



Wednesday, June 4, 2008

Mayor Gwen Regalia  
Members of the City Council,  
Planning Commission  
City of Walnut Creek  
1666 North Main Street  
Walnut Creek, CA 94596

**RE: Walnut Creek Transit Village Development Proposal - SUPPORT**

Dear Mayor Regalia and Councilmembers, Planning Commissioners:

This year marks 50 years of Greenbelt Alliance's work of protecting the Bay Area's working farms and natural areas while making our cities better places to live. Specifically, our Compact Development Team evaluates development proposals, endorsing and advocating for those that use land efficiently, are oriented around transit and pedestrians, and provide homes people can afford. We write to inform you of our support for Walnut Creek Transit Village. This project deserves the support of the City of Walnut Creek because it takes advantage of a prime location, enhances the neighborhood to make it more friendly to those traveling on foot, and because its mix of uses makes it a complete community. We also request your consideration of suggestions for how the project could be further enhanced to provide maximum benefit to the community.

There is no better location for transit-oriented development than sites adjacent to BART, Caltrain, or other major transit service. Realizing this, BRE Properties has proposed a project that makes the most of the opportunity presented by this site. They have proposed 599 homes, including 10% affordable homes, for the site. Plenty of homes here means that plenty of Walnut Creek residents will be able to live a more transit-oriented lifestyle, running many errands on foot thanks to the proximity of downtown. With gas prices in the Bay Area higher than most places in the country, many are realizing the plentiful benefits of this lifestyle. A March 3 article in *Wall Street Journal* described this unprecedented shift: "As consumers make major spending decisions, such as where to live and what kind of vehicle to drive, they are beginning to factor in the cost of fuel. Some are choosing smaller cars or hybrids, or are moving closer to their jobs to cut down on driving. Those changes effectively lock in lower gasoline consumption rates for the future, regardless of the state of the economy or the level of gasoline prices." As developers shift away from the urban edge and focus more on building infill, projects like Walnut Creek Transit Village will become models for other cities.

The Transit Village plans include expanded County Connection transit facilities, including four more bus bays and an expanded transit office, recognizing that this station is also the culmination of many bus lines. Demand for parking is high at this station, with many commuters driving from more suburban areas and parking for the day to ride BART to San Francisco and East Bay jobs. BRE smartly proposes regulating the demand by imposing market-rate pricing at the proposed BART replacement garage. For the parking provided for new homes here, the developer hopes to achieve a reduction to 1.3 spaces per home due to BART proximity. Greenbelt Alliance strongly supports this reduction. The success of transit-oriented development rests on encouraging transit use and discouraging excessive, unnecessary automobile use.

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From our evaluation of the plans, it is clear that Walnut Creek Transit Village will transform the area around the BART station to make it enjoyable for those getting around on foot. This project anchors the Walnut Creek BART Station, providing a much-needed sense of place and stronger link to the downtown through its pedestrian orientation. BRE will provide a large amount of its parking underground to preserve the pedestrian environment. The developer is also considering providing free or discounted transit passes for residents and establishing an attendant bike system similar to that at Fruitvale BART station. Greenbelt Alliance encourages these additions to the project. A pedestrian and bicycle overpass crossing Ygnacio Valley Road will address existing pedestrian safety issues that endanger pedestrians here, and will also provide linkage to Iron Horse Trail. Along paths of pedestrian circulation, homes will have front porches or stoops, contributing to a neighborhood sense of belonging and activity.

Like much of downtown Walnut Creek, this project proposal mixes land uses to ensure complete streets. In addition the 599 homes, there will be 30,000 square feet of office space and 18,516 square feet of retail space. Between these various components will be the elements of livable communities: plazas, public art, street furniture, and wide, walkable sidewalks. Each residential area will have a central pedestrian corridor to weave together the shops, homes, and offices.

Greenbelt Alliance encourages BRE Properties to include family-sized 3-bedroom units and to ensure that some of these homes are below-market-rate so the low-income families who work in Walnut Creek can also afford to live there. We also strongly urge the developer to provide more affordable homes than the required 10%. The current plans call for 10% below-market-rate homes, including low-income or very-low-income homes, or both. Increasing the provision of affordable homes to 20% and including a mixture of low and very-low-income homes will provide for a seamless, well-integrated community where people from all walks of life interact with one another. Research has indicated that mixed-income communities are most successful when there is not a large divide between income levels and where shared spaces for community interaction are provided.

In closing, Greenbelt Alliance supports the Walnut Creek Transit Village proposal and encourages the Planning Commission and City Council's support of it. Adding more affordable homes, including homes that are large enough to accommodate families, will make this project even stronger. As Bay Area residents are turning to BART in record numbers, this development should prove immensely successful. We look forward to supporting the Walnut Creek Transit Village project in future hearings.

Regards,

/s/

Marla Wilson  
Sustainable Development Associate

CC:  
Scott Harriman

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<sup>i</sup> Campoy, Ana. March 3, 2008. "Americans Start to Curb Their Thirst for Gasoline." *Wall Street Journal*.