

REPORT TO GENERAL PLAN 2040 STEERING COMMITTEE

Subject: Downtown Precise Plan and Plan Boundary

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City is preparing a “Precise Plan” for Downtown San Rafael concurrently with the 2040 General Plan. The General Plan Steering Committee will also serve as the Steering Committee for the Precise Plan and will be a sounding board for proposed Downtown policies, proposals, and regulations. This agenda item will include an overview of the Precise Plan components and the proposed Downtown Plan boundary. The boundary reflects input from Committee members, who addressed this issue at their September 12, 2018 meeting.

REPORT

Background

In May 2018, the City of San Rafael received a \$500,000 grant from the Metropolitan Transportation Commission to prepare a “Precise Plan” for Downtown San Rafael. The purpose of the grant is to facilitate housing production, placemaking, economic vitality, innovative transportation solutions, and community engagement – with an eye toward sustainable, transit-oriented development. San Rafael’s eligibility for the grant was facilitated by the SMART rail station and Downtown’s role as a regional transit hub and designated Priority Development Area (PDA).

The City prepared a Request for Proposals for services on the Downtown Plan in August 2018. Six proposals were received, four firms were interviewed, and Opticos Design was selected. Opticos is a Berkeley-based urban planning firm and is known for their pioneering work developing “form-based” zoning codes and addressing the “missing middle” segment of the Bay Area housing market.¹ The City executed a Professional Services Agreement with Opticos on January 22, and they have begun their work on the Precise Plan. We anticipate that they will attend the March or April Steering Committee meeting to facilitate a visioning and brainstorming conversation with the Steering Committee.

¹ Missing Middle is a term used to describe multi-unit or clustered housing types compatible in scale with single-family homes that help meet the growing demand for walkable urban living. Typical missing middle housing products include townhomes, duplexes, triplexes, fourplexes, etc.— priced at levels that are more affordable to moderate and middle income households than conventional single family homes.

Downtown Precise Plan Work Products

The Downtown Precise Plan includes a number of work products, summarized below:

- Downtown Area Profile Report (addressing Downtown’s relationship to the rest of San Rafael, Marin County, and the region; a history of past plans; a demographic summary; a physical conditions summary; an urban design summary; a summary of Downtown improvement programs; a summary of zoning regulations and development opportunities; and a synopsis of key issues)
- An Historic and Cultural Resource Survey and Analysis
- A Multi-Modal Transportation Access and Connectivity Strategy
- A Parking Analysis and Policy Strategy
- A Downtown Infrastructure Profile
- An Economic and Market Profile
- An Affordable Housing and Anti-Displacement Strategy
- Design Guidelines and a Place-making Strategy
- An “options” report which looks at alternative uses on key sites
- The Precise Plan itself, including new zoning districts and development standards that replace those now in place.

Community engagement is critical to the success of this effort. The consulting team is planning a multi-day design “charrette” later this Spring and will be asking for participation by Steering Committee members.

Downtown Boundary

The attached map provides the proposed boundary for the Downtown Precise Plan. The following attributes should be noted:

1. The area covered by the 1993 Downtown Vision Plan was the starting point for the proposed boundary.
2. The 1993 Downtown boundary was expanded east of Highway 101 to include part of the area covered by the 2012 Station Area Plan—however, it does not extend to the full one-half mile radius around the SMART station, as that would take in many residential areas where change is not anticipated.
3. The boundary includes two areas (noted on the map) which are primarily residential in character—these areas would retain residential designations on the General Plan. They have been included to provide logical edges to the planning area and facilitate data collection and analysis.
4. On September 12, the General Plan 2040 Steering Committee divided into three groups and did a multi-part “small group” exercise. One element of that exercise was developing a boundary

for Downtown. Feedback from the groups was considered in developing the proposed boundary. A few Steering Committee members suggested that Downtown extend south of the Canal on the east side of Highway 101, south along Andersen Drive, and north along Lincoln Avenue. The proposed boundary is slightly more compact and does not include these areas.

5. A number of parcels along 1st Street and B Street are included in the boundary, such as Safeway and several smaller (1950s-60s vintage) office buildings. These properties are functionally part of Downtown but were not in the 1993 study area boundary.
6. The “Glass and Sash” site just south of 2nd Street (near the SMART station) is included in the boundary.

