
REPORT TO GENERAL PLAN 2040 STEERING COMMITTEE

Subject: Recap of Downtown Precise Plan Charrette

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City convened a Downtown San Rafael Planning and Design Charrette from May 8-11, 2019. The purpose of the Charrette was to solicit input from San Rafael residents and businesses about Downtown's strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities---and to begin a dialogue about how Downtown could become a more successful, dynamic, and memorable place in the future. This memo provides links to key charrette work products.

BACKGROUND

In Spring 2018, the City of San Rafael received a \$500,000 grant from the Association of Bay Area Governments/ Metropolitan Transportation Commission to prepare a detailed plan (called a "Precise Plan") for Downtown San Rafael. The intent was to update the 1993 Downtown Vision Plan, incorporate the 2012 Station Area Plan and other more recent planning studies, and develop a comprehensive set of zoning standards and design guidelines to manage future Downtown development. The Precise Plan provides an opportunity to address issues such as historic preservation, economic vitality, pedestrian and bicycle safety, parking and wayfinding, and the design and programming of public space. The lead consultant on the project is Opticos Design (Berkeley).

Downtown planning workshops with the General Plan Steering Committee took place in March and April 2019. In May, the Steering Committee's regularly scheduled monthly meeting was formatted as the "opening event" of a four-day workshop (called a "charrette") focused on Downtown. In addition to the opening event, the charrette included:

- Focus Group Interviews (May 2 and May 8)
- A Downtown walking tour (May 8)
- Brown bag lunches on historic preservation (May 9) and economic development (May 10)
- A closing presentation (May 11)
- An open studio in a storefront at 1200 Fourth Street where the public was invited to share ideas with the design team
- A pop-up table during the second Friday artwalks (April 12 and May 10)

Comment cards were provided at all events. In addition, participants were provided with post-it notes to place on exhibits and photographs presented at the charrette. More than 100 people participated in the events, including most Steering Committee members and many of the Alternates. Over the four-day period, 285 post-it notes were applied to the exhibits.

LINKS TO WORK PRODUCTS

At the meeting on June 12, Steering Committee members will have an opportunity to “debrief” on the charrette. Most of the work products are available on the project website and are linked in the text below.

The opening presentation for the charrette may be viewed [here](#). It includes an overview of the planning process, a summary of Downtown assets and challenges, and a Downtown Profile. The Profile addresses urban form and design, demographics, economic data, transportation issues, and natural resources. It also includes a series of “big ideas” for future consideration.

Results of the table exercises at the opening presentation may be viewed [here](#). Participants were divided into eight groups of 6-8 people each and were asked to summarize their comments for the larger group at the end of a 45-minute breakout session. The link above summarizes what we heard.

The closing presentation for the charrette may be viewed [here](#). The presentation includes conceptual design ideas for key Downtown spaces, as well as preliminary ideas for improving circulation, Downtown gateways, the open space network, and development opportunities. The design ideas have been posted on [Neighborland](#) for public comment.

The brown bag lunch presentations from May 9 and 10 may be viewed [here](#). These presentations cover historic preservation and the Downtown economy.

Notes from the Focus Groups may be viewed [here](#). The four Focus Groups were historic preservation, Downtown merchants, Downtown social service providers, and Downtown development. The notes include a list of attendees and comments

Comment cards from the charrette event may be viewed [here](#). These are anonymous comments submitted by participants in various charrette events.

FUTURE WORK PRODUCTS

A Downtown Profile report will be posted to the project website in the coming weeks. Staff received an Administrative Draft of the report from Opticos and has provided comments and suggested revisions, which are now being made. We will notify Steering Committee members as soon as the report has been completed and is available for public review. The report is a summary of “existing conditions” Downtown and does not include policy recommendations. Those will follow later in 2019 as the Plan is prepared.

A City Council briefing on the Downtown Precise Plan is being planned for July 2019.