

CITY OF SANTA ROSA
CITY COUNCIL

TO: MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL
FROM: AMY LYLE, SUPERVISING PLANNER
PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
SUBJECT: DOWNTOWN STATION AREA SPECIFIC PLAN AND FINAL
SUBSEQUENT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT

AGENDA ACTION: ADOPTION OF THE DOWNTOWN STATION AREA SPECIFIC
PLAN, CERTIFICATION OF THE FINAL SUBSEQUENT
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT, APPROVAL OF THE
MITIGATION AND MONITORING PROGRAM AND CEQA
FINDINGS OF FACT, AND APPROVAL OF GENERAL PLAN
AMENDMENTS FOR CONSISTENCY

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended by the Planning Commission that the Council, by two resolutions: 1) certify the Final Subsequent Environmental Impact Report; 2) approve the Mitigation and Monitoring Program and CEQA Findings of Fact; 3) approve General Plan Amendments; and 4) adopt the Downtown Station Area Specific Plan.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Downtown Station Area Specific Plan (DSASP) addresses land use, circulation, urban design, infrastructure, and environmental considerations for the approximately 720 acres surrounding the Downtown Station Sonoma-Marín Area Rail Transit (SMART) site in the heart of Santa Rosa. The Plan Area is roughly bounded by College Avenue to the North, Sebastopol Road to the South, Santa Rosa Avenue and Brookwood Avenue to the East, and North Dutton Avenue and the Imwalle Gardens area to the West.

The Draft DSASP is an update to the 2007 DSASP and is intended to facilitate high density mixed use residential and commercial development proximate to transit facilities, including the Downtown SMART rail station, the Downtown Transit Mall, and major bus routes. It involves updates to the regulatory framework that guides Downtown development, and it identifies improvements to public facilities needed to support the growth envisioned. The main objectives of the Draft DSASP are to enhance the role of Downtown as an energetic commercial and cultural center; increase the number of residents and employees within a half mile of high frequency transit; strengthen sense of

place by providing enhanced bicycle and pedestrian amenities and improving the public realm; and leverage City-owned properties to catalyze redevelopment that can help to address the city's unmet housing need.

On September 24, 2020 the Planning Commission held a public hearing and adopted resolutions recommending that the City Council certify the Subsequent Environmental Impact Report, adopt the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program, Findings of Fact, approve General Plan amendments, and adopt the Downtown Station Area Specific Plan.

BACKGROUND

On October 9, 2007, the City Council adopted the Downtown Station Area Specific Plan (2007 Specific Plan). The primary objective of the Specific Plan is to increase the number of residents and employees within walking distance (1/2 mile) of the SMART station through the intensification of land uses in the Plan area.

The EIR for the 2007 Specific Plan was certified in October 2007 (SCH #2006072104). That EIR described and disclosed the environmental effects associated with adoption of the existing Specific Plan. As evaluated in the 2007 EIR, the 2007 Specific Plan involved changes to land use and zoning regulations intended to foster a vibrant mix of housing, shopping, and jobs in proximity to transit, as well as a range of circulation and infrastructure improvements needed to support the densification and intensification of uses downtown.

On December 14, 2017, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) notified local governments in the Bay Area of the availability of grant funding for the Priority Development Area (PDA) Planning Grant Program for up to \$800,000 (with a 12% local match). The PDA Grant Planning Program provides financial support for planning processes that seek to intensify land uses by increasing housing supply, including affordable housing, and jobs, boosting transit ridership, increasing walking, bicycling, carpooling and car-sharing, and retaining and expanding community assets.

On March 5, 2018, based on Council Policy 000-62, which authorizes the City Manager or his designee to submit grant applications, the City submitted an application to MTC for the PDA Planning Grant Program to amend the existing Specific Plan. The grant would allow the City to comprehensively address land use and transportation issues, as well as infrastructure needs, associated with intensification of housing development in the downtown.

On April 25, 2018, MTC approved a grant in the amount of \$800,000 to the City of Santa Rosa to update the Downtown Station Area Specific Plan. A match of 12% (\$109,090) was required, which is to be provided as in-kind staff time from the Planning and Economic Development Department's existing budget.

On November 27, 2018, the Council, by resolution, authorized the Mayor to sign a Professional Services Agreement with Dyett & Bhatia Urban and Regional Planners, a

California corporation based in Oakland to assist the City in preparing the Specific Plan update.

On January 8, 2019, the City Council considered the scope and visioning of the Specific Plan update and adopted a Community Engagement Strategy.

On January 17, 2019 the DSASP was presented at a joint meeting of the Cultural Heritage Board and the Design Review Board to solicit feedback on the proposed scope and visioning.

On March 3, 2019, the first meeting of the Community Advisory Committee (CAC) was held, with the purpose of outlining the project's goals and objectives and developing a strategy and methodology to maximize community engagement.

On May 1 and May 4, 2019, Community Workshops numbers 1 and 2 were held at the Central Library Branch and Chop's Teen Center, respectively. The workshops represented a culmination of Phase I: Outreach and Opportunities.

On May 30, 2019, representatives of City departments, outside agencies, and other technical experts met for Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) meeting number 1. The purpose of the meeting was to consider two potential project alternatives and develop additional items of consideration that should be tested toward preparation of a preferred alternative.

On June 20, 2019, at a joint meeting, the Cultural Heritage Board and the Design Review Board received a summary of Phase I and provided feedback regarding potential land use and circulation alternatives to be considered. On July 16, 2019, at a joint meeting, the Planning Commission and the Council received a summary of Phase I and provided feedback regarding potential land use and circulation alternatives to be considered.

On July 29, 2019, Community Workshop number 3 was held at the Central Library Branch. More than 120 attendees participated in a small-group exercise designed to gather feedback and preferences regarding the draft alternatives.

On October 2, 2019, representatives of City departments, outside agencies, and other technical experts met for Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) meeting number 2. The purpose of the meeting was to review the draft preferred alternative concept prior to it being presented to decision makers.

On November 6 and 7, 2019, a Draft Preferred Plan Concept intended to guide the update to the Specific Plan was presented to the Cultural Heritage Board and the Design Review Board, respectively.

On December 3, 2019, the City Council reviewed for the Draft Preferred Plan Concept and expressed strong support.

On December 19, 2019, the City published an Initial Study and Notice of Preparation for the SEIR which initiated a 30-day review and comment period.

On January 15, 2020, the City held a public scoping meeting at the Central Library Branch to gather additional input.

On May 20, 2020, representatives of City departments, outside agencies, and other technical experts met for the TAC meeting number 3. The purpose of the meeting was to review the certain policy decisions for the Draft DSASP before public release.

On June 29, 2020, a virtual CAC meeting was held, with the purpose of reviewing and providing comments on the community engagement plan.

On July 15, 2020, the City released the Draft DSASP and Draft SEIR for public review, initiating a 45-day comment period that ran through August 31, 2020.

On July 23, 2020, the Draft DSASP was presented to the Waterways Advisory Committee.

On August 13, 2020, the Draft DSASP and Draft SEIR was presented to the Planning Commission.

On August 19, 2020, the Draft DSASP was presented to a joint meeting of the Design Review and Cultural Heritage Boards.

On September 14, 2020, the City released the Final SEIR and Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program.

On September 24, 2020 the Planning Commission held a public hearing and adopted resolutions recommending that the City Council certify the Final SEIR, adopt the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program and Findings of Fact, approve General Plan amendments, and adopt the Downtown Station Area Specific Plan.

Project Description

The project includes an update of the 2007 Downtown Station Area Specific Plan consisting of goals, policies, standards, guidelines, and diagrams to guide the future development of the Planning Area. The DSASP will legally function as a Specific Plan for regulating land use and coordinating the provision of public services and infrastructure. The DSASP serves the following purposes:

- Establish a long-range vision that reflects the aspirations of the community and outlines steps to achieve this vision;
- Establish long-range development policies that will guide City departments, Planning Commission, and City Council decision-making;

- Provide a basis for judging whether specific development proposals and public projects are in harmony with plan policies;
- Plan in a manner that meets future land needs based on the projected population and job growth;
- Allow City departments, other public agencies, and private developers to design projects that will enhance the small-town character of the community, preserve environmental resources, and minimize hazards; and
- Provide the basis for establishing and setting priorities for detailed plans and implementing programs, such as the zoning ordinance, subdivision regulations, specific and master plans, and the Capital Improvement Program.

The Draft DSASP would replace the existing 2007 Specific Plan in all elements. The Draft DSASP would establish a planning and policy framework that would extend to horizon year 2040.

Objectives

The Draft DSASP provides the basis for the City's land use and development policy and represents the basic community values, ideals, and aspirations that will govern development and conservation. Specific objectives established for the project include the following:

- Enhance the role of Downtown Santa Rosa as an energetic commercial and cultural center with a range of housing, employment, retail and restaurant options in a vibrant, walkable environment;
- Facilitate the production of housing that provides a range of options for people of all incomes, abilities, and stages of life;
- Enhance connectivity for pedestrians, cyclists, and transit users within in the Planning Area and to/from key destinations;
- Increase the number of residents and employees within one half mile of high frequency transit options;
- Strengthen sense of place by providing welcoming civic spaces, public art, and uses and design that promote day and nighttime vitality;
- Leverage City-owned properties in the Planning Area to catalyze redevelopment that can provide for the community's unmet housing needs within the Planning Area;
- Reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT) through improved jobs-housing balance within the Planning Area.

Draft Station Area Specific Plan Contents

The Draft DSASP contains six chapters, with each presenting guiding goals and accompanying policies; design standards and guidelines; and recommendations for implementation. Each chapter is described below.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This Introduction Chapter primarily includes background and context including the objectives and goals of the Specific Plan effort, an overview of the community engagement process, and a strong statement of vision and guiding principles that will assist in decision making throughout the life of the DSASP.

Chapter 2: Land Use

The Land Use Chapter provides a land use and development framework to guide the evolution of the Downtown Station Area. It includes land use designations and standards for development intensity, as well as policies to support economic vitality and the creation of new housing for all income levels, lifestyles, family types, and ages. Key topics in this chapter include existing land uses; development potential; a land use map; permitted uses and intensities; and policies to promote vitality, walkability, art and culture. The Draft DSASP includes three key moves to achieve land use goals and vision. These include:

New Land Use Designations: The Draft DSASP introduces four new land use designations including Core Mixed Use, Station Mixed Use, Maker Mixed Use, and Neighborhood Mixed Use. It also identifies “Opportunity Areas” where there are clusters of vacant and under-utilized land where change is foreseeable. Overall, the Draft DSASP reduces the number of downtown land use designations from 14 to 9 and provides descriptions intended to recognize and enhance the character of various distinct downtown districts.

Regulating Height and Density with Floor Area Ratio: In order to increase flexibility for developers, the Draft DSASP establishes a system that regulates Floor Area Ratio (FAR) in and around Opportunity Areas, replacing existing height and density regulations. Existing height and density regulations would remain in place for the majority of established residential neighborhoods within the Plan area. FAR is the ratio of total building space in relation to lot size. FAR does not directly limit the height or number of stories of a building; it simply controls the amount of building space allowed on a given lot. The Draft DSASP would calculate FAR as the total area of all floors in a building as measured to the outside surfaces of exterior walls or to the center line of common walls. Calculations exclude crawl spaces, structured parking, carports, breezeways, attics without floors, porches, balconies, terraces, below grade structures, and open space (common, public, or private). Additionally, for ceilings over 20 feet above floor height, the gross floor area of these areas would be doubled for the purpose of calculating floor area ratio, but not for the purpose of determining actual floor area. This is to ensure that double-height lobbies, ballrooms, and similar spaces are adequately accounted for in the FAR calculation.

Ground Floor Activation: A primary goal of the DSASP to create a vibrant and safe environment for pedestrians and street frontages. The Draft DSASP requires that new development activate the ground floor of buildings in a flexible way with uses and/or design techniques that promote an enhanced pedestrian environment. Active ground floor uses include retail and service establishments, restaurants, cafes, bars and brew pubs, co-working spaces, art and craft studios, and other substantially similar uses on certain streets. Building design that optimizes pedestrian access; facade length and articulation; and window coverage will be required. The intent is to provide developers with a menu of options from which two or more items are selected. The overlay would apply at locations within mixed use areas where retail currently exists and where enhanced walkability and vitality is desired.

Chapter 3: Mobility

The Mobility Chapter articulates a strategy to improve connections to and within the Downtown Station Area, with an emphasis on improvements that support transportation choices beyond the car. These policies present a range of transportation improvements and programs to support downtown development and make it safe, easy, and convenient to get to and through the Downtown Station Area. Key topics in this chapter include the roadway network, the bicycle and pedestrian network, the transit network, and parking. The Mobility Chapter includes the follow key moves:

Elimination of Minimum Parking Requirements: The Draft DSASP waives minimum parking requirements for development within the entire Downtown Station Area. This move increases the flexibility for developers to provide parking amounts in line with market demand and the lending requirements of financial institutions. This effectively “unbundles” parking relying on viable alternatives to the automobile. The parking policy structure includes a holistic parking management strategy that includes shared parking between adjacent land uses with different peak parking demand times; a residential parking permit program in existing neighborhoods; on-demand bike share and scooters; among other tools.

Parking Agreements to Incentivize Development: Unbundled parking also incentivizes participation in a City shared parking program, which makes surplus spaces available to residential and commercial developments. Most of the Downtown Station Area is within 1,000 feet (or a 5-minute walk) of a City-owned parking lot or garage; however, occupancy count data indicates that a significant portion of the spaces in several municipal lots and garages is available during peak midday hours. These spaces could be made available to nearby development, potentially offering significant savings that can assist with the financial feasibility of high-density and affordable residential developments. The Draft DSASP also contains a policy encouraging the redevelopment of City-owned surface lots

through a public-private partnership to further incentivize and promote housing in the Downtown Station Area.

East-West Connection Through the Mall: A bicycle and pedestrian connection along Fourth Street through the Santa Rosa Plaza Mall will strengthen and facilitate connectivity between Courthouse and Railroad Squares. This will be achieved by exploring different programs with key property owners to enhance the existing connection through the Mall, such as extending hours of operation, adding high-visibility wayfinding signage, and locating certain shops to activate the connection.

Transit Downtown Loop: A strengthened transit connection along Third Street will link Courthouse Square and the SMART station, with a circulator bus or trackless trolley, with enhanced CityBus service, or on-demand electric vehicle.

Chapter 4: Urban Design and Civic Spaces

The Urban Spaces and Civic Spaces Chapter provides urban design principles, policies, standards, and guidelines to guide development in a way that respects our existing heritage and creates a vibrant sense of place while providing development flexibility. Topics in this chapter include urban design principles, the public realm, site and building design, and historic resources. Key moves in this chapter include:

Urban Parks and Civic Spaces: The Draft DSASP creates a new designation called Civic Spaces. These are envisioned to be publicly accessible open spaces programmed or improved with green space and recreational amenities.

Design Guidelines for Active ground Floors and Transition Areas: The Draft DSASP provides standards and guidelines for building placement and transitions; building design; ground level design; environmental sustainability; and trees and landscaping. In general, transitional standards apply where development immediately abuts uses designated as Preservation Districts or Low Density Residential, Low-Medium Density Residential, and Medium Density Residential. The intent of transitional standards is to ensure that new development fits into existing neighborhoods with a cohesive urban form, to provide transition between higher-density and lower-density neighborhoods, and to facilitate new infill development with respect to neighboring properties. Setback and street frontage standards also ensure a continuously active and engaging street frontage in certain locations, supporting vibrancy, activity, and safety. The Draft DSASP establishes two different transition areas to ensure adequate daylight and neighborhood scale are achieved: Downtown Transition and Neighborhood Transition.

Historic Resources: The Draft DSASP recognizes historic resources as an important part of downtown character and City heritage and aims to integrate

designated historic resources while accommodating new development and intensification of uses. Policy language continues the existing protections of historic structures and preservation districts and includes incentives to encourage the rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of historic properties. In addition, the DSASP directs the City to conduct an historic survey for the Opportunity Areas to identify historic resources requiring designation and streamlining development for non-historic properties.

Chapter 5: Public Services and Sustainability

The Public Services and Sustainability Chapter's goals and policies emphasize careful stewardship of natural resources and public services to ensure that the Downtown Station Area evolves into an attractive place to live, work and play. Topics in this chapter include public services (schools, libraries, police/community safety, fire, and utilities); noise and hazardous materials; environmental hazards and emergency response; and clean air, water, and natural environment. Key moves to achieve these goals include:

Air and Noise Pollution: Toxic Air Contaminants (TACs) are generated from stationary and mobile sources in the Downtown Station Area, including Highway 101 and SR 12. The Draft DSASP requires any projects that locate sensitive receptors, such as residences, schools, daycares, or nursing and retirement homes within areas identified near TACs to include indoor air filtration systems or other design and landscaping techniques that reduce health impacts. Additionally, policies are included to reduce noise impacts from increased transportation noise, integrate noise attenuation in sensitive areas, establish feasible noise limits for mixed-use areas.

Chapter 6: Implementation

The Implementation Chapter summarizes the identified infrastructure needs, their costs, and potential funding sources. It also includes a discussion of major policies and actions that will ensure effective implementation. Key topic areas include regulatory implementation; phasing; infrastructure financing strategies; and periodic plan review. Key moves to achieve successful DSASP implementation include:

- **Phased Development and Implementation:** While ultimate phasing of development and necessary improvements within the Downtown Station Area will be based on market factors as well as costs and available financing, the Draft DSASP outlines a phased approach, including near-term actions to occur within the next five years, and intermediate/longer-term actions.
- **Funding Tools and Mechanisms:** It is anticipated that the cost of public infrastructure and service system improvements will be covered in part by the expansion of existing City General Fund revenues, which will increase as new

development contributes additional tax revenue. The remaining infrastructure obligations may require additional financing may be met through various mechanisms, most commonly impact fees, user fees, and community facilities districts (CFDs). For projects that are public priorities, tax increment financing may also be available in designated redevelopment areas.

OUTREACH AND PUBLIC COMMENTS

The Draft Plan was released for public comment for 45 days between July 15 through August 31st. The following outreach meetings were conducted in addition to approximately 20 individual meetings with stakeholders.

- July 15- Virtual Public Open House
- July 23- Waterways Advisory Committee
- Aug 6- Downtown Subcommittee
- Aug 7- St Rose Neighborhood Walking Tour/Meeting
- Aug 17- Downtown Action Organization, Santa Rosa Metro Chamber
- Aug 17- Historic Neighborhood Community Meeting #1
- Aug 17- Historic Neighborhood Community Meeting #2
- Aug 18- Historic Neighborhood Community Meeting #3
- Aug 19- Joint Design Review and Cultural Heritage Board Meeting
- Aug 25- Disability Rights Center Meeting
- Sep 2- Spanish Virtual Public Open House
- Sep 3- Downtown Subcommittee

Approximately 35 comment letters and emails were submitted by multiple signatories, and form-letter submissions collected from the www.plandowntownsr.com website. The Planning Commission and City staff have evaluated all the feedback received and all recommended changes to the Draft DSASP are included in Attachment 1. All public comments are also attached to this staff report, Attachment 3 includes all comments received up to September 2 and Attachment 4 includes all comments received up to the publication of this staff report.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

A Subsequent Environmental Impact Report has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act of 1970 (CEQA). According to CEQA, lead agencies are required to consult with public agencies having jurisdiction over a Proposed Project, and to provide the general public with an opportunity to comment on the Draft SEIR. The Draft SEIR was made available for public review on July 15, 2020. The CEQA-mandated public comment period ended on August 31, 2020. The Draft SEIR identified significant impacts associated with the Proposed Project and examined alternatives and recommended mitigation measures that could avoid or reduce potential impacts. The Draft SEIR was distributed to local and State responsible and trustee agencies and the general public was advised of the availability of the Draft SEIR through

public notice published in the local newspaper and on the City website and the project website as required by law.

On Thursday August 13, 2020, a public hearing was held on the Draft SEIR during the official public review period. The meeting was held virtually, consistent with Governor's Executive Orders N-25-20 and N-29-20 to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, from 4:00 to 9:00 p.m. A total of one comment letter on the SEIR was received during the 45-day comment period on August 29, 2020. While several comments on the Draft DSASP were received, overall the edits and additions to the Draft DSASP, together with the revisions to the Draft SEIR, merely clarify and make insignificant changes to an adequate SEIR. As a result of these changes, there would be no new significant or substantially more severe impacts or new mitigation measures that were not already included in the Draft SEIR, and consequently recirculation of the Draft SEIR is not required.

The Final Subsequent Environmental Impact Report (Final SEIR) was released on September 14, 2020. The Final SEIR includes the Draft SEIR, response to comments received on the Draft SEIR, and Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program.

BOARD/COMMISSION/COMMITTEE REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

On September 24, 2020, the Planning Commission held a public hearing in consideration of a recommendation to Council on the Final SEIR and the DSASP. During the meeting eight members of the public provided comments. The comments included a variety of topics including site specific issues and concerns; issues related to the St Rose neighborhood including transition zones and historic "contributing" properties; issues related to preservation of existing parking garages, retention of office uses, and ground floor activation requirements for existing office buildings; concerns related to affordable housing, infrastructure, and anti-displacement strategies; and overall support for the DSASP. In addition to oral comments, two letters were submitted as late correspondence from the Airport Business Center. Staff addressed late comments on the Draft DSASP verbally during the meeting. The other comment letter was related to the Final SEIR. CEQA does not require responses on late comments (Pub. Resources Code Section 21091(d)(1)), however, staff will be providing responses to the Airport Business Center.

Staff identified five key areas for heightened review by the Planning Commission. These included creek activation (Prince Memorial Greenway), use of floor area ratio, parking, homelessness services, and policies focused on the St. Rose neighborhood and preservation district.

The Planning Commission recommended the following additional amendments (also within Attachment 1) to the DSASP based on public comment and staff recommendations:

- Removal of FAR designations along Lincoln Street within the St Rose District
- Addition of a Transition Zone between properties along College Ave and Lincoln Street
- Addition of a Gateway Symbol on 3rd Street and Roberts Avenue
- Amend rear setback of Table UDCS-2 to reflect a lesser setback

The Planning Commission adopted Resolutions #12023 and #12024 (Attachment 5) recommending that the City Council certify the Subsequent Environmental Impact Report, adopt the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program, Findings of Fact, approve General Plan amendments, and adopt the Downtown Station Area Specific Plan.

NOTIFICATION

On October 1, 2020, a Notice of Public Hearing was published in an 1/8-page advertisement in the Press Democrat.

FISCAL IMPACT

The total DSASP budget is \$909,090. \$800,000 was awarded by the Metropolitan Transportation Commission PDA Grant with a \$109,090 local match funded by the City's general fund which covers City staff time.

ATTACHMENTS

Project Website Link: <https://www.plandowntownsr.com/draft-plan>
(Links to all project documents including the Draft Downtown Station Area Specific Plan and the Draft and Final SEIRs)

- Attachment 1 - DSASP Amendments and Maps
- Attachment 2 - General Plan Text and Figure Amendments
- Attachment 3 - Public Comments Received through Sep 2, 2020
- Attachment 4 - Public Comments Received between Sep 2 to Oct 8, 2020
- Attachment 5 - Planning Commission Resolutions #12023 and #12024
- Resolution 1 - Certification of the Final Subsequent Environmental Impact Report, Adoption of the Findings of Fact and Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program
- Exhibit A: EIR Cert - Findings of Fact
- Exhibit B: EIR Cert - Mitigation, Monitoring, and Reporting Program
- Resolution 2 - Adoption of the General Plan Amendments and the Downtown Station Area Specific Plan
- Exhibit A: DSASP Amendments and Maps (as seen in Attachment 1)
- Exhibit B: General Plan Text and Figure Amendments

CONTACT

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