



# “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:

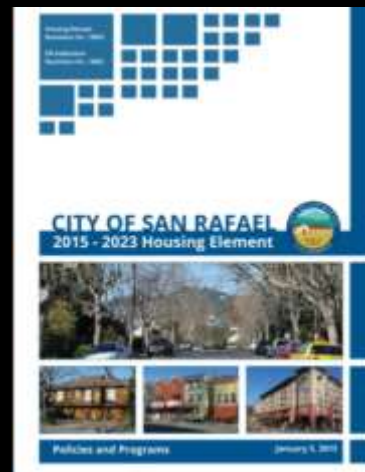
- With significant projects now in the pipeline in Downtown San Rafael, define the elements of “good design” to provide guidance for decision makers and project developers





# 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, bikeable and well served by transit
- Attracts a significant residential population
- Enlivened by many programmed activities
- Traditional grid streets contribute to wayfinding and mobility





# Strengths:

**4<sup>th</sup> 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:

**Lindero 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:

**2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> 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<sup>th</sup> 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<sup>th</sup> Street to the 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> 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.**

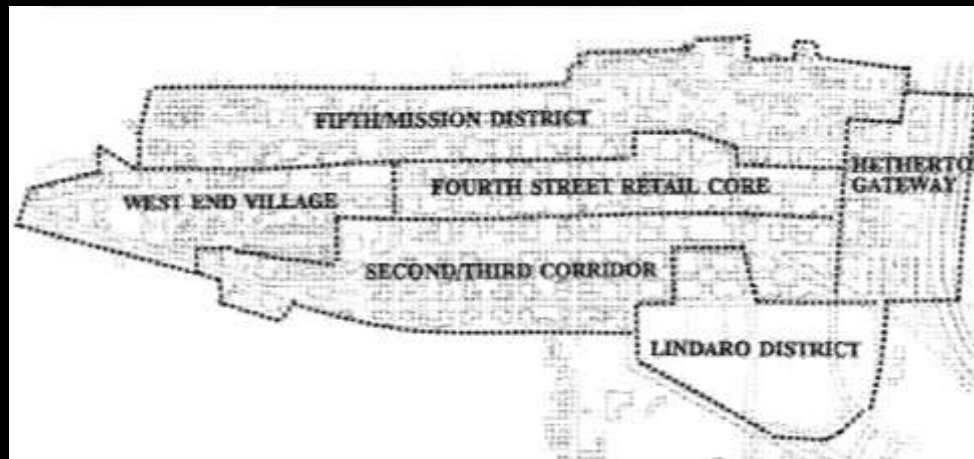
## **However:**

- 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

## 4<sup>th</sup> 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

## 4<sup>th</sup> 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

## 4<sup>th</sup> 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 5<sup>th</sup> Ave\*
- Enhance the Tamalpais greenway from 2<sup>nd</sup> to Mission as a complete street
- Anchor the district with a high quality transit center





# District Guidelines

## 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> Corridor & Lindero:

- Reduce building mass along the boulevards with 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> 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

## 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> 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 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 4<sup>th</sup> Street design guidelines
- Apply the 4<sup>th</sup> 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 4<sup>th</sup> 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 2<sup>nd</sup> through 4<sup>th</sup> 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 4<sup>th</sup> to link each side of the freeway (except over the creek)
- Commission an illuminated art piece on the underside of the freeway viaducts at 4<sup>th</sup> 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 3<sup>rd</sup> and Lindaro intersection to support better access to 4<sup>th</sup> street



# Site Specific Guidelines

## Seagate Site 3<sup>rd</sup> & Lincoln:

- Apply design guidelines from the Gateway transit and 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> district
- Recognize the importance of the relationship to the transit center and NWP depot building
- Limit vehicular access to one driveway on Tamalpais and one on Lincoln or provide driveway access from 3<sup>rd</sup> Street only
- Lincoln and Tamalpais corners are preferred retail locations
- Orient the primary pedestrian entrance on Tamalpais



# Site Specific Guidelines

## 1001 – 1017 4<sup>th</sup> Street:

- Orient building mass and bulk toward 3<sup>rd</sup> street to insure access to sun on the north side of 4<sup>th</sup> Street including Courthouse Square and City Plaza
- Use of the setback above the 4<sup>th</sup> street façade for a terrace is encouraged
- Provide a distinguished and welcoming building entrance on 4<sup>th</sup> 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

