



# JOINT SESSION COMMISSION REPORT City of Sacramento

915 I Street, Sacramento, CA 95814-2671

**STAFF REPORT**  
**October 2, 2007**

To: Members of the City Planning, Preservation, and Design Commission

**Subject: The Sacramento Railyards (P05-097).** The project covers proposes adoption and implementation of the Sacramento Railyards Specific Plan ("Specific Plan") and related entitlements. The Specific Plan covers approximately 244 acres and establishes a comprehensive framework for redevelopment of the Railyards, featuring a transit oriented mixed use urban environment that includes up to approximately 10,000 - 12,100 dwelling units, 2.3 million square feet of office, 1.3 million square feet of retail, 1,100 hotel rooms, 491,000 square feet of mixed use flex space, 485,390 square feet of historic/cultural uses, and 42 acres of open space.

#### **Location/Council District:**

The Railyards is located east of the Sacramento River and north of the Central Business district in downtown Sacramento.

Council District 1.

**Assessor's Parcel Numbers:** 001-0210-013, -016; and 002-0010-018, -019, -025, -035, -035, -037, -038, -039, -041, 043

**Applicant: Thomas Enterprises,** 431 I Street, Suite 202, Sacramento, CA 95814

**Contact: Suheil Totah** (916) 329-4500

**Meeting Purpose:** This is the second of three joint public commission hearings with the City Planning, Design and Preservation Commissions. The purpose of these joint hearings is for staff to inform and receive input from the public and each commission. Each commission will hold additional public hearings to make a recommendation to the City Council in November 2007 (a public hearing schedule is provided on page 4 of this staff report). These joint hearings provide each commission with the benefit of seeing the questions and comments of other commissions as well as the public comments that relate to each commission.

The purpose and scope of this hearing is as follows:

- Recap and Responses to questions and comments from September 11<sup>th</sup> hearing.

- Subsequent Individual Project Approval Process
- Remediation
- Open Space

### **SEPTEMBER 11, 2007 JOINT MEETING RECAP AND RESPONSE:**

On September 11, 2007, City staff and Thomas Enterprises (“Thomas”) presented the Commissions with an overview of the project in the context of Smart Growth Principles and discussed topics regarding connectivity/circulation, historic preservation and Riverfront development. Questions raised by the Commissioners and Community members, and responses are detailed in Exhibit A.

In summary, the main questions/comments raised during the September 11, 2007 hearing were the following:

- **Design Guidelines Specificity:** Some commission members had questions regarding the Design Guidelines and the level of specificity contained therein. Some of the commissioners questioned whether the Design Guidelines contained the necessary specificity to ensure that subsequent projects would be well designed and of high quality while understanding the need to allow flexible development standards in an urban environment.

**Response:** City Staff and Thomas are working to identify and strengthen certain components of the Design Guidelines where appropriate. Examples of this include changing some of the “should” guideline statements to “shall” statements, strengthening general principle statements, and including additional clarity through graphics and additional guidelines where appropriate.

- **Historic District Boundary:** Some commissioners raised questions relative to the rationale behind the Historic District boundary.

**Response:** The proposed boundary for this historic district was derived utilizing criteria set forth in the *National Register Bulletin: How to Complete the National Register Registration*. It is a geographically definable area which possesses a significant concentration, linkage, and continuity of contributing resources that are united by past events, aesthetic features, and physical development. The proposed boundary of the Central Shops Historic District encompasses each of the remaining contributing resources that were part of the original Central Shops. The proposed boundary also reflects the visual changes in the character of the area, specifically that the land adjacent to the Central Shops, which currently consists of bare land with no historic context, and that is currently being remediated under the authority of the California Department of Toxic Substances Control. Further, the proposed boundary for the Central Shops Historic District also reflects the fact that new construction that will be forthcoming on adjacent parcels as part of the Railyards redevelopment project. This new construction

presents an obvious visual barrier that will mark a change in the historic character of the overall Railyards planning area.

Additionally, Thomas Enterprises submitted a Historic District Nomination application which would add the District in to the City's Historic register and included in the application process (Exhibit B).

- **Transition Zone:** There were questions regarding the Transition Zone and how new development within the Transition Zone would relate to the historic resources within the Historic District. There were suggestions to "beef up" the Transition Zone Design Guidelines to provide greater clarity as to how new development would "come to" the historic resources.

**Response:** City staff and TE have added additional clarity and specificity to the Design Guidelines with respect to the Transition Zone, including greater specificity in the actual guidelines and through conceptual sections and diagrams. This additional language provides additional guidance to developers and City staff as to how development within this zone should relate to the Historic District.

- **Riverfront Development:** Some commissioners had questions regarding the rationale behind high rise towers along the riverfront and how those high rises would interface and integrate with open space in the Riverfront District.

**Response:** The development of parcel 35 is key to creating a vibrant and pedestrian-friendly riverfront for the City of Sacramento. It serves as a noise buffer for the park from the elevated highway and the busy rail corridor directly to the south thereby creating a place that provides a world class pedestrian experience. In addition, it frames the open space and reflects other similar high-rise development along the river. Currently, the City of Sacramento has planned high rises as part of the Docks project along the river. The City of West Sacramento currently is building a 19 story tower directly across from the Railyards. Therefore, these uses are in context given their benefits to the site and their context in relation to other development projects on both sides of the Sacramento River.

To address questions of interaction, City staff and TE are working on strengthening the Design Guidelines to demonstrate how development on this parcel will accomplish the above goals and integrate, activate, and facilitate the creation of dynamic urban open space, and examples of these revisions are attached to the Response Table.

- **Current Approval Schedule, Framework, and Process:** One of the questions raised at the first joint hearing was the current approval schedule, framework, and process.

**Response:** The planning process and community outreach has been in process for approximately five years. In addition to the numerous community meetings and outreach efforts, in 2002, the City Council also approved its Infill Development Strategy policies supporting and encouraging infill development. In 2005, Thomas filed its first formal application. After two more years of public input and planning, Thomas has arrived at the current set of proposed entitlements. Since the entitlements include legislative amendments, the City Council will be taking final action on all entitlements. Each commission will be responsible for making recommendations on certain entitlements.

City staff has brought the project before each commission individually for review and comment during the past two years. There is now a series of three joint commissions for review and comment. The purpose of the joint commission hearings is to maximize input from each commission. City staff will then have a hearing before each individual commission and request a recommendation on the respective entitlements to the City Council.

The remaining hearings are scheduled as follows:

<b>Date</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Committee</b>	<b>Hearing Type</b>
September 25	6:00 pm	City Council	Review & Comment
September 26	5:30 pm	Preservation Director	Initiate Historic District
October 2	5:30 pm	Joint Workshop	Review & Comment
October 3	1:30 pm	Subdivision Review Committee	Master Tentative Map
October 3	5:30 pm	Preservation	Historic District
October 4	7:00 pm	Parks Commission	Presentation
October 22	5:30 pm	Joint Workshop	Review & Comment
October 23	6:00 pm	City Council	Review and Comment
November 6	5:30 pm	Design	Recommendation to City Council
November 7	5:30 pm	Preservation	Recommendation to City Council
November 13	5:30 pm	Planning	Recommendation to City Council
November 13	2:00 pm	City Council	Pass for Publication Consent Agenda
November 20	6:00 pm	City Council	Public Hearing and Action

These hearings represent the culmination of a five-year review and planning process that has included numerous hearings and significant input from both the public and the City leaders and commissions.

## **HEARING TOPICS:**

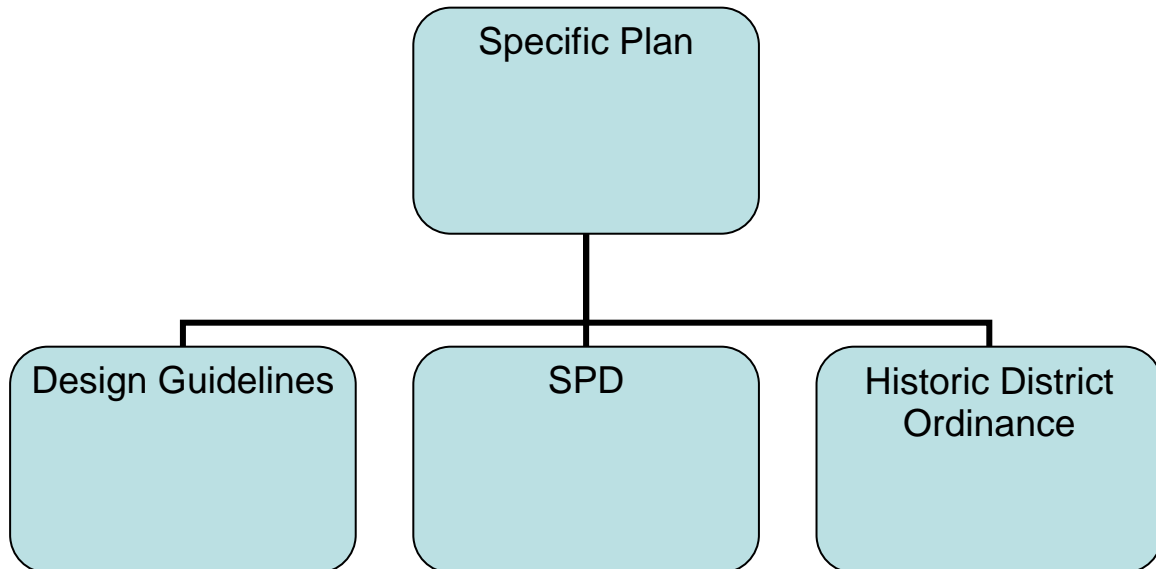
### **Future Individual Approval Process:**

The entitlement process and structure was derived in accordance with the City's adopted Infill Strategy. In 2002, the City Council adopted the City of Sacramento Infill Strategy. Among other things, this document recognized the specific challenges that exist in developing infill sites in the City of Sacramento (Exhibit C). The Council, through the General Plan adopted goals and policies for infill development:

1. Promote infill development, rehabilitation, and reuse that contributes positively to the surrounding area and assists in meeting neighborhood and other City goals.
2. Revise City plans and ordinances to support infill development goals.
3. Remove regulatory obstacles and create more flexible development standards for infill development.
4. Provide improvements to infrastructure to allow for increased infill development potential.
5. Provide financial incentives and project assistance to assist in infill development in target areas and sites. These target sites are those that provide the greatest infill opportunity in terms of number of vacant lots, total potential for new infill development, or overall economic or environmental benefit.
6. Engage the community to ensure new infill development addresses neighborhood concerns and to gain greater acceptance and support for infill development.

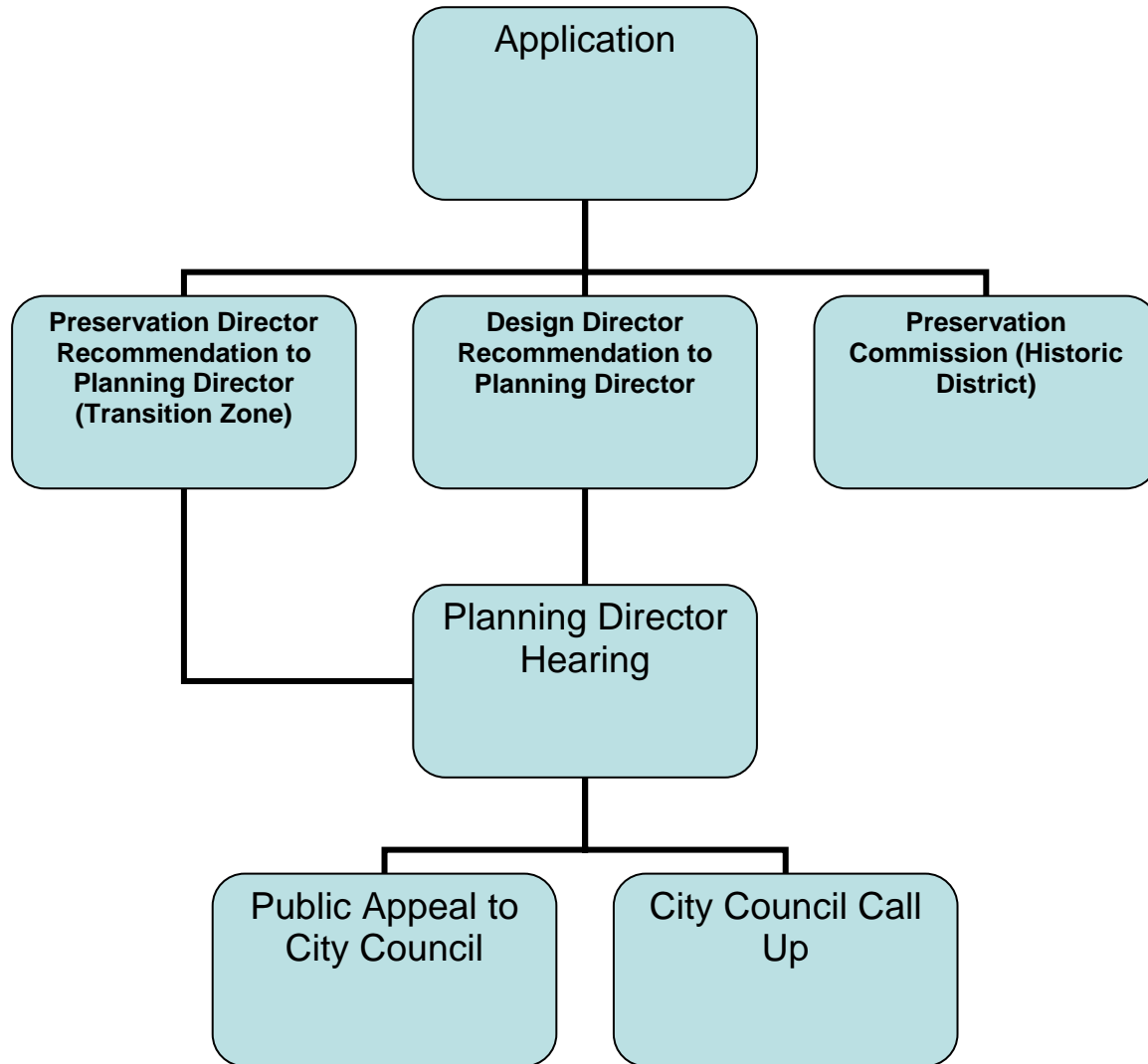
City staff, together with Thomas endeavored to create an entitlement framework, that effectively implemented these City Council adopted policies and goals.

The Railyards Plan area has four over-arching policy documents that are specific to the Railyards and that will shape future development of individual projects within the Railyards, as well as a Master Development Agreement that will vest various development rights. All future individual projects must be consistent with each of these policy documents and the Master Development Agreement. These policy documents are the following:



All future individual projects will be reviewed to determine consistency with these documents. In addition, each of these documents contains specific areas of guidance for development. The Specific Plan contains goals and policies that every project must be consistent with to receive approval. The Design Guidelines contain specific design guidance for specific areas of the planning area to guide future individual development. The Railyards SPD sets forth specific allowed uses, development standards, and approval processes for the planning area. And finally, the Development Agreement sets forth certain rights and obligations of the City with respect to future development in the planning area. These policy documents form a detailed policy framework that is more extensive than other similar forms of master planning, such as a Planned Unit Development (“PUD”), while also providing future flexibility in an urban environment.

The SPD is the tool that establishes the procedures to evaluate future individual projects against the approved policy documents. The SPD establishes that all future individual projects will be required to receive a Planning Director Urban Development Permit. This process establishes specific requirements for applicants; it requires review and recommendation on each individual application for consistency by the Design Director except projects within the Transition Zone, which require review by the Preservation Director, and projects within the Central Shops Historic District, which are subject to Preservation Commission review and approval consistent with Chapter 17.134; it requires a public hearing before the Planning Director that is noticed to the public and the Planning Director’s action may be appealed to the City Council or may be called up unilaterally by the City Council. Below is a chart setting forth the process:



The benefits of this process are several: (1) It achieves the City Council adopted goal to promote infill development by creating an efficient, certain, and streamlined process; (2) It maintains a role for the public through early noticing and an appeal process; (3) it implements the policy goals and standards of the commissions established in the guiding planning documents (The Railyards Specific Plan, the Design Guidelines, and the SPD); (4) it preserves a role for the public in the hearing process; (5) it combines what typically is a cumbersome multi-hearing process into one streamlined hearing; and (6) it provides certainty for the City, developers, and developer lenders thereby making infill development feasible and ensuring ultimately a better development project.

In addition, to establishing process, it also establishes allowed uses, development standards, and other site specific requirements (such as demonstrating evidence of

remediation prior to permit issuance). Each of these elements further implements the Infill Strategy adopted by the City.

**Remediation:**

On-site contaminants are due to prior industrial operations. Thomas Enterprises is working actively with the State Department of Toxic and Substance Control (DTSC) to expedite clean up of soil and groundwater contaminants. Soil remediation for much of the site has been accomplished, with completion expected in 2008. DTSC certification of installation of Central Shops remediation systems, including groundwater, is anticipated by end of 2009.

Since the transfer of ownership, Thomas has handled over 300,000 cubic yards of material, including the excavation of approximately 140,000 cubic yards of soil. Thomas has also extracted approximately 30 million gallons of groundwater. Approximately 320 pounds of volatile organic compounds have been removed from the subsurface between extracted vapors and groundwater since January 1, 2007. Cumulatively to date since beginning of remediation site-wide, nearly 20,000 pounds of various volatile organic compounds have been extracted from the subsurface, over 800 million gallons of groundwater have been pumped, and 650,000 cubic yards of soil have been excavated.

Regulatory process has been kicked into high gear, hence, expediting various approvals of submitted plans. Work at the site is proceeding with a safety record of zero OSHA incidents.

Chapter 4, Section 8/Hazardous Substance details the policy guidance for the remediation effort and Chapter 10 details the implementation of these policies in the Specific Plan.

**Urban Open Space/Parkland:** Developments in urban infill areas present unique challenges in parkland dedication requirements, and the City Parks and Recreation Department recognizes that the concept of parks and open space is different in an urban environment compared to a typical suburban development.

During the public outreach efforts, park design quality and provisions for adequate outdoor recreation space for residents and employees was a key theme. This theme is captured in Specific Plan Open Space goal (page 44 of the Specific Plan):

*Provide a system of parks, open space and recreational facilities that serves the needs of future residents and employees of the Plan Area, and that enhances the overall identity of the Central City and the Railyards, including the Riverfront District.*

Policies (page 45 of the Specific Plan), Open Space vision (chapter 6, page 61) and design guidelines (page 3-50 of the Design Guidelines) also support a unique open space approach that utilizes a framework of plazas, parks, innovative use of non-

traditional spaces such as rooftops, green roofs, community gardens and areas under the freeway. Private open space standards for office and residential developments are contained in the Draft Special Planning District. These open space areas shall be in the form of courtyards, public plazas or private decks/balconies for residential units. History and cultural aspects are weaved in to the plan and future open space designs and functions as a linkages between the past and future and City districts such as Old Sacramento and Alkali Flat. Refer to page 3-61 of the design guidelines and page 68 of the Specific Plan, for the Interpretative Walk discussion. City staff is supportive of this approach given the unique infill challenge of balancing density and urban recreation needs and compatible with Parks and Recreation Department efforts to developing policies relative to small public spaces in urban areas.

Some of the key public open spaces set forth in the Plan (refer to page 63 of the Specific Plan) include the following:

1. Depot Park. A grand park that will frame the historic Depot and provide a central gathering place in the Intermodal Facility.
2. The Bridge. An elevated park structure that bridges the tracks and connects and integrates the existing downtown with the Railyards. It will provide dramatic views of the downtown and the River.
3. Roundhouse Plaza. An urban open space plaza that honors the historic nature of the site and its earlier use as a roundhouse.
4. 5th Street Steps. The 5th Street Steps are the first major entry point to the Central Shops. A grand staircase will mark this entry point and gateway to the historic Central Shops.
5. Box Cars Park. This set of six block sized parks form a linear open space that anchors the RMU district and provides a long open space amenity that is rare and unique in downtown settings, but is seen in some great downtown areas such as the Mall in Washington DC.
6. Vista Park. Vista Park comprises of the sculpted landform with functional spaces, and will comprise approximately 10 acres of open space.
7. Riverfront Park. The park serves the important role of re-connecting the site and City with the Sacramento River.

These park spaces would accommodate urban recreation for all ages and could be designed to reflect the past, present and future needs, consistent with community input received. In addition to these dynamic open spaces, there are features of the open space that while not included in the acreage amount, are significant amenities that help make the Railyards a high quality open space project. For example, the Interpretative Walk is a pedestrian walk that will celebrate the history of Sacramento and enrich the pedestrian experience with an education component. The walk will also serve as a

connection between Alkali Flat, the Railyards, and Old Sacramento. Finally, the spaces under the freeway represent unique opportunity to transform an often forgotten space in to a memorable transitioning space.

Therefore, not only is there adequate acreage for open space, but it is also highly amenitized and fits harmoniously with the urban nature of the project.

**NEXT JOINT COMMISSION HEARING**

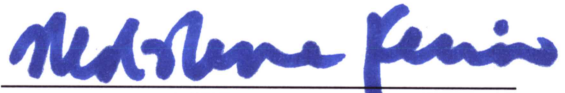
**Monday, October 22, 2007**

Summary and Recap

Housing

Public Facilities

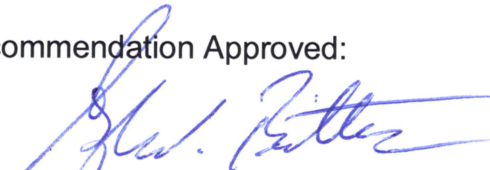
Respectfully submitted by:



NEDZLENE FERRARIO

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Recommendation Approved:



GREGORY BITTER

Principal Planner

**ATTACHMENTS**

**Exhibit A - September 11, 2007, Summary of Issues and Response Table**

**Exhibit B – City Historic District Nomination Application**

**Exhibit C – Infill Strategy**

**Note: Draft Specific Plan and Design Guidelines previously distributed.**