

Advisory Committee Meeting #5

October 6, 2021

Summary Notes

Meeting Objectives

- Updates on progress to date
- Report Back on Community Survey #2 Results
- Review and receive feedback on the proposed Zoning Framework

Attendees

Advisory Committee Members

- **Present:** Jane Barr, Eduardo Cervantes, Gina Cole, Maria Elena De la Garza, Neva Hansen, Felipe Hernandez, Sylvia Luna, and Jenni Veitch-Olson
- **Absent:** Francisco Estrada-Councilmember, Aurelio Gonzalez, Carmen Herrera Mansur, Sal Orozco, Ben Ow, William Ow, Manuel Rodriguez, Shaz Roth, Brian Spector and Tony Scurich

City Staff

Suzi Merriam (CDD Director), Justin Meek (Principal Planner), Sarah Wilke (Assistant Planner), Carlos Landaverri (Housing Manager Community Development), and Elena Ortiz (Administrative Assistant II)

Consultant Team

- Simran Malhotra and Jasmine Williams, Raimi + Associates
- Peter VanderWal and Andrew Krizman, Sargent Town Planning

Introduction and Welcome

Simran Malhotra, Project Consultant, welcomed the Advisory Committee (AC) members and re-introduced the consultant team and Suzi Merriam introduced City Staff who were in attendance. A brief overview of zoom tools such as mute/unmute, raise hand, and live Spanish interpretation features were covered and a contact email was provided in case any attendees had technical issues. Roll call attendance was taken for Advisory Committee members. Simran followed with an overview of the

meeting agenda, an overview of the Specific Plan process, where the team is currently at in the process, and what efforts the consultant team has completed since the last Advisory Committee Meeting on April 28, 2021.

What We've Heard So Far

Simran presented the overall engagement process to-date as well as the outreach methods used and results from Community Survey #2. The survey results were based on 257 responses that were received from May 6th, 2021 – June 17th, 2021. The survey collected the following information:

- Respondent Age & Race Breakdown
- Respondent Location
- Character Area Responses: Historic Downtown Core, Civic Core, Gateway, Commercial Flex, Residential Flex, Workplace/Industrial, East Neighborhood, West Neighborhood
 - Downtown Big Idea Priorities
 - Historic Downtown Core-Top Three Priorities
 - Civic Core- Top Two Priorities
 - Commercial Flex- Top Three Priorities
 - East Neighborhood- Top Two Priorities
 - West Neighborhood- Top Three Priorities
 - Workplace/ Industrial District Neighborhood- Top Two Priorities
 - Open Ended Responses
 - Preserve Downtown's historic look & feel
 - Address safety, homelessness, and mental health issues
 - Create a vibrant and navigable downtown
 - Encourage a mixture of uses and experiences
 - Make housing a priority
 - Combat gentrification and displacement
- Public Environment Responses:
 - Main St. (SR 152 between Lake & Beach)
 - Beach St. (SR 152)
 - Regional Bike Connections
 - Open-Ended Responses
 - Incorporate parklets and widened sidewalks (The team will continue to discuss trade-offs with the community)
 - Create pedestrian and bicycle friendly environment

- Traffic concerns are linked to reduced bicycle and pedestrian safety

Comments/Questions from AC Members & Public

Following the presentation Simran asked the group if they had any questions on the presentation materials. Four questions/comments were raised by AC members and the public.

- Would like to see Main St. lanes reduced to accommodate parklets and other amenities.
- Only a minority of people were against lane reduction which is great because many favored parklets and sidewalks.
- It would be nice to have Watsonville highlight the agricultural industry and make those roads less about pedestrians and more about trucks. Moving pedestrians away from Walker St. in certain areas.
- Many people in District 1 have asked for more pedestrian enhancement along Walker St. for their employees, because they walk to the area.

Zoning Code Framework Plan

Coding the Downtown Vision: Peter VanderWal, Project Consultant, began the Zoning Code Framework Plan section by discussing how to implement the character area vision through zoning. Peter explained that the “Development Code” was a tool used to regulate and implement the vision for Downtown that has been expressed through character areas. This could be implemented in the following ways:

- Activate the Core of Downtown
- Extensions of the Core
- Workplace Industrial Environment
- “Flex” Downtown Neighborhoods
- Sensitive neighborhood-adjacent “edges” of downtown

Peter explained the differences between conventional and form-based zoning while highlighting some of the features, limitations, and advantages associated with each. Following a detailed discussion of each zoning type, Peter introduced the concept of having a “hybrid” code which would incorporate standards from both the form-based and conventional zoning systems.

Active Public Realm Environment (Public & Private Frontages): Following the explanation of code systems, Peter presented recommendations for creating an active public realm through code requirements. Peter defined the public realm as a network of streets and public spaces that connect and unify the great variety of uses and building forms downtown. He explained the details of the

mechanisms available through the code that could create an active public realm. This included the design and calibration of frontages (e.g., public vs private frontages) as well as the need to create flexible frontages that can accommodate a variety of active ground floor uses, especially where ground floor uses may be desired to change over time.

Comments/Questions from AC Members & Public

Following the presentation Simran asked the group if they had any questions on the presentation materials. Three questions/comments were raised by AC members and the public.

- These are good examples of how architecture can open to the streetscape with very little cost. This can make all the difference downtown.
- Have these changes been considered along Walker St.? Also, has there been consideration for the Walker St. train and trail connection?
 - *We can't predict the future but were trying to understand what the future looks like and what the possibilities are. We will discuss this further later in the presentation.*
- What are the mechanisms to make builders use these designs?
 - *The objective standards in the zoning code, which makes it completely required for any new buildings.*

The Active Downtown Core (Built Form & Urban Character): Following questions/comments, Peter began to explain that the Downtown Core (Main St. and area around Watsonville Plaza) were intended to be the most active areas downtown. His presentation for this section highlighted the mechanisms available to create the most ideal and activated environment downtown. Peter presented the following tools along with a brief definition and visual representation for each:

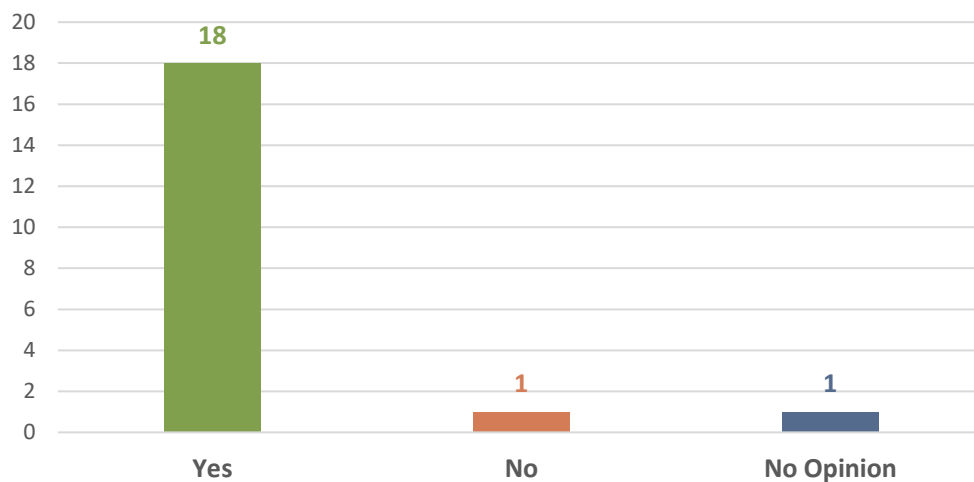
- Shopfront Transparency
- Seamless Indoor/ Outdoor Spaces
- Active Residential Frontages
- Frequency of Entries
- Generous Ground Floor Height
- Building Height
- Massing & Façade Composition
- Downtown Corridors (Extensions outward of the core along primary streets with use flexibility)
- “Retail Ready” (Flexible) Frontages

Comment/Questions & Poll Question #1 for AC Members & Public

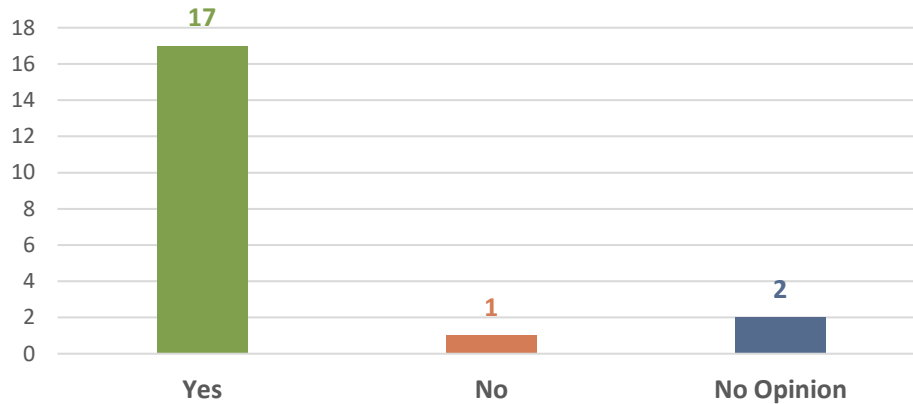
Following the presentation by Peter, Simran asked the group if they had any questions on the presentation materials and Jasmine opened the first group poll. Not all attendees answered every question. The Advisory Committee and public were asked the following three questions.

1. Does prioritizing the most active uses / frontages around Watsonville Plaza make sense?
 - *90% of respondents responded Yes; 5% of respondents responded No; 5% of respondents indicated No Opinion*
2. Do you agree with the code requiring flexible frontages to accommodate a variety of active ground floor uses?
 - *85% of respondents responded Yes; 5% of respondents responded No; 10% of respondents responded No Opinion*
3. Do 4-6 story building heights seem appropriate in the core?
 - *90% of respondents responded Yes; 10% of respondents responded No*

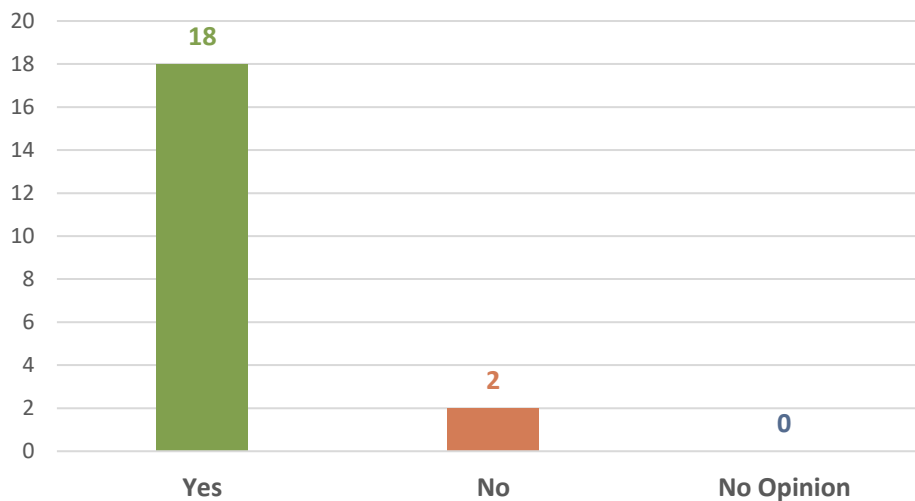
1. Does prioritizing the most active uses / frontages around Watsonville Plaza make sense?



2. Do you agree with the code requiring flexible frontages to accommodate a variety of active ground floor uses?



3. Do 4-6 story building heights seem appropriate in the core?



Jasmine closed the poll after providing the group with a few minutes to cast their responses. After closing the poll, Jasmine shared and read the results to the group. Simran followed the poll results by opening the floor to discussion.

- How tall is the Civic Plaza building?
 - It's a tall 4 story - current height limit is 75 feet in CCA

- 4-6 story buildings are appropriate, and a taller building could be suitable. Height limits may change with invoking of affordable housing legislation (three stories over a local jurisdiction's height limits through invoking Density Bonus Law)
- I like the examples that show residents on the first floor. Safety is a concern for first floor residential.
- What is the vision for parking in the downtown area given these types of uses and accommodating them?
 - *Shared parking district and parking ratios are being explored.*
- Open storefront concept will activate spaces, current downtown has closed off spaces.
- Is there an obligation for new buildings to do housing? And that you can go three stories higher if you provide affordable housing?
 - *The intent is to not require certain types of uses. Residential would be allowed in most parts of the Specific Plan. There is no requirement, but there will be an allowance for it.*

Flex Downtown Neighborhoods (Built Form & Urban Character): Following the first poll and questions/comments, Peter continued his presentation and introduced concepts that are envisioned for the Downtown Flex Neighborhoods. Peter discussed creating a flexible mixed-use neighborhood that would have its own distinct neighborhood character, neighborhood-scale buildings, and “context-aware”/compatibility standards. His presentation provided visual examples for neighborhood-scale building types such as:

- Small-Lot/Side Yard House (15 Dwelling Units/Acre)
- Multi Plex (4-8 Dwelling Units/Acre)
- Attached/Rowhouse (20-25 Dwelling Units/Acre)
- Courtyard Housing- Surface Parked (20-25 Dwelling Units/Acre)
- Walkup Apartments (25-35 Dwelling Units/Acre)

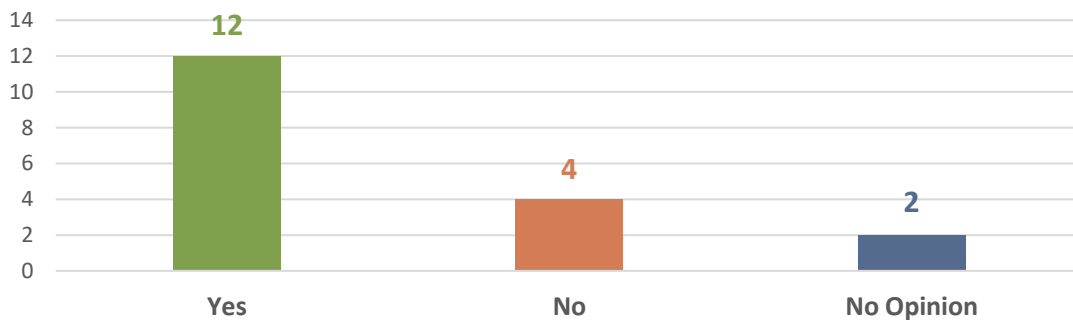
Comment/Questions & Poll Question #2 for AC Members & Public

Simran followed Peters presentation by asking the group if they had any questions on the presentation materials and Jasmine opened the second group poll. Not all attendees answered every question. The Advisory Committee and public were asked the following three questions.

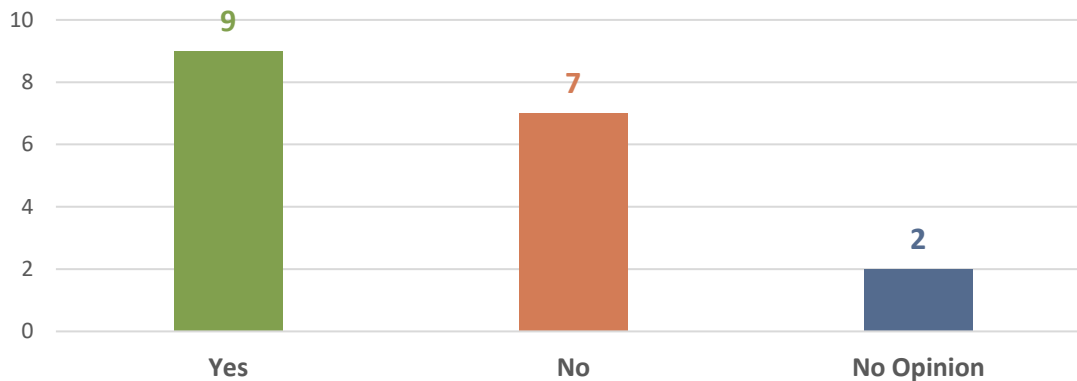
1. Does it seem appropriate to treat the Flex Neighborhoods as a single zone with a very flexible mix of uses and housing types in this zone?

- 67% of respondents responded Yes; 22% of respondents responded No; 11% of respondents indicated No Opinion
2. Does it seem appropriate to treat the Flex Neighborhoods as a single zone with a very flexible mix of uses and housing types in this zone?
- 50% of respondents responded Yes; 39% of respondents responded No; 11% of respondents responded No Opinion

1. Does it seem appropriate to treat the Flex Neighborhoods as a single zone with a very flexible mix of uses and housing types in this zone?



2. Does the approach of neighborhood-scale building types in this area seem logical? Building heights could range from 2-4 stories, but the code would provide compatibility standards to ensure building scale is appropriate based on immediate context.



Jasmine closed the poll after providing the group with a few minutes to cast their responses. Upon closing the poll, Jasmine shared and read the results to the group. Simran followed the poll results by opening the floor to discussion.

- Be careful when we talk about scale. Yes, we need to consider the scale of residential neighborhoods but projects within a block or two of downtown may be transitioning to larger, dense housing. There is currently lots of pressure to build due to RHNA.¹ We may not have the amount of housing that is needed if we look at lower scales of housing.
- Even lower density residential can accommodate 3 stories. I can't see anywhere being limited reasonably to lower than 3 stories. One person's "inappropriate transition" can be another person's "inappropriately low existing density." CLT (Cross Laminated Timber) is now wood construction for up to 15 stories.
- Is there a reason not to go higher considering the housing crisis (7,000 unit need immediately)?
 - *Construction type of building changes as you go up (wood to frame)- buildings become more expensive and due to costs in Watsonville that type of construction is less feasible.*
 - *However, construction is changing and may be feasible in the future.*
 - *This is a good point of discussion, maybe the code should be allowing for greater heights especially if there is the feasibility for it.*
- Even with Density Bonus you can go taller, but you may not want to go taller. I cannot see 8-9 story buildings in downtown Watsonville. The height question deserves conversation among staff.
- Height is ok, but code compatibility standards don't work as they are subjective.
- How does more than 6 stories affect sunlight in the area?
- Compatibility is worthwhile but we need to have options open for developers to build at a greater height to meet these numbers.
- Please have the community in mind before developers.
- A building height increase results in an increase in cost. Conflict exists between the cost in construction and amount of units/cost of rent. There needs to be a balance between the cost

¹ RHNA stands for the "Regional Housing Needs Allocation" that is assigned to the City. It is based in large part on population growth projections and housing demand, and represents the City's share for providing needed housing in the AMBAG region.

of construction of what units will be rented for. What is the expectation of the city, consultant, and community members regarding what the rent will be?

- *This is a good point; cost of construction does drive the cost of the units.*
Construction is changing and we should not limit ourselves to how things are now.
Height can impact the feasibility of the project.

- We shouldn't forget that we need all levels of affordable housing including market rate housing.
- I understand that single-family residential is slowly going away and that changes are happening to housing.
- Let's not forget about the Safe Streets program to make sure PVUSD students can safely walk to Radcliffe, Mintie White, E.A Hall, and Watsonville High School. Also consider the charter schools such as Ceiba and the new Charter school at the Gottschalk's building.
 - *Great comment and needed. This should also include the children attending Navigator's Watsonville prep.*

Workplace/Industrial: After Simran wrapped up the second poll discussion, Peter continued his presentation focused on the Workplace/Industrial character area. Peter explained that the team was hoping to confirm the priorities for this area which included preserving existing industrial uses, providing guidelines for adaptive reuse, enabling infill development, and incorporating tactical public realm improvements. Peter provided some additional clarification on each of the priorities. He stated that new or industrial residential uses would be subject to review to prevent the unintended displacement of businesses. He also shared that a variety of new uses could re-use structures while businesses could contribute to tactical public realm improvements that create a unique district. Peter concluded his presentation by suggesting that infill development in this area could help bring new uses to vacant or underutilized parcels, especially near existing and potential multi-modal connection being discussed for this area.

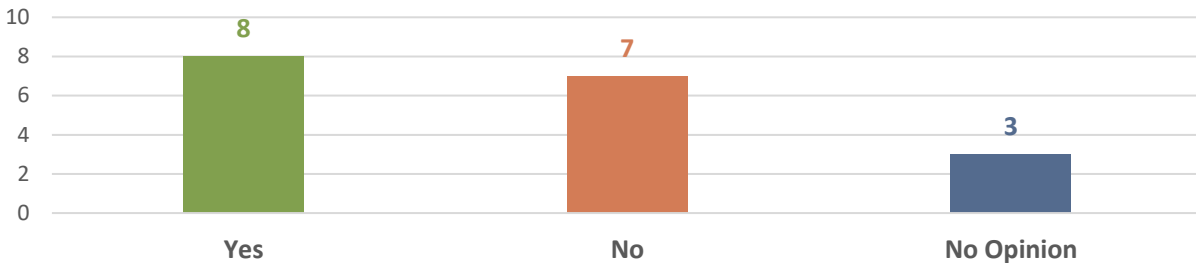
Comment/Questions & Poll Question #3 for AC Members & Public

Simran followed Peters presentation by asking the group if they had any questions on the presentation materials and Jasmine opened the third and final group poll. The following four questions about the Workplace/Industrial area were asked.

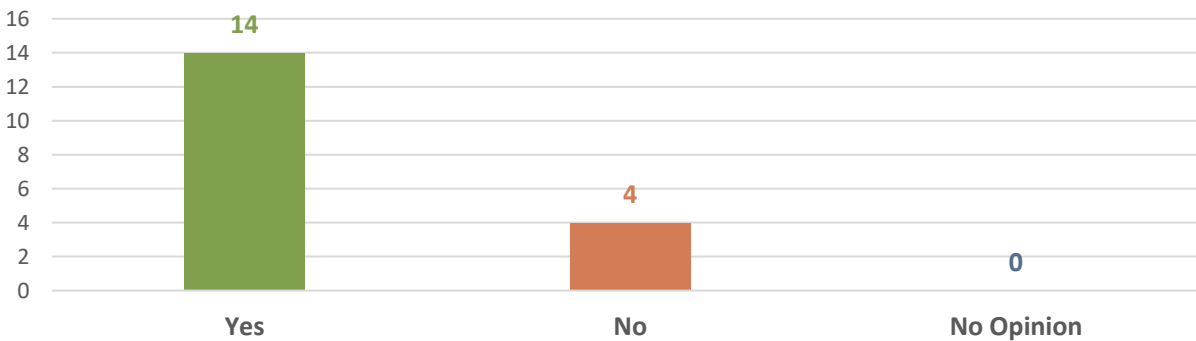
1. Preserve existing industrial / workplace uses?
 - *44% of respondents responded Yes; 39% of respondents responded No; 17% of respondents responded No Opinion*

2. Preserve existing buildings / adaptive re-use?
 - 78% of respondents responded Yes; 22% of respondents responded No
3. Encourage new / additional uses?
 - 78% of respondents responded Yes; 22% of respondents responded No
4. If you answered yes to Q3, indicate which new / additional uses should be allowed:
 - 72% of respondents chose Light Industrial Uses
 - 72% of respondents chose Flex/R&D Uses
 - 44% of respondents chose Logistics Uses
 - 89% of respondents chose Other/ Downtown Supportive Uses (e.g., Coffee Roasting, Bakeries, Brewing/Distilleries, Fresh Food Processing)

1. Preserve existing industrial / workplace uses?



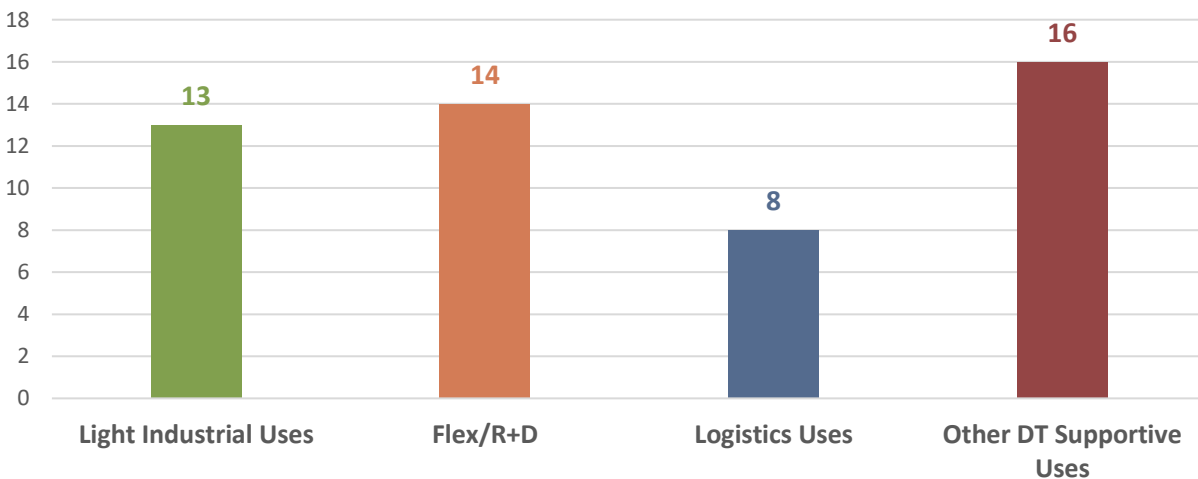
2. Preserve existing buildings / adaptive re-use?



3. Encourage new / additional uses?



4. If you answered "yes" to "3", which new/additional uses should be allowed: (check all that apply)



Jasmine closed the poll after providing the group with a few minutes to cast their responses. After closing the poll, Jasmine shared and read the results to the group. Simran followed the poll results by opening the floor to discussion.

- Answered yes, to preserve industrial to make sure that jobs are kept. If they go vacant then yes, there should be new and additional uses.
- We need to be mindful of jobs and housing balance.
- Should the future of this area just be limited to jobs, or should we encourage residential here?
 - *If you take the employers out of the area and put residents there, then how will the residents pay rent? The area needs the employment first.*
 - *Prefer to see residential in flex areas first.*
 - *We should be expanding out from the core but anything half a mile from the bus station should be considered for housing especially with more funding opportunities.*

- *This comes down to needing that rail. Yes, we need jobs, and the reality is that they don't exist, and that people are commuting to work. Housing needs to be the priority because of the housing crisis. We need that flexibility because some people are counting on that rail to get to work. Conversation seems premature because we don't know if rail is coming. We need flexibility.*
 - *Perhaps it makes sense to explore allowing uses contingent on the rail line.*
- Older industrial buildings need to be used for new housing. If this area is going to be mixed-use, we must invite different types of businesses that will be compatible with higher density housing. We cannot put high noise uses next to multifamily housing.
- Speed bumps like Bridge St. would be better for Walker and Rodriguez/Second St.
- Lots of conflicting information regarding rail trail, which go along Walker Street. If that becomes a major corridor for people, it is just a block or two from the bus station. This could be a major transportation hub. You could bring jobs to this area. If there is housing nearby, it may make sense. We need flexibility in planning for the transit line to become a reality and need to plan for that.
- I don't want to see businesses pushed out or moved. However, vacant business should be filled with more opportunities (jobs & mixed-use of restaurants for people working) and if safe more housing.
- Is there interest for businesses to move into this area or is this an empty space and this is just being proposed?
 - *Nothing is being proposed at this time but we're thinking ahead if something does get proposed.*
- If Walker becomes a major corridor to move people, it is just a block or two to the bus station and it could be a major transportation core which ties back to the jobs and the opportunity for more jobs.
- As the town grows, they will need support services (e.g., food, retail, shops).
- If properties are rezoned that does not mean the use will go in. It is up to property owners to make changes for new uses.
- Existing industrial property owners will make the changes based on the market.
- Supports seeing nonprofits downtown as assets.

Public Comments

Members of the public were given the opportunity to share any additional thoughts or comments on the material presented thus far. Three community members provided public comment. These comments are summarized below:

- Thank you for keeping the meeting accessible and via Zoom. Also, thank you for allowing the community to participate and speak for more than 2 minutes at the end.
- I appreciate the hard work. Beautifying Watsonville and the housing crisis should be prioritized over jobs. The whole state is a bedroom state. Maybe we could do more research on the impact of building upwards. The rail would be a great opportunity to move residents around and alleviate congestion and pollution.
- We need more trees (e.g., fruit trees) to help with the environment, wildlife, and shade.

Wrap-up and Next Steps

Simran closed the meeting, offering next steps. She shared that the consultant team will be bringing back revised recommendations to the AC at some point this year. Additionally, she mentioned that the consultant team would be providing more details about the street environment, bike network, policies about housing (e.g., anti-displacement and affordability). Last, Simran and Justin shared that a draft of the Specific Plan is expected for Spring 2022. The draft will come to the Advisory Committee for their review first and then will be taken to City Council by the end of 2022.

Meeting Adjourned at 8:00 pm

Relevant Meeting Links

Project Website:

- www.cityofwatsonville.org/1626/Downtown-Specific-Plan

Advisory Committee Meeting #5 Agenda:

- <https://www.cityofwatsonville.org/DocumentCenter/View/17311/DWSP-Advisory-Committee-Mtg-5-Agenda-10-6-21>

Advisory Committee Meeting #5 Full Presentation:

- <https://www.cityofwatsonville.org/DocumentCenter/View/17457/DWSP-AC-Mtg-5-Presentation-Slides-10-6-21>

Advisory Committee Meeting #5 Facebook Live Recording

- <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1tTha1ZWVILqM3-QFA9pKn86hzp8PCsOt/viewFinal> Vision

Themes and Guiding Principles:

- www.cityofwatsonville.org/DocumentCenter/View/15529/Vision-Themes-and-Guidng-Principles

Community Survey#2 Summary Memo

- <https://www.cityofwatsonville.org/DocumentCenter/View/17382/Survey-2-Summary-7-7-21>