

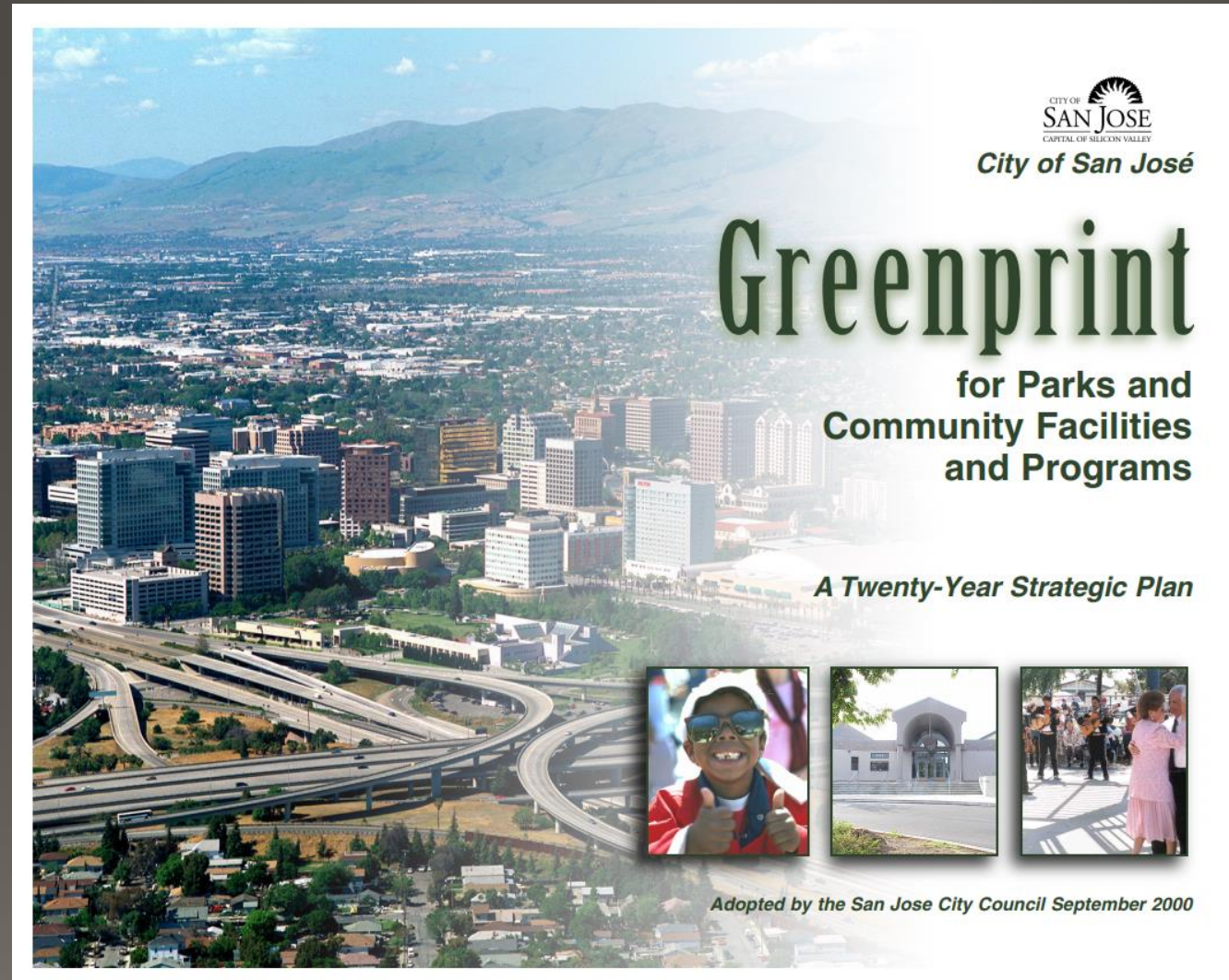
# San José Light Tower

*-- an informal critique of the proposal*

by L. Ames, 1/29/19

# San José lacks an identifying icon...

...even the cover of the 2000 San José Park Strategic Plan (“The Greenprint”) featured a freeway interchange as the iconic image of the city.



# San José used to have an icon

- San José once had a famous Light Tower, built in 1881.
- A group of local citizens have formed “the San José Light Tower Corporation” (SJLTC) to give San José a new “*Iconic Structure*”





# San José has had several icons

- San José was famous for more than just the Light Tower.
  - San José is home to the first and oldest park in California: Alum Rock Park, founded in 1872, was famous for its mineral waters. (And it's still open and popular.)
    - >> We could have an iconic *fountain display* to honor our past.
  - The San José area was known as “The Valley of Hearts Delight”, world famous for the profusion of flowering fruit trees.
    - >> We could have an iconic *garden of flowering trees*.
- *And...* we now have an iconic City Hall!



# Support group is well-organized

The SJLTC is well-funded, has hired consultants, and has already met with numerous local “movers & shakers”, City department heads, elected officials, and interest groups.

## Final Words

### Excitement on the Horizon

On September 26th, 2018 Steinberg Hart revealed the final site recommendation to members of the San Jose Light Tower Corporation and City of San Jose. Overall, the group displayed a palpable excitement for the site recommendation.

The discussion was kick-started by commentary from several members of the group on their overall satisfaction with the collaborative spirit of this endeavor. Members then expressed their satisfaction with the site recommendation - Arena Green. Most commented how the area as a whole is in need of activation and the introduction of a landmark would not only activate the park specifically but would also act as a catalyst for future projects in the city. Members also felt a landmark was an appropriate program to come to Arena Green considering its compatibility with the SAP Center and Google's future development across the street.

Discussion on the next steps dominated the remainder of the meeting. Members were anxious to acquire City Council approval within the next couple of months, further exemplifying the overall excitement for Arena Green as the future location of San Jose's very own iconic landmark.

Members of the San Jose Light Tower Corporation (SJLTC), City of San Jose (various departments), and Steinberg Hart (SH) following the site recommendation reveal meeting at San Jose City Hall on September 26th, 2018.

Clockwise from left: Maggie Gaudio (SH), Kerry Adams-Hapner (OCA), Domenic Onorato (DPW), Jon Bai (SJLTC), Steve Borkenhagen (SJLTC), Michelle Dumont (SH), Margie O'Driscoll (Design Competition Consultant), Nicole Burnham (PRNS), Kim Walesh (CMO), Angel Rios, Jr. (CMO), Blage Zelalich (OED), Michael Ogilvie (OCA), Jon Cicirelli (PRNS), and Ernie Yamane (SH).



PRC AGENDA: 12/5/18  
ITEM: VII. D.

See video: <http://www.sanjoselighttower.org/>

# The proposed project is undefined

- It's not necessarily a "Light Tower"; "it could be anything." (However, they definitely expect that it *will* have lights.)
- An Independent Jury is to make the selection: San José would have little to no say in the design.

Ideas Competition	
Phase 1	Ideas solicited from throughout the world Seven member jury selects three finalists
Phase 2	Finalists further refine and develop idea Jury selects winner and makes recommendation to SJLTC and City Manager

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# Consultant's site-selection study

- The group has evaluated seven downtown sites: all are public lands.
- They did not consider giving the land as part of the gift.

## Site Selection Study

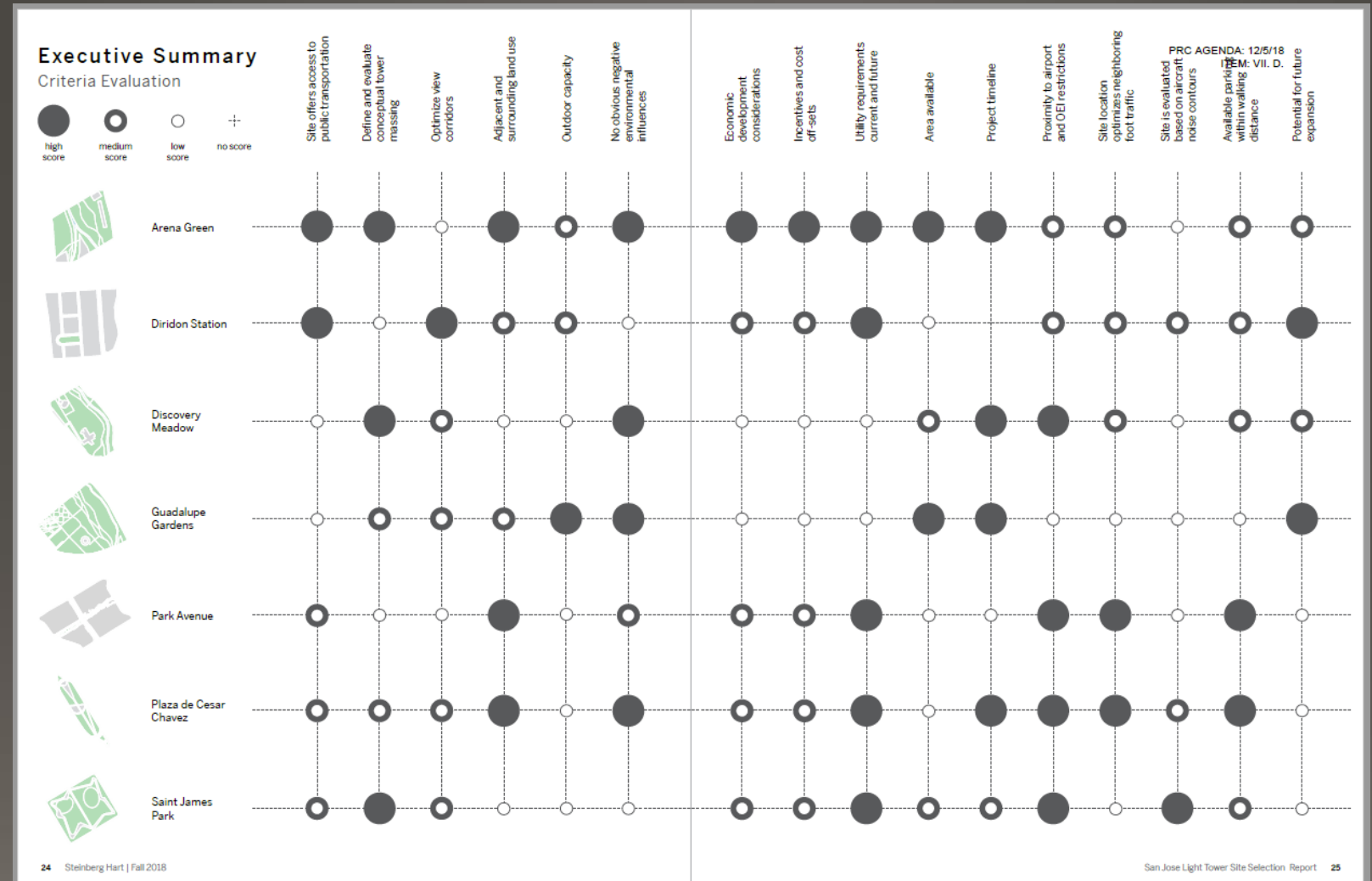
1. Arena Green
2. Diridon Area
3. Discovery Meadow
4. Guadalupe Gardens
5. Park Avenue
6. Plaza de Cesar Chavez
7. St. James Park

Image courtesy of Steinberg Hart



# Site selection based on trade matrix

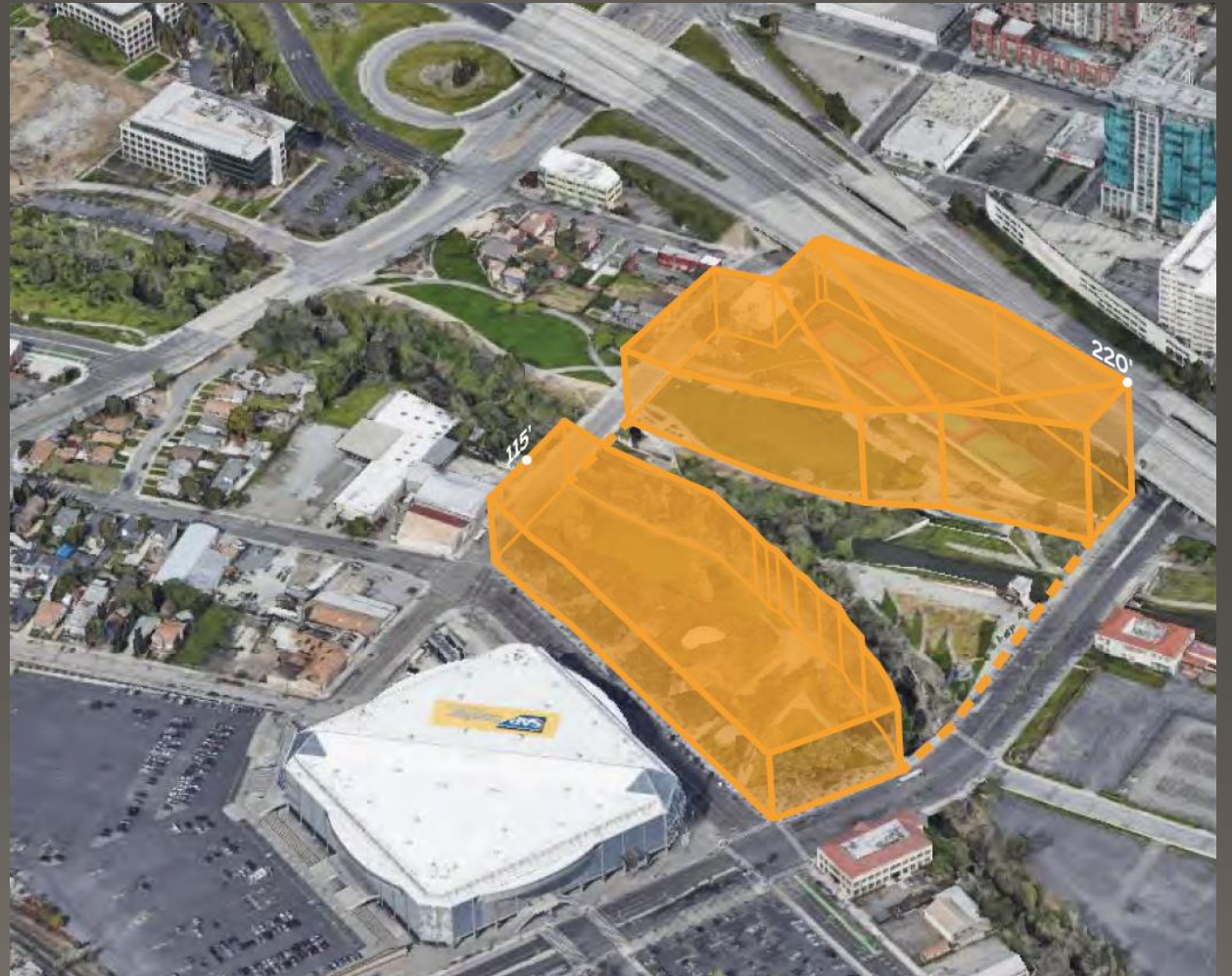
- Limited trade-space
  - Limited to downtown SJ
  - only public lands
- Questionable scoring?
  - “No transit” at Discovery Meadows?!
  - “Environmental influences” were interpreted to mean impacts to the gift rather than impacts by the gift





# SJLTC's selection: Arena Green

- Are they asking for the entire 420,000 sq.ft?
- Wants to give a “blank canvas” to allow maximum flexibility and creativity:
  - Wouldn't commit to using only a limited portion of the park;
  - Wouldn't commit to not impacting trail network;
  - Way too close to the Los Gatos Creek.



# What makes an icon?

*Not every big city has an icon, and not every city icon is big:*

- Seattle has the Space Needle, Paris has the Eiffel Tower -- and, yes, San José once had The Light Tower.

- An icon could be something useful:  
SF's Golden Gate Bridge  
or Sydney Australia's famous Opera House:

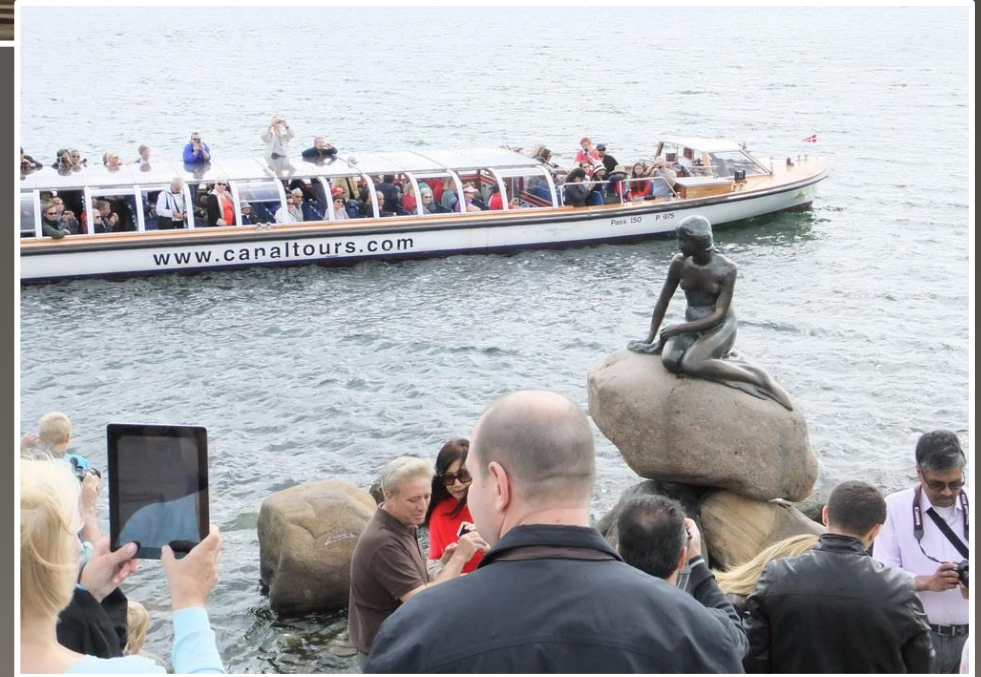
>> Could the groups join forces and build San José a truly iconic new train station?





# What makes an icon?

- Doesn't have to be large: Chicago's silvery "Bean"; Copenhagen Denmark's "Little Mermaid" statue is barely life-sized.
- Doesn't even have to be a structure: San Antonio's "River Walk"
- We don't want a "White Elephant" -- a prestigious gift that can't be used and is expensive to maintain.





# Airport Considerations

- Airport limits the allowable height.  
Comparison:
  - Seattle Space Needle: 605'; Paris Eiffel Tower: 984' (plus antenna)
  - SJ's original tower was 237' tall; a typical transmission tower is about 150'.
- Other considerations:
  - Aircraft noise
  - Impact of light on departing flights
  - Visible to air passengers?





# Icons are not always downtown

Rio De Janeiro, Brazil



Los Angeles, California

# Issues, p. 1

- Need to establish a limit on the amount of public land that could be lost to the icon, and assure that the trail network is not degraded.
- Respect the riparian habitat:
  - need to insure that there is no incompatible development within at least a 100-foot setback from the creeks.
  - no light directed into the habitat;
  - control of contaminants, runoff, public impacts, noise, soil compaction, etc.
- Respect the birds:
  - the creeks are natural flyways, and whatever project is selected should be designed to avoid distracting or imperiling the birds: no lights directed into the bird flyways, no windows or glass panes, and no wire meshes or other hazards.



# Issues, p. 2

- Avoid negative impacts to the city:
  - no lights flashing at the aircraft taking off from San José International
  - no lights shining into the windows of downtown high-rises.
- Require City oversight:
  - an international selection committee can assist with the design competition,
  - the Parks & Rec. Commission, the Arts Commission, and the Historic Landmarks Commission should review the proposed designs
  - the City Council should have to give final approval prior to any project before being authorized to proceed.

# Status

- At the December meeting, the SJ Parks & Rec. Commission voted:
  - to decline to approve Staff's recommendation to select Arena Green,
  - to defer the selection of the site to the City Council,
  - and to ask Council to first clarify various issues, address concerns, and establish the necessary design constraints.
- The SJLTC has since reached out to environmental groups:
  - They heard a number of representatives raise numerous concerns.
  - The SJLTC did not appear to be moved.
- The SJLTC will request that City Council approve Arena Green as their selected site for their undefined gift on Tues. Jan. 29<sup>th</sup>  
**Feb. 26th**

# Summary

- What's the rush? This is to be the gift of a lifetime: we should take the time to assure that it is done right.
  - Reach out in an open process to see what the public would like as an icon.
  - Evaluate the impacts on the natural and built environments: creeks, birds, parklands, trails, airport, residents, visitors, ... .
  - Only then ask the City to recommend an appropriate site for the gift.
- The SJLTC is offering San José the gift of an iconic structure that *could* be a welcome addition to the city;
- We truly hope that a properly designed and properly situated gift *will* be a welcomed icon for the city.