



Purpose of Issue Paper

930 Tamalpais Avenue (also referred to as “Whistlestop site”) is located adjacent to the proposed Downtown San Rafael SMART Station site. The purpose of this issue paper is to examine the historical use of the site, potential impacts on the site from the proposed SMART Station, and options and mitigation efforts.

Historical Use of the Site and Background

Whistlestop, a senior service provider, has occupied the site at 930 Tamalpais Avenue since February 1971. Prior to this, the building was used for retail uses and the Northwestern Railroad Depot. Trains thrived in San Rafael, heavily utilized for commuting and tourism, until the opening of the Golden Gate Bridge in 1937 when many residents began using automobiles and buses. Although freight ran on the tracks until the 1980s, the last passenger train ran in 1958.



Northwestern Railroad Depot in November 1938, photographed by Fred Stoess

The building is on the City’s inventory of historical structures but is not on the historic registry, which means demolition of the building can technically be considered. Although a second floor was added in 1987, it was not found to compromise the historical character.

The site has a General Plan designation and is zoned for Hetherington Office (HO) with a floor area ratio (FAR) of 2.0 and an allowable height of 66 feet. Most office, retail, and some multi-family residential uses are allowed. Whistlestop operates under a Conditional Use Permit approved in 1982 and amended in 1987 with the increase of 1,390 square feet, bringing the building footprint to 14,228 square feet. Any changes to the site plan, including reductions in parking spaces, will require an amendment to the use permit.

Impact of SMART Station

The proposed SMART Station may impact the use of 930 Tamalpais in several ways. This section examines the impacts of parking, the design of the station, noise, foot traffic, and the operations or services offered to seniors.

Parking Currently, Whistlestop has a total of 44 regular parking spaces and 2 disabled spaces. 23 of these spaces are located in the SMART right-of-way. Previously, Golden Gate Bridge Highway and Transportation District (GGBHD) allowed Whistlestop use of the land for those spaces. Whistlestop does not technically lease the land from SMART for its parking, however after the land

transferred from GGBHD to SMART, SMART permitted the parking to continue while planning for the station commenced. Depending on the station design, the SMART Station may eliminate most or all current parking spaces on SMART right-of-way. Depending on SMART’s station design, the building may be left with little to no parking. The SMART station plan does not include the provision of any new or replacement parking spaces. The site is not located within the Downtown Parking District.

Design The SMART Station will have two tracks and one or two platforms depending on whether they choose a center platform scenario or a double outside platform scenario. The proximity of the platform may impact the main entrance of the building, which may require new entrances on the west side of the building or some other solution to allow clients to enter the building. It may also impact the loading area in the rear, which provides ADA access for Whistlestop’s shuttle for senior patrons. The entrance impacted by the station is the building’s only ADA access point. Moving the ADA access to the other side of the building will require the sidewalk to be widened and a reconfiguration of the street, as well as an ADA drop off and pick up point near the door.

SMART is looking at four platform design options with varying distances from the building’s entrance. Two options are for platforms on the outside of the tracks. Two other options are for center platforms between the tracks. These designs include a fence blocking the tracks from the building. The center platform design would allow more space between the station and the Whistlestop site.

Appendix A shows four design options. Table 1 compares the various distances of the platforms or fences to the building’s edge and main entrance. These figures are based on rough preliminary estimates using SMART’s conceptual designs and are subject to change.

Table 1. Platform Design Options

Option	Platform Design	Alignment to site	Feet from Building Edge	Feet from Main Entrance
1	Outside	Parallel	5-7'	10-12'
2	Outside	Skewed	12' at 4th St; 25' at 3rd St	18-20'
3	Center	Parallel	15-18'	20'
4	Center	Skewed	12-15' at 4th St; 22-25' at 3rd St	20'

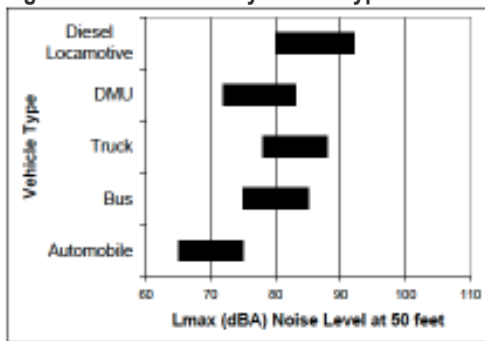
Noise Due to the site’s close proximity to the station, it may experience increased noise levels from trains and construction (temporary). The sound of the proposed trains have a lower noise profile than a bus and the building already experiences noise impacts from buses at the nearby transit center and Highway 101. According to SMART’s Environmental Impact Report, the noise levels at 50 feet may range from 64.5 dBA to 82.5 dBA, depending on the train’s activity (stationary or accelerating). Figure 1 on page 3 compares noise levels at 50 feet by vehicle type. The proposed vehicle type for SMART is the DMU.

SMART's EIR found the only potentially significant noise impact would be the sound of train horns at grade crossings. The sound of the vehicle's horn is 110 dBA. For safety reasons, the train will blow its horn at every grade crossing, including 3rd and 4th Streets. A Quiet Zone could be established for Downtown that would exempt all trains from sounding their horns.

SMART's EIR found that vibration levels may be perceptible at distances between 20 feet and 100 feet from the tracks, however they are expected to be less than FTA's impact significance criteria.

Some land uses are more sensitive to increased noise and vibration levels than others. Increased noise levels may impact the Whistlestop building because noise can interfere with conversation. A commercial use of the building, other than lodging, may be less sensitive to this increase in noise.

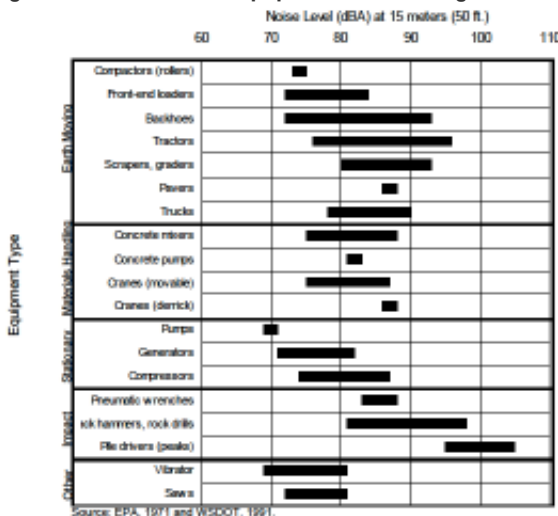
Figure 1. Noise levels by vehicle type



Source: Draft Environmental Impact Report, SMART, November 2005

Construction activities may increase noise levels, impacting the Whistlestop site. These noise increases are transitory and limited to the duration of construction. Figure 2 compares the varying noise levels of different construction activities.

Figure 2. Construction Equipment Noise Ranges



Source: EPA, 1971 and WSDOT, 1991.

Foot Traffic SMART is proposing 24 daily weekday stops and 8 weekend stops at the Downtown San Rafael Station. The Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) projects that by 2025, the

Downtown Station will have an average 455 alighting and boarding passengers per day during the week, resulting in an increase number of people outside of the building during the day.

Foot traffic impacts may vary depending on the kind of platform design chosen by SMART. Platforms located on the outside of the tracks may lead to an increased number of people in front of the building, while platforms located in the center of the tracks would do so to a lesser degree.

The issue of public restrooms was raised by Whistlestop at SMART's first public workshop in February 2010. SMART will not provide public restrooms at the station, but may provide them on the trains themselves. Public restrooms are located at the Bettini Transit Station across the street, but Whistlestop may experience transit riders coming in asking to use their private restrooms.

Operations or Services offered to Seniors The station may impact Whistlestop's services in both negative and positive ways. Whistlestop may experience increased activity by persons using the train, such as increased patronage of their Café. On the other hand, Whistlestop may lose patrons if parking options are inconvenient. Depending on the time of day, increased noise may disrupt some of the services such as support groups, classes and movies.

Whistlestop estimates one-third of their patrons use public transit, one-third use Whistlestop transportation services, and one-third drive personal automobiles. As Whistlestop expands services to active seniors, they expect to see an increase in demand for parking.

Whistlestop provides an array of services to seniors including:

- Whistlestop Jackson Café—serving low-cost lunchtime meals during the week.
- Whistlestop Wheels—providing transportation services 7 days per week amounting to approximately 145,000 rides annually.
- Multicultural Services—providing services such as citizenship assistance, ESL classes, adult peer counseling in Spanish, social activities and educational programs.
- Whistlestop Programs & Resources—providing services such as legal counseling, tax assistance, insurance counseling, support groups, exercise classes, computer classes, art classes and weekly movies.

Options and Mitigation Efforts

There are several options and mitigation efforts available to the City of San Rafael, SMART, and Whistlestop.

Parking The loss of parking spaces will affect both current and potential uses of the site. Any changes to the number of parking spaces will require Whistlestop to amend their permit with the City. New uses will have to either provide parking or prove to the City they are a use that does not require parking.

Discussions between the City and Whistlestop have taken place to explore alternative parking options such as leasing spaces from other nearby lots, but currently no sites have been identified. Distance from off-site lots to Whistlestop may be inconvenient for Whistlestop patrons, as well as safety issues during the evening use of the building. A shuttle can be used to take patrons to and from the parking lot but this may not be economically viable.

The City can consider amending the Downtown Parking District boundaries to include the site. This will exempt the site from providing on-site parking, however that may not solve the practical needs for parking in close proximity to the building, depending upon its use.

Prior to obtaining the parking spaces in the right-of-way, the building operated as a legal non-conforming use. By expanding the number of parking spaces, the site lost this status by conforming. Whistlestop can discuss with the City whether these existing grandfathered rights are still valid. This would exempt them from meeting parking requirements.

Aside from the City requirements, the functionality of the building may be constrained without on-site parking. Retail use requires 1 parking space per 250 square feet and office use requires 1 parking space per 300 square feet. Residential parking requirements vary from 1-2 spaces per unit depending on the number of bedrooms and square footage of the units. Table 2 shows parking requirements for several square footage scenarios.

Table 2. Use and Parking Requirements

Use	Parking Requirement
100% Office	47 spaces
75% Office, 25% Retail	50 spaces
50% Office, 50% Retail	52 spaces
25% Office, 75% Retail	55 spaces
100% Retail	57 spaces
33% Retail, 33% Office, 33% Residential	42 spaces

Design SMART’s station design team can work with Whistlestop so the impact of the station is minimized with regard to the building’s ADA accessibility. Of the four platform design options, the two center platform options maximize the distance between the building and the platforms.

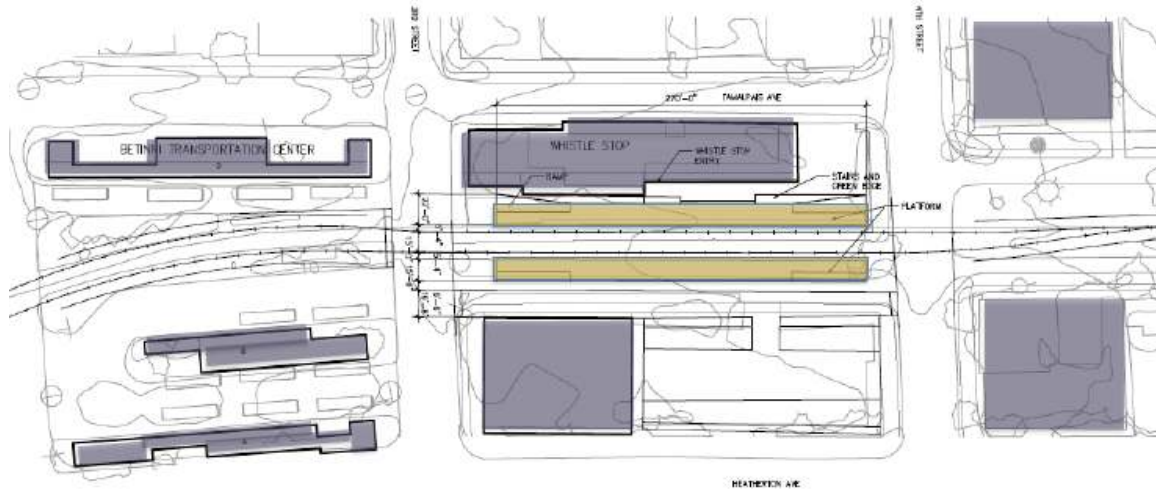
Noise The City of San Rafael is working with SMART to apply for a Quiet Zone that allows trains to pass without sounding their horns. Whistlestop can make sound proofing improvements to the building.

Foot Traffic Whistlestop may consider posting a sign saying restrooms are not available to the public. SMART may want to consider providing public restrooms at the station or a sign directing restroom availability at the Bettini Transit Center.

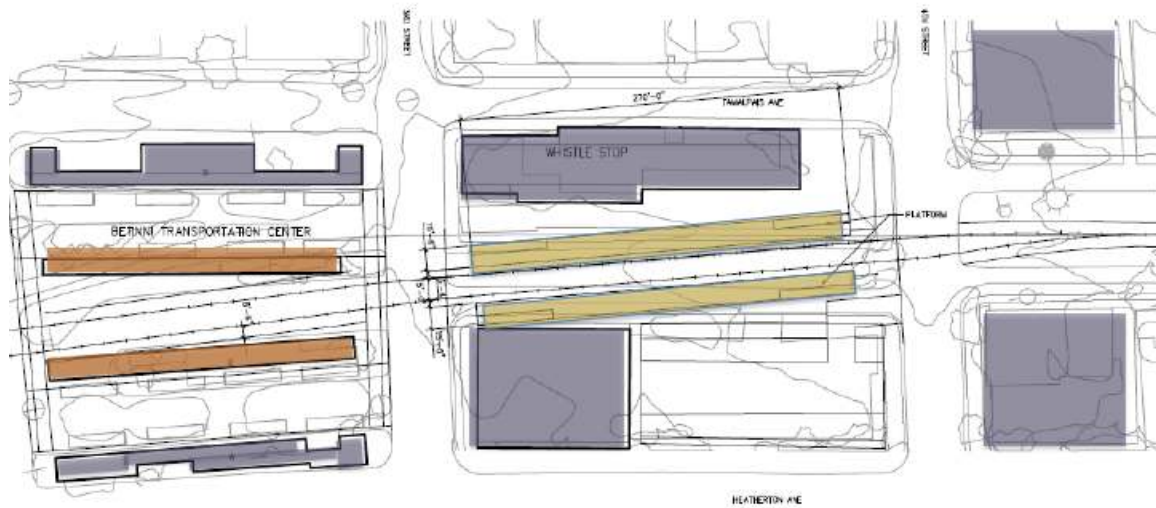
Operations or Services offered to Seniors If Whistlestop continues in this location, they can increase their café services to capitalize on the new market created by station users. If an adequate parking solution is not found, Whistlestop may consider relocating to a different space. Whistlestop’s Chief Executive Officer Joe O’Hehir stated that the agency would like to stay centrally located, near other community services and public transportation. They would also like a location with more parking, ideally around 75 spaces. If Whistlestop chooses to relocate, the City can work with them to find a buyer of the property as well as a new location.

Appendix A

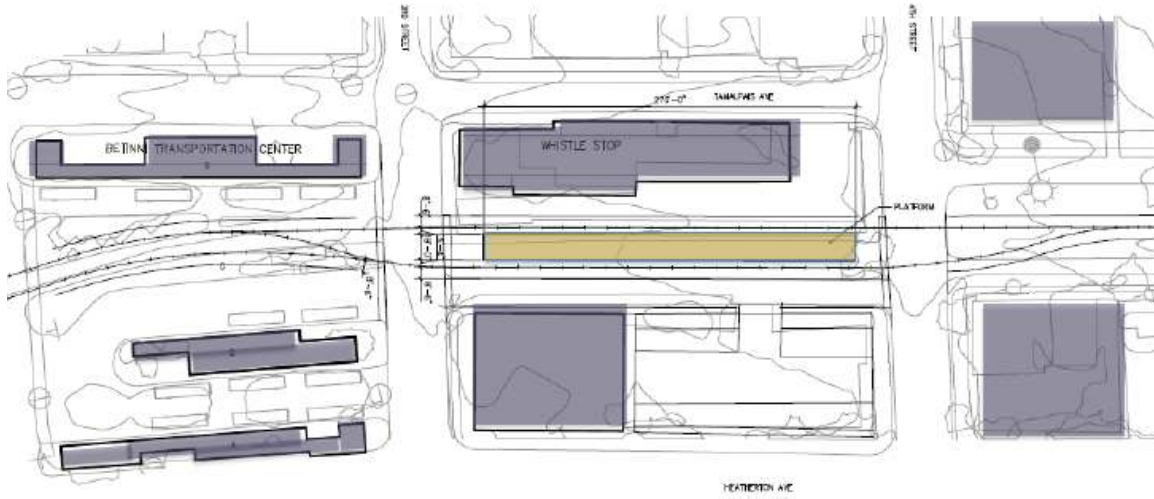
Platform Option 1



Platform Option 2



Platform Option 3



Platform Option 4

