Gallion satisfied Chapter 32. Since the Community/Convention Center Expansion is a public project, Chapter 32 does not apply to demolition by the City of the Merrium. However, the intent of Chapter 32 has been met by the investigation of moving the Merrium and the determination by the City Council of the infeasibility of doing so.

The City Council, in adopting the resolution regarding the Findings of Fact and Statement of Overriding Considerations supporting the Sacramento Community/Convention Center Expansion, recommended the following mitigation measure which would reduce the significant effects on the housing and assure that the project is consistent with the General Plan.

The City will establish an aggressive program to locate appropriate replacement housing in the Central City for tenants displaced from the Merrium Apartments. The City will also cause replacement housing to be built, if the relocation of the Merrium Apartment building is found to be infeasible.

The City Council has since found the relocation infeasible, as mentioned above, and has embarked on a program of gap financing to provide replacement housing on a one-to-one basis.

#### RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the City Planning Commission find the proposed Convention Center Expansion to be in conformity with the Sacramento General Plan.