



**SANTA CRUZ COUNTY
GROUP**

Of The Ventana Chapter

P.O. Box 604, Santa Cruz, CA 95061

<https://ventana2.sierraclub.org/santacruz/>

email: sierraclubsantacruz@gmail.com

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Santa Cruz City Council

Mayor Justin Cummings

809 Center Street, Rm 10

Santa Cruz, CA 95060

Subject: Mixed-use Project on Downtown Public Parking Lot 4

Dear Mayor Cummings and City Council Members,

The Sierra Club asks you to consider the economic impacts and the climate emergency as you review the Parking Lot 4 mixed-use project. This proposal, including its planned four hundred car garage, replaces the largest public open space downtown and puts the City in a vulnerable economic position during the coronavirus pandemic. It is antithetical to sustainable, ecological principles; rather than new construction, invest precious community resources to keep the current library on its present site and preserve public open space on Parking Lot 4.

We support Jayson Architect's library renovation proposal. This project will improve our library; its renovation will create a revitalized Civic Center, bounded by the library, City Hall and the Civic Auditorium. Cultivating public space, both on Parking Lot 4 and at the Civic Center will promote health, tourism and the quality of life we enjoy in Santa Cruz.

City Consultants Do Not Support Additional Downtown Parking

We are not alone in our reasoning. Experts in the fields of parking management and economics have recommended improving parking management instead of financing the fifty million dollar garage. In a 2015 presentation to the City Planning Commission consultants Janis Rhodes from JR Parking Associates, Frederik Ventner from Kimley-Horn and Ria Hutabarat-Lo from Nelson Nygaard unanimously supported implementing alternative parking strategies before increasing our parking inventory.

Presentations to the City Council from parking expert Patrick Seigman, formerly of Nelson/Nygaard, and UCSC Environmental Parking Economics professor Adam Miller-Ball (March, 2019) were clear: **don't build more parking; manage parking better** by implementing parking and transportation demand management strategies. Both emphasized that we have a parking

management problem, not a parking supply problem.

Public Presentation of Parking Study

The Sierra Club would like the City Council to hold a public review of the recent Nelson/Nygaard Santa Cruz Downtown Parking Study undertaken between 2017 and 2019. The findings from this study are critical to the decision-making process. In this “Parking Toolbox” they advise a wide variety of parking strategies to achieve balanced, sustainable approaches to parking management before building additional parking. **“...it is better and less expensive for a city to increase the efficiency of how existing parking is used, rather than to simply build more spaces” (94)**, they write. They articulate a strong cautionary warning: **“Building and maintaining parking is expensive, so it is critical to the City’s long-term financial sustainability”** that decision makers find the appropriate balance between parking supply and encouraging residents to use other modes to come downtown (1).

Compliance with California Climate Action Goals

Transportation is the single largest contributing factor to climate change. We cannot reduce carbon without reducing Vehicle Miles Traveled and CO2 emissions. California has taken the lead with Senate Bill 32 which requires a 40% reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. Santa Cruz can join proactive cities of the world by designing city centers to support the climate, pedestrians and bikes. The City’s 2020 Climate Action Plan (p.41) calls for a 10% reduction of car trips by 2020. ***The operation of a large new Parking Garage would work at cross purposes to the critical goal of reducing car trips. Specifically, if the City prioritizes its Climate Plan Goal, the parking garage will be underutilized and unable to service its debt. If the City meets the parking garage debt, it is by providing additional parking at an economical price, thus effectively incentivizing increased automobile trips and working against the goals of the Climate Plan. Albert Einstein said that “one cannot simultaneously prevent and prepare for war” He could have been talking about automobile trips and their impact on the world’s climate.***

Preserve Public Open Space Downtown

The City Council has recognized the benefit of open space for the mental and physical well-being of residents. Its Health in All Policies ordinance, now codified in our municipal code (6.02) is explicit: public health requires “Accessible built environments that promote health and safety, mitigate emissions, [and] improve parks and green space...”

Affordable Housing Downtown

We understand the environmental benefits to building affordable, workforce housing near transit, employment, public space and shopping areas. We are not convinced that the City needs a parking garage as a means to create housing. ***We support affordable housing downtown and recommend that the City invest in it directly, without additional parking, as per new guidelines around parking and affordable housing recently passed at the state level.***

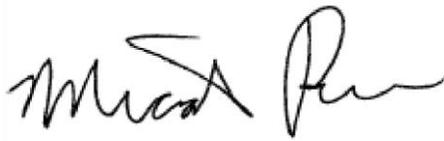
The Covid-19 Crisis Economy Is Precarious

Due to the exceptional circumstances with Covid-19, our recommendations are even more cogent: financing a major capital expenditure is unwise in uncertain economic times. Facing what the International Monetary Fund recently called the "worst downturn since the Great Depression", makes building a garage an imprudent economic decision. A mixed-use project will further undermine the City's economic stability.

Conclusion

The Sierra Club requests you review the parking consultants' findings and present the downtown parking study to the public. We urge you to support Jayson Architect's library renovation and do not move forward with a mixed-use project on Parking Lot 4. We need to recreate Parking Lot 4 for tourists, community gatherings and events, enhancing our quality of life with the largest public open space downtown.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Micah Posner". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "M" and "P".

Micah Posner, Chair

Sierra Club, Santa Cruz Group