“Good Design” Guidelines for Downtown

Preliminary Findings and Recommendations

City Council Meeting - February 5, 2017
Advisory Committee Team:

- Larry Paul: Planning Commission / Architect
- Bruce Bagnoli: Business Leader / Project Manager
- Bill Carney: Landscape Architect / Environmental Leader
- Max Crome: Architect / Retail and Branding
- Lisa Max: Environmental Leader / Developer
- Jeff Rhoads: Architect / Town Planner
Purpose:

- With significant projects now in the pipeline in Downtown San Rafael, define the elements of “good design” to provide guidance for decision makers and project developers.
Process:

- Review San Rafael’s prior planning efforts
- Study Downtown San Rafael’s historic and existing built environment
- Identify successful designs and analyze less successful ones
- Study other communities to see what we can apply here
- Identify key design principles appropriate for San Rafael
Objectives:

• To ensure that change will improve our Downtown
• To address community concerns regarding growth
• To unify widely varying opinions on what “good design” means for San Rafael
• To improve the quality of Downtown architecture and public spaces
Opportunities:

• Support land uses that benefit San Rafael
• Create welcoming public spaces and public amenities
• Enhance existing historic and architectural resources
• Promote environmental sustainability
Strengths:

San Rafael’s Downtown is Marin’s city center and crossroads

• Varied architecture contributes to its sense of place

• Historic building stock is worthy of protection

• Neighborhoods are walkable, bike-able and well served by transit

• Attracts a significant residential population

• Enlivened by many programmed activities

• Traditional grid streets contribute to wayfinding and mobility
Strengths:

4th Street is a classic main street, with architectural variety from the 1860’s to the modern era:

• It is easily walkable from one end to the other
• The city’s “Alive after 5”: promotes activity beyond working hours and on weekends
• It has diverse retail, dining, entertainment, and other options
• There is ample on street parking and access to convenient public and private garages
Strengths:

**Gateway District** is San Rafael's front door

- SMART train and Bettini Transit Center
- North-South Greenway
- Access to the Canal and Montecito
- Transit oriented development potential
- Excellent visibility from all transportation modes
- Tamalpais is the pedestrian/bicycle/transit front door to downtown
Strengths:

**Lindaro District** epitomizes San Rafael's role as an employment center

- A transitional district between Downtown and adjacent light industrial and residential neighborhoods
- Corporate Center is a well designed office campus with plazas, internal courtyards, open spaces and appropriate street relationships
Strengths:

2nd/3rd Street Corridor is San Rafael’s major east-west arterial

- Current traffic volume of 63,865 Average Daily Trips
- Availability of $10 million in roadway and pedestrian improvements could create a boulevard character and improve pedestrian safety
- Variety of building ages, types, setbacks, heights and character
- Larger and taller buildings are anticipated in this boulevard setting
Strengths:

N-S Pedestrian Streets connect the Lindaro and Boulevard districts to 4\textsuperscript{th} street

- B Street is a key historic street
- A Street is a key pedestrian connection between the Mission and Albert Park with a legacy view of Saint Raphaels bell tower
- Lindaro is a key pedestrian connection from 4\textsuperscript{th} Street to the 2\textsuperscript{nd}/3\textsuperscript{rd} Boulevard and Lindaro Districts
General Downtown Design Guidelines:

• Each project should have an internally consistent design vocabulary

• Forms and materials should express the building’s design intent and context

• Design strategies such as “base middle and top” are encouraged but not the sole design alternative
General Downtown Design Guidelines:

• Height and bulk can be mitigated by step backs, articulation, use of different materials

• Projections over public right of ways shall be limited to bay windows, balconies and marquees *
General Downtown Design Guidelines:

• Provide architectural interest such as strategic placement of forms and applied features and special treatment at corners especially at intersecting streets

• Concentrate premium materials at points of maximum enjoyment:
  ▪ At street level
  ▪ At building entrances
  ▪ On highly visible architectural forms and elements

• Maintain pedestrian scale, especially at the lower floors
General Downtown Design Guidelines:

• Buildings should relate to established streetscape elements such as cornice lines, fenestration or other shared elements

• Historic and distinguished period buildings should be retained, restored, and if necessary repurposed as a key element of place making*

• New building design may include high quality contemporary architecture
General Downtown Design Guidelines:

• Use landscape to humanize and frame the built environment *

• Use durable, reusable, flexible, permeable and repairable pavement materials*

• All mechanical equipment shall be screened and shall not project above its enclosure*
General Downtown Design Guidelines:

Exceptional design is encouraged and may be allowed to deviate from the design guidelines.

However:

• Projects must be exemplary
• They must make a significant contribution to their surroundings
• They must contribute public benefit beyond great design
General Downtown Design Guidelines:

- Projects should conform with General Downtown Design Guidelines and District Design Guidelines
- Different districts of Downtown have different design priorities
District Guidelines 4th Street:

• Build to the street wall
• Preserve and restore attractive historic and period buildings
• Set back new floors behind period storefronts when adding height to an existing building,*
• New buildings should be maximum of 3 stories at the street wall, particularly on the south side of the street. If adjacent buildings are taller, additional height may be allowed*
District Guidelines

4th Street:

• Provide active storefronts including higher floor to floor height and store front transoms

• Implement pedestrian scale signage*

• Encourage sidewalk activities such as dining

• Plant and maintain appropriately scaled trees*
District Guidelines

4th Street:

• Locate parking behind buildings with access from side streets

• Improve alleys to create inviting public spaces*

• Avoid extension of barrier free ramps into public sidewalks

• Conform to standards for dining areas that extend into the sidewalk and parklets in curb side parking zone*
District Guidelines
Gateway District:

• Provide active street fronts along Tamalpais

• Articulate elevations to avoid a “building as wall” parallel to the freeway.

• Create a sense of arrival with welcoming gateway elements such as:
  ▪ Distinctive building form massing and detailing
  ▪ Public plazas
  ▪ Creek restoration
  ▪ Improved pedestrian experience under the freeway
District Guidelines
Gateway – Transit District:

- Target specific historic resources in the district for preservation including the former railroad depot and residences fronting 5th Ave*
- Enhance the Tamalpais greenway from 2nd to Mission as a complete street
- Anchor the district with a high quality transit center
District Guidelines
2nd/3rd Corridor & Lindaro:

• Reduce building mass along the boulevards with 3rd or 4th floor setbacks and at ground level corner entrances

• Use distinctive forms and detailing at corners particularly those facing oncoming traffic

• Locate retail at intersections and along pedestrian N - S streets
District Guidelines
2nd/3rd Corridor & Lindaro:

• Enhance the boulevard, by providing continuous curbside planting strips and/or ample tree pockets with grates *

• Consider increasing the 5’ setback requirement along 2nd and 3rd Street*

• Varied setback depths are encouraged particularly on N-S streets for pedestrian amenities and landscaping

• Place back flow preventers, transformers, and other utilities out of site or in under-sidewalk vaults*
District Guidelines
N-S Pedestrian Streets:

• Apply the 4th Street design guidelines
• Apply the 4th street building mass setbacks limitation on A and B Streets
• Design all intersections as highly visible pedestrian safe zones*
• Minimize driveways and service bays
Suggested Next Steps

• Review standards for encroachments into the right of way such as dining areas, parklets, ramps and signage and revise where needed

• Establish sun and shading standards for select public and quasi-public spaces downtown

• Conduct a quick analysis of potential historic resources in active project areas including the transit center: Identify resources with high preservation priority
Suggested Next Steps

• Prepare standards for projections over rights of way (bay windows, balconies, marquees)

• Review 4th street streetscape and determine how to respond to pavement heaving, maintenance, and other issues

• Prepare standards for street trees and landscaping within and adjacent to downtown streets (Prioritizing 2nd through 4th street first)

• Review and revise enhanced pavement standards for public plazas and sidewalks
Suggested Next Steps

Prepare a Downtown Precise Plan including:

• A Form Based code
• Height and bulk standards
• Historic preservation standards
• Street scape section, pavement and landscaping standards
• Programmatic EIR with a development capacity envelope
• Transfer of Development Rights criteria
Suggested Next Steps

Applying in lieu exactions for public benefits

• Create a programmable “Town Square” at 4th Street level in front of the buildings at Courthouse Square

• Extend retail/food and beverage uses under the 101 viaducts at 4th to link each side of the freeway (except over the creek)

• Commission an illuminated art piece on the underside of the freeway viaducts at 4th Street

• Re green downtown creeks including under the freeway

• Implement a public art program
“Good Design” Guidelines for Downtown

Questions and Comments
Site Specific Guidelines
Bio Marin/Whistlestop:

• Provide a strong pedestrian connection with amenities along west side of Lindaro

• Implement traffic control and pedestrian crossing improvements on the west side of the 3rd and Lindaro intersection to support better access to 4th street
Site Specific Guidelines

Seagate Site 3rd & Lincoln:

- Apply design guidelines from the Gateway transit and 2nd and 3rd district
- Recognize the importance of the relationship to the transit center and NWP depot building
- Limit vehicular access to one driveway on Tamalpias and one on Lincoln or provide driveway access from 3rd Street only
- Lincoln and Tamalpias corners are preferred retail locations
- Orient the primary pedestrian entrance on Tamalpais
Site Specific Guidelines
1001 – 1017 4th Street:

• Orient building mass and bulk toward 3rd street to insure access to sun on the north side of 4th Street including Courthouse Square and City Plaza

• Use of the setback above the 4th street façade for a terrace is encouraged

• Provide a distinguished and welcoming building entrance on 4th Street
End
Suggested Next Steps

Implement a historic preservation program as part of a downtown place-making and branding strategy:

• Update the City’s historic resources inventory and ordinance with initial focus on downtown and active project areas

• Implement a Mills Act contract program to incentivize historic preservation

• Designate more historic landmarks to provide access to 20% historic landmark tax credits