

February 10, 2019

Dear MayorFaulconer, Councilman Chris Ward, Members of the Hillcrest Business Association, Uptown Planning Board:

We represent the landowners and business owners of the Normal Street and adjacent University Avenue Areas. We are writing to communicate our comments and concerns with the proposed Normal Street Promenade Project as presently conceived. Some of the comments below are individual property owner concerns, while others are jointly held by all of the property owners represented. The ultimate purpose of this letter is to establish a platform and regular dialogue to collectively create solutions to the concerns presented. We encourage creative thinking by the City, and want to ensure all ramifications are being considered when making long term decisions.

While we applaud and support the concept and effort towards the beautification of Normal Street, we feel the present concept will be extremely detrimental to business and, rather than being a catalyst to the revitalization of this area, it could lead to parking shortages where it is most needed, homeless encampments, general health, safety and blight concerns. This project has the chance to be a true town center for the Hillcrest neighborhood, and a landmark area for the City of San Diego, so we offer our recommendations to make this successful.

There have been successful examples of creating public space in San Diego such as the Piazza dellaFamiglia, and the County Waterfront Park, but there are also examples that have not been successful such as Horton Plaza Park. Successful public spaces have strong design features, public activation/maintenance/security, and private investment which need to be considered as first steps in long-term success of the Normal Street Promenade.

Our concerns are as follows. Without modifications to the current plan, we believe the Normal Street Promenade will not enhance the neighborhood, and could conversely detract from it:

1. Parking: The reduction in parking in the blocks where most critically needed – the intersection of Normal and University. Most businesses and restaurants in this area depend entirely on street parking. While additional parking has been planned for the other end of Normal St. near Washington Street, the customer type and nature of most of these businesses will not find this remote parking supportive of their businesses at all. Customers driving into Hillcrest for medical, dental, chiropractic, fitness, and salon appointments during their busy work days will not find remote parking or shuttles sufficient. The idea that these businesses will be adequately supported by local residents is completely unfounded – as is clearly demonstrated by the continual turnover of many businesses, particularly restaurants, in the area. Hillcrest simply does not have the residential density to be fully supported from local residents only. Hillcrest business requires patrons from outside the community who drive in on a daily basis.
2. Access to Adjacent Parking Lot: The removal of the Normal Street driveway into the EastHill 1440 Center (NW corner of Normal and University) will:

- A. Create stacking of patrons' cars into traffic lanes of University Avenue as they are trying to turn in and find parking.
 - B. Create traffic and pedestrian safety concerns at the very busy intersection of Normal and University.
 - C. Limit fire truck and police access and protection for the center.
 - D. Greatly compromise access into the lot by all users.
 - E. Make the existing parking lot configuration unusable – which will require re-striping and loss of some parking spots.
 - F. Negatively affect businesses of the center.
3. Encourage and Increase Homeless Populations in the Area: The homeless populations in this neighborhood are already a serious and growing health and safety concern. It is detrimental to business owners who are striving to present a safe and friendly entrance to their stores. We, the business and property owners of the area, deal with the impact of this population on a daily basis.
- A. Homeless encampments on public and private property, porches and entrances
 - B. Breaking and entering into vacant store fronts, storage rooms, utility rooms, side yards, garages, etc
 - C. Public urination and defecation – often in front of businesses or on their private property, corners of shopping centers, side yards, alleys, etc
 - D. Damage to property caused by the urination
 - E. Drug use and related refuse, including used needles and smoking refuse
 - F. Aggression towards residents, employees and patrons – much of it serious and physical creating significant personal safety concerns
 - G. Trash and food on public and private property
 - H. Public intoxication with vomit often left on porches and entrances to businesses
 - I. Panhandling
 - J. Shoplifting

As currently designed, the Normal Street Promenade could create a homeless encampment consisting of a concrete sleeping pad with shade and weather shelters, benches, seating, tables and little to no evening and nighttime business activity or supervision (from KTU&A location to DMV and northward to Lincoln St.) to discourage loitering there. The impact to the present and future residents and adjacent businesses will be severe. It will increase homeless populations in the area. This environment will dissuade consumers, visitors or residents from using any of the proposed parking at Washington street as it would involve walking through a potentially dangerous homeless environment.

Proponents of the Normal Street Promenade Proposal acknowledged this real and mounting homeless population concern, but offer no committed funding, strategy nor program to mitigate the issue.

4. University Avenue Congestion and pedestrian Safety Concerns: The plan as presently conceived creates a community gathering plaza at the busy intersection of Normal and University. Current community events on Normal Street most often flow over into adjacent streets and businesses. By pushing this event location directly onto University Avenue, a serious safety concern has been created where event participants will be milling onto traffic lanes of University Avenue with the risk of being hit by cars or killed. It seems that a better, more secure solution for civic events is to create a plaza environment on the block between Harvey Milk and Lincoln Streets. Not only will this be a safer venue location, but on an everyday basis create a true draw for people to “promenade” up Normal street, which presently does not exist. The ONLY reason currently to stroll anywhere on Normal Street is the block between Harvey Milk and University Ave. The rest of Normal Street lacks businesses, shops or restaurants to entice people to stroll, so the only people strolling down there on this new promenade will be people walking to the DMV and the homeless!

5. Need for a True Park – Present Plan Insufficient in Beautification, Landscape and Vegetation: We are concerned with the general concrete environment being created with this project. We acknowledge that this is desirable for the Farmers Market, which is one, three-quarter day use of the space per week, but does little for the true beautification and daily enjoyment of a park like setting for the residents, employees and visitors to the area on a daily basis. Plans for the repurposing and beautification of Normal Street have been proposed since the 1930’s and up until the 1980’s this contemplated a central boulevard park, similar to those of the beautiful boulevards of other major cities. These provide dog walking paths, event areas, reading and socializing in a green, nature-focused environment. The desired civic event plaza could be established in the block in between Harvey Milk and Lincoln Streets, creating a true pedestrian draw into the Normal Street Park experience.

We understand that this concept has not been pursued due in large part to the easement right limitations on this street area. We are interested in assisting to eliminate these concerns through our participation towards a true park-like beautification of Normal Street. We would like further discussions with you to this end.

We also understand the HBA’s focus on this plan is in large part to serve its revenue generator: the Farmers Market. But this use can still be well served with this alternative proposal and establish a much more beautiful, user friendly Framers Market experience similar to those in Union Square of New York City and others. Where people can shop and buy food to be enjoyed on benches in a tree filled park environment.

Successful concrete based promenades around the world are only successful when they are surrounded by continual, daily, vibrant, interactive retail, food, and experience-based draws. These include cafés, galleries, park settings or gardens, designer boutiques, restaurants, shops, flower stands, etc. There are NO SUCH DRAWS existing nor planned for the Normal Street corridor in the foreseeable future. An architects’

office, church, DMV and apartments are not that kind of draw. There is in fact NO reason for people to “promenade” up Normal street except for the once a week Farmers Market and sporadic civic events (most of which will not be located up Normal Street according to the present plan in any case but instead be held on University Avenue). The rest of the week, it will be abandoned and unused except by the homeless and those in line for the DMV.

The true and healthy revitalization of Hillcrest is absolutely dependent on a robust and stable business environment. Civic events and Farmers Market opportunities are also important for this health and revitalization. Therefore needs of ALL must to be taken into careful consideration and supported. One without the other will NOT succeed.

Business in Hillcrest is struggling. Parking and homeless issues are certainly major contributing factors as any business owner and leasing agent will confirm. Housing densities are not like in Little Italy or Downtown (and their resultant underground parking opportunities) and so the resident populations (and Parking) are not sufficient for providing an adequate consumer base. For Hillcrest businesses to survive, customers must come from surrounding communities. Many of our existing businesses (medical, dental, fitness, salon, chiropractic, home improvement, etc) are dependent on city or county-wide support. These are exactly the type of businesses that Hillcrest needs in order to thrive. These businesses bring in outside revenue, increased consumer traffic, visitors for all businesses and diversification. Civic events only begin that process. Seven-day-per-week safe, attractive, healthy business keeps it coming back to the area every day.

Again, we are committed to and support the concept of the true beautification of Normal Street with a Park-like environment that serves all concerned and truly promotes a fully functioning healthy, vibrant, and business-friendly as well as pedestrian-friendly Hillcrest. We strongly believe the present plan will NOT accomplish this goal and will, in contrast, lead to a blighted, homeless-friendly environment, a reduction in critical parking for local businesses, therefore creating a detriment to local businesses and property owners. We are eager to work with you towards a better solution.

Sincerely,

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