

Community Workshop #1

Summary Notes

Meeting Agenda

- Provide an overview of the Downtown Watsonville Specific Plan project
- Review existing conditions, issues + opportunities
- Gather feedback on your vision for Downtown Watsonville
- Take the community survey

Attendees

Community Members

About 40 community members attended this meeting via Zoom. The meeting was also broadcasted live on the City of Watsonville's Facebook page.

City Staff

Suzi Merriam (Community Development Director), Justin Meek (Principal Planner), Ivan Carmona (Associate Planner), Sarah Wilke (Assistant Planner), Carlos Landaverry (Housing Manager Community Development), and Elena Ortiz (Administrative Assistant II)

Consultant Team

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

Meeting Summary

Opening Exercise

Simran Malhotra, Project Consultant, briefly opened the meeting, welcoming attendees and introducing a Mentimeter.com word cloud exercise where attendees were invited to share their vision for Downtown by submitting words and phrases that describe their vision. These words and phrases

Raffle Drawing #1 and Icebreaker

The first of two live raffle drawings were conducted; identifying four winners to have a pizza from Slice Project delivered to their home during the meeting. Simran introduced a brief icebreaker to the group, asking attendees to raise their hand in Zoom and share what their favorite thing is to do in Downtown Watsonville. Three community members verbally shared; their responses are summarized below:

What is your favorite thing to do in Downtown Watsonville?

- Attend Farmer's market
- Eat at authentic Mexican restaurants
- Hang out and talk with community members in the plaza
- Take my dog for a walk while picking up garbage – helping keep Downtown beautiful

Presentation

Simran Malhotra began the workshop presentation – starting with an overview of what a specific plan is. A map of the Specific Plan study area was introduced, as well as, the project process and schedule, the technical studies that will accompany the Specific Plan, and various ways the community can participate in the planning process. Simran then presented various elements that help make a downtown successful, noting that Watsonville already has many of these elements in place, which is a great starting point for the Specific Plan to build off of. Existing land uses, downtown demographics, downtown character areas, and street networks were presented from the consultant team's existing conditions work. At this point, the floor was opened up to an Open Forum for questions and answers.

Open Forum – Question and Answer

Matt Raimi, Project Consultant, began the open forum by inviting attendees to ask questions about the presentation or project process before diving into three questions the consultant team specifically wanted input on from the community.

- ***Questions about the presentation or project process:***

- Q: What kind of values do you want in the new Watsonville? Do you want Watsonville to represent its diversity? George Washington bust and cannon do not belong in the plaza anymore. Also wondering what kind of businesses you are targeting to come here? Santa Cruz businesses or local Watsonville businesses?

- A: We are at the beginning of the process and right now we are collecting information. For now, there is not a clear direction which is why we are meeting tonight and will continue to gather input from the community. The city can target businesses to a certain degree, but businesses go into a property which likely has private owners and the city is not able to dictate what businesses can go where on privately owned land.
- Q: Will slides be available after this meeting? It was hard to find information on this meeting. Want to review slides again to see if Gottschalks building is listed as vacant on the slide or not.
 - A: Presentation will be on the city's project page. We are presenting vacant land in terms of a land use perspective – only land that does not have a building is considered vacant.
- Q: What is a Caltrans designation? Is widening sidewalks on Main Street going to be an issue with this designation? Is there a plan to redirect traffic somewhere?
 - A: Caltrans owns the right-of-way on Main Street which means they have control of what the right-of-way is and this can make it harder to make changes to the road. Yes, it is true that changes have been discussed in attempt to make Main Street more pedestrian friendly
- Q: Noticed that you kept using the term underutilized, would like to know what constitutes an underutilized site? What is a concrete example of an underutilized site in downtown?
 - A: Underutilized means a use that is not taking full advantage of what that site could be. For example, a surface parking lot on a site which could be better used for a building that could have affordable housing. Main Street surface parking lots are underutilized.
- Q: Zoning in downtown, is it mixed use? Are there limits to how tall buildings can be?
 - A: Downtown is zoned Central Commercial Core area – which allows retail on the first floor and residential and office uses on the upper floors. The current height limit in the downtown is 75 feet. Both the zoning and maximum building height in the downtown can change through this process.
- Q: Why are we worried more about the plaza looking more urban when there is not enough affordable housing going on. I am confused on this.
 - A: We are not talking about changing the plaza itself. The plaza is the City's crown jewel and needs to be preserved as an open public space. However, what happens around the plaza has potential to change. The sites around the plaza could potentially see new development.

- Q: How are we going to have residents of Watsonville walk to work when residents can not even afford to live there? What is the plan for more affordable housing near the plaza?
 - A: City has inclusionary housing ordinance which requires any new developments to have affordable housing component to it. Secondly, the Specific Plan process can establish a higher requirement for affordable housing in downtown. The city is also looking to increase density in the Downtown and increase the number of units they are allowed to build in downtown. Through an increase in density, we achieve more supply, which will result in reduced pressure on housing rents/prices.
- Q: Slide that was shown summarizing the Advisory Committee conversations was oversimplified.
 - A: The slide was intended to provide a broad overview of those conversations with the aim of letting people know that conversations have happened to date. The aim of this workshop is not to dwell on what was said at the Advisory Committee meetings but to gain new input from community members. There are very detailed notes of the Advisory Committee meetings on the project website.
- Q: Who are considered the stakeholders in downtown?
 - A: Businesses, nonprofits, people who live downtown, people that work downtown, Watsonville residents. It is a broad term for anyone who has input on what is happening in the downtown.
- Q: When the plan is moving forward, will you take into account those who live just outside of the Specific Plan planning boundary?
 - A: Yes, absolutely. Surrounding context will be considered throughout this planning process.
- Q: What about the cannons and the George Washington bust?
 - A: This Specific Plan process will not be changing the plaza at all. The plaza is dealt with through the Parks and Rec Department and Commission – the cannon and George Washington bust will be addressed by the Parks and Rec Department and Commission in a different conversation.
- ***Group Discussion: What should stay the same in Downtown?***
 - The small town feel, small businesses. Mexican restaurants are great. We want to keep our downtown owned by locals. No more chain restaurants or chain stores. Home-grown businesses would be the best!

- Preserve the authenticity that is Watsonville
 - Downtown Plaza and the events that can be held there. I also enjoy the local restaurant feel.
 - Preserve the parks and open spaces. Would love to see more art downtown and preserve the art that is there right now
 - Character of the plaza frames what the community is, celebrating culture – the predominate Mexican heritage that Watsonville has. Agrees with previous comments that locally owned businesses are a top priority in downtown. Preserve local art.
 - The great businesses in the area need to stay, however, there needs to be more opportunity for local entrepreneurs in the downtown area to start a business. Opening a business is tough and if we can get a smoother pathway to opening a business more people would give it a try. There are a lot of people that have the potential, as well as, downtown has the buildings to bring businesses into. The potential is there, if there was a way to ease the process that would be great. Downtown dies around 8:00/9:00 PM at night which ends up shortening business hours.
 - Architecture is special. Like the small town feel. Would like to see the plaza stay the same and also expanded to really be utilized as a hub for the community.
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- *Group Discussion: What elements do you think are missing in the downtown and what challenges do you think need to be overcome?*
 - Would like to see the height of the buildings increase in the downtown. We need to build up, tired of seeing townhomes being built in the city. Would like to see more than 1 or 2 bedroom units in downtown, rather family housing so that families could live in the downtown together.
 - Vacant buildings are sitting empty and have so much potential. Gottschalks building, Fox Theater. These empty buildings with owners who do not want to do anything with the buildings are the biggest challenge downtown is currently facing.
 - Parking is a challenge. Recommends going back to the angled street parking. Also recommends not adding new housing and building up, this will make Watsonville too crowded years down the road. The City should use existing buildings before adding new.

- Housing affordability is the biggest challenge that downtown faces. Need to think about who we are planning for. Would like to see some big goals set in terms of housing and affordable housing.

- ***Group Discussion: Housing and Affordable Housing***

- Q: Are we expecting to define the number of affordable housing units and low-income units in this plan? What can realistically be done to decrease the cost of housing?
 - A: The Specific Plan can do a lot of different things, if it is the will of the community to set a target then the planning process will do its best to achieve this. It is important to not only identify a number of units but also a pathway to get these units built.
 - A: Specific plan needs to be clear on how the RHNA (Regional Housing Needs Assessment) affects the Downtown Watsonville Specific Plan. We need education on RHNA for the community members. We need to also talk about what the city can do and what it has the power to do to provide affordable housing units to residents.
- Q: Who in the City is in charge of setting standards determining who qualifies for affordable housing or not. The speaker personally knows a lot of people that should qualify for affordable housing but do not and these people are getting pushed out of the city.
 - A: There are many different formulas. Eligibility requirements and income brackets are all set by the State and then the City goes from there.
- Q: Is there any way for the city to make its own definition of affordable housing?
 - A: We already do this. Watsonville's housing limits are 30% less than compared to the County. City Council set this standard years ago.
- Note: The City plans to set up a separate discussion on housing and affordable housing rules and technicalities for community educational purposes.

- *Group Discussion: Finish this sentence: A successful downtown Watsonville would_____*

- ____ be a safe place for children with childcare services!
- ____ incorporate something like the “Made with Love Market” in Arizona on a monthly or regular basis. The Public Market in Emeryville is also a cool model and thinks would be successful in Watsonville. Local residents could rent a stall and display and sell their talents. Small business mentality, everyone supporting each other.
- ____ be open past 10 PM and still be alive. Have spaces for live performances
- ____ “have mixed income housing, have a low carbon footprint, high density, good public transportation, green roofs – solar and living plants, night life for people both over and under 21, art that represents the culture of the community and community spaces”
- ____ have orange and lemon trees in downtown rather than the low maintenance bushes that provide nothing but aesthetic to downtown. These trees could also help feed the homeless who are downtown. In terms of homelessness would like to see some kind of program where people who are experiencing homelessness can clean up the downtown in exchange for food or vouchers to exchange for a shower at a gym or a pizza at a restaurant. More events for all ages are important. Live artists for art projects that involve the community.

Online Community Survey:

Following the Open Forum Discussion, the Community Visioning Survey was introduced to attendees and then five minutes was given for attendees to complete the survey. This survey is available in both English and Spanish. Links were provided on the presentation, in the Zoom chat, and on the Facebook Live stream. The survey will remain open for 3 weeks. Attendees were encouraged to share the survey with friends, family, colleagues, and anyone who may be interested in shaping the downtown.

Raffle #2 Drawing, Wrap-up and Next Steps

A second live raffle drawing was completed with one winner of a gift card to Forever Fly, a local business in downtown. Simran closed the meeting, thanking attendees for their participation and then reviewed next steps, detailing that summary notes of this meeting will be available on the project website and the consultant team will be checking in with City Council and the Planning Commission.

Meeting Adjourned

Comments in the Zoom chat:

- Concerned the plan will care more about businesses than affordable housing
- Concerned through this process that Watsonville will be gentrified instead of providing resources and opportunities for residents and youth already living there. Do not want Watsonville to become another Santa Cruz
- There is a lot of residential next to the delineated area for the downtown plan. That area will be impacted by anything that happens in the downtown area
- Farm workers are already being pushed out of the community because they cannot afford to live here. Having to move further away from their job which creates long commute hours
- Goal is to decrease the cost of living
- Move cannons in the plaza to the Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds. Would rather see modern pieces of art created by LatinX artists.
- Not understanding the median income – is it for one person? If so, the county AMI is considerably higher. Seems verbiage should be added to indicate it is for one person
- Would like to see discussion focused on affordable housing and opportunities/resources for the residents already here
- Would like to see a statue that commemorates the work of El Campesino and honor the community. This link was shared: <https://americanart.si.edu/artwork/vaquero-31943>
- Watsonville needs an art hub and to expand our local current small businesses
- The best way to pay for much more affordable housing is more height. It takes both - height and requirements for more affordable housing that can prioritize locals
- One thing some CA cities have started doing is having a tax on vacant buildings / parcels that goes toward affordable housing

- The city needs to collaborate with Plaza Vigil to bring in more local businesses from people who do not have the funds to start a business but have great ideas and work ethic. Make rent affordable, educate locals who are interested in starting a business. Working with Plaza Vigil is essential and vital to get more people to start their own businesses
- Yes, more community gardens! More nightlife/things to do for all ages. Bowling alley, arcade, swimming pools, dance halls, etc.
- Advisory Committee meetings are open to the public, if you want to stay engaged you should attend
- Watsonville works is letting the homeless help clean up trails, but I agree we could get them vouchers along with pay. Portable showers and bathrooms for the homeless are needed

Project related links shared in the Zoom chat:

Project Website:

<https://www.cityofwatsonville.org/1626/Downtown-Specific-Plan>

Community Visioning Survey (English and Spanish):

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/DWSPCommunity1English>

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/DWSPCommunity1Spanish>

Watsonville's Affordable Housing Ordinance:

<https://www.codepublishing.com/CA/Watsonville/#!/Watsonville14/Watsonville1446.html>