

FIVE WOUNDS VILLAGE SHOULD BE A MODEL FOR CITY

By Davide Vieira and Joan Rivas-Cosby

We're excited that San Jose's Envision 2040 Task Force has proposed urban "villages" throughout the city as part of the new general plan. We'd like to advise, however, that it takes a village to plan a village. That's what we've been doing for the past few years in the neighborhoods surrounding Five Wounds Church – the beautiful church near Highway 101 and East Santa Clara Street.

We hope other neighborhoods adjacent to the proposed villages will have a chance to plan their own future as we did—and we hope the city will be realistic about how much time and effort that takes. We also hope the Envision 2040 plan can be made more consistent with our own.

Our planning started in 2002, when we learned that a BART station was being planned behind Five Wounds Church. Our community wanted to ensure that its vision would be part of that future development. Working with CommUniverCity (a partnership of our neighborhoods, San Jose State University and the City of San Jose), we held four community workshops plus two for youth and one each for Spanish and Portuguese speakers. Over 150 residents participated and 60 SJSU urban planning students helped with research, technical details and mapping.

The result is a mixed-use, transit-oriented development that accommodates significant growth while respecting and integrating the surrounding neighborhoods. A "town square" is a major feature -- an idea that a high school student suggested and workshop participants enthusiastically incorporated.

Our community produced a prototype for the villages that are proposed in the Envision 2040 draft general plan. Our plan even anticipated and is consistent with the broad goals of Envision 2040 – community-based planning, regional employment centers, focused growth, urban villages, regional transit hubs, grand boulevards and main streets, environmental stewardship, and design for a healthy community.

But some important elements of the two plans are not consistent. We hope the years of work and thought our community put into our plan will ultimately become part of Envision 2040 and not be cast aside.

In October, our Five Wounds Village Task Force initiated a dialog with Envision 2040 planners to identify differences between the plans.

One such difference is Envision 2040's maintenance of industrial zoning on the periphery of the Five Wounds Village. One industrial area falls along the dormant railroad right-of-way north of Julian Street within a stone's throw of the village. The other is near the southern endpoint of the railroad right-of-way south of East San Antonio Street. In both cases, the community plan proposes mixed-use retail, commercial, and residential development along a planned pedestrian and bicycle trail on the right-of-way. "Eyes on the trail" provide a measure of safety for trail users, and industry in that area would make the trail less safe and less pleasant.

Another issue is that the railroad right-of-way is not protected from development. To ensure its preservation for future trail use, it must be designated as public park and open space instead of the current floating park designation that fails to protect the entire length of right-of-way.

Finally, Envision 2040 plans 4,050 new jobs and 845 dwelling units for the thirteen-acre Five Wounds Village. Although our village plan doesn't specify numbers, its intent is for a healthier, more judicious balance of jobs and housing. More work will be necessary to bridge the gap in expectations.

Time is short. The Envision San José 2040 Draft Plan will be considered by City Council in 2011.

We hope to reconcile the handful of differences between plans so that our community vision may be incorporated into the general plan for the benefit of all—and as a model for the planning of the other villages.

Davide Vieira and Joan Rivas-Cosby are members of the Five Wounds/Brookwood Terrace Neighborhood Action Coalition.