

CITY OF CHICO
MARCH 26, 2009 AD HOC DOWNTOWN COMMITTEE MEETING NOTES
Key Policy Questions
Municipal Center - 421 Main Street - Conference Room 1 from 3 to 5 p.m.

Members Present: Katrina Davis-Woodcox, Alan Chamberlain, David Halimi, Glenda Morse, TJ Glenn, Nick Ambrosia, Jim Walker (for Mary Flynn), Cheryl King

Staff Present: Steve Peterson, Bob Summerville, Meredith Williams and Mark Brodeur (PMC), Laurie Sevier

General Plan Team presented on: General Plan Update Status, Downtown Element Draft Outline, and Downtown Element Draft Goals.

Committee Feedback on Draft Goals

- The group does not want to lose sight of the 1994 General Plan's role of music and festivals as part of Downtown life. That would have to be a policy that is backed up with an implementing tool.
- Funding for the City has changed dramatically, and the City is moving more towards revenue generating actions, but there is community support for higher emphasis on quality of life. The entertainment factor is missing from the document, including restaurant activity and farmer's markets. Downtown offers a neat package. We need to adopt measures that enforce sense of place.
- Goals are outcomes and these are process statements. Instead of emphasize goal of Downtown, should say the Downtown **IS** the center of cultural activity. Language is soft, enhance, encourage, and improve. Doesn't speak to the goal.
- Committee wants to see what policies go along with goals. Policy must show how to meet goals.
- Goal: Have sufficient parking on edges of Downtown where visitors can walk to Downtown.
- Goals should be specific where there could be lots of interpretations.
- The Committee would like a chance to comment on the document with all the policies in place.

General Plan Policy Discussion

1. Ground Floor Use

A. Within the Downtown Retail Mixed Use designation, do you think ground floor retail should be mandatory or permissive?

Consensus of group is that mandatory is too limiting. The Downtown already struggles with vacancies and to limit allowed uses further could increase that rate. Consultant agrees that many cities struggle with a black and white approach. Best to limit the specifics at a zoning level.

- Consultant acknowledges this is a struggle for many communities. If ground floor retail use is mandatory, what about professional offices, service commercial uses?
- The group questions whether or not it's possible to be permissive and then cap certain uses at a set level. To no more than X amount and then it triggers a use permit requirement.

B. If permissive, do you think that the ground floor use should be expanded to include other pedestrian/consumer or personal service uses (such as art galleries, theaters, bakeries, hair salons, offices) that contribute to an active streetscape?

- Group doesn't want real estate offices in core.
- Certain non-retail uses are pedestrian killers (they don't attract them), dental lab for example. Most members want retail only, sift out offices, but keep more permissive at General Plan level and modify zoning code.
- Group remembers current vacancies, so we need flexibility.
- Language in Coronado is supportable to group. Defining commercial based on variety of uses, but prohibits some things.
- Group concerned with prohibited uses, any uses "detrimental" could be determined by Planning Commission
- Group would like to limit ground floor uses to those that do not detract from other Downtown uses, such as a TV station that can't take advantage of Downtown traffic. Establish a policy limiting ground floor uses without having to limit the discussion to goods for sale.
- Language should speak to performance instead of sales driven.

2. Mandatory Mixed Use

A. Do you think mandatory mixed use (vertical and/or horizontal) is appropriate for Downtown Chico?

- Consultant reminds group to think of single-use situation that they may want that would be excluded with mandatory enforcement.
- An example given is if an existing business wants to expand, not above single story, this would limit that use. Mandatory is a deal-killer.
- Note - the original intent of the question was for new construction.
- A lot of local developers are scared to mix residential above retail. The only way to get it is to make it mandatory.
- Makes sense rather than waiting for project to pencil out.
- As long as it doesn't have to be residential above, but other mixes of uses (offices).
- Planning Commission could offer incentives
- If developer can't make residential component work, he's going to bail on whole project.

B. If so, for what types of uses or in which designations?

Discussed above.

3. South Downtown Identity

A. Do you support South Downtown as a transitional area supportive of rather than imitating the North Downtown?

- Group is mostly in favor of a transitional district, but in a complementary way, not just a place to drive through.
- Several years ago there was talk about a design district (furniture, etc) - 18 different businesses somehow involved in design and décor downtown.

- Other cities have branded sections for design and concentrated in that area. Need to create a strategy to get that. Start to grow a commercially vibrant district instead of country cousin of downtown.
- Needs to be walkable and a transition district to downtown in terms of buildings and scale to blend with the north core.
- Some group members feel the word “transitional” doesn’t reflect the nature of South Downtown. It has its own characteristics.
- Need to continue all services, not restrict, let it be what it is, having trouble with “transitional”.
- If 10 uses are allowed in North DT and allow 25 more in South DT.
- DNA a little different in South, lot sizes larger, bigger footprints, think Trader Joes

B. If so, how restrictive should the City be about uses in the South Downtown?

- Consider using the “transitional” term as a plan to phase development over a few years to make South Downtown closer to the north core, with opportunity to do downtown planning correctly with parking in center of block.
- Could be better than downtown core if done right.
- Like to see phasing out of auto uses in South DT, don’t see people wanting to bring their business next to auto use.
- As the south district transitions, it will keep pushing existing uses further south
- Can use policy framework to move towards parking in interior of lots, uses fronting the streets, transition towards something, mimic towards downtown, but different. Use language to clarify how different.
- Group would like to increase residential densities allowed in downtown, to 60 units/acre limit.
- Need to look at what’s there now and support those uses, allow natural progression, as uses cease to exist.
- Opportunity for a convention center? How much space would there have to be?

C. What is the new identity for the South Downtown and how can this area complement the traditional North Downtown retail district?

- Like to see north core achieve saturation with thriving businesses, not marginal, and have South DT evolve in way that tenants are comfortable moving to the south because connections are in place. Don’t want to see businesses move to strip malls like Mangrove.
- As it evolves, the opportunity is there to succeed.
- Emphasize that design should compliment, but uses don’t necessarily need to imitate the north.

4. University Housing Downtown

A. Should the City be joint venturing with the University to produce student or faculty housing in the Downtown?

- Not a popular idea, and no way for student housing. However, saying yes creates opportunity for housing, parking; things that haven't been done before.

B. What joint use opportunities exist in and near the downtown for this type of housing (e.g. Lost Park)?

- Focus not only on needs of students but needs of downtown.
- Bad past experiences: parking structure was considered as a joint venture with the university- students use while in school and at other times open to all. DCBA was not receptive to that at the time.
- Map of university master plan looks like parking structure on 2 blocks, with an opportunity for ground level retail w/ parking above.
- Original parking structure plan became financially not feasible due to transit center. Have to go up too high because of size of buses; next option became to move 2 blocks down. University still looking, but there's no funding for it.
- Parking is self-supported (parking fees). It's probably 3 years before CSUC can begin planning due to budget. The structure would sit back from 2nd street with 5 stories of parking with retail below, green space up front.
- Relationship with the university is without a doubt critical to downtown. Need recognition that downtown also critical to university, a partnership.
- Downtown has become more of a student community and less devoted to rest of community. It needs to be more for the whole community and not specific to uses of students.
- Encouraging more student housing in core diminishes need for parking. Lack of housing in DT creates the parking problems we have today.
- Group concerned that this isn't an appropriate idea for GP. We need more housing, but is this topic pertinent to the General Plan?
- Lost Park should be off the table as an option for student housing.
- Should work with university to reclaim downtown, but it needs to expand. Partnering doesn't mean giving up control.
- Would feel more comfortable if this was in the university master plan.
- Let's partner any way we can to correct issues, all for it.
- Keep DT sacred. It needs upscale residential.

5. Downtown Traffic Calming and Circulation

How can the City create a “pedestrian first” environment in the downtown (such as conversion of Main and Broadway from 3 to 2 lanes with one lane of diagonal parking)?

- We have addressed this in our report “A Walkable Downtown”. We've given everything to make this happen.
- We just want an implementation strategy for the findings for the DCBA approved walkability report.
- It has traffic calming mechanisms in it already.
- All DCBA agreed to 2 lanes with diagonal parking on Main and Broadway. Use the tools from this report to make it work.

Business from the Floor

Some Committee members thought we were codifying the DCBA's report. They understood that to be their purpose when the committee was created. The 16 specific criteria from the report, if implemented, would improve Downtown.