

CITY OF SANTA ROSA
BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN ADVISORY BOARD
STAFF REPORT
September 19, 2019

SUBJECT

Downtown Station Area Specific Plan Update

ISSUE

The Board may review and provide feedback on the Preferred Alternative for the Downtown Station Area Specific Plan Update.

STAFF PRESENTER

Patrick Streeter, Senior Planner

RECOMMENDATION

The Board may provide input on the preferred alternative for the Downtown Station Area Specific Plan Update.

BACKGROUND

On October 9, 2007, the City Council adopted the Downtown Station Area Specific Plan (Specific Plan), which as part of its 20-year vision, included development of more than 3,400 new downtown residential units. Presently, midway through the planning period, approximately 100 units have been constructed. While a lack of vitality in the downtown can in part be attributed to market forces, feedback has indicated that the Specific Plan is too restrictive, in terms of development standards such as density and height, to finance and fully realize the City's need for high density downtown housing and job centers within walking distance to the Downtown Station.

Following the Council's designation of downtown housing as a top priority, the City applied for a Planning Grant Program through the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC), which was approved on April 25, 2018. The grant provides funding for an update to the Specific Plan to address land use and transportation issues, as well as infrastructure needs, associated with intensification of housing development in the downtown.

Phase 1: Outreach and Opportunities of the specific plan update process has concluded. Phase 2 involves analysis of "alternatives", or potential land use and circulation strategies that could be incorporated into the plan.

ANALYSIS

Based on a review of the issues and opportunities identified as part of Phase 1, three preliminary draft alternative concepts were developed. These concepts represent different strategies the City could take to stimulate housing development downtown, foster economic and cultural vitality, improve multi-modal connectivity, and promote a walkable, livable environment.

Alternative 1 - Vibrant Core: seeks to create a vibrant, big city downtown core around Courthouse Square and to strengthen connections between that location and other parts of the planning area. It would concentrate the bulk of new housing through 2040 in the Courthouse Square area, featuring new buildings taller than 8 stories along Third Street

and on City-owned catalyst sites and a vibrant mix of employment, entertainment and visitor-oriented uses. The concentration of higher density housing in the Courthouse Square area under this alternative would provide a critical mass of new residents to support amenities like shuttle service between the SMART station and Courthouse Square; underpasses activated with pop up retail or performances; and a grocery store. Outside the greater Courthouse Square area, the SMART site, the Santa Rosa Avenue corridor, and the former industrial buildings on both sides of the rail corridor between Wilson and Donahue would also see housing development. Maxwell Court and the area between West Third Street and Sebastopol Road in the vicinity of Roberts Avenue would retain an employment-oriented focus.

Alternative 2 – Village Centers: envisions the planning area as a network of interconnected village centers, each with its own distinct character. The overall amount of housing would be the same as with Alternative 1; however, the new units would be distributed more widely throughout the planning area with the intent of fostering a series of centers to serve the daily needs of neighborhoods in and adjacent to the planning area. Each village center would accommodate new high-density housing but building heights would not exceed 6 stories at any location. The focus of mobility improvements under this alternative would be on improvements to connect the various village centers with one another and to promote travel within the plan area by modes other than single-occupant vehicles. This alternative would involve the extensions of Roberts Avenue and Donahue Street envisioned in the 2007 Plan as well as the reconnection of Fourth Street through Santa Rosa Plaza. It would also involve road diets on Mendocino Avenue, Santa Rosa Avenue and E Street.

Alternative 3 – Transit Forward: would focus new, higher-density development along high frequency transit corridors in the planning area in order to build connections between downtown and other parts of the City, increase vibrancy, and promote walking, biking and transit use over single-occupant vehicles. Key corridors for densification are Mendocino Avenue between College and Courthouse Square; Santa Rosa Avenue between Maple and Courthouse Square; West Third Street from Davis to Dutton; and Sebastopol Road between Olive and Dutton. Each of these roadways would be reconfigured as multi-modal streets with priority for transit and an activated public realm featuring bicycle lanes, wide sidewalks, plazas, parklets, and roof-top green spaces. Under this scenario, the existing transit mall would be expanded to the south and the block would be redeveloped with a mix of residential, office, retail, and entertainment options in addition to transit and parking facilities in buildings 6 to 8 stories tall.

Preferred Alternative: Based on outreach and meetings with decision makers during Phase 2, the project team has developed a preferred alternative that borrows from each of the three alternatives listed above. City staff requests feedback from the BPAB before it is brought before the City Council for review.

RECOMMENDATION

The Board may provide input on the preferred alternative for the Downtown Station Area Specific Plan Update.

Attachment 1: Specific Plan Update - Draft Alternatives