

Community Workshop #2

May 6, 2021

Summary Notes

Meeting Objectives

- Provide an overview of the Downtown Watsonville Specific Plan project
- Provide updates on progress to date
- Review and receive feedback on the potential Opportunity Sites concepts
- Review and receive feedback on the proposed Street and Bicycle Network concepts

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 (CDD Director), Justin Meek (Principal Planner), Sarah Wilke (Assistant Planner), Carlos Landaverry (Housing Manager Community Development), and Elena Ortiz (Administrative Assistant II)

Consultant Team

- Simran Malhotra and Kelsey Hubbard, Raimi + Associates
- Peter VanderWal and Andrew Krizman, Sargent Town Planning
- Meghan Weir and Zach Zabel, Nelson/Nygaard

Introduction and Welcome

Simran Malhotra, Project Consultant, welcomed community members and re-introduced the consultant team and Suzi Merriam introduced City Staff who were in attendance. A brief overview of zoom tools such as mute/unmute, raise hand, and live Spanish interpretation features were covered and a contact

email was provided in case any attendees had technical issues. Simran presented an overview of the agenda for the meeting and then conducted the first of two live raffle drawings; winners received gift cards to local downtown businesses.

Simran followed with an overview of what a specific plan is, the specific plan process, and what the consultant team has done to date.

Final Vision Themes and Guiding Principles

Simran presented the revised Vision Themes and Guiding Principles which are now final for the project. The Vision Themes and Guiding Principles were updated based on the over 100 public comments that were received from December 15th, 2020 – January 10th, 2021. The final Vision Themes and Guiding Principles are as follows:

Vision Themes: Vitality, dignity, equity, preservation, safety, and innovation

Guiding Principles (note these are high-level guiding principles – there are further details following each high-level principle which can be viewed in the full Vision Themes and Guiding Principles that are featured at the end of this document)

- Preserve key elements that make Downtown unique
- Establish a varied choice of uses and experiences for our diverse community
- Create housing opportunities for all
- Promote local economic prosperity
- Create a vibrant, safe, and active Downtown
- Foster a healthy, inclusive, and culturally connected community where all members can thrive
- Re-imagine and innovate mobility options and connections
- Incorporate sustainable design elements to improve community health

What Big Ideas We Have Heard So Far

Following the Vision Themes and Guiding Principles, Simran summarized the Big Ideas the consultant team has heard through community input to date. These big ideas are listed below:

- Retain Downtown’s **historic architecture and character**
- Build on and extend **Downtown’s walkable scale**
- **Activate Downtown** with new uses, special events and programming, and:
 - Provide **improvements to the public realm** – streetscape, public art, murals
 - **Re-imagine Main Street** right-of-way to address goals

- Provide **more housing choices** and maintain affordability
- Improve **bicycle and pedestrian connectivity and safety**
- Address **traffic speed and congestion concerns**

Downtown Street Framework and Improvements

Simran then provided an overview of the downtown existing street framework. This included the Main Street corridor, various regional connectors (Lake Avenue, Beach Street, Riverside Drive, Freedom Blvd), cross-town connectors (Union Street/Brennan Street, Rodriguez Street & Walker Street), and local neighborhood-serving streets and how they each relate to the connection and movement of users in the downtown.

Simran explained that a key multi-functioning street in the downtown is Caltrans State Route - 152 which runs along portions of Main Street, Lake Avenue, and Beach Street. Caltrans controls the portions of each street that SR- 152 runs through. Currently, Lake Avenue and Beach Street are part of a one-way couplet – the consultant team is exploring short- and long-term options on how to improve these streets as well as their potential conversion to two-way again. The benefits for the conversion for various users and to the public realm in the downtown was also discussed.

Concluding this section, Peter VanderWal, project consultant highlighted the importance of balancing priorities and tradeoffs that each street intervention and potential improvement brings. When balancing priorities, it is important to remember that streets have various users with various needs. There are pedestrians, vehicles, bicyclists, business owners - all of whom share the same right-of-way but at times have conflicting priorities in terms of the way they would like to utilize the right-of-way.

Downtown Character Areas and Opportunity Sites

Peter presented a refined downtown framework and character area map. The downtown framework has been divided into character areas - originally there were six-character areas which were presented at the last Advisory Committee meeting. Through refinements there are now eight total character areas. They are listed below, and the new character areas are underlined. A full map of the character areas is featured at the end of this document.

- Historic Downtown Core
- Civic Core
- Gateway

- Commercial Flex
- Residential Flex
- Workspace/Industrial Flex
- East Neighborhood
- West Neighborhood

For each character area the key existing characteristics, placemaking priorities, and proposed land use and character were presented. Additionally, some character areas feature potential opportunity. These opportunity sites have the potential to spark catalytic development and new uses in the downtown. Brief high-level concepts were presented for each of the potential opportunity sites to illustrate the types of development that could occur on these sites. However, since many of these sites are privately owned, these concepts are only a preliminary idea of what could be built on these sites. This detailed information can be accessed in the full meeting presentation which is located on the project website and a link is provided at the end of this document.

Street Improvements

Megan Weir, transportation consultant, Megan provided a high-level overview of the street level recommendations, including short- and long-term changes to the street. Specific concepts for working within the Caltrans right-of-way (Hwy 152) were also presented.

Bicycle Improvements

Following the street improvements, Megan presented the existing bicycle facilities and the proposed bicycle network improvements. An overview of the various types of bike facilities was provided and then maps of both existing facilities and proposed bicycle networks were presented to the group. These maps can be found at the end of this document, as well, as in the full meeting presentation.

Questions/Comments

- Watsonville is a working town with active industrial uses, and these uses should be preserved.
- Highlight connection to the beach with better signage and wayfinding
- Build on agricultural heritage.

Breakout Room Discussion and Report Back

Meeting attendees were then assigned into one of three breakout rooms where groups were instructed to dive into each character area and discuss the following in detail -

- Placemaking priorities:
 - Are these the right vision and priorities?
 - Are we missing anything?
- Opportunity sites
 - Do the concepts shown meet your vision for the Character Area?
 - Are there any opportunities we have missed?
- Street and Bicycle Network
 - Does the proposed street and bicycle network balance the desired priorities?
 - Are there other opportunities we should explore?

Each group had one facilitator and one notetaker from the project team and all attendees were enabled to use the Zoom annotate tool to write comments and draw directly on the maps provided.

Following the breakout rooms, the group reconvened together and reported back on their conversation. Breakout room discussions are summarized in a high-level below:

Group 1: (Justin & Peter)

- Discussed the road network, esp. along Walker Street – possible connections and rail line enhancements.
- Walker Street has no sidewalks and is especially not accessible to those who are mobility impaired.
- Liked the bicycle network.
- Concern about how Hwy 152 runs into Downtown.
- How do we enhance walkability in Downtown?

Group 2: (Suzi & Kelsey)

- Like the idea of more amenities for High School students to walk to, with more outdoor dining and seating. Also like the idea of a parking structure behind Plaza Vigil.
- General agreement about not changing the flavor and character of Watsonville. Instead elevate what Watsonville is.
- Provide more green spaces, urban farming, green roofs, recreational spaces, bringing in elements of the Climate Action Plan.
- Build on Downtown's strengths.

- Lot of discussion on bike safety, ensure bikeways in Downtown are as safe as possible.
- Celebrate and elevate Cabrillo and nonprofits in Downtown. They bring a fair amount of pedestrian traffic to Downtown.
- Build housing at all income levels – both affordable and low income.
- Look at providing more parking – paid and free.
- Do something with the Fox theater and Depot building.
- Watsonville ought to put out a call for creating a spectacular architecture specimen low-income housing on a transit-adjacent site.
- Create a nightlife area behind Plaza Vigil – plaza area, dancing, etc. Build housing on the Post Office site.
- Keep the Bean!

Group 3:

- Support the Plaza as the heart and support it.
- Mid-block crossing to the Plaza Vigil block is a good idea.
- Ensure there is new programming for current and new visitors, expand to other areas in Downtown such as Stroesser Alley and Romo Park.
- Collaborate with Recreation Dept.
- Extend pedestrian connections all the way to the hotels on Freedom and Main.
- Support and excitement for reduced travel lanes and make a destination where those want to eat, work and play.
- Enhanced opportunities for dining and other activity, new parklets dining, support for new businesses.
- Concerns about parklet safety - can be done with bulb-outs, bollards, trees, etc.
- Help ease new business startup constraints, especially for restaurants.
- Make bike riding safer in Downtown.
- Ensure there is space for buses and other transit

Facebook Live Stream Comments:

- Hope the plan includes lots of lighting for everyone's safety.
- Need safety improvements on Rodriguez.
- Need to get all the power lines underground on Rodriguez Street and definitely more lighting is needed on Rodriguez as well.

- Will this place be accessible to the public? Because there are a lot of homeless people that camp in that area at night.
- This would be good, but which current businesses will have the outdoor seating? There needs to be businesses that people will want to visit. Also, can the city provide a trail period for super small businesses like in Santa Cruz downtown is doing?
- Any improvements on Walker Street should start with changing the traffic speed limit
- Seems like a lot of focus is on Walker... which is an industrial space that would be overwhelmed with congestion, parking, etc.
- Suggest signs flashing lights cross walks.
- Kids walk from Second to Radcliff school. Instead of doing a market behind the train station why not make a parking for those are going to commute?
- One of the opportunity sites has an existing industrial business that make kitchen cabinets, etc.
- Plus, the restaurant across the street has been there for many years, is the City going to help them upgrade?
- Why bring another brewery we have George's liquor store across the street?
- What happened to Safe Streets project?
- My son crosses Walker Street to second street coming from Ceiba college prep and he tells me that he doesn't feel safe crossing.

Community Survey

Simran introduced the second community survey to attendees, encouraging all to participate and share with their networks. The survey is available in both English and Spanish and the links are featured at the end of this document.

Raffle #2, Wrap-up, and Next Steps

The second live raffle was conducted where winners received gift cards to local downtown businesses. Simran closed the meeting, offering next steps and what is expected to be covered that the next community meeting.

Meeting Adjourned at 8:00 pm

Relevant Meeting Links

Project Website:

- www.cityofwatsonville.org/1626/Downtown-Specific-Plan

Community Meeting #2 Full Presentation:

- <https://www.cityofwatsonville.org/DocumentCenter/View/16115/DWSP-Community-Workshop-2-Presentation-Slides-5-6-21>

Community Meeting #2 Facebook Live Recording

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wTnZvpltCEc>

Final Vision Themes and Guiding Principles:

- www.cityofwatsonville.org/DocumentCenter/View/15529/Vision-Themes-and-Guidng-Principles