



## AGENDA SUMMARY EUREKA CITY COUNCIL

**TITLE:** Jacobs Campus Town Hall Debrief and Next Steps

**DEPARTMENT:** Development Services

**PREPARED BY:** Cristin Kenyon, Director of Development Services

**PRESENTED FOR:**  Action  Information only **Discussion**

### **RECOMMENDATION**

Receive report and provide direction on next steps.

### **FISCAL IMPACT**

No Fiscal Impact  Included in Budget  Additional Appropriation

### **COUNCIL GOALS/STRATEGIC VISION**

**General Plan Goal LU-8:** Improve and promote community engagement and participation in the public process for all segments of the community.

**General Plan Policy LU-8.1: Collaboration.** Encourage and empower members of the public from all segments of the community to participate in public decision-making processes and to collaborate with City leaders in planning decisions.

**General Plan Policy LU-5.5: Existing Neighborhoods.** Protect and enhance the integrity of Eureka's existing neighborhoods by...ensuring that new or renovated structures are compatible with the established character, development form, and function of the neighborhoods.

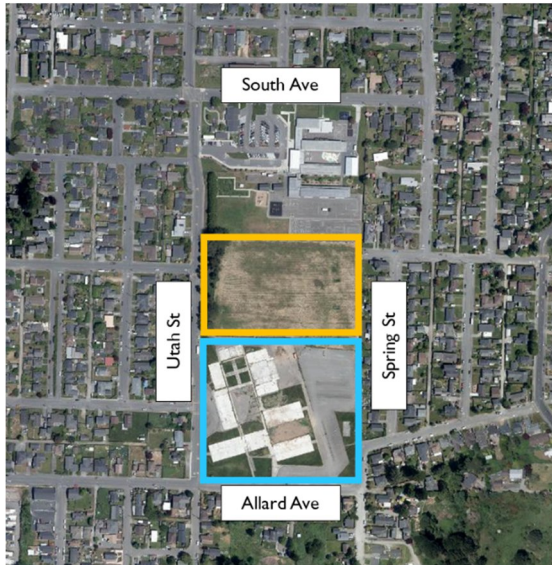
**General Plan Policy LU-6.2: Infill First.** Promote development of vacant infill properties and redevelopment/reuse of economically underutilized sites and buildings to accommodate new growth and internal densification prior to considering potential annexation.

**General Plan Policy LU-1.7: Parcel Specific Considerations.** Provide for potential variation in the application of City regulations and standards in consideration of unique parcel specific characteristics and/or limitations when new development and/or uses are proposed. Such variations may include: (1) further restricting General Plan and Zoning Code uses, policies, and standards when determined necessary to protect public health and safety and/or ensure compatibility with adjacent uses; or (2) relaxing such uses,

policies, and standards when appropriate to enhance the feasibility of the proposed new development or use.

## **DISCUSSION**

At their regular meeting on February 6, 2024, City Council requested a future agenda item with a staff report on the findings from the recent Jacobs Campus Town Hall as well as additional information about rezoning of the site.



**Figure 1. The Jacobs Site** (the yellow box delineates the recreational fields to be retained by the District and the blue box delineates the 8.3 acres approved for sale)

### **Background on Jacobs Site**

The former Jacobs Junior High campus (Jacobs site) is 14.1-acres in size and is owned by Eureka City Schools (the District). The junior high was built in 1956 and operated as a junior high, adult education and a continuation high school until the facility was closed following the 2008-2009 school year. The property remained unused and unmaintained for over a decade until the District demolished all structures on site in January 2021. In 2019, the District's Board of Education (the Board) declared the Jacobs site as surplus to the District's needs, and various entities such as California Highway Patrol (CHP) and the City of Eureka negotiated to purchase the site from the District. In December 2023, the Board ultimately voted to enter into an exchange agreement with AMG Communities – Jacobs, LLC (the Developer) to exchange the lower 8.3 acres of the Jacobs site for a 0.15-acre developed residential parcel

at 3553 I Street (valued at \$650,000) and \$5,350,000. The District plans to retain the recreation fields on the northern 5.8 acres of the site.

The future of the Jacobs site is of great interest because the City of Eureka is largely built out, with relatively few sites that provide realistic opportunities for new development. Unlike other remaining vacant land in the City, the site is relatively large and unconstrained – it is outside of the Coastal Zone, relatively flat, and not located in an ecologically sensitive or hazardous area.

At this time, the District and Developer remain under contract for the land exchange, but a closing date has not been set. The Developer has not informed City Staff about their plans for development of the Jacobs site, although the Developer has published a website (<https://thejacobscommunity.com/>) stating they have “no firm plans,” but that the Jacobs site “is large enough to support a mix of housing and some neighborhood-serving commercial uses,” and “will likely be redeveloped into a mix of rental and owner-occupied housing.”

Any proposed private residential or commercial development at the Jacobs site would require Zoning and General Plan Map amendments to change the zoning/land use designations of the site, as the current Public Facilities Zoning and Public Quasi-Public Land Use Designation only allow for government facilities, schools, and similar land uses as described in Eureka Municipal Code (EMC) §155.216.020 (Allowed Land Uses). Pursuant to EMC §155.432.020, Zoning and General Plan Map amendments can be initiated by the City Council, Planning Commission, Director of Development Services, or one or more owners of the property for which the amendment is sought. A ballot initiative can also require Zoning and General Plan Map amendments if approved by the voters, and there is [a ballot initiative](#) that qualified for the City's next general election, that, if passed, would require the City to rezone the Jacobs site.

### **Debrief on Jacobs Site Town Hall**

In response to the District's decision to sell the lower 8.3 acres of the Jacobs site to the Developer and the resulting questions and concerns voiced by the community, Council Member Moulton hosted a town hall meeting on January 23, 2024 to discuss the future of the Jacobs site. Over 100 community members attended the meeting with approximately 60 in person at City Hall and 40 on Zoom. The town hall included polling of the audience which revealed that the majority of attendees live within the neighborhood surrounding the Jacobs site. South Eureka Neighborhood Alliance (SENA) spoke on their previous community engagement campaigns for the Jacobs site, and City Staff presented information on current and potential future zoning of the site. The town hall also included group breakout sessions where community members had a chance to discuss neighborhood strengths and weaknesses, and opportunities for the Jacobs site. At the end of the meeting, Council Member Moulton held a question and answer session with the attendees. The town hall provided a forum for the community to learn about and discuss the current situation and future of the Jacobs site, as well as provided the City with input on how the community would like to see the site developed.

In reviewing the meeting video, breakout group notes, polling responses, and exit surveys from the town hall, Staff found that there was near consensus among attendees over the desire for transparency regarding the Jacobs site and public involvement in planning for its future. In contrast, there were a variety of opinions and no clear consensus on the best use of the site going forward. Some attendees expressed disappointment the District's negotiations with CHP were unsuccessful, and many attendees wished the site could be used solely for free community amenities like a community swimming pool and dog park, which is not feasible if property ownership transfers to a private developer.

Given the approved sale, housing was a big topic of discussion, with a mix of excitement and concerns surrounding more housing. Top concerns regarding housing included density, building height, traffic/parking impacts, and the resulting effects on neighborhood character, safety, and property values. Various people also expressed a desire for mixed income and owner-occupied housing as opposed to entirely low-income rental housing.

Various people expressed support for some neighborhood commercial uses at the site in addition to housing, such as small retail shops and restaurants. There are limits on what public improvements can be required from a private developer on privately owned land, but town hall attendees made it clear they would like future development of the site to include the incorporation of community amenities to the extent feasible, such as bicycle and pedestrian paths and community open spaces.

The City has a Talk Eureka page dedicated to the Jacobs site with a forum where community members can share ideas about how they would like to see the site developed (<https://talk.eureka.gov/jacobs-site>). Comments on the Talk Eureka page are similar to what was heard at the town hall.

### **Potential Next Steps**

Staff has identified three potential options for the City moving forward:

1. **Adopt General Plan and Zoning Map amendments to change the land use designation and zoning district for the lower 8.3 acres of the Jacobs site (i.e., “rezone” the site):** Council could initiate a rezone of the Jacobs site that could be completed this year. Because the standards for the City’s base zoning districts are pretty general, Staff anticipates the need to also adopt site-specific standards/requirements in addition to the base zone, such as requirements for street and/or trail connections through the site. To ensure the site is rezoned appropriately, Staff recommends that any rezoning process include extensive public outreach as well as an economic feasibility analysis to help understand the potential mix of uses, density, and building typologies that can be supported by the market. In addition, Staff anticipates a rezone of the site will require environmental review under CEQA in the form of an Initial Study/ Mitigated Negative Declaration. Based on initial discussion with one of the City’s on-call consultants, the cost of a rezone is estimated at \$75,000, \$12,000 of which would be for the economic feasibility analysis and \$36,000 of which would be for the CEQA environmental review.

It’s important to note if the City Council choose Option One and rezones the Jacobs site and then the ballot initiative passes in November, the City would be required to rezone the site a second time to be consistent with the initiative. If the site is rezoned by initiative, CEQA would not be triggered because the City would have no discretion to change the project or impose mitigation in response to environmental concerns. Any rezoning would not affect use of the site by a state agency such as CHP, since state agencies do not have to comply with City land use regulations.

2. **Develop and adopt a new “Mixed Neighborhood” Overlay Zone that could potentially be applied to the Jacobs site and other sites within the City in the future:** A new “Mixed Neighborhood” overlay could be adopted into the Inland Zoning Code by Council to potentially utilize on the Jacobs site and/or elsewhere in the City in the future. Overlay zones can be applied to distinct geographic areas on the Zoning Map in addition to the underlying base zoning

district to add special requirements, limitations, or enhanced flexibility on top of the base zoning district standards. The “Mixed Neighborhood” overlay could be applied to a site to add “form-based” standards to ensure increased residential density and limited neighborhood-serving commercial uses proposed within or adjacent to predominately single-family neighborhoods are designed to be compatible in scale to single-family homes (e.g., “missing middle” housing types like townhomes and bungalow courts that are never larger than the scale of a house). Regardless of what base zone is adopted for the Jacobs site and what uses that base zone allows, the “Mixed Neighborhood” overlay could be applied to ensure new uses allowed by the base zone inhabit buildings that fit with the existing neighborhood’s scale and character. Such an overlay could also be applied elsewhere in the City in the future, potentially in transitional areas with increasing density. Adopting a new overlay zone into the Inland Zoning Code without yet applying it to a particular site would likely qualify for a common sense CEQA exemption and thus would be less expensive than rezoning the Jacobs site. The cost is estimated at \$40,000.

3. **Do nothing (the “no action” alternative):** There is significant uncertainty about the future of the Jacobs site given the approved (but not yet final) sale to a newly formed LLC and the site’s implication in a voter initiative on the ballot this November. The City could wait for greater certainty to act, or could wait for the current or future property owner to initiate a rezone of the site. If the property owner initiated the rezone, it would be the responsibility of the property owner to pay for the process, including the full cost of the CEQA environmental document.

If Council selects Option 1 or 2, Staff recommends having an initial public outreach meeting in late April to receive input on the rezone of the site or the development of a Mixed Neighborhood overlay zone, respectively. Development Service’s existing budget could pay for Option 1 or Option 2, but not both. In addition to hard costs, Options 1 or 2 would have opportunity costs in City staff time and resources.