

CITY OF SANTA ROSA
PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
STAFF REPORT FOR THE DESIGN REVIEW BOARD
AND CULTURAL HERITAGE BOARD
October 21, 2020 (Continued from October 15, 2020)

PROJECT TITLE

Downtown Station Area Specific Plan Design
Guidelines and Zoning Code Consistency
Amendments

APPLICANT

Not applicable

ADDRESS/LOCATION

Downtown Station Area Specific Plan Area

PROPERTY OWNER

Various

ASSESSOR'S PARCEL NUMBER

Various

FILE NUMBER

ST20-002

APPLICATION DATE

Not applicable

APPLICATION COMPLETION DATE

Not applicable

REQUESTED ENTITLEMENTS

Recommendation on Design Guidelines

FURTHER ACTIONS REQUIRED

Approval by City Council

PROJECT SITE ZONING

Existing – Various Commercial and
Residential Zoning Districts within the SA
(Station Area) Combining District

Proposed – CMU (Core Mixed Use), SMU
(Station Mixed Use), MMU (Maker Mixed
Use) within the DSA (Downtown Station
Area) Combining District.

GENERAL PLAN DESIGNATION

Existing – Various Commercial and
Residential land uses

Proposed – Core Mixed Use, Station Mixed
Use, Maker Mixed Use, Neighborhood Mixed
Use

PROJECT PLANNER

Amy Nicholson, Senior Planner

Andrew Trippel, Acting Supervising Planner

RECOMMENDATION

Recommendation of Approval of Design
Guideline Amendments

Comments on Zoning Code Amendments

Agenda Item #6.1 (continued from October 15, 2020)
For Design Review Board and Cultural Heritage Board Meeting of October 21, 2020

CITY OF SANTA ROSA
DESIGN REVIEW BOARD & CULTURAL HERITAGE BOARD

TO: CHAIRS AND MEMBERS OF THE BOARDS

FROM: AMY NICHOLSON, SENIOR PLANNER
ANDREW TRIPPEL, ACTING SUPERVISING PLANNER
PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

SUBJECT: DOWNTOWN STATION AREA SPECIFIC PLAN DESIGN
GUIDELINES AND ZONING CODE CONSISTENCY
AMENDMENTS

AGENDA ACTION: ADOPTION OF A RESOLUTION; PROVIDE COMMENTS

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Design Review Board (DRB) and Cultural Heritage Board (CHB) recommend approval of the proposed Design Guidelines amendments to implement the Downtown Station Area Specific Plan to the City Council. Staff further recommends that the DRB and CHB provide comments on specified Zoning Code amendments to the Zoning Code to implement the Downtown Station Area Specific Plan.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Santa Rosa Design Guidelines are the primary design criteria under which the City staff and review authorities process requests for discretionary design review. Intended as a “living” publication, the Guidelines are to be updated periodically for consistency with newly adopted Specific Plans. In coordination with an update to the Downtown Station Area Specific Plan (DSASP), Planning proposes updates to Section 2 of the Design Guidelines covering the Downtown Station Area to:

- reflect new guidelines from the DSASP,
- remove design concepts addressed by the standards of the DSASP, and
- eliminate redundancy and overlap that exists in the 2002 document

Additionally, the format of Section 2 has been updated to be consistent with other sections of the Guidelines.

The Santa Rosa Zoning Code implements the goals and policies of the General Plan by classifying and regulating land use and the development of structures within the City. The proposed Zoning Code amendments seek to: (1) implement the design standards of the DSASP, (2) update the Historic combining district with additional preservation district character defining elements, and (3) modify the Landmark Alteration and Design Review process to clarify and streamline the development process in the City, while protecting existing historic resources and elevating the built environment.

The purpose of this meeting is to (1) review proposed amendments to Section 2 of the Design Guidelines and the Zoning Code (2) receive a recommendation of approval for the Design Guidelines amendments and to receive comments on the proposed Zoning Code amendments.

BACKGROUND

On October 9, 2007, the City Council adopted the Downtown Station Area Specific Plan (2007 Specific Plan), which sought to increase the number of residents and employees within walking distance of the Sonoma Marin Area Rail Transit (SMART) station through the intensification of land uses in the Plan Area. The 2007 Specific Plan did not address other areas of policy necessary to facilitate Downtown development and combined with the Great Recession of 2007-2009, very little housing was produced within the Plan Area.

On April 24, 2018, the City received a grant from the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) in the amount of \$800,000 to update the 2007 Specific Plan based on the Plan Area's designation as a Priority Development Area. The proposed Downtown Station Area Specific Plan (DSASP) updates the 2007 Specific Plan and represents the community's vision of creating a vibrant, sustainable, and important community gathering place where residents can celebrate their diversity and heritage. The DSASP strives to facilitate increased mixed use and residential development in a transit supportive environment by increasing flexibility of regulations; preserving historic resources; improving connectivity to create safe, attractive, walkable streets; increasing civic, recreational and open space opportunities; and by providing for appropriate environmental protection and infrastructure development to support the increase in population and intensification of uses.

On January 8, 2019, the City commenced the DSASP planning process which featured a robust community engagement strategy including four community workshops, four Citizen Advisory Committee meetings, three Technical Advisory Committee meetings, online surveys, focus groups, and other events held both in person and virtually to create a vision for the Plan Area and to receive feedback on draft documents.

On August 19, 2020, at a joint meeting of the Cultural Heritage Board and Design Review Board, both boards reviewed the DSASP and provided comments.

On September 24, 2020, the Planning Commission held a public hearing and adopted resolutions recommending that the City Council certify the Final Subsequent Environmental Impact Report and adopt General Plan Amendments and the DSASP.

During a public hearing on October 13, 2020, the City Council considered certification of the Final Subsequent Environmental Impact Report, Findings of Fact, and the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program, and adoption of General Plan Amendments and the DSASP. These actions require amendments to the Zoning Code and Design Guidelines in order to implement the adopted vision and policies.

ANALYSIS

Design Guidelines Amendments

The Design Guidelines are the primary design criteria under which discretionary review is conducted. The guidelines apply to all projects that require Design Review and Landmark Alteration entitlements, including new buildings, infill development, and public improvements including streets. In order for discretionary projects to receive required approvals, they must exhibit superior design and demonstrate consistency with applicable design guidelines. For projects subject to ministerial review, objective design standards provide design criteria. For instance, pursuant to recent State housing law, certain residential and mixed-use projects are exempt from discretionary review and would be subject only to objective standards adopted by the City.

Originally adopted in 2002, the Design Guidelines are intended to be a “living” publication, updated periodically for consistency with newly adopted Specific Plans and General Plan policies. Section 2, last updated in 2012, reflects the vision of the 2007 Downtown Station Area Specific Plan and focuses on design within the Downtown Station Area, a 720-acre area surrounding the Downtown Sonoma-Marin Area Rail Transit (SMART) Station in the heart of the City. The Design Guidelines express the community’s design preferences and complement the objective development standards contained in the Downtown Station Area Specific Plan and Zoning Code. In preparing an update to the DSASP, new standards and guidelines for public and private development projects in the Downtown Station Area were created with extensive public input. Input included a visual preference survey conducted in January and February 2020 to gauge community preferences for the design of building features, the public realm, and Civic Spaces.

The update to Section 2 of the Design Guidelines incorporates design guidelines from the DSASP. While much of the original content has been preserved, design concepts addressed by the standards of the DSASP have been removed, and redundancy and overlap that exists in the 2002 document has been eliminated. Additionally, the format of Section 2 has been streamlined for consistency with other sections of the Guidelines. To match other sections, the goals have been relocated to the front of the document and headings and subheadings have been added to organize the guidelines and help

with navigation.

The following briefly outlines the proposed changes to Section 2 of the Design Guidelines:

- Section 2.0 (Introduction) – This section introduces the Downtown Station Area Design Guidelines, provides background on the DSASP, identifies Urban Design Goals for the Downtown Station Area, provides instructions on implementation of design guidelines and project review, and reflects the proposed adjustment to the Downtown Station Area Plan boundaries. New maps and photos were added.
- Section 2.1 (Downtown Area / Station Area) - Guidelines related to on-site surface parking, and architectural step backs that duplicate standards in the DSASP were removed. Guidelines related to height limits that conflict with Council direction and standards in the DSASP were removed. Historic preservation guidelines were consolidated in Section 2.4.
- Section 2.2 (Public Streets) – The Section was renamed "Public Realm and Streetscapes" to better reflect a pedestrian orientation and a street furnishings palette was integrated. Guidelines for ground level transparency that duplicate standards in the DSASP were removed. Guidelines related to underpasses were updated for consistency with public input and content of the DSASP. New guidelines related to trash receptacles, paving treatments, and the location and frequency of curb cuts on pedestrian streets were also added.
- Added Section (Wayfinding) - Guidelines from the DSASP related to gateways, wayfinding, SMART station access, and transit were incorporated.
- Section 2.3 (Buildings) - Section was renamed "Site and Building Design" to better reflect the range of topics addressed by the associated guidelines. Guidelines related to setbacks that conflict with standards in the DSASP were removed, in addition to guidelines related to articulation, blank walls, and setbacks that duplicate or overlap with standards in the Plan. Duplicative/repetitive guidelines related to creating an interesting pedestrian environment were consolidated.
- Section 2.4 (Historic Districts) - Existing guidelines were preserved without change.
- Section 2.5 (Parks and Open Spaces) - Section was renamed "Parks and Public Spaces" based on input from Parks and Recreation. Creek guidelines were maintained and new public space typologies and associated guidelines from the DSASP were added.
- Added Section (Parking) - Existing guidelines from Section 2.3 were moved to a

new section and supplemented with guidelines from the DSASP.

- Added Section (Environmental Sustainability) - Existing guidelines from Section 2.3 were moved to this new section and supplemented with guidelines from the DSASP.

Zoning Code Amendments

The Zoning Code implements the goals and policies of the General Plan by classifying and regulating the use of land and structure development within the City. The Zoning Code protects and promotes the public health, safety, and general welfare of residents, and preserves and enhances the aesthetic quality of the City in the following ways:

- Provides standards for the orderly growth and development of the City, and guides and controls the use of land to provide a safe, harmonious, attractive, and sustainable community;
- Implements the uses of land designated by the Santa Rosa General Plan and avoids conflicts between land uses;
- Maintains and protects the value of property;
- Conserves and protects the open space, scenic beauty, and other natural resources of the City;
- Protects the character, and social and economic stability of residential, commercial, and industrial areas;
- Assists in maintaining a high quality of life without causing unduly high public or private costs for development or unduly restricting private enterprise, initiative, or innovation in design; and
- Provides for appropriate citizen participation in the decisions.

The Zoning Code Amendments listed in Attachment 2 to this Staff Report are required for consistency with the DSASP update. While numerous land use changes are proposed throughout the Zoning Code to implement the DSASP, the items in Attachment 2 are focused on building and site design, the Historic combining district, and Landmark Alteration and Design Review processes.

Four new zoning districts will be added to the Zoning Code to implement the DSASP, and each allow for a broad range of residential and non-residential land uses. These districts include Core Mixed Use (CMU), Station Mixed Use (SMU), Maker Mixed Use (MMU), and Neighborhood Mixed Use (NMU). The design-oriented standards to implement the DSASP will be located in the new CMU, SMU, MMU, and NMU zoning districts, and site-specific transition and overlay zones, discussed below. The majority of historic preservation areas, including the established low and medium low residential

areas within the DSASP boundary, will not be rezoned. As such, the design specific amendments discussed below will not apply in these areas.

The proposed design and process related Zoning Code amendments are summarized as follows:

Floor Area Ratio (FAR)

Floor Area Ratio is a ratio of the building(s) total Floor Area divided by Gross Lot Area. The building total floor area is measured as the entire area within the walls of a building, measured in a horizontal plane from the outside edge of exterior wall to exterior wall or from the center line of common walls to the outside edge of exterior walls, in square feet. Gross Lot Area is the total area included within the lot lines of a lot, exclusive of adjacent dedicated street rights of way.

Floor Area Ratio controls building mass and form but does not directly regulate height and residential density. FAR maximums will be added to the Zoning Code to allow for implementation of the Plan within the CMU, SMU, MMU, and NMU zoning districts. The highest FAR maximums are assigned to areas within the core of the Plan area (FAR 8.0), while the lowest FAR values (FAR 2.0 and 3.0) are assigned to parcels abutting lower density development, including the preservation districts.

Site Design

General site design and building placement development standards will be implemented through the CMU, SMU, MMU, and NMU zoning districts. These standards address building setbacks, tower separation requirements, on-site parking, and the analysis of shadows for new buildings along First and Third Street between A and D Streets.

Building Design

Building design standards addressing dimensional relief, the extent of building design, and transparency and ground level elements will be included in the CMU, SMU, MMU, and NMU zoning district standards.

Transition/Overlay Zones

The Special Design Considerations Map within the DSASP designates new transition and overlay zones within specified Downtown areas that coordinate integration of the existing built and natural environment and the Plan's vision for new development.

Downtown Transition

The Downtown Transition will be applied to areas within the Plan area to create a welcoming pedestrian environment along Fourth and Fifth Streets, between E Street and B Street, and along B Street between Fourth and Fifth Streets. Buildings in the Downtown Transition zones will be required to step back a minimum of 6 feet, or a lesser distance as approved by the Review Authority, above the fifth floor along these frontages.

Neighborhood Transition

Specified blocks within the Plan area will need to comply with Neighborhood Transition standards. These standards seek to reduce the visual impact of new development on most residential areas within preservation districts. These standards include more restrictive front setbacks, front building stepbacks above the 3rd floor, daylight planes of 45 degrees above the 6th floor, and ground floor orientation of new residential units, along segments of Seventh, Ninth, Cherry and B Street, and Mendocino and Sonoma Avenues. In addition, surface parking areas will be prohibited between the sidewalk and building façade on each of the aforementioned streets. Rear stepbacks will be applied to new development on Santa Rosa Avenue, College Avenue, and E Street, to protect existing residential development.

Creek and Trail Activation Transition

The Creek and Trail Activation Transition is applied to promote the use and visibility of specified creek areas within the DSASP area. Three segments along the Santa Rosa Creek have been identified for activation. Within these areas, new buildings within 200 feet of the creek will be required to have at least one pedestrian entrance, and any residential stoop entrances, facing the creek. Pedestrian pathways to connect the new development to the creekside trail network, and additional lighting consistent with the Santa Rosa Creek Design Guidelines, will also be required. To provide additional visibility of the creek, blank facades at ground level and above will be discouraged, and windows, doors and transparent openings will be encouraged. In addition, at least one activating use, or two activating design features, will be required.

Active Ground Floor Overlay

New development within the Active Ground Floor Overlay in the DSASP area will be required to provide design features that optimize the pedestrian experience. The standards for this overlay will provide a variety of design options for new development including: awnings or overhangs over ground floor entrances, street furniture, public art, publicly accessible recreational space, or green/living walls. Ample percentages of glass or other glazing materials will be required for new buildings. Additionally, access to off-street parking will be discouraged from streets within the Active Ground Floor Overlay, and surface parking will be prohibited between the sidewalk and building façade. Unlike the previous plan, this Plan does not seek to regulate ground floor uses.

Wayfinding Signs

The Zoning Code does not currently allow for wayfinding, gateway, and directional signs. The proposed amendments would allow these sign types within the Plan area without a sign permit when proposed as part of a project subject to design review. These signs may be located off-site, in the public right-of-way, and may not include advertising or commercial identification. The appropriate size, location and number of these signs would be determined by the review authority.

Historic Combining District

The Historic combining district will be updated to include Character Defining Elements, and additional context statement information, consistent with Cultural Heritage Board Resolution 209. These amendments would supplement information currently provided for the Burbank Gardens, Cherry Street, Ridgway, McDonald, Oliver Park, St. Rose, West End, and Railroad Square preservation districts. Character Defining Elements for each of the districts are categorized as Architectural Style, Types of Buildings, Building Materials and other Neighborhood Elements.

Historic and Cultural Preservation/Design Review

The Historic and Cultural Preservation Chapter will reflect the 2017 Revision to Secretary of Interior Standards, and various minor exemptions (non-visible changes from the street) from the Landmark Alteration process. The Design Review and Landmark Alteration process has been amended to reflect a mandatory joint DRB/CHB Concept Review for new development projects in preservation districts, with the roles of each board clearly indicated. References to “preliminary” and “final” design review would be removed from the Code, resulting in a one step process for design review.

The decision criteria for Landmark Alteration permits have been modified to more accurately regulate new development and ensure compatibility with preservation districts while reflecting the City’s intent to support new development. In addition, the Cultural Heritage Board section has been modified such that a CHB affirmative action would require an affirmative vote by majority of the quorum. This change is consistent with the requirements for the City Council, Planning Commission, and Design Review Board, for non-legislative actions.

FISCAL IMPACT

A recommendation of approval on the Design Guidelines Amendments, and comments on the proposed Zoning Code Amendments, do not have a fiscal impact on the General Fund.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

The proposed amendments to the Section 2 of the Design Guidelines and the Zoning Code will facilitate implementation of the Downtown Station Area Specific Plan for which an EIR has been certified. There are no changes proposed or new information provided, related to the proposed amendments, which would require major revisions to the EIR. There will not be any new effects that were not anticipated and discussed in the EIR, and no new mitigation measures are needed. As a result, staff has found that the proposed amendments are within the scope of the EIR, and no further environmental review is necessary.

NOTIFICATION

Pursuant to Zoning Code Section 20-66.020(D), Alternative to Mailing, the public hearing notice was placed as a one-eighth page in the Press Democrat. The notice was disseminated to the Department's email distribution list, which includes the City's Community Advisory Board, was uploaded to the Planning and Economic Department's webpage, and was posted at City Hall.

DESIGN REVIEW BOARD AND CULTURAL HERITAGE BOARDS' ROLE

The role of the Design Review Board and Cultural Heritage Board is to make a recommendation to the Council on amendments to the Design Guidelines. Planning staff are also seeking feedback on the Zoning Code amendments which will be discussed or incorporated in the Zoning Code amendments reviewed by the Planning Commission and Council.

ISSUES

Preservation Districts

City Staff has received many written comments regarding concerns over the proximity of high-density development and support for historic preservation efforts throughout the DSASP process. The DSASP, Design Guidelines, and Zoning Code recognize the value of the City's historic neighborhoods and seeks to balance preservation with new development to promote vibrancy and respect our shared heritage.

To respond to these comments, the existing protective standards within preservation districts remain. There are no changes proposed to building height or setbacks requirements in the Historic combining district. In addition, the neighborhood character defining elements for each preservation district will ensure that new development is considerate of these elements during the project design phase. Finally, the existing Design Guidelines for Historic Districts are proposed to remain; unchanged.

Creek and Trail Activation

The Santa Rosa Creek represents one of the key east-west connections throughout the Plan Area. Public feedback throughout the DSASP update indicated public safety and maintenance along the Greenway as major concerns. Commenters stressed the need for specific standards applicable to properties along Santa Rosa Creek and its trails that require either uses or design features to activate the area. Other commenters cautioned requiring development to activate the creek and trails with uses and design techniques must be accompanied by features such as lighting and safety patrols. The Waterways Advisory Committee discussed these issues at length during three separate meetings.

To respond to comments from the Waterways Advisory Committee and the public, Creek and Trail Activation standards were added to the DSASP and the Zoning Code text amendments and are described above.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – Design Guidelines Redline, Section 2 – Downtown Station Area
Attachment 2 – Focused Zoning Code Text Amendments

CONTACT

Amy Nicholson, Senior Planner
Planning and Economic Development
anicholson@srcity.org
(707) 543-3258