

Ronstadt Transit Center Joint Development Project
Staff Compiled, Categorized Emailed Question/Comments

QUESTIONS/COMMENTS (received during comment period and inadvertently missed):	OFFEROR	CATEGORY
<p>Additional Comment 1 Is the inclusion of the University of Arizona a necessary condition in order to make project financing work? What is the status of your discussions with UA?</p>	PEACH PROPERTIES	ARCHITECTURE / DESIGN
<p>Additional Comment 2 Is the inclusion of Greyhound a necessary condition in order to make project financing work? What is the status of your discussions with Greyhound?</p>	BOTH	ARCHITECTURE / DESIGN
<p>Additional Comment 3 As a relatively new member of the University and nearby Downtown communities (nearly 2 years), I would like to express my support for the protection of the brick shade structure at Ronstadt as you move towards a decision on the architect and project plan. Though I'm definitely favorable to a remodel of the property, the shade structure seems to me to be in perfect harmony with the architecture of our city. I'm hopeful that you'll consider saving the brick structure, tile and oak trees from demolition. My understanding is that the Alexander project best accomplishes this - but I'd be open to a re-work of the Peach project in order for these local treasures to be saved.</p>	BOTH	ARCHITECTURE / DESIGN
<p>Additional Comment 4 Having reviewed both proposals, I strongly encourage you to choose the Alexander design, which respects the historic context of the site, the artwork so beloved by the community, and the Tucson aesthetic. The Peach design could be in any city...it does not relate to Tucson, and appears impersonal and sterile to me.</p>	BOTH	USES & PARKING
<p>Additional Comment 5 Alexander Group's proposal excels in almost every respect. Alexander clearly have a lot of experience with projects of this nature, including restoring and/or adaptively reusing historic properties and remediating brownfield sites. Peach appeared to be out of their depth: all glitz and no substance.</p>		

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<p>GOAL A: USES & CHARACTER</p> <p>“RESPONSIVENESS TO URBAN FABRIC”</p> <p>–it preserves and incorporates the existing public art, the arcades and beautiful handmade tilework created for the Ronstadt Center, itself echoing the tilework on County Hall and other landmark Downtown buildings. Although not yet 50 years old, as stated in the meeting, it was the first public art used in a TDOT project, so has a historic status in that sense. Beyond that, Bus Riders in the meeting I attended spoke warmly about how great they felt that the COT had created a beautiful place for them to use. I was horrified to hear Peach had not considered preserving it. So much for their lip service to public art! In today’s dollars, I’m told, an equivalent installation would cost half a million dollars.</p> <p>–more broadly, the Alexander proposal respects the historic built environment with an overall design, massing and scale sympathetic to the existing historic streetscape. The Peach proposal, while vague, looks like a Dagwood sandwich, and heaven forfend they actually use the glaring acid yellow that appears on the drawings. Unless the final design is drastically rethought, it will be an instant eyesore looming over downtown. My notes say the “towers” would be “5 to 12 stories” high. Did I mishear, or was it indeed this vague? Fans of jutting exterior balconies should consider the problems with students throwing missiles from the high-rises near campus.</p> <p>Along with the nondescript Cadence building, this raises the general need for design standards for Downtown construction: new buildings need not look like “fake” old buildings but should not dwarf and disrespect the historic streetscape.</p> <p>“SUSTAINABLE/ENVIRONMENTALLY SENSITIVE DESIGN”</p> <p>Alexander Group propose a LEED Silver certification, which they said was “realistic.” Peach paid lip service to sustainability throwing out ideas such as farmers’ markets and rooftop agriculture--but can someone explain how two rooftop swimming pools reflect sustainable design in a desert?</p>		

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<p>GOAL B: TRANSPORTATION & INFRASTRUCTURE</p> <p>MULTIMODAL</p> <p>–The Alexander proposal returns the Greyhounds to the site, where they belong. They need to be apprised that buses to Mexico need to be fitted in as well. The Peach proposal puts the Greyhounds on the other side of the tracks—literally—and proposes a bridge people can trudge over in 105 degree heat to get to them. That bridge looks like a folly that will be cut first thing when the budget pinches.</p> <p>“ENHANCE FACILITIES FOR CURRENT BUS RIDERS & INCREASE APPEAL”</p> <p>--The only drawback to Alexander’s proposal, and something they could hopefully be asked to reconsider, is the blocking off of the transit center itself from the retail and the street. I understand turnstiles promote quick boarding, and consequently greater bus frequency. But transit-oriented retail should serve transit users first, surely! Bus or transit riders should not have to pass through a turnstile, possibly paying a double fare, to get a drink, a sandwich or a newspaper. These should be available where transit riders, including those using the center only to transfer, can access them. Sorry, but vending machines just don’t cut it. Those all-important discretionary riders we need to balance the books must be enticed to use the facility, not punished like those with no choice.</p> <p>–bus riders also spoke warmly about the openness and airiness of the current RTC. This was the only aspect of the Peach proposal that was more appealing than the Alexander proposal. A Wisconsin firm may not realize that nothing falls from the sky in Tucson that will stop the buses from running, nor will it need to be shoveled. If Alexander’s bus terminal could be opened up a bit, perhaps over the bus bays themselves (while allowing riders an air-conditioned waiting area) it would meet that goal. It would also make for better ventilation of exhaust fumes.</p>		

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<p>GOAL C: FINANCIAL & ECONOMIC VITALITY –probably most important from most people’s perspective, the Alexander Group offered a detailed budget of \$49 million, and had even worked out what funding sources were likely, including \$12 million of public funds, and \$37 million of private investment. A member of the team told me afterwards that in their experience such a project could not raise more than \$50 million. They also estimated an \$850,000 annual return to defray the investment. Peach volunteered no budget at all, and when pressed, Phil Swaim, who appeared to be their spokesman rather than Ron Schwabe of Peach, offered an “estimate on a concept” of \$174 million. How can the budget figures be so disproportionate?</p>		
<p>GOAL D: “COMMUNICATION & PARTICIPATION” Peach’s touts their “local” credentials, but the track record of their team members reflects disregard for public input and the historic built environment in the current Broadway process. HDR was recently sent back to the drawing board by an exasperated Citizens Task Force; Kaneen furnished a “facilitator” unable to build consensus, remain neutral, or even end meetings on time; and Jim Schon based traffic modeling on 2040 projections we all know are wrong.</p> <p>Apparently someone local thinks it’s acceptable for current bus riders to trudge to Alameda to purchase tickets--and let’s not even discuss ticketing for the Streetcar.</p> <p>If Peach’s glitzy but vapid presentation represents the quality of proposals that normally get funded in Tucson, it’s no wonder we have such a patchy record of seeing projects completed. If I were the COT I would not trust them to pull this off.</p> <p>Alexander appears by far the more competent, professional and experienced. Their design is superior and exponentially cheaper.</p>	BOTH	GENERAL / MULTIPLE TOPICS