

**REPORT TO MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL****TO THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL:**

DATE: February 4, 2014

SUBJECT: UPDATE ON PROGRESS OF THE DOWNTOWN CONCORD SPECIFIC PLAN**Report in Brief**

The development of a Specific Plan for the Downtown Concord Priority Development Area (PDA), funded primarily through a grant from the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC), has been progressing since January 2013. The Specific Plan project is funded primarily through a \$480,000 grant from the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC). Two Council members (Leone and Grayson) serve as Chair and Vice-Chair of the 13-member Downtown Steering Committee (DSC) created to guide the effort.

The DSC selected a preferred land use strategy during the Summer of 2013 allowing the project team to move on to development of the Draft Specific Plan. As part of the Community Outreach Plan initiated in January 2013, staff is providing regular updates to the Planning Commission and City Council at key junctures in the schedule. This will serve as the last formal update, prior to review and adoption of the Specific Plan and environmental document for the project, anticipated to occur in May 2014. This timing will allow the Specific Plan to inform the Housing Element Update currently being prepared by the Planning Division for the Cycle 5 period 2014-2022.

The purpose of this update to the City Council is to present the progress to date on the Specific Plan preparation and environmental review, community outreach, and follow-up on comments made by the Council at the last update, in addition to obtaining any comments and/or feedback based on the project to date.

Background

There are many benefits associated with the PDA Program and the development of a specific plan for the City's Downtown PDA. It can serve as an economic development tool because it will enable streamlined CEQA review for future development projects and other activities. It will also leverage grant funding ensuring Concord's eligibility for future state and regional grant funding and enabling the City to comply with other State mandates. Areas designated as PDAs are eligible for additional technical assistance and funding for certain types of planning studies and capital projects from regional and state sources.

A specific plan is a planning tool intended to provide policies, measures, and strategies to develop a defined geographic area for adoption by the City Council to become part of the General Plan. It has the advantage of combining a land use plan, specific zoning, unique development standards and infrastructure financing (if desired) into one comprehensive package. The specific plan is similar to a zoning ordinance

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in that it regulates land use through development standards; however, there is flexibility to tailor the standards to a specific area. This can be done through implementation strategies, performance measures and phasing.

City staff retained the services of Perkins + Will, kicking off the project in January 2013, and has been moving steadily forward since that time based on the project schedule (Attachment #1). A 13-member Downtown Steering Committee (DSC) formed in February 2013 has: 1) guided the Specific Plan process; 2) received continuous reports from staff on the project, during the nine meetings held to date, and 3) provided regular feedback to the project team. The Downtown Specific Plan page of the City's website has served as the repository of information for the project including agendas, minutes, reports, and updates as the effort proceeds. A Technical Advisory Committee, including staff from relevant regional agencies and special districts including the Contra Costa Water District (CCWD), Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART), Contra Costa Transit Authority (CCTA), Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG), Contra Costa Health Services (CCHS), and Contra Costs County Connection (CCCTA) have been receiving regular updates and providing feedback on the project; with four meetings throughout 2013.

Discussion

The focused aspects of the Specific Plan process to date have included the following components: 1) Development of a Downtown vision; 2) A community engagement process to further the preparation of the Specific Plan; 3) Preparation of goals, policies and implementation strategies to promote enhanced pedestrian and bicycle access to and from the BART Station, attractive high-density infill, incentives for affordable housing, and improved transit opportunities; and 4) Development of strategies to spur new development.

One important aspect of the project has developed since the last update. Staff was able to narrow the timeline by 3 to 4 months based on the project team's determination that the environmental documentation appropriate for the project was an Addendum to a previous Environmental Impact Report. The Preferred Land Use Strategy being developed through the Specific Plan does not propose any rezoning as a part of the plan. This consistency with the earlier General Plan and Development Code allowed staff to pursue the preparation of an Addendum to the Supplement to the General Plan EIR, rather than prepare a new EIR; thus resulting in cost and time savings. As a result, staff was able to shorten the project timeline. This approach also required less work by the consultant, and as a result, additional outreach and DSC meetings have been added to the project.

Downtown Vision

Through a series of summer meetings, the Downtown Steering Committee developed the following Downtown Vision:

The Downtown is distinguished by its authenticity and historic assets, preserved and strengthened by the strategic infill of new high quality development that links the past with a vibrant future. The origins of Concord, beginning in 1834 as Rancho Monte del Diablo, are evident throughout Downtown. The central plaza, which retains the City's original name of Todos Santos, is a rare example of the 16th Century Law of the Indies which once dictated the planning and design of Spanish colonial cities. New buildings demonstrate their respect for the City's heritage through modern interpretations of early California architecture. Thoughtfully blending the old with the new, Downtown Concord is constantly evolving and growing in an organic and sustainable manner.

Downtown Concord is dynamic, safe and attractive to families, businesses, and visitors. It supports a thriving local economy by providing a variety of living, employment, and entertainment opportunities for multiple generations. A mix of boutique shops, restaurants, cafes, and cultural destinations are integrated by a lush green network of pedestrian-friendly streets which ensure activity both day and night. Grant Street, anchored by Todos Santos Plaza, connects the Downtown to the rest of the Bay Area via the BART Station. It is just one example of the many distinctive streets that have been designed to integrate walking, biking, transit use, green infrastructure, and active storefronts. The synergy created by the diverse mix of ages, incomes, and housing types promotes healthy, active lifestyles and a prosperous community.

Community Engagement Process

A community engagement process to develop a vision for the area has been at the forefront of discussions since the PDA grant was submitted. The Community Outreach Plan focuses on obtaining input from a variety of community members including residents, businesses, local and regional stakeholders and transportation partners. A strong community engagement process will remain a focus throughout the preparation of the specific plan. The following meetings have been held to date:

- Downtown Ideas Fair - To obtain input from residents & stakeholders within the Downtown (Sept. 22, 2012)
- Four (4) Technical Advisory Committee meetings (March 13, April 3, June 3, Sept 9 in 2013)
- Nine (9) Downtown Steering Committee meetings (March 13, April 18, June 3, July 1, July 22, August 5, September 9, and October 15 in 2013, and January 13, 2014).
- Three (3) Community Workshops (May 6th and October 7th of 2013, and January 27th 2014)
- One developer panel (July 9, 2013) with an additional panel tentatively scheduled for the Spring of 2014.
- Stakeholder meetings and individual outreach meetings in 2013 (Feb. 27 – affordable housing interests, and August 27 – Doris Court neighborhood, as well as a variety of one on one meetings)

These meetings were focused on providing background information, developing the existing conditions report, engaging broader community involvement, discussing and evaluating land use alternatives, obtaining feedback on technical issues, and determining a preferred land use strategy (Attachment #2).

Web page

Staff implemented a project specific webpage for the Downtown Specific Plan. All of the documents associated with the above tasks can be found on the webpage at www.cityofconcord.org/downtownplan. In addition, agendas and meeting minutes for recent and upcoming meetings are frequently uploaded to the site.

Relevant Goals

The relevant goals for the Downtown Specific Plan were discussed within the City's grant application for the PDA Planning Program. The overarching goal envisions the PDA as a bustling, transit-oriented, urban space serving as both a magnet of activity for the City, as well as a more regional

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commuter hub for central Contra Costa County. Specific goals for the Downtown Specific Plan project area include:

- Increasing BART ridership and efficiency of multi-modal connections;
- Intensifying uses and densities from currently built levels;
- Promoting mid- and high-density housing;
- Constructing housing projects for a mix of housing types and income levels;
- Increasing job creation;
- Enhancing a strong business climate and expanding the City's economic base; and
- Implementing strategies to foster a vibrant downtown prior to initiation of construction within the Concord Reuse Area.

Completed and Remaining Tasks

The following tasks have been completed toward the preparation of the Downtown Concord Specific Plan and associated environmental documentation:

- Task 1 – Project Initiation and Refined Project Schedule
- Task 2 – Existing Conditions Report
- Task 3 – Community Outreach Plan
- Task 4 – Development of Alternative Plan Concepts
- Task 5 – Development of Preferred Plan and First Draft of the Specific Plan
- Task 6 – Completing environmental review and Draft Addendum to the GP EIR

The two final tasks are anticipated to be completed in the Spring of 2014 with adoption of the plan anticipated in May 2014. The Project team is currently working toward the completion of:

- Task 7 - Final Specific Plan and Final Addendum to the General Plan EIR
- Task 8 – Development of an Implementation and Phasing Strategy

Land Use Development Strategy

The Specific Plan establishes the land use plan, infrastructure plan, development regulations and design guidelines which govern future development. The current zoning for most of the central Downtown includes Downtown Pedestrian (DP) and Downtown Mixed Use (DMX) zoning. The two districts allow similar uses and both allow 33 to 100 dwelling units per net acre. However, the blocks immediately surrounding Todos Santos Plaza with DP zoning have a minimum height of 30 feet (2-3 stories) and maximum height of 70 feet (5-6 stories), while DMX zoning has a minimum height of 30 feet and a maximum limitation of 200 feet (15-18 stories).

The Specific Plan, in large part, builds upon the existing policies within the current Development Code. In addition, due to the flexibility of the Development Code in terms of the uses currently allowed (general retail, office, restaurants are all allowed uses) and those allowed with a Use Permit (multi-family, mixed use, live work units), it is necessary to develop implementation and phasing strategies to promote specific uses within the downtown, in particular within the City's transit overlay district. A key piece of the Specific Plan will be the preparation of implementation and phasing strategies to occur during the Spring of 2014.

A summary of the development planned for the downtown over the next 20 to 25 years is summarized below in two phases, with information regarding the existing development within the PDA in the top row of the table below for comparison. This level of development is consistent with the land use designations provided for within the General Plan and more recently by the Development Code adopted in July 2012.

**Summary of Development for
Downtown PDA
(Projection to Year 2040)**

| | Housing Units¹ | Residents | Office | Retail | Jobs |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------|---------------|---------------|-------------|
| Existing | 4,429 ² | 10,700 | 2,840,000 | 1,500,000 | 9,278 |
| Phase I | 3,465 | 8,680 | 586,400 | 281,200 | 2,900 |
| Phase II | 555 | 1,420 | 981,500 | 462,000 | 4,820 |
| Phase I+II | 4,020 | 10,100 | 1,567,900 | 743,200 | 7,720 |
| Total Projection | 8,449 | 20,800 | 4,407,900 | 2,243,200 | 16,998 |

¹ Assumes average 1,000 sq. ft. unit.

² Includes 179 units of approved Renaissance Phase II apartments.

Looking forward, the project team expects to complete the Final Specific Plan and Final Addendum to the Specific Plan and the Implementation and Phasing Strategy in the Spring 2014. The Downtown Long Range Property Management Plan, addressing the City’s four downtown vacant sites, was approved by Council on December 10, 2013, and will be reviewed by the Successor Agency Oversight Board on February 6, 2014. Once approved by the Board, the plan will be forwarded to the State for review and approval.

The Downtown Specific Plan (Attachment #3), once adopted, will be used to inform the Housing Element Update 2014-22, currently under preparation.

Implementation Strategies

The project team and DSC are currently working towards review and refinement of those strategies for the Specific Plan with a final DSC meeting planned for March 31st. The Specific Plan will provide the City with a mechanism to manage growth in the Downtown by utilizing an implementation matrix of strategies to regularly revisit and “truth test” goals, objectives, and policies, as circumstances change. Periodic reporting via the Annual General Plan Update on the status of performance indicators will provide the information necessary to guide adjustments in the Specific Plan over time to achieve the desired results.

Based on the DSC meetings and Community Workshops held, the following highlights have been discussed for inclusion within the Specific Plan. It is important to note that the Specific Plan does not propose any rezoning as a part of the plan, but rather focuses on implementation strategies to more quickly encourage the full potential of growth possible within the PDA by:

- Providing a stronger connection along Grant Street between Todos Santos Plaza and BART.

- Offering a looping shuttle to easily transport residents and commuters from BART to Todos Santos Plaza and major office and retail uses.
- Providing a greenway (consisting of streetscape/landscape improvements within the current right-of-way) to improve access and walkability while facilitating access to the major destinations within the downtown. This includes a greenway under the BART tracks to connect existing trails/walkways.
- Providing traffic smoothing/management at key locations within the downtown.
- Creating a range of implementation strategies to facilitate growth, economic development and a move toward complete streets at key locations within the downtown.
- Highlighting the City's historic connections and providing an emphasis on Early California architecture through design guidelines without becoming overly prescriptive.
- Developing performance measures for tracking and performance monitoring to assure implementation of the Plan over time, with checks and balances to provide steady and balanced development into the 2035-2040 horizon.

Response to Council comments

During the last City Council Update on September 24, 2013, three general comments were heard from the Council. These have been addressed in further detail below.

Jobs/Housing Balance – The jobs/housing balance is shown within Chapter 3 of the Specific Plan but the brief summary is shown in the table on the previous page. The total projected jobs of 16,998 compares positively to the projected housing units of 8,449 during the 2040 horizon.

Notification to Property Owners – Property owners were directly notified prior to the Community Workshop on October 7th through a letter invite, and property owners as well as tenants within the project area were directly notified through a post card mailer for the Open House recently held on January 27th.

Modifications to Plan to Clarify Greenways – Earlier versions of graphics associated with the Specific Plan portrayed green space within the downtown on private parcels giving the impression the City may be expanding parklands. These graphics have been revised to clarify that proposed greenways are intended as improved landscaping and hardscaping treatments within specified public rights-of-way. The City does not intend to nor have the funds to expand parkland in the downtown.

Environmental Review

The Specific Plan does not propose any rezoning as a part of the plan. This consistency with the earlier General Plan and Development Code allowed staff to pursue the preparation of an Addendum to the Final SEIR to the 2030 Concord General Plan EIR (Attachment #4), rather than prepare a new EIR. As a result, staff was able to reduce the project timeline by a few months. A draft of the environmental review document was made available for public review on January 28, 2014, and final adoption of the Downtown Specific Plan is expected in May 2014.

Fiscal Impact

The completion of the *Downtown Concord Specific Plan* will have a beneficial fiscal impact on the City by enabling the City to be eligible for future grants from State and regional agencies and will streamline future development by providing specific policies, and implementation and financing strategies.

Public Contact

This item has been posted at the Civic Center at least 10 days prior to the public hearing.

The public outreach for the Specific Plan has been achieved through the implementation of the Community Outreach Plan for the project since January 2013, as discussed earlier in this report.

Additional public outreach for the project has also been implemented through press releases and the creation of a dedicated page on the City’s website (<http://www.cityofconcord.org/downtownplan/>) to provide regular updates, maintain the schedule of meetings, and provide key reports, agendas and minutes for regular meetings. Staff also utilized social media to provide outreach on the most recent Open House. Power point presentations for each of the meetings have also been uploaded to the site. All property owners within and tenants in the project area were sent notices with the Community Workshop details.

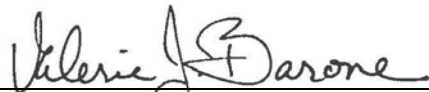
Recommendation for Action

This staff report is provided for informational purposes only. While no formal approval is required, staff requests that the City Council provide comments to staff on the progress to date of the Downtown Concord Specific Plan preparation.

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Attachment 1 – Updated Project Schedule/Timeline

Attachment 2 – Map of Preferred Land Use Strategy

Attachment 3 – Final Draft Specific Plan – available on-line at:

<http://www.cityofconcord.org/pdf/projects/downtownPlan/draft.pdf>

Attachment 4 – Draft Addendum to the Final SEIR to the 2030 Concord General Plan EIR for the Development Code Project – available on-line at:

http://www.cityofconcord.org/pdf/projects/downtownPlan/seir_draft_add.pdf



PROJECT TASKS

1. Project Initiation

2. Existing Conditions

3. Community Outreach

Stakeholder meetings (one half-day meeting)

Community workshops (three workshops)

DSC/TAC meetings

Planning Commission and City Council meetings (three meetings)

4. Development of Alternative Plan Concepts

5. Development of Preferred Plan and first Draft Specific Plan

6. Environmental review and Draft EIR addendum

7. Final Specific Plan and Final SEIR

8. Implementation and Phasing Strategy

MEETINGS

City and team meetings (five in-person meetings; six on-line meetings)

Meetings in person ● Meetings on-line ●

DELIVERABLES

