

Advisory Committee Meeting #2

Summary Notes

Meeting Objectives

- Reconvene the Advisory Committee for the Downtown Watsonville Specific Plan.
- Review Existing Conditions Analysis prepared by the consultant team.
- Brainstorm the guiding principles for the Specific Plan process.
- Develop a shared vision for Downtown Watsonville.
- Provide an overview of the Specific Plan process moving forward.

Attendees

Advisory Committee Members

- **Present:** Jane Barr, Eduardo Cervantes, Gina Cole, Maria Elena De la Garza, Francisco Estrada, Neva Hansen, Felipe Hernandez, Carmen Herrera Mansur, Sylvia Luna, Jenni Veitch-Olson, Sal Orozco, William Ow, Shaz Roth, and Brian Spector
- **Absent:** Aurelio Gonzalez, Manuel Rodriguez, and Tony Scurich

City Staff

- **Present:** Suzi Merriam (CDD Director), Justin Meek (Principal Planner), David Honda (Police Chief), Rudy Lopez (Fire Chief), Maria Esther-Rodriguez (City Engineer/Asst. PW Director), Murray Fontes (Principal Engineer – transportation)
- **Absent:** David Caneer (Principal Engineer – water & storm water), Tom Sims (Assistant Police Chief)

Consultant Team

- Matthew Raimi, Simran Malhotra, and Kelsey Hubbard, Raimi + Associates

Summary Notes

Introduction and Welcome

Simran Malhotra, Project Consultant, welcomed the Advisory Committee (AC) members and re-introduced the consultant team to the AC. Suzi Merriam, CDD Director, made opening remarks – providing project updates to date and addressing how COVID-19 has affected the specific plan process. Simran Malhotra took attendance of the AC and each AC member shared what their favorite COVID-19 activity has been. Simran then revisited the ground rules and purpose of the AC.

Review of Existing Conditions Analysis

Simran Malhotra presented the existing conditions reports developed by the consultant team, which included an Economic Profile and Real Estate Market Assessment and an Existing Land Use, Policy, and Built Form Framework. Matt Raimi presented key findings on the existing conditions and a summary of what the consultant team has heard so far from the AC and Stakeholder Interviews. Elements of a successful downtown were presented to the AC – after which AC members were called on alphabetically to vocalize their vision for a successful Downtown. Following this, the floor was opened up for discussion.

Group Discussion

The consultant team posed four questions to the Committee. A summary of responses are as follows:

- *What is your vision for a successful Downtown Watsonville?*
 - Pedestrian and bicycle friendly
 - Diverse commercial uses that provide various experiences and options
 - Safe and walkable pedestrian environment – particularly on Main Street
 - Historic architecture beautifully restored
 - More housing – a mix of both affordable and market rate housing
 - A destination that attracts and welcomes a wide range of people
 - Mixed-use buildings
 - Vibrant and lively
 - Inclusive to everyone –all ages, all incomes, all backgrounds
 - Provides educational opportunities accessible to everyone
 - Job creation through new businesses

- *What will Downtown Watsonville feel like in 20 years regarding physical and social form. What characteristics are the same? What are different?*

Physical Form:

- New infill housing with a wide variety of buildings that complement each other - both historic and new
- Main Street decreased from three to two lanes and sidewalks expanded, prioritizing the pedestrian experience
- More public transportation – build off rail trail opportunity
- Urban forest – more trees and streetscape improvements
- Less vacancy – more people and business
- Art galleries and performing arts spaces
- Diversity of restaurants and businesses
- Outdoor seating for cafes and restaurants – streets coming to life with people!
- Restored and re-adapted historic buildings

Social Form:

- Inclusive and welcoming to all, regardless of social status, race, or income. Strong sense of belonging for everyone
 - Lively, vibrant, and colorful!
 - More public art!
 - Encouraging local entrepreneurs to start businesses downtown
 - Maintain small town character and charm
 - Maintain cultural diversity and identity
- *When you think about defining success within the downtown, how would you define it?*
 - Vibrancy
 - Healthy quality of life, mental and physical
 - Environmentally friendly spaces – solar, green roofs
 - Less auto-centric and more pedestrian friendly
 - Folklore stories about Watsonville passed down from generation to generation
 - Fox Theater restored and thriving!

Public Comments

Members of the public were given the opportunity to share any thoughts or comments. Several community members provided public comment.

- Would like to see the chat feature open during these meetings
- Need more creative spaces for artists downtown – dance spaces, performing art spaces
- Downtown needs to be multi-generational
- Keep Watsonville’s unique identity - Watsonville is not Santa Cruz and do not want Watsonville to turn into Santa Cruz
- Low income and affordable housing are needed. A lot of people who grew up in Watsonville can no longer afford to live there
- Would like to see a downtown that is not constrained by highways – rather a downtown that prioritizes pedestrians and bicyclists
- Make downtown lively – feature live music or outdoor theater spaces
- Mixed-use zoning throughout downtown
- Should be growing vertically and increasing downtown housing density
- Representative from Caltrans spoke and mentioned how strong the engagement is in Watsonville and Caltrans is looking forward to a collaborative process regarding Caltrans routes in downtown

Questions posed by Advisory Committee Members

- Q: Why is the team not using the 2020 census information as this is a long-term plan?
 - A: The 2020 census data is not yet available, and the Specific Plan process cannot wait until it becomes available
- Q: How is the community being made aware of these meetings?
 - A: Meeting notifications were posted in the City’s newsletters, as well as, on the project website, which is maintained by the City, and the City’s social media accounts
- Q: What does the consultant team mean by “lack of synergy between residents and businesses”?
 - A: The consultant team has heard through stakeholder interviews that the residents who live downtown do not use the downtown very much. The services and uses they are looking for are not in the downtown so there is this lack of synergy between desires of residents and what businesses are providing

- Q: What percentage of vacant spaces in retail are existing?
 - A: 5%
- Q: How may Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) change the downtown?
 - A: New TOD multifamily housing in downtown will enliven downtown by adding vibrancy and more foot traffic
- Suggestion to add affordable housing developers into this discussion
 - A: Jane Barr, an AC member, represents the affordable housing developer community

Wrap-up and Next Steps

Simran closed the meeting, offering next steps and acknowledged that community engagement will begin at this point in the process.

Adjourned at 8:00 pm