

TO: CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION

FROM: RON WHISENAND, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: DRAFT UPTOWN/TOWN CENTRE SPECIFIC PLAN

DATE: AUGUST 25, 2009

Needs: To receive a briefing on the Draft Uptown/Town Centre Specific Plan: its goals, policies, and implementation actions/projects, and scheduling and to accept and discuss any comments made by the public or the Commission.

Facts:

1. On July 6, the City released the Draft Uptown/Town Centre Specific Plan for public review and comment.
2. The goals, policies, and implementation actions/projects contained in the draft specific plan were formulated to reflect the input received from City Council, Planning Commission, and the public as expressed in the public workshops and Charrette conducted in April and May 2008.
3. A joint City Council/Planning Commission workshop is scheduled for Thursday, September 3, 2009. At that meeting, there will be a brief presentation of the plan and the Environmental Impact Report to be prepared. Following the presentation, the public will be invited to comment on the plan and the issues to be discussed in the EIR.
4. Press releases were made in July, to announce the availability of the draft plan, and in August, to announce the September 3 workshop. Copies of the press releases, in English and in Spanish, were mailed to all property owners, residents, and tenants (commercial).
5. Beyond September 3, no formal schedule for workshops and hearings has been set. Options for further scheduling for the Specific Plan and the EIR are discussed in the Analysis Section, below.

Analysis and
Conclusion:

The guiding principles of the specific plan include the following:

- Catalyst for change;
- Celebrate history;
- Encourage infill;
- Mix land uses;
- Build variety;
- Increase connections;
- Walk rather than drive;
- Promote highest and best uses;
- Make streets places, not just conduits;
- Make great architecture and public spaces;
- Expand and facilitate evolution of recreational uses of parks.

The Draft Uptown/Town Centre Specific Plan divides the planning area into the Spring Street Corridor and 6 districts: Uptown, Midtown, Downtown, South of Downtown, Riverside Corridor, and Salinas River. Attached is Section 1.1 of the plan, which summarizes some of the major implementation items for the Spring Street Corridor and for each district.

The form based code, which is contained within Chapter 5 of the plan, places a high value on the physical form of buildings and the public spaces they create. It encourages more mixed uses (residential and commercial); it proposes that buildings in the downtown only allow commercial uses on ground floors and restrict office and residential uses to upper floors. The purpose of this is to maintain a critical mass of urban activity on the street in order to enhance the vitality of the downtown.

The plan has a 25 year horizon. Many of the proposed projects are costly and will take many years to pursue. One of the critical tasks before the Commission and Council will be to identify and prioritize those projects that will catalyze further private investment in the planning area, which in turn will generate revenue to pursue other projects.

The draft plan proposes possible locations for some projects (e.g. parking garages, performing arts center, and City Hall). It should be noted that the plan assigns commercial or residential land uses to each of the underlying properties and will allow property owners to pursue development of such uses. The plan does not commit the City to pursuit of projects at any specific location, but merely makes suggestions, which would allow the City to negotiate with property owners in the future should any suggested location prove optimal for a project.

The draft plan also suggests alternative uses of some public facilities (e.g. Pioneer Park, and Robbins Field). It should be noted that the plan does state that existing facilities in those parks (ballfields and skatepark) shall not be removed until alternative locations for these facilities are in place.

Schedule

- The September 3 workshop will be the first of several opportunities for the public to provide comment on the plan.
- The City Council and Planning Commission have appointed ad hoc committees to review the plan, including meeting with stakeholders to solicit their comments.
- No formal schedule for workshops and hearings has been set. The City Council may wish to hold additional workshops, either on the plan generally, or focused on certain aspects (e.g. the proposed form-based zoning code) prior to conducting public hearings.
- Moule and Polyzoides and Impact Sciences, their subconsultant preparing the EIR, have proposed a tentative schedule for the EIR with the following milestones:

Notice of Preparation released for 30-day Review Period	August 21, 2009
EIR Scoping Meeting	September 3, 2009
Screencheck EIR Submitted to City for Review	October 30, 2009
Public Draft EIR released for 45-day Review Period	December 15, 2009
Close of Draft EIR Review Period	January 29, 2010
Final EIR Completed	March 20, 2010
Planning Commission/City Council Hearings on Specific Plan	April/May 2010

The above schedule is later than the City’s original goal of bringing the plan to hearings in November and December 2009. The delay is a consequence of the City staff having

had to divide its efforts among several specific plans in late 2008/early 2009, which caused a protracted period of review and comment on administrative draft versions of the specific plan. The City Council's action of April 23, 2009 not only gave priority to completing the Uptown/Town Centre Specific Plan, it directed that the plan (as well as all specific plans in process) be formulated to maintain the 44,000 population threshold. Prior to that time, the draft plan was considering a development scenario that would have caused the 44,000 population threshold to be exceeded. The Notice of Preparation for the EIR could not be issued until the draft plan identified the development scenario that the plan will be based on. The EIR will consider two higher growth scenarios (basically more-intense levels of infill development).

Policy

Reference: 2003 General Plan; 2006 Economic Strategy

Fiscal Impact: The costs of preparing the specific plan have been budgeted from the Redevelopment Fund. The costs of pursuing the projects recommended by the plan are listed in Table 3.3-1 in Chapter 3. Chapter 3 also discusses options for funding the recommended projects.

Options: No action is necessary. The Planning Commission may recommend that the City Council consider a schedule for additional workshops on the draft specific plan.

Prepared by:

Ed Gallagher, City Planner

Attachment: Section 1.1 of the Draft Specific Plan

ED\UPTOWN SPECIFIC PLANDRAFT COMMENTS – PUBLIC REVIEW\PCR 082509

1.11 - Plan-Wide Policies - Specific

A. District, Neighborhood, and Corridor Initiatives

The diagram at right identifies the plan-wide objectives that implement the goals and plan-wide policies that drive this plan. Accordingly, this diagram informs the vision, programs, implementation measures, and development regulations that will carry out the plan over its 25-year planning horizon.

The walkability sheds represent the extent of the distance a typical pedestrian will walk - approximately 5-minutes or a quarter of a mile. This dynamic influences the revitalization strategy in terms of scale and distribution of buildings, uses, transit, services, open space and other amenities throughout each neighborhood, district, and corridor within the plan area.

The plan-wide objectives for the seven general subareas are identified below the diagram. On the following two pages spread, the individual initiatives and catalytic actions/projects that address these objectives are described.

Plan Wide

1. Ensure the long-term protection of historically significant buildings and districts as identified in the Historic Resources Survey.
2. Introduce selective infill on properties not currently occupied by buildings of historical significance.
3. Introduce street trees, sidewalks, and pedestrian improvements.
4. Designate Park Street as a portion of the Anza Trail.
5. Improve Vine Street and Riverside Avenue with sufficient bike lanes to act as a bike boulevard linking the Uptown and Town Center areas.
6. Address the infrastructure needs and identify areas where improvements will be needed for the long term success of the plan.
7. Introduce a performing arts center. Possible locations include:
 - The northeast corner of 12th and Spring Streets across the street from City Park.
 - The southwest corner of Riverside Avenue and 24th Street on the north side of the existing Paso Robles Event Center parking lot.
8. Build a new City Hall building. Possible locations include:
 - The southeast corner of Sixth Street and a realigned Pine Street.

Spring Street Corridor

1. Enhance the northern and southern "gateway entries" from Highway 101 with planting.
2. Transform Spring Street into a street with segments of differing character.
3. Improve Spring Street as a transit corridor linking the Uptown and Town Center areas including transit loops to Riverside Avenue.

Uptown

1. Introduce a small-scale retail district at the corner of 34th and Spring Streets.
2. Expand the existing aquatics complex at 28th and Vine Streets. Possible projects include introducing classroom space, expanding and/or updating the existing pool, introducing a water slide, and adding additional parking.
3. Develop the block bounded by Oak street, 36th Street, Spring Street, and the 101 Freeway with an Early Childhood Learning Center that may house a City Library-operated study center.
4. Rehabilitate the Oak Park Housing Project and introduce a new community recreation center to replace the George Stephan Center.
5. Improve Georgia Brown Elementary School and Vine Street, including terracing the hillside to accommodate more soccer fields.
6. Introduce new streets to create a better connected street and block network.
7. Introduce pedestrian improvements along Oak Street between Fein Street and 30th Street.
8. Introduce a pedestrian/ vehicular crossing over the existing railroad tracks at 28th Street.

Midtown

1. Introduce a greenway along Park Street that provides an attractive pedestrian and bicycle connection between Uptown and Downtown.
2. Introduce commercial and office uses along Spring Street.
3. Introduce a commercial corridor along 24th Street that allows retail and small office uses.
4. Introduce an improved drainage course for Mountain Spring Creek that crosses Vine Street, runs along 23rd street, down Oak Street to 21st Street to Spring Street, and on to the Paso Robles Events Center.
5. Introduce a park on the block surrounded by 16th Street, Vine Street, 17th Street, and Oak Street. Placement of a park on this site is contingent upon meeting the requirements of a covenant that restricts the site's use to "educational" uses.
6. Improve pedestrian access and safety across 24th Street that meet ADA requirements as necessary.

Downtown

1. At key locations introduce lined parking garages, whereby the garage is located at the center and is screened from street by retail uses.
2. Create a small plaza at the corner of 10th and Spring Streets to celebrate Paso Robles' hot springs history.
3. Introduce a farmers' market along the north side of 11th Street.
4. Traffic-calm 13th Street in order to encourage/allow easier north/south pedestrian and automobile crossings of 13th Street.
5. Expand the existing retail district northward to 16th Street southward along Pine Street to the train station.
6. Transform Railroad Street between 12th and 14th Streets into a more pedestrian-friendly street by narrowing its width and introducing new paving materials and street furniture.
7. Introduce a pedestrian bridge at 12th Street that crosses the 101 Freeway, connecting Downtown to the Salinas River.
8. Introduce new angled parking in the downtown core, including on Spring and 13th Streets to supplement the downtown's on-street parking supply, calm traffic, improve pedestrian access, and "visually announce" when a driver has arrived in Downtown.



- In order to enhance the cultural and educational quality of the community, support establishments such as "Studios on the Park", a project that will introduce a working artist studio into the heart of Downtown.

Riverside Corridor

- Revitalize the Paso Robles Event Center, Pioneer Park, and the Pioneer Park historical museums and organizations.
- Introduce retail and other related uses in the Farmers Alliance Building as well as the addition of new commercial buildings on the site that will improve the attractiveness of the property as a community destination.
- Introduce a pedestrian bridge from the Farmers' Alliance building, across the railroad tracks, to the proposed City Hall building (at Sixth and Pine Streets).
- Transform Riverside Avenue into a bicycle-friendly boulevard.
- Extend Riverside Avenue north to pass under the 101 Freeway to reach the Hot Springs property and provide connection to the overall river trail system.
- Introduce a natural history museum/interpretive center at the Salinas River end of the 12th Street pedestrian bridge.
- Introduce a Paseo along the Salinas River, shaded by native trees and equipped with seating, forming a clearly-defined edge, public walkway, and river overlook.
- Incorporate an amphitheater along the Salinas River Paseo facing the river.
- Encourage buildings to be of industrial/agricultural character and to face the Salinas River.
- Provide safe pedestrian crossing along 24th Street over the railroad tracks.

South of Downtown

- Consider transforming Robbins Field into a performance venue or a Civic Park, but only if an appropriate replacement ball field is first developed elsewhere within the West Side of the City.
- Extend Fourth Street beneath the railroad tracks to Riverside Avenue in a manner that preserves the historic rectilinear street and block network.
- Between Fourth and Sixth Streets, move Pine Street westward so it terminates at the center line of Robbins Field.
- Introduce a pedestrian bridge across the railroad tracks between the new City Hall building and the historic Farmers' Alliance building.
- Provide a new north frontage for the existing Post Office building that better relates to Park Street.
- Introduce flex space along Park Street between Robbins Field and City Park. Flex space is an occupancy that is designed to accommodate a variety of uses including office, retail, or residential (typically in a loft configuration) also called "Live/Work".
- Introduce a flood mitigation and stormwater quality treatment area on the block bounded by Fourth Street, Oak Street, Third Street, and Vine Street.

Salinas River

- Provide greater access to the Salinas River, particularly along its eastern edge.
- Develop a habitat preservation and management plan for the Salinas River that:
 - Ensures the survival of the next generation of vegetation through no-mow protocols and sapling planting;
 - Identifies mitigation opportunities for area development that contribute to river restoration;
 - Enacts stormwater best management practices (BMPs) to filter out pollutants and contribute to the recharging of the region's groundwater.
- Create destination opportunities, such as an amphitheater, river outlook, outdoor classroom/interpretive displays, and a wetland boardwalk.