

**Summary of San Rafael General Plan 2040 Steering Committee Meeting
Meeting #19 October 9, 2019
6:00 – 9:00 PM at 750 Lindero St.**

Attendance

Members Present: *DJ Allison, Don Blayney, Maribeth Bushey, Bill Carney, Richard Hall, Eric Holm, Linda Jackson, Margaret Johnston, Jeff Jones, Bonnie Marmor, Jack McGinn, Robert Miller, Stephanie Plante, Kate Powers, Jeff Rhoads, Jackie Schmidt, Sparkie Spaeth, Karen Strolia, Cecilia Zamora*

Alternates Seated: *Samantha Sargent, Joanne Webster*

Absences: *Berenice Davidson*

Members Excused: *Jenny Broering, Omar Carrera, Drew Norton, Roger Smith*

Staff Present: *Anne Derrick, Allison Giffin, Paul Jensen, Barry Miller*

Consultants: *Mitali Ganguly, Stefan Pellegrini (Opticos); Bob Grandy (Fehr and Peers)*

Sign-Ins: *Shirl Buss, Chris Hart, Jean Severinghaus*

(1/2) Call to Order/ Roll Call

The meeting was called to order at 6:07 PM.

(3) Approval of Minutes

The minutes of September 11, 2019 were approved without amendment (Motion: Strolia, second: Jackson).

Barry Miller announced that there was an error on the agenda that had been emailed last Friday, and a corrected agenda had been distributed to Committee members. The titles of the items were correct, but the descriptive text was incorrect on a few of the items.

(4) Public Comment

Fred Divine commented on his concerns about the Downtown Precise Plan Options Report. He expressed that parking was a critical issue and it seems to be underplayed and insufficiently covered by the report. He further stated that Marin County was much more auto-dependent than the Bay Area as a whole and we should not assume that parking demand would decline in the future.

(5) Presentation and Discussion Items

A. Downtown Options Report

Chair Plante introduced Project Manager (PM) Miller. PM Miller noted that tonight's meeting would focus almost entirely on Downtown, as we were at a pivotal point in the process. He reviewed the Options Report that had been prepared by Opticos Design, and noted it had recently been presented to the Planning Commission, where it received a robust discussion.

Several Committee comments were made before the speaker was introduced (staff responses are in italics):

- Is the Downtown Profile Report on-line? *PM Miller replied that both the Options Report and the Downtown Profile Report (a more detailed report documenting “existing conditions”) were on line at sanrafael2040.org.*
- Terra Linda is not well represented at the table and does not seem to get much say in these meetings, despite the fact that they are a large share of the City’s population.
- Can the Committee discuss issues before they are asked to vote in electronic polling sessions? *The discussion has been set up so that the discussions take place after the vote rather than before.*
- Can we vote again after the discussion? *Staff replied that we will try to accommodate this request and vote before and after the discussion, in the event people wish to change their votes after hearing from others.*

PM Miller introduced Stefan Pellegrini from Opticos. Following Stefan’s initial presentation, a real-time electronic polling (e.g., “clicker”) exercise was conducted with Committee members. The results are below:

		A. Yes, Definitely	B. Yes, with some modifications	C. No, I have a few concerns	D. No, I don't like this direction	E. Not sure, need more information	Total
1	Do you agree with the illustrative vision and design intent for the Transit Station Area?	3	6	9	2	1	21
2	Do you agree with the illustrative vision and design intent for the Downtown core?	3	7	6	4	1	21
3	Do you agree with the illustrative vision and design intent for the West End Village?	5	8	5	1	1	20
4	Do you agree with the illustrative vision and design intent for the Montecito Area?	3	8	6	4	0	21

[Note: the polling was not done all at once, but was done following a presentation on each area]

Comments of the polling questions were as follows:

Question #1 Do you agree with the illustrative vision and design intent for the Transit Station Area?

The Committee had the following comments:

- I answered “C” because I have a few concerns, although I am generally supportive. Tamalpais Ave corridor is a critical link in the North/South greenway and should be a shared street from Mission to Second rather than just a plaza from 4th to 5th. Further, the illustration is misleading with regard to how the rail line relates to the public space. It is heavy rail and not a streetcar—the edge conditions

are not as friendly as the drawings imply. The rail line and West Francisco are “flipped” on the map and should be corrected. Also—is a parking structure intended for the current site of the Bettini Transit Center, as the drawings imply?

- You would never see children on the grass next to the SMART train—it’s not realistic. Also, subterranean parking is not realistic due to the high water table and flooding in the area. *Stefan responded that the parking structures would not go underground, and that would be clarified.*
- It is not clear how new Mixed Use/Retail development will support the downtown corridor. Demand is finite and if we add new retail it may take away from the retail that is already on Fourth Street. Also, designing a new plaza next to the train could be a problem given the large homeless population. *Stefan responded that most ground level space would be parking, loading, and services, with limited retail; the intent is not to add a lot of new retail space, especially off of 4th Street. Also, zoning standards could call for different models of retail in newer buildings, to reduce competition and complement existing small floor-plate uses.*
- 800 units in this area seems like a lot--where will the new units go exactly? It was hard enough to get approval for a 60-unit building, how we will we ever get to 800? Also, a major historic spine of Downtown is Lincoln Ave, and there is nothing in the Plan about strengthening this north-south corridor. We should raise its profile. Also, a lot of the east/west turning movements in this area have been disrupted by SMART, contributing to congestion. And many of the lots are small, making it challenging to assemble viable development sites. We need incentives for lot aggregation. *Staff agreed with these observations. Stefan noted that the small lot issue is a challenge and developers tend to not develop these lots until the larger lots are no longer available. He noted that if there is an opportunity to consolidate lots and merge them or use underutilized right-of-way to make the lots larger, we could increase development capacity. He cited Ritter Street as an example of a public space that could be vacated to make the area more conducive to development.*
- I voted “D” (no, I do not like this direction) since the plan does not appear to be anchored in data or reality. I heard a lot of “buzz” words like multi-modal, “create a sense of arrival,” etc. but I want to see data relating to what percentage of trips today are by car vs other modes now and in the future. How will this design address the fact that most visitors arrive by car? This plan will drive business away if it is not rooted in real data about mode of travel. Also, there is no mention of autonomous vehicles, Ubers, deliveries from Amazon and so forth. We need more drop off spaces for Amazon and Uber-type services to avoid congestion. Also, there is no reference to what the Level of Service (LOS) is today, and what it will be in the future. Are we discarding LOS? There is also a lot of focus on a plaza at SMART, but they are in financial ruin and if the March 2020 ballot measure fails, they will run out of money. What is our Plan B if they fail? Where will the money come from to relocate the transit center if SMART is not there?

Stefan noted that the Precise Plan will have an EIR that will address issues related to existing and anticipated traffic conditions, including the impacts of the Plan on circulation. He further noted that the proposed development program could be achieved under existing zoning, and no increases in height had been proposed. He also noted the scenario being contemplated is consistent with past visions for Downtown. He added that the increment of development being considered would be unlikely to create extreme congestion relative to regional volumes and existing conditions. He agreed that curbside management was a critical issue that would be further addressed in the plan. He noted that even if SMART failed, there would still be bus transit service—and he did not know of any examples of transit systems in the US in the last 40 years that stopped functioning completely.

- I voted “B” (yes, with some modifications). The previous speaker has given us all a reason to vote for continued SMART service next March. We need to look for tools for assembling parcels and providing density/ height bonuses, as the current code does not seem to be working. I agree with the

earlier speaker regarding Tamalpais—there is a great opportunity to extend this north-south corridor as a pedestrian space. Regarding homelessness in public space, this is a compelling reason to bring in small businesses or retail (like cafes) on the perimeter to create a sense of ownership and make the plaza concept work. Also, the Plan should note the opportunity site(s) along Fourth Street east of the freeway. This is an important corridor between the transit center and east end/ Montecito. We should also preserve the historic architecture (Victorian homes) along 5th Avenue near the freeway, but recognize opportunities further west (Lincoln to A Street).

- I voted “E” (Not sure, need more information). I am concerned about parking and traffic congestion, particularly for those of us dependent on Point San Pedro Road. The bottleneck will be even worse if the area is developed without transportation improvements. I need more information about how the transit center plan will work. *Stefan responded that more discussion about circulation will be forthcoming.*
- We need to focus more on pedestrian safety, particularly for Canal residents, students and seniors and people coming to San Rafael to work.
- Also, consult the Canalways conceptual design plan and proposed ped/bike bridge across the Canal.

Question #2 Do you agree with the illustrative vision and design intent for the Downtown core?

The Committee had the following comments:

- This implies that we are going to be a “European Community” with public squares—but we still have a crucial need for parking to keep our businesses going. We don’t have the density or demographics to make some of this work. We have an aging community, and we need more density and housing opportunities for families. We should not remove street parking for public squares. This may work in other cities, but we are just starting out down this path and need to move cautiously. We need to figure out how to spend public dollars efficiently and understand the return on our investment. We can’t just do these things because they feel good.

Stefan responded that the expansion of the Courthouse Square as shown in the renderings would remove only six parking spaces. He noted that there is research (Jan Gehl) indicating that each parking space eliminated increases pedestrian traffic by about six people. It is also important to think about this over a 20-year timeframe and remember this is not intended to happen all at once.

- I like the general approach for this area, particularly the emphasis on in-fill housing, which is desperately needed. The City plaza (South side of 4th at Court) should be redone—it is depressing. Our City has not done a good job caring for street furniture and landscaping. How will we take care of new public spaces if we are failing with our existing space? Also, the drawings should show the concept of a new Library and Community Center in Albert Park.
- It’s important to keep in mind that these are not “overnight” changes and we should be thinking about 20 years and beyond. The Committee needs to think of who will be here in the next twenty years and who will be patronizing Downtown. Many people in their 30s are supportive of these kinds of improvements. The current Downtown does not meet our needs—and we are the ones who will be spending the money. We would like to see San Rafael to become a more pedestrian and bike friendly place.
- It would be great to see the demographic data about who is shopping Downtown.

- It's not just 30-somethings. 60-somethings also shop Downtown.
- The trees should be taken off the illustrative diagrams. They make the streets look tree-lined, but they aren't. It would be easier to understand where the public spaces are and how they are being linked without the presumed tree canopy dominating the drawings. Also, what will the balance be between jobs and housing under this plan. What kinds of jobs will be created? From an environmental standpoint and to reduce greenhouse gas emission, we should have housing near new jobs. *Staff agreed and noted that the Plan emphasized housing Downtown in order to bring people to retail, public spaces, and the jobs that were there.*
- The Plan needs to acknowledge extreme weather events, particularly more flooding. We need to anticipate flood issues around the transit center and Montecito Shopping Center. *Agreed--this is covered in the Downtown Profile Report.*
- How does the high cost of housing and the high cost of construction get reflected in the Vision? *Stefan remarked that we are at the point in the Bay Area market cycle where we will continue to build what is now in the pipeline, but projects that get entitled in the near future may not be built in this cycle. We are in a conundrum because it is very expensive to build in the Bay Area, there is a lot of pent up demand, and the governor is putting pressure on municipalities to create much more affordable housing over the next ten years. He noted that over time, there will be changes in the industry to reduce costs such as factory built housing. We may also see money coming from the State to help cities deal with the high costs.*
- Construction costs are unlikely to fall and are only getting higher with the new tariffs. Development does not pencil out so it won't get built.
- The report needs more data on where the people who live in the new housing are coming from, and where they will work. I believe the new housing will be luxury units serving San Francisco commuters. They will be commuting to the city and exacerbating congestion. *Stefan responded that this is a regional issue that all cities in the Bay Area are dealing with.*

The Committee took a short break at this point.

Question #3: Do you agree with the illustrative vision and design intent for the West End Village?

The Committee had the following comments:

- Shell just rebuilt their gas station, so it is unlikely to be a housing site in the next 20 years. The Best Buy site is owned by several people, which makes it challenging. San Rafael appears to have a mismatch between housing supply and the current demographics. There are many residents who are older who would like to stay in the city but not in their big homes---they are a market segment that can be captured through smaller lot infill projects (8-10 units, etc.).
- We should consider taller buildings in the West End. Building 2 to 4 floors is not realistic if you want to incentivize development. Private entities will only assemble small parcels if there is enough density to justify the effort. Otherwise, the concepts for this area are fine and make sense. The actual sites that end up getting developed may be different than what is shown, but that's OK.
- 2-4 stories sounds right to me. The recently approved condos on Fifth Avenue are similar in height and mass to the condos on Fourth and G. We should do more of that scale.

- The height limits are OK but the parking standards may be too high. Some of the residents may not own cars.
- The drawings for this area are OK with me. The West End makes downtown very linear though—and the idea of having 16 different nodes as shown on the diagram seems a little unrealistic. Can we have fewer nodes? *Stefan responded that the nodes are meant to indicate areas where there is development potential that could be encouraged through public investment. These investments could be things like sidewalk improvements. However, 16 nodes probably is too many.*
- The two nodes shown in the West End are the western gateway by Yardbirds and 4th and E. I'm OK with 3-4 stories in these areas, but perhaps at 4th and E we could go a little taller so we take advantage of terrain. There is a lot of placemaking potential here.

Question #4: Do you agree with the illustrative vision and design intent for the Montecito Area?

The Committee had the following comments:

- The Montecito Shopping Center was built in the 1950s. Many plans over the years have looked at reoriented the center with stores facing the Canal. Right now, though, it is a very well used Center and it seems unlikely there'd be much support for turning the stores around and redeveloping the site. The same is true of United Markets and Whole Foods—these are active businesses and not underused sites. That makes the drawings for this area seem like “Fantasyland.” We do need a park in this area, however, and we should include one in the plan.

Stefan responded that parcels on the north side of the Canal are generally large enough to facilitate redevelopment with buildings that are elevated to prepare for sea level rise. This also creates opportunities for public access and the deposit of dredge spoils to raise base elevation and create a band of open space along the shoreline.

- The extension of the street grid through this site is probably not worth the effort. All that does is shift the entrance to the one-way paired couplet a few blocks to the east. We would not gain much. However, we should retain the view corridor from 4th Street to the High School portico. In terms of the park site, the City should talk to San Rafael City Schools to make better use of their Corporation Yard in that area.
- As a local resident, we definitely need a park in this area. Using the corp yard is a great idea. Why aren't we focusing more on 4th Street as a civic space in this area though? It's underutilized.

Chair Plante called for a Re-poll of the Four Questions asked previously. The results are as follows:

		Yes, Definitely	Yes, with some modifications	No, I have a few concerns	No, I don't like this direction	Not sure, need more information	Total
1	Do you agree with the illustrative vision and design intent for the Transit Station Area?	1	10	6	4	0	21
2	Do you agree with the illustrative vision and design intent for the Downtown core?	1	11	6	3	1	21
3	Do you agree with the illustrative vision and design intent for the West End Village?	8	10	3	0	0	21
4	Do you agree with the illustrative vision and design intent for the Montecito Area?	0	11	8	1	0	20

Community Development Director Jensen reminded the Committee that the Station Area Plan and various other studies addressing Downtown had a number of specific recommendations for this area that would be incorporated. He noted that we must consider parking in some fashion, as well as sea level rise issues.

Discussion of Downtown Transportation Options

Bob Grandy gave a presentation on the Downtown Transportation Options. He posed three questions to the group dealing with: a) changing the one-way pairs on B, C, and D Streets to two way traffic; (b) redesigning 4th Street as a “shared” street’ and (c) implementing a bicycle circulation system. He noted that those who work in Downtown San Rafael have VMT (vehicle miles traveled) that is 50% more than the region—there are a lot of commuters. Also, buses carry 90% of the Downtown transit volume (much higher than SMART)—it will be interesting to see how the Larkspur extension changes travel patterns. He noted that there has been an explosion in the demand for curbside space for Uber, Lyft, Amazon deliveries, food delivery, etc. Are there places where we need to convert short term parking to loading for these services?

The following Committee comments were made:

- The bike circulation system shows a gap on B Street near 1st—can we fill that in? *Grandy replied that yes, this gap could be closed.*
- Can we designate specific areas on Fourth Street for loading and unloading? *Grandy replied that this would be a good idea, and that timing the zones would be beneficial.*
- East/west traffic has been affected by the SMART trains, especially on 2nd and 3rd Streets. With the new transit center coming in, it doesn't really make sense to make it more difficult to drive on Fourth Street, as has been proposed. *Grandy responded that the displacement of 4th Street traffic onto 2nd and 3rd would be minimal, but there would be many benefits of this change to pedestrians and bicyclists.*

- Fourth Street was intentionally designed to be wide to allow for multiple modes (including buses) and loading and unloading and bike riders can go down that street with ease.
- 98 % of the traffic going east west on Fourth Street is in cars, and probably less than 2% is bikes. Where is the data on the number of bikes that currently use 4th Street, and why are we planning for that very small segment of demand. We should not spent huge amounts on projects where there will be a negative return on investment. It is a “leap of faith” that adding a bike lane on Fourth Street will slow traffic down and induce more cycling. *Grandy noted that this idea had already been included in the adopted Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan.*
- Bike lanes are not solely intended to reduce traffic. They also improve safety and comfort. I would like to see a bike lane on 4th Street. It is currently dangerous for bicyclists.
- Will the traffic analysis look at conditions post extension of SMART operations to Larkspur? *Grandy responded there will most likely not be enough time to collect this data, though there may be some preliminary data.*
- There was a discussion of plans for the new Public Safety Building, and it was noted that there was already a plan to make a portion of D Street between Fourth and Fifth into a two-way street.

The Committee was polled on transportation options:

		Great Idea, Let's Do it	Interesting Idea	Don't like it, leave it	Don't know not enough information	Total	
1	Please share your thoughts on the possible conversion of B, C, D Streets from one-way to two-way streets	9	9	2	0	20	
2	Please share your thoughts on the possible redesign of Fourth Street as a “Shared Street”	4	8	7	2	21	
3	Please share your thoughts on the development of an -east-west bikeway that connects the Miracle Mile to Montecito	3	7	10	0	20	

PM Miller noted that the there is a portion of Stefan’s presentation that will not be covered tonight due to time limitations. He encouraged the Committee to provide comments on the Options report via email.

B. Neighborhoods Element On-Line Tool

PM Miller noted that Item 5B will not be discussed tonight due to lack of time, but encouraged Committee members to visit the project website and try out the on-line tool for neighborhood organizations to weigh-in on the Neighborhood Elements of the General Plan.

6. COMMITTEE ALTERNATE COMMENTS

There were no comments from Alternates.

7. GENERAL BUSINESS ITEMS

Chair Plante indicated the next Steering Committee meeting is November 13, 2019.

8/9. PUBLIC COMMENTS/ ADJOURNMENT

Shirl Buss from Youth in Arts/ Y-Plan commented about her students who are developing their own ideas for the future of Downtown.

The meeting was adjourned at 9.03 PM.