

Memorandum

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR
AND CITY COUNCIL

FROM: Edward K. Shikada

SUBJECT: SEE BELOW

DATE: December 1, 2014.

INFORMATION

**SUBJECT: TECH MUSEUM/GEHL ARCHITECTS DESIGN RESEARCH PROJECT
REGARDING CITY HALL PLAZA**

The purpose of this memorandum is to inform the City Council of public space research activities that will be taking place in City Hall Plaza over the upcoming few months as part of a Knight Foundation grant to The Tech Museum of Innovation and Gehl Architects.

BACKGROUND

The City of San José and its partners have made it a priority to continuously strengthen Downtown as Silicon Valley's urban center. In addition to significant new business attraction and residential construction activity, significant planning and implementation actions are focused on enlivening underutilized public spaces—including parks, plazas, paseos, and sidewalks. For example, the San José Downtown Association/Property-Based Improvement District adopted a 10-year "Street Life Plan" to create memorable, active public spaces throughout Downtown. The City and its partners recently launched two temporary, low-cost pilot programs to attract people to public spaces with activity and demonstrate future possibilities: the Summer of Fun in St. James Park and the San José Pop-Up Retail Project.

A new project focused on City Hall Plaza continues this spirit of public space innovation and experimentation. The Tech Museum of Innovation and Gehl Architects recently received a \$200,000 grant from the Knight Foundation to explore small-scale interventions in San José's public spaces, initially focusing on City Hall Plaza. The grant will fund research to study how Downtown and City employees, residents, and visitors currently use City Hall Plaza, and to experiment with temporary installations to further activate the public space. Of key interest is how the space could encourage more interaction and collaboration among employees and to enhance the interrelationship of City Hall and the surrounding area.

The Tech Museum's mission is to "Inspire the Innovator in Everyone" and this project is part of the Tech's new initiative to foster civic innovation throughout San José. Gehl Architects, based in Copenhagen, is one of the world's foremost experts on designing public spaces that are effectively and creatively used by people. The Knight Foundation has been a key source of philanthropic support for projects that facilitate San José's urban transformation, attract talent, and engage the community. The collaboration between Gehl Architects and the Knight Foundation is part of a larger effort to advance socio-economic opportunities in cities through the transformation of public spaces.

ANALYSIS

The project will last approximately 10 weeks from December 2014 to March 2015. In the first four weeks, the project team will conduct design research through observations and interviews at City Hall and within a half-mile radius of the Plaza. The second phase of the project will consist of four weeks of experimentation with temporary structures and programming in City Hall Plaza, all coordinated with Public Works event, facilities and security staff. During the final two weeks of the project, the team will synthesize their findings into design principles to guide future efforts, whether by the City or other organizations, to activate City Hall Plaza and other public spaces in San José.

The City is not contributing any funds into this research project, and is not committed to implement any of the project recommendations. However, key City staff will advise the project team during the design research and experimentation phase to ensure that researchers are aware of City goals and other considerations for the Plaza, including safety, security and accessibility. The addition of the US Patent and Trademark Office federal employees and the new VTA Bus Rapid Transit Station on Santa Clara Street in front of City Hall will also be considered.

This project provides an opportunity for the City of San José to benefit from research and engagement activities conducted by experts on a topic that is aligned with several of the City's internal and external initiatives.

- The research findings will provide insights into how to maximize prior investments in City Hall to create an even more productive civic space for City employees and the Downtown community. The project timing coincides with recent investments to repair the Bamboo Courtyard, and may result in design ideas or principles that inform future investments in Plaza hardscape, design elements, or programming by the City with its partners.
- The project's goal of engaging employees to share their vision for City Hall common spaces aligns with the Workforce Support and Development Strategy, specifically the efforts to improve physical and cultural aspects of the workplace environment to support collaborative, innovative and efficient work.

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- The study contributes to City goals for generating activity and interest in Downtown San José, including how best to align City-managed assets with the overall strategy for Downtown San José's public spaces.

City Hall Plaza is a symbol of the City's dedication to design, reinvention and innovation. This project will provide opportunities for the city and its residents to discover ways to embody this spirit in one of our community's most symbolic and central public places.

COORDINATION

The Office of Economic Development will act as the sponsor of the project within the City of San José and will facilitate communication between the design research team and other City resources. Key City executives will serve as advisors and supporters of the project, including Director of Public Works David Sykes, Director of Transportation Hans Larsen, and Director of Communications David Vossbrink.



Edward K. Shikada
City Manager

For questions, please contact Kim Walesh, Deputy City Manager, at (408) 535-8177.

