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UNAPPROVED DRAFT MINUTES

PLANNING COMMISSION
CITY OF SEBASTOPOL
MINUTES OF July 25, 2023

PLANNING COMMISSION:

The notice of the meeting was posted on July 20, 2023.

1. **CALL TO ORDER:** Vice Chair Fritz called the meeting to order at 6:00 P.M. and read a procedural statement.
2. **ROLL CALL:**
 - Present:** Vice Chair Fritz, and Commissioners Burnes and Oetinger
 - Absent:** Chair Fernandez (excused)
 - Staff:** Kari Svanstrom, Planning Director
John Jay, Associate Planner
3. **COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC ON ITEMS NOT ON AGENDA:** None.
4. **STATEMENTS OF CONFLICTS OF INTEREST:** None.
5. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES:** None.
6. **PUBLIC HEARINGS:**
 - A. **ANYTIME FITNESS** – The applicant, Grant Witham, is seeking approval for a Conditional Use Permit on behalf of Anytime Fitness at 968 Gravenstein Highway South. Anytime Fitness has requested to operate 24 hours a day and 7 days a week, which will be staffed Monday through Saturday from 9am to 7pm. The gym will offer group-training classes that range from 1-5 members and are run by a certified personal trainer. The proposed project has been determined to be exempt from further environmental review under Section 15301 – Existing Facilities, Class 1 of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines.

Director Svanstrom presented the staff report.

Vice Chair Fritz asked for Planning Commission questions of staff. Seeing none, he invited the applicant to give a presentation.

The applicant gave a presentation and was available for questions.

Vice Chair Fritz asked for Planning Commission questions of the applicant.

Kathy Oetinger, Commissioner

Are you okay with the conditions that staff has recommended: eliminating the 7pm to 8am time slot for classes, having 15-minute gaps in between sessions, having staff onsite during the off hours, and providing security when staff is not present?

Grant Witham, Applicant

The only one that I would not be okay with would be not being able to be open 24/7 in the way that our model has it. For one, we can't actually do that with our franchise, so I couldn't not be open 24/7 with key fob access. In terms of having a security guard there when our staff members are not there or having staff members there 24/7, that's just not economically feasible for me. In terms of the conditions set forth in Exhibit B, those are all good, such as limiting the classes to certain times, that's stuff is fine, but that last condition of having to be open and have staff 24/7, that would be too difficult for us and that wouldn't work for me.

Deborah Burnes, Commissioner

In light of that response, where are you currently a franchise owner and do you have unstaffed, unsupervised hours at those locations? It seems like a very risky situation to have an unstaffed gym.

Grant Witham, Applicant

My first club that I opened was in Novato, and I have four other locations in different parts of the state. I've got one in the central coast, I've got a couple in the Sierra foothills, and one in Winters, California. The model has actually been in place for over 20 years, is in place at over 4,000 locations, and has worked very well for that time. We've never had an incident at my locations, and just to be clear, the system is not fully open to the public after hours. When we lock the doors we actually have a full security system in place that's on. There are a couple of security features that Anytime Fitness is really big on, one of them being a panic button located in the gym and shown to every member on our tour. There are also panic necklaces, so if you're in the gym anytime of day, staff or not, and you hit that panic button or you hit one of the panic necklaces, it goes right to one of our monitoring stations and we all get phone calls. So I'll get a phone call, the managers onsite will get phone calls, and we will dispatch the police and fire emergency services to the gym, and then we will also respond. For me, I live very close, so that's an easy response for me, but the managers who manage the gym, that's part of their job responsibility that if an alarm goes off at 3am the police are there and they're there. There is also an automated external defibrillator onsite if anyone were to have cardiac arrest. The only way to get into the club is with a secure access key fob, which is issued to members only. Other parts of the security system are cameras everywhere, the door access, and we also have a tailgating system, so if somebody thought I'll just scan my key and let somebody in, we actually get that alert, and if members do that they will lose their membership. We've got a 911 phone that members can utilize if they don't have a cell phone with them. So we have a lot of security features in place, and again, the system is not fully open during unstaffed hours, and I will say it's worked splendidly over 20 years, even before I got involved, and I was a member of the Anytime Fitness in Santa Rosa prior, so I've seen it from the members' perspective but also as an owner of a gym as well.

Kathy Oetinger, Commissioner

I'm a little confused, because if we're looking at Exhibit B, the only issue there is that it doesn't offer training classes, but it looks like people can still use the gym during those off hours, is that correct?

Grant Witham, Applicant

Yes. I know there were some concerns about the amount of people coming into the gym, and so one of the conditions was limiting classes that bring larger amounts of people into the facility, but the do-it-yourselfers, they're getting off a shift at a bar or restaurant and maybe it's 11:00 o'clock at night and other gyms aren't open. They're able to scan their key—they're a member already—get into the facility, change and use the treadmill, so the gym is open 24/7 for members who want to do their own thing.

Kari Svanstrom, Planning Director

Under the recommendations, the first recommendation we did include in the conditions of approval; the other three are for Planning Commission consideration as part of this meeting.

Paul Fritz, Vice Chair

So the hours for classes as proposed would be 8am to 7pm, and I don't see this in the conditions but in the staff report and I think it was a maximum of seven people. Is that a condition, or is that just a recommendation for discussion?

John Jay, Associate Planner

It was a recommendation from the last meeting we had regarding the Pilates studio. The application states ranging from one to five members and we wanted the Commission to have some thought as far as expanding that membership a little bit further if business took off and classes were successful so that Grant wouldn't have to come back to add two more people onto their daily allowance, or if the Commission feels that that number is still too low and wants to go further, that was just a number.

Paul Fritz, Vice Chair

So Grant, does that make sense? It's not conditioned this way at this point, but staff's recommendation was to allow up to seven people per class rather than five in your application. The way it works is whatever you say in your application is what we adhere to unless we specifically say otherwise in the conditions, so I want to know if the seven would be preferable to you, or ten, or do you have another number that you could potentially see being your absolute maximum? If you say five and end up with six people, then you'd technically have to come back to us and ask to have six.

Grant Witham, Applicant

I'm good with five. I know it says classes, but what we're doing is more personal training in a small group setting, so we're not looking to bring 12 or 20 people into a group class; it's more five people working with the trainer, so I'm totally fine with five.

Kathy Oetinger, Commissioner

While we're on that, would it be better for you if you could start at 6:00 o'clock and run to 9:00 o'clock? I know I go to the gym and a lot of people go really early, so would that work for you?

Grant Witham, Applicant

I would love that. Obviously being able to service people who want to achieve their health and wellness goals before work and after work would make things much easier for me for sure, so yes, if that were an option I would take it in a second.

Vice Chair Fritz asked for further Planning Commission questions of the applicant. Seeing none, he opened public comment. Seeing none, he closed public comment.

The Commission discussed the application as follows:

Paul Fritz, Vice Chair

It sounds like the five people per class is good, so we don't need to go beyond that. Commissioner Oetinger suggested 6am to 9pm for classes. I am fine with that. Commissioner Burnes, do you have any concerns about that?

Deborah Burnes, Commissioner

No.

Paul Fritz, Vice Chair

So it sounds like the Commission is good with the extended hours. Is there any further discussion about the security issues and staff's recommendations regarding that?

Kathy Oetinger, Commissioner

I don't have issues with it. It seems to be working in other communities. It looks like this comes back in four years, but certainly if we had problems with security we could bring it back sooner.

Kari Svanstrom, Planning Director

Normally use permits do not have to return to us for review unless there's an issue.

Kathy Oetinger, Commissioner

Okay. I'm fine with it being 24/7. There was that little issue no one has discussed about neighbors over the back fence, but I think we looked at it before at other uses on this site and there are just a few houses, and the way the building is constructed I don't see that that would be a real issue, and they don't play really loud music.

Kari Svanstrom, Planning Director

Commissioner Oetinger, for that one there is the recommendation to have a Good Neighbor Policy to address any noise or other issues. That's making sure people coming in the middle of the night aren't slamming car doors, having staff trained to make people aware that there are residential neighbors nearby, and also have a contact so if neighbors do have problems they go to Anytime Fitness first rather than to the Planning Department.

Deborah Burnes, Commissioner

I definitely am not comfortable with someone being at unstaffed gym. I think all the security is fantastic, but coming from the spa industry where I've also had spas for 30 years and there have been no issues, and yet most every single spa has some issue with this, and that's with an employee who you vetted and with customers who have been coming forever and ever and just two people in a room, so it doesn't feel comfortable to me to have people there without some security. I get it that it doesn't pencil out financially, but I think that needs to be part of the whole thing and that there is some type of security in place for those hours where there are going to be people there alone. I know that they can be called at 3:00am, but it seems unrealistic to me too with four or five different franchises and a manager who is going to be there and providing jobs in Sebastopol. Places are closing all over Sebastopol because they can't find people to work, so that's amazing if you find someone who is going to get up at 3:00am.

Paul Fritz, Vice Chair

I agree with Commissioner Oetinger that this has been a franchise business that's been in operation for a long time, and it sounds like you do have some security protocols in place. I remember when you had come to us some years ago about the downtown location and we had a very long conversation about the security. I feel confident that this seems to be working and I'm not inclined to make any additional requirements around that issue. The other issue is scheduling classes. There is a 15-minute gap in between classes. I think that's okay; I don't have a question one way or the other.

Kathy Oetinger, Commissioner

I think that's fine. I think it really helps give people time to park and still get in. I think it's a good policy if you're holding a class to have them at 15-minute intervals.

Paul Fritz, Vice Chair

Grant, do you have any concern about the 15-minute gap between classes?

Grant Witham, Applicant

No, 15 minutes sounds more than fair, and the logic and reasoning behind it seems pretty solid, so I would be totally okay with putting a 15-minute block between when a session ends and when a session would begin.

Paul Fritz, Vice Chair

What I have heard then is that we would modify Condition 6 to allow the classes to be held between 6am and 9pm, and then maybe in that same condition we add the 15-minute gap between classes.

Commissioner Oetinger made a motion to approve a Conditional Use Permit for 968 Gravenstein Highway South, subject to the additional conditions of approval referenced by Vice Chair Fritz.

Kari Svanstrom, Planning Director

Someone brought up the Good Neighbor Policy, which is not currently in the conditions of approval, so if desired, add that.

Paul Fritz, Vice Chair

Do we have a standard of what that is, or how does that get crafted? What exactly is a Good Neighbor Policy?

Kari Svanstrom, Planning Director

We do them for restaurants and it includes things like no bottle dumping after 9pm, things like that, but what you could say is the applicant shall develop a Good Neighbor Policy that addresses contacts for neighbors and training for staff and submit that as part of their Building Permit for staff review and approval.

Kathy Oetinger, Commissioner

A Good Neighbor Policy is added to the motion.

Vice Chair Fritz seconded the motion.

AYES: Vice Chair Fritz, and Commissioner Oetinger

NOES: None

ABSTAIN: Commissioner Burnes

ABSENT: Chair Fernandez

7. REGULAR AGENDA ITEMS:

A. VEHICLE MILES TRAVELED PROJECT KICKOFF

Director Svanstrom introduced the item.

Ian Barnes, Principal of Fehr & Peers, and Director Svanstrom gave a presentation and were available for questions.

Vice Chair Fritz asked for Planning Commission questions of the presenter and staff.

Paul Fritz, Vice Chair

What is the desired outcome of today's meeting? Are we going to get into the details of what you want to do in approaching the mitigation measures or thresholds and things like that, or is this just a presentation and questions?

Kari Svanstrom, Planning Director

This is mostly presentation, but if Commissioners have comments and some direction, that would be great to help us on our way.

Ian Barnes, Fehr & Peers

Absolutely. I know we were talking about there was that 50,000 square foot number and taking it down for retail projects, giving some guidance there. What I have seen commissions do is ask staff to do a little bit of research on the typical types of projects that come through on the retail front and try to work down to those numbers. I've seen that 50,000 number come down to 30,000 or 20,000. Healdsburg is thinking 10,000 for general retail but 30,000 for grocery stores. There are a lot of different ways to slice and dice that number coming down from 50,000 square feet to a more city appropriate number.

Paul Fritz, Vice Chair

You said they're trying to finish this up by the end of the year, so what is the overall process of what's happening in terms of meetings, decision-making, and implementation?

Kari Svanstrom, Planning Director

We are going to be working with Ian on this and basically want to get input from the Planning Commission, again, if we can get that tonight. Mostly it's what is VMT? Let's make sure everyone understands, because it's an incredibly simple concept, but as Ian talked about, even the transportation consultants had a war on how they're going to calculate it, what it means exactly, and how it's done. For us, moving forward what I see is the State has a 15%. I wouldn't want to go below that because that opens us up to a lot of potential exposure to say 10% is fine. The 15% or more stringent is more what people are doing. I know we're missing our chair tonight, but I can always talk with him as well and make sure he watches the video to get some initial input or questions that you want staff to look into in terms of, like Ian said, what's the typical retail size, like the Exchange Bank was X square feet and that kind of a thing to help you understand what the different dynamics are. For me, the percentages below VMT we need to select whether or not it would be the city level or the regional level for the home-based. I would say confirm that for the office we want to go with the regional level. Then for the retail level of screening out is there a sense tonight on square footage? We won't talk about potential mitigations, projects, or ways in the City to reduce VMT. When the concept of mitigation bank was first proposed at SCTA I was like I know for sure that Sebastopol won't want to pay into something if they don't have projects in that pool as well, and that's because the unofficial Chamber motto is "Think globally, act

locally,” and they’re really going to want to see a reduction of VMT in town, they’re going to want to do something locally as part of those projects, so that’s my sense of where Council and the Commission would want to go with that. But if there are projects like the bicycle lanes that we installed, crosswalks, or other things that would actually be—and this is where Ian can help us—sort of a regional level mitigation bank kind of a project so that when SCTA does develop that we have some thoughts about what those projects might be. That’s kind of the later stages of it, but first is making sure everyone understands VMT, and again, we can still use level of service, particularly when we’re reviewing a project and the specific site circulation around that project. Like for Woodmark, we did an analysis of trips coming out of that site. It’s right at the Robinson/Bodega intersection, so do we need a traffic light, do we need a crosswalk, what do we need there to make sure that the intersection is safe but also that it’s not causing undo delay? We can still do that level of analysis for that project. They’re adding a crosswalk, but for that kind of higher level CEQA stuff where do we want to go in terms of do you have to do a traffic analysis for the trip generation stuff and the vehicle lane (inaudible) trips?

Ian Barnes, Fehr & Peers

Usually where we see the most deviation, as Kari noted, was 15% for residential projects, city versus regional, and for employment does regional make sense? Then the retail screening criteria, what number or what range of numbers makes sense to look at? It’s always tough to pare down to a number in a meeting without further research.

Paul Fritz, Vice Chair

So we’re going to have this meeting tonight and I assume there is going to be a similar kind of presentation to the Council at some point, and then will you come back to us with a final package of how we’re going to adopt this?

Ian Barnes, Fehr & Peers

Yes. We’re having some of these introductory meetings, because it’s such a deep topic, and getting some initial feedback. Then we will circle back with City staff, have some discussions internally, and then, yes, this would go back to Planning Commission and the Council for formal adoption. That’s a very key step for CEQA, because the Council needs to adopt all general use thresholds of significance by ordinance or resolution, so we will be coming back with recommendations. It would be great to get some initial input tonight, but there needs to be a little bit more research done tonight and some technical memoranda developed to supplement that.

Kathy Oetinger, Commissioner

My question is maybe theoretical, but maybe not. This is a lot about greenhouse gasses and the environment as much as the numbers of cars on the street, and I understand putting things together so the cars don’t have to travel so far to get the thing accomplished, included the economy, but as cars become more environmentally clean through electricity how does that affect this? Does that get factored into we’re still trying to keep the cars from moving, because everything generates heat and congestion, so how does that balance out?

Ian Barnes, Fehr & Peers

For now, and probably at least through the end of the decade if I were to speculate, the mode share that’s electric and hybrid vehicles is still dwarfed by gas guzzling SUVs and trucks in a lot of cases, and so for right now the law does not recommend divvying up by traction power, electric versus gas versus diesel. To the degree that the fleet mix does change, that would be captured in the greenhouse gas section of CEQA related to the pollutant emissions, versus for the transportation section we’re looking at the intersection of the land use pattern and the transportation system to align CEQA and to give an easier pass

for projects in CEQA that are located in areas where people are more likely to walk and bike, or the likelihood to drive is less because there are alternative options. Another way to think of it was it used to be really hard to put residential near BART stations because it would be very congested and under level of service you'd just have really bad CEQA impacts; now it's flipped around.

Kari Svanstrom, Planning Director

Commissioner Oetinger, I agree with you and assume this 15% OPR level does have some accounting for the transition to EVs at that kind of macro level, and I know our Climate Action Committee is trying to track the percentage or number of electric vehicles in the City and how that progresses over time. The DMV actually tracks that, so there are metrics there, but in the big picture being able to walk or bicycle versus a vehicle, even if it's an EV there are a lot of emissions related to either the production of energy and all of the consumables that come with that in terms of the mass production of that, and the energy and greenhouse gas that goes into that, so cars wear out. Bicycles wear out too, but there is probably not the same kind of environmental impact to produce a bicycle. Solar panels aren't all the great for the environment too, so it's a little bit the same in that. That's not really what's being accounted for in the VMT, but I think that's from that kind of macro level of how you're looking at it. I think I included the number of General Plan components that we have just in the transportation section, but there are a lot of other components of our General Plan that talk about walkable and bikeable communities and things like that, so it's all kind of the same thing going toward the same goal of a smaller town where you can walk or bike and having that as an option based on where we're doing future development.

Kathy Oetinger, Commissioner

Overall it's hard to see that this has any affect at all on what our little town does. I don't think it's ever going to stop or change anything; it seems like a lot of good effort toward a goal and I just don't think it will ever change anything overall.

Paul Fritz, Vice Chair

It's interesting to look at the idea of the bulls eye and putting things close in as a way to encourage more development in the places that are already walkable-oriented places, and I think we can still do that. I think that needs to be coupled with other policy changes; we can't just do that and expect people to start developing downtown. I think it's a way that helps them get through their CEQA documentation for a project like the Habitat for Humanity project or whatever kind of project might be proposed downtown, but there are still other policies we need to look at that would even further encourage that kind of development, like parking requirements and things like that. There are still a lot of things that we do beyond VMT that will help push that development and help reduce our overall impact.

Kari Svanstrom, Planning Director

Right, and our Climate Action Committee have been looking at some of those policies. For instance, they looked at the scooter share program but after vetting that with some of the suppliers of those they came to the conclusion that what we actually need more is a bicycle or e-bike share program, because we have enough topography and we have a good system of trails to get from one side of town to the other in some areas. So they are continuing to look at other programs like that that would also help, because it's great to have a bunch of bicycle lanes but if you are coming in from Santa Rosa on a bus but you have that last mile between the bus and where you need to get to for your job and there's no link, are you going to take the bus or are you going to drive because it's easier? And other policies certainly help along with obviously locating jobs close to where the bus routes come in.

Deborah Burnes, Commissioner

How do you take a hotel into account? Obviously the hotel that is going to be in downtown is going to have less VMT because they can walk to the restaurants or movie theater as opposed to the one that is outside of town, but how do you look at those tourists? Because they're going to go to the wineries, and they're going to go to Healdsburg to eat, and they might go to San Francisco.

Ian Barnes, Fehr & Peers

It's wineries and hotels that are going to count first, and the answer is actually somewhat similar for both. Let's just say for these types of uses in general there is going to be an employment component of that use, and you look at that employee VMT using the employee VMT threshold. But then you would look at that visitor VMT, like you would at least here in Sonoma County thus far, as being looked at under that retail. How much driving occurs because of that, and for hotels do you have a hotel in an under-served area or an over-served area? The other important thing, and we didn't get too deep into this because it's beyond the scope of this presentation and it gets deep into the methodology, is there is an expectation that you track the full lengths of your trips. You can not just cut the trip lengths off at the County line, for example, and that's why big data and cell phone data for hotel projects, wineries, and tasting rooms are so important, because you need to capture all that VMT associated with the project, not just for transportation analysis but also to seed your air quality, greenhouse gas, and energy analysis, and those areas are subject to comment and review by the public as well.

Deborah Burnes, Commissioner

I guess we don't have many hotels yet, but if you look at visitors will that make your VMT go up in your city and does that get harder to control?

Ian Barnes, Fehr & Peers

That's a very tough question. Visitor VMT is tied back to the land uses in a lot of cases. We're talking about the origin destination method. Trips that just pass through your city and don't stop anywhere are just ignored in the calculation because they're not interacting with any land uses there. So for a hotel project, yes, we would be looking at the VMT going to wineries or their trip to the hotel from SFO, so we do try to track all of that VMT because that's ultimately what CEQA requires for a defensible analysis.

Vice Chair Fritz asked for public comment.

Kyle Falbo

I'm really impressed to see improvements or transformation of the way that we're measuring vehicles. I love that there are mathematical models happening in the background behind all this, and I feel like it's an improvement. But I have to agree that at the end of the day, especially when it comes to housing, that automobile-centric housing is a self-fulfilling prophesy, and until we commit to looking at alternative housing models and solutions that aren't focused on a car, a garage, a driveway, a parking space, because that's the entire conversation about housing and has been for a very long time, we're going to be spinning in circles and giving lip service to a new metric that really won't create any sort of actual impact. I appreciate identifying that, but let's get to the work of actually modifying our objective standards in such a way that will actually reduce the amount of auto-centric housing that we have.

Vice Chair Fritz closed public comment.

Paul Fritz, Vice Chair

Do you want to then go through the slides that you want some discussion or feedback on?

Ian Barnes, Fehr & Peers

One of the first major questions that come up is 15% versus another number. For context, a lot of agencies have adopted the 15% number. A handful have adopted 16.8% with the understanding that requiring 16.8% could increase the number of environmental impact reports that need to be prepared versus a 15%, and then beyond that just making it harder for projects to screen out. There are some cases in some smaller cities where 16.8% is such a large drop that no areas of the city can qualify for screening because it's such a big drop versus the grand average across the city.

Kari Svanstrom, Planning Director

I think part and parcel of that is for the home base whether you use the city level or the Bay Area region, because obviously those are going to be different as well.

Ian Barnes, Fehr & Peers

There is one other consideration there, and that is the control over the metric number there, if it's the city average or the regional average. There are some agencies in the County that have adopted the county-wide average, but you could theoretically down the line—because it's a rolling baseline—run into a situation where those rows of the table flip where the county-wide average is actually higher than the city-wide average, and now your threshold isn't defensible, versus the OPR guidance. We haven't been able to talk about this yet, but we see an example in Southern California where that did occur in Orange County and it got a major EIR. It was going to be a mitigated negative declaration, but then it got kicked into an EIR because of a swap in how those numbers lined up.

Kari Svanstrom, Planning Director

Obviously these two numbers interact. It feels like just using the City VMT is the easier way to do that; then we're basically looking at if we have for home-based trips 17.1 vehicle miles per resident, that's something that we can actually grasp. If you take every resident of Sebastopol, they're driving 17.1 miles a day. Can we get that number down by 15-16%? That a little easier to grasp than doing Bay Area region where you think about all those other varying factors, so I would recommend using the city. I think it will be more of a challenge to the City to see how much below our own threshold can we get it and not be comparing ourselves to a region that has a lot of different transit and other dynamics, and then focus on 15-16%.

Kathy Oetinger, Commissioner

Is that number adjusted?

Ian Barnes, Fehr & Peers

Yes, because it is a rolling baseline. What analysts typically do is look at—and I'm going to use this technical term—the basier of the model, which for Sonoma County is 2019, and the future year of the model, 2040, and interpolate to the year of that. The model is updated about every five years, so Sonoma County is going to be updating their model starting next year, so fiscal year 2024/2025, and so the model is fairly well maintained in terms of land use changes, transportation network changes, so you're really using each version of that model for only five years at a time before it gets an update. Next year will the model be a little bit long in the tooth? Potentially, but it's still, in my opinion, the best available tool that we have.

Kari Svanstrom, Planning Director

I think it will be helpful when they do that, because it will be long enough after COVID. When we did the model on 2019 everyone was like, "2019, wait a second. That's not right." Fehr & Peers actually did, and we as the planning directors worked to make sure we had metrics that were pre-COVID and made sense in terms of the different seasonality as well, knowing that we have both ag workers and tourist season, and then we have schools on the season, and so all that data was taken into account pre-COVID for the model, correct?

Ian Barnes, Fehr & Peers

Correct.

Kari Svanstrom, Planning Director

So it will be kind of the post-COVID, and I would imagine with the work from home and hybrid schedules that there will probably be some sort of shift at that point.

Kathy Oetinger, Commissioner

And everyone is getting older. We're an aging community still.

Kari Svanstrom, Planning Director

Sebastopol is, yes, and I'm not sure how that impacts travel.

Ian Barnes, Fehr & Peers

I'm not going to comment on that, but what I would say is to the degree that there are those factors, when the models get updated we do incorporate big data, we do have to recalibrate the model back to new traffic counts, new travel patterns, and really make sure that the model is at least for the base year serving as a good replicator of the conditions out there within the bounds imposed on us by the State.

Paul Fritz, Vice Chair

I tend to agree with Kari on using the city-wide versus the regional numbers in terms of the 15% versus 16.8%. I don't know if I feel strongly about it. I'm kind of inclined to go with the 15% just to not make it too extra onerous.

Kari Svanstrom, Planning Director

I don't know what kind of questions we should be asking to see where we should be setting that number. Like how much does 1% impact? When you say 16.8% means that nothing could screen out, and in the screening as the lead agency for CEQA if there's a project that by the numbers looks like it should be screened out but staff knows of something that's really specific and odd about that, we can pull that. So screening means that they wouldn't have to go through that for CEQA, but if staff knows of something that's really weird that would most likely put it below that 15%, we can always pull it and request the VMT analysis anyway.

Ian Barnes, Fehr & Peers

The other part of perspective here is in that VMT mitigation research. For a rural/suburban town like Sebastopol the theoretical maximum effectiveness if you did everything feasible on a site is reducing the VMT down by about 10%. So if you took the average residential unit in Sebastopol and put all of the feasible transportation demand measure on it, you'd still be above the threshold of significance. A lot agencies and decision-makers have asked about how 15% versus 16.8% doesn't seem like a lot in determining whether you have an impact that needs mitigation or no mitigation, but then can you even mitigate that for the average land use. So 15% versus 16.8%, in my opinion 15% would be fairly stringent given the mitigation potential.

Paul Fritz, Vice Chair

I just did a quick calculation, and it's very minor in terms of for the average household the 17.1 VMT, it's like 2.5. The 16.8% is 2.8, so it's not a huge difference in actual vehicle miles, but I hear what you're saying about the mitigation becomes and more challenging as you get to those levels.

Ian Barnes, Fehr & Peers

And proving it for CEQA purposes and where does the evidence point you in terms of that?

Deborah Burnes, Commissioner

I agree with the 15% Vice Chair Fritz is suggesting. I think that makes the most sense as well.

Kari Svanstrom, Planning Director

Just to confirm, we do have for office uses, and this is just office, not industrial.

Ian Barnes, Fehr & Peers

Usually for employment-focused uses, places where the vast majority of your SB 743 VMT is going to be commuters, because we're going to be excluding freight and economic activity from those calculations, yes, those would be carried under the office.

Kari Svanstrom, Planning Director

A recent example that has come before the Commission, we've had cannabis manufacturing and they have also requested a delivery permit, so in the cannabis manufacturing, which they probably have two or three offices in the building as well as the manufacturing locations, that would be considered office, but the delivery part of it would not be?

Ian Barnes, Fehr & Peers

It would not be part of that, and it actually may not even be subject to SB 743 at all.

Kari Svanstrom, Planning Director

Because it's transportation of the goods, just like when a winery is shipping their wine, that part of the industry is not...

Ian Barnes, Fehr & Peers

Yes. The actual formal definition, without getting too far into it, is it's VMT generated by automobiles and light trucks, pickup trucks, delivery trucks, and those sorts of things are not subject to VMT in the transportation section. They would be subject to VMT in greenhouse gas, energy, and those other sections that consider the whole and complete VMT.

Kari Svanstrom, Planning Director

Then similar, like we just had Anytime Fitness, would that be considered retail?

Ian Barnes, Fehr & Peers

That's a tough one.

Kari Svanstrom, Planning Director

Obviously the employees there would be part of the office.

Ian Barnes, Fehr & Peers

The employees there, if I had to guess I'd probably consider that a retail, because most of your trips are going to be patrons.

Kari Svanstrom, Planning Director

But they would be captured by a home base if someone were coming from their home to the gym and back.

Ian Barnes, Fehr & Peers

Yes, so in that case it would be home based if we were analyzing a residential project, but for the purposes of the Anytime Fitness project, we would look at the gym itself as a net new VMT.

Kari Svanstrom, Planning Director

So for the office we have the option of doing the region, which is higher. It's a little bit more latitude in terms of a potential revenue generation economic project for the city versus Sebastopol. We actually have a pretty low home-to-work VMT. Do you know why that is?

Ian Barnes, Fehr & Peers

Yes, I think what we're finding in general is if you work in Sonoma County you usually live in Sonoma County, more so than for the Bay Area region writ large where you have people commuting from Concord to Silicon Valley. In that case, that commute trip would be 110, because it's 55 one way and 55 the other way. So that's why that number is so high versus employment uses here in Sonoma County that generally fair better, because work local/live local.

Kathy Oetinger, Commissioner

Do you even count the work from home? I guess you count every person who works.

Ian Barnes, Fehr & Peers

That would be zero.

Kathy Oetinger, Commissioner

What about the people who don't work? Are you counting those as people too?

Ian Barnes, Fehr & Peers

No. This is about commute trips. Our travel models can specifically isolate out the commuter trips, and so a lot of what we've had to do lately is changing around the numbers and assuming a work from home factor. I would not recommend we get deep into that for Sonoma County, but certain mega office projects, for the Googles and the Facebooks of the world down in Silicon Valley, have some complex CEQA things that they have to deal with down there. I can only presume that when the County updates their model some of these work from home variables are going to hop in there.

Kari Svanstrom, Planning Director

But the reality is if you're working from home you're not producing any VMT, and you're also potentially not going to have an office project, because you're working from home, not an office.

Ian Barnes, Fehr & Peers

Yes.

Kari Svanstrom, Planning Director

But retirees do not contribute to home to work based trips, so our elderly population is not why we have a low commute VMT.

Ian Barnes, Fehr & Peers

And that's why, if you look at the variable there, it is per employee and not per resident.

Kari Svanstrom, Planning Director

Ian, do you have a recommendation? It sounds like most people are just using the Bay Area region for the same reason Vice Chair Fritz recommended the 15%.

Paul Fritz, Vice Chair

Because it gives you a little more leeway if you use the Bay Area region.

Ian Barnes, Fehr & Peers

Yes, it's consistent with the OPR analysis, and so most agencies are just going 15% below the region.

Paul Fritz, Vice Chair

That makes sense to me.

Kari Svanstrom, Planning Director

Then there's the question of 15% below the regional, or if you wanted I assume you could leave residential at 15% but change office if you wanted to.

Ian Barnes, Fehr & Peers

Yes, you could. For full disclosure, most places are just choosing 15% both sides. I know that there are some agencies in Southern California where employment VMT dominates the residential VMT; I think City of Industry is one of those. I think even they've just kept it at 15%, so the 15% tends to be the magic number out of the State Office of Planning and Research.

Kari Svanstrom, Planning Director

So it would be 15% below the 22.3%?

Ian Barnes, Fehr & Peers

Yes.

Kari Svanstrom, Planning Director

So it would actually allow the VMT to offices to be a little bit higher?

Ian Barnes, Fehr & Peers

Yes.

Kari Svanstrom, Planning Director

You had the comment about the retail.

Paul Fritz, Vice Chair

I would say the 50,000 square feet seems pretty high for Sebastopol. I don't imagine us ever getting a 50,000 square foot retail facility, so I don't have a sense of what that number should be. What's your experience with other smaller jurisdictions like ours, what they're going towards?

Ian Barnes, Fehr & Peers

Healdsburg is thinking about 10,000 for general retail, and your typical convenience store is about 5,000-6,000 square feet in a lot of cases, so that's about the scale.

Kari Svanstrom, Planning Director

I think Exchange Bank was 5,500 square feet.

Paul Fritz, Vice Chair

I want to say the new SVS is 15,000 square feet, just to give a sense of what that is.

Kari Svanstrom, Planning Director

Most of the downtown stores are about 2,000 square feet, so 50,000 square feet is huge for Sebastopol. We do require a conditional use permit, and the square footage threshold for that is 30,000 square feet, which still seems very high to me.

Paul Fritz, Vice Chair

Safeway is probably 30,000 square feet. Lucky is probably that scale.

Kari Svanstrom, Planning Director

To not analyze traffic on something like that from a VMT seems a little bit odd.

Kathy Oetinger, Commissioner

What was the old CVS?

Kari Svanstrom, Planning Director

The CVS building is 26,000 square feet, which was still a very large building, and 30,000 square feet is the threshold for a conditional use permit. When I first got here I wondered why that number wasn't more like 15,000 square feet.

Paul Fritz, Vice Chair

How do you encourage a larger grocery store in the center of town that has maybe not as much parking as another grocery store, like a Whole Foods versus Lucky kind of thing? The Whole Foods has a small parking lot, is downtown, is more walkable; and Lucky is bigger, has a bigger parking lot, and is more a kind of drive to place. What's the level of the preference for something like the Whole Foods versus something like a Lucky? But you also at the same time want it be distributed so people can walk to places as well, so it's a little bit of a tricky thing of what you're trying to really incentivize.

Kari Svanstrom, Planning Director

That's a whole discussion of dynamics. Safeway is where the Analy High School students go. If you've ever been around Safeway at 3:30 on a weekday during the school year you know what I'm talking about. Whole Foods, I see a lot of people grabbing lunches, so office workers and they're probably walking there; the same with Safeway. When I'm at Pacific Market over lunch hour I see folks who are coming in from wineries and stuff or from the ags and other businesses, and they're going there because then they don't have that extra mile to get to downtown. Yes, it definitely is an interesting dynamic, so conditional use permit at what level is definitely a good conversation to have and we'll add that to our Planning Commission work plan, since that's not necessarily tonight's discussion, but I guess the question is at what point would a conditional use permit be required? I'm hearing 50,000 square feet; let's bring that down. Staff can bring some options back to you at the next meeting if you want us to look at certain things and see if you have a sense of buildings or uses that you want us to look up, or get a sense of what we've been permitting

lately to get a feel for how busy that is at what square foot is probably a good way to get a handle on it in terms of what square footage versus traffic.

Paul Fritz, Vice Chair

I think it would be good to have a sense. It's hard at this point to know where to go with it. Some kind of tiered system makes sense, but I don't know exactly what the tiers are.

Kari Svanstrom, Planning Director

So the larger scale, like a grocery store, being different from...

Paul Fritz, Vice Chair

From the local serving retail. You mentioned the local serving versus a wider serving. Like there are stores that cater to just in-town residents and stores that cater more toward all of West County or whatever.

Ian Barnes, Fehr & Peers

Just a reminder that these screening criteria could always be revised over time if they get set up. Kari also mentioned that if there is a particular project that fits under that cap but maybe it's not truly local serving, staff has the ability to pull that and to require analysis to prove it. From my perspective I've heard something less than 50,000 square feet, but then a little bit of homework.

Kari Svanstrom, Planning Director

I think Ian and John and Suzy and I will put our heads together and think about what might be a good recommendation. I can also reach out to Healdsburg and Cotati and see why they picked their metrics so we have someone who has thought about and set it at that different level.

Ian Barnes, Fehr & Peers

And again, there is the ability to deny the use of screening for projects with certain elements. The typical one that gets brought up a lot is drive-throughs. I understand drive-throughs are not going to be happening in Sebastopol anytime soon, but that's an auto-oriented feature that encourages people to drive.

Kari Svanstrom, Planning Director

Like a carwash.

Ian Barnes, Fehr & Peers

Yes, a carwash particularly. You may have heard some things that are very much tourist focused. It may be small, but it's tourist-focused, they don't get to just automatically pass out of VMT, so they're having some discussions at some of the more rural agencies, not Santa Rosas, not Rohnert Parks, not Cotatis, about that particular item there as well.

Deborah Burnes, Commissioner

Back to tourism and hotels. All of these small towns like Healdsburg and Windsor do these events where people come from all over, so Peacetown would one that we do here. How do you look at the VMT for something like that?

Ian Barnes, Fehr & Peers

Usually the way I go about it is because of the big data we're able to plop a zone in the system and we can look back at previous events and say what does the VMT and trip pattern look like? If that event were to move to another space, what is the VMT effect of that move? Another way is if you had a certain type of special event and then another

person wanted to have the same type of special event ten miles away, you can kind of get the catchment area for this original special event space and then apply that same catchment area to this new space and then change around the trip (inaudible) associated with that. Big data has been a revolution there and that's definitely a case where we'd want to not use the travel model and really let the actual trip patterns dictate how that VMT gets calculated.

Kari Svanstrom, Planning Director

A lot of our special events like the Apple Blossom Parade, July 3rd and those types of things are temporary events that are exempt from this kind of analysis. CEQA is for built projects. There is a specific exemption for temporary events like that.

Paul Fritz, Vice Chair

You brought up the mitigation measures and what kind of projects will we have in Sebastopol, and I think there could be some things that we certainly could do to either our own pool or impact fee kind of thing where we pool our own resources to do more bike lane projects or the bike share programs or whatever it is.

Kari Svanstrom, Planning Director

There is a Sebastopol shuttle that Sonoma County Transit does and the City supports, and I know there was a discussion at the budget meeting this year about can we afford to continue to do this? Is that something that a mitigation fee could do, and have you ever seen a local community that isn't a half a million people or larger do their own impact fees for that?

Ian Barnes, Fehr & Peers

The short answer is yes; we have seen that. I think Walnut Creek is a really good example where they run the downtown trolley from their BART station, and there are other ones that run from the Pleasant Hill BART, which is actually in Walnut Creek, to other parts along the Treat Boulevard corridor and using development impact fees and other programs to fund those, so that's a very popular program. There are a handful of other agencies in the Bay Area that have that downtown trolley. And then, yes, supplementing these regional connections to, say, a SMART station is definitely going to be a backbone of the bank and exchange programs. For example, Western Riverside County getting people to the Metrolink 91 lines in San Bernardino. You would maybe see something similar for Sebastopol to get to downtown Santa Rosa or Cotati's SMART, something like that.

8. SUBCOMMITTEE UPDATES

Design Review Subcommittee, Director Svanstrom

The Design Review Subcommittee met on July 25th to discuss the objective design standards, and continued the discussion to the next meeting.

9. PLANNING DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Director Svanstrom provided updates.

The Commission asked questions of Director Svanstrom.

10. ADJOURNMENT: Vice Chair Fritz adjourned the meeting at 7:58 p.m. The next regularly scheduled Planning Commission meeting will take place on Tuesday, August 15, 2023 at 6:00 p.m.