

Advisory Committee Meeting #7

April 14, 2021

Summary Notes

Meeting Objectives

- Updates on project progress
- Learn about the Downtown Watsonville Specific Plan's mobility and parking recommendations
- Discuss the recommendations

Attendees

Advisory Committee Members

- **Present (7):** Jane Barr, Aurelio Gonzalez, Neva Hansen, Carmen Herrera Mansur, Jenni Veitch-Olson, Sylvia Luna, and Andrew Ow
- **Absent (11):** Eduardo Cervantes, Gina Cole, Maria Elena De la Garza, Francisco (Paco) Estrada- Councilmember, Felipe Hernandez, Sal Orozco, Ben Ow, Manuel Rodriguez, Shaz Roth, Brian Spector, and Tony Scurich

City Staff

Suzi Merriam (CDD Director), Justin Meek (Principal Planner), Sarah Wikle (Associate Planner), Elena Ortiz (Administrative Analyst), and Angelica Jauregui (Interpreter)

Consultant Team

- Simran Malhotra and Jasmine Williams, Raimi + Associates
- Meghan Weir and Zachary Zabel, Nelson Nygaard

Total Meeting Attendees

- 44

Introduction and Welcome

Simran Malhotra, Project Consultant, welcomed the Advisory Committee (AC) members and began by providing a brief overview of zoom tools such as mute/unmute, raise hand, and live Spanish interpretation features. She also mentioned that the meeting was being recorded and live streamed on Facebook in addition to sharing a contact email in case any attendees had technical issues during the meeting. Roll call was not taken on the call; however, the project team recorded meeting attendance. Simran introduced the consultant team and Justin Meek, City of Watsonville (City) Principal Planner, introduced City Staff who were in attendance. Justin followed by discussing past AC efforts since the start of the project and mentioned that there are two final meetings before the project concludes in the summer of this year. Justin explained that the meeting's focus would be on the topic of mobility and parking and that feedback would be used to refine the mobility chapter of the Specific Plan.

Simran followed with a reminder of the project vision and guiding principles, an overview of the meeting agenda, Specific Plan process, and where the team is currently at in the project. She shared details of past planning and engagement efforts, recent and ongoing efforts (e.g., Big Ideas for Downtown, Character Areas, Public Realm Design Refinements, Caltrans Updates, and drafting of the Specific Plan), and what efforts the consultant team intends to complete before the end of the project.

Mobility In Watsonville

Zachary Zabel kicked-off a six-part presentation intended to discuss mobility in Watsonville. The segments included an explanation of the mobility framework, where we are, what we heard from the community, model priorities, network recommendations, design concepts, and parking and curb management.

Mobility Framework:

Zachary presented on background information and mobility in Watsonville and set the stage with the framework which covered:

- Transportation in the Specific Plan Area
- Mobility Themes
- Mobility Goals
- Mobility Foundation

Following the mobility framework, Zachary transitioned into a discussion about what the project team has heard since the beginning of the DWSP planning process. He mentioned that these were the thoughts and opinions of the Watsonville community and that they required understanding to help frame the discussion clearly and honestly.

What We Heard:

Zachary shared that the project team has been listening to the community throughout the planning process and that he would be reflecting what members of the community had shared about mobility in Watsonville. Comments included:

- Building on and extending Downtown's walkable scale
- Providing streetscape improvements such as additional lighting, shaded sidewalks, and plantings
- Improving bicycle and pedestrian connectivity and safety
- Addressing traffic speed and congestion
- Creating an all ages and abilities bicycle network
- Increasing the separation between people walking, biking, and motor vehicles
- Finding opportunities to expand the public realm (e.g., outdoor dining, parklets, and paseos)

Modal Priorities:

Zachary transitioned into an explanation of modal priorities by sharing a graphic that represented how the community can distill achieving the goals previously discussed by prioritizing streets to move people as opposed to motor vehicles. Zachary explained that the plan recognized these priorities by recommending a transportation system that balances the need of different types of travel and focuses on the things that will improve the overall experience within the Plan Area. Zachary shared a glimpse into the structure of the mobility chapter and guidelines which will provide technical guidance and specifications for some of the features in the design concepts, as well as ensure that new development in the downtown also improves the way that everyone can get around. The downtown multimodal network is intended to create prioritized spaces and networks for people who walk, bike, and take transit by:

- Installing improvements to enhance pedestrian safety and access, bicycle connectivity, and revitalizing the Downtown streetscape.
- Providing bicycle infrastructure that connects Downtown to key locations and provides a low stress environment for bicycle riding.

- Providing widened and more comfortable sidewalks for walking.
- Improving intersections to reduce crossing distances and increase visibility between different modes.

Questions from AC Members & Public

Following this segment of the presentation, the following questions/comments were raised by AC members and the public.

- What will these improvements do to emergency vehicle travel?
 - *These improvements are expected to keep flow as efficient as possible for emergency vehicles. Changing the lane configuration of Main Street from four to three with a center running turn lane and one lane in each direction simplifies potential conflict points, such as turning movements at intersections, and reduces vehicle pausing on inside and outside lanes, which results in traffic flowing more efficiently and in a calmer manner. (This simultaneously makes the street safer for pedestrian by reducing the crossing distance, enhancing visibility, and eliminating potential conflicts.)*

Network Recommendations:

Following the question segment, Meghan Weir described the network recommendations that will be part of the Downtown Watsonville Specific Plan. Meghan explained that there were three key network changes being put forward by the plan:

- Converting E Lake Avenue and E Beach Street, which currently operate as one-way couplets, into two-way streets.
- Reducing the number of travel lanes for Main Street from four to three with a center running left turn lane and one lane in each direction.
- Squaring off the connection between Union Street and Alexander Street from E Lake Avenue to E Beach Street and converting that portion of Union Street for private development.

Meghan also focused attention on a variety of improvements specific to the pedestrian network, which is expected to expand pedestrian connections, improve crossings, and generally make the entire Downtown district more inviting and comfortable for people walking. These include:

- Wider sidewalks or parklets where possible **to expand the pedestrian realm**
- Intersection improvements like direct accessible ramps and curb extensions
- Crossing improvements like new signal timing to give pedestrians a head-start before cars start turning
- Sidewalk lighting rather than highway-scale street lighting

- An expanded network of paseos - so pedestrians can cut across blocks and enjoy a smaller scale space free of cars

To conclude the network recommendations segment, Meghan identified some recommended bike network improvements throughout the Downtown area. The improvements include:

- Incorporating new facilities to fill in east/west gaps and add more north/south connections east of Main Street. These allow for more convenient, safe, and comfortable travel by bicycle to key destinations.
- Designing bicycle facilities beyond minimum acceptable widths to create a safe and inviting bicycle network for people of all ages and abilities and to reduce potential conflicts between bicyclists and motorists.
- Minimizing impacts on residential parking by enhancing the bicycle network.

Questions from AC Members & Public

Following the presentation, the following questions/comments were raised by AC members and the public.

- There is a concern about traffic safety in the Downtown. Specifically, about cars going through red lights. Will the Specific Plan address redlight cameras? And what is their legality?
 - *The Specific Plan is focused more on physical change, programs, and development policies. However, there is room to identify those priorities within the guidelines. Red light cameras are seen more as enforcement. Vision Zero is focused on pedestrian and bicycle safety as a city-wide scale so that would be an appropriate forum for further investigation. The Downtown Specific Plan can refer to the importance of Vision Zero in the downtown.*
- The plan is to introduce traffic calming on Main Street and what is the impact to other streets like Walker Street?
 - *Traffic calming doesn't always translate to lower volume as the emphasis is on creating a street design that by default enforces better speed control, resulting in slower, more careful, and more predictable traffic flow. This doesn't mean the capacity will be significantly altered. Post-road diet studies show that there are little volume changes (i.e., additional traffic) on surrounding streets. The intention is not to push cars off Main Street. It is also important to note that the traffic calming recommendations are being provided in the DWSP for a variety of streets dependent on street types, which could also be applied to other surrounding neighborhood streets.*

- How will we address bicycle education because many people do not know how to use the streets to bike?
 - *Education could be addressed as a priority or guideline and backed up by other programs the city has in place. The team will make a note as a policy idea to include more robust ideas for education (ideally at a city-wide scale) and integration into safe routes to school.*
- How do you treat locations where there are both bulb-outs and bike lanes?
 - *We don't get into the design specificity in this plan but there are some real good design interventions and best practices; there is more emphasis on bulb-outs on wide streets which won't have bike lanes. Streets with bike lanes will have other traffic calming measures.*
- What is the discussion with Caltrans?
 - *We have had preliminary conversations with Caltrans. There has been interest in the plan recommendations including changes in lane configurations (i.e., from four to three) and enhancement for pedestrians. This is a potential for making changes, with the State taking this on, but it would be designed, built, and funded by Caltrans. This represents a large cost savings to Watsonville.*
- What is the timing?
 - *They have different programs and cycles for identifying, planning, designing, funding, and installing them. For example, this could be a SHOPP project in the next cycle (which could be years out). However, the timing is reasonable and having this in the plan puts it on the record and makes sure that Caltrans is supportive and potentially prioritizes this change; the advantage is that it's a Caltrans street and is consistent with their priorities regarding creating multi-modal corridors^{1,2} and complete streets^{3,4} and reducing greenhouse gas emissions, in accordance with State mandates.⁵ The*

¹ Caltrans website: Multi-Modal System Planning Guidelines and Procedure, <https://dot.ca.gov/programs/transportation-planning/multi-modal-system-planning/guidelines-procedures>

² Corridor Planning Process Guide (Caltrans Division of Transportation Planning, February 2020), <https://dot.ca.gov/-/media/dot-media/programs/transportation-planning/documents/system-planning/systemplanning/corridor-planning-process-guide-12-24-2019-a11y.pdf>

³ Caltrans to require “Complete Streets” features in planning and design of all new projects, <https://dot.ca.gov/news-releases/news-release-2021-039>

⁴ Caltrans Director’s Policy DP-37: Complete Streets (effective date 12/7/2021), <https://dot.ca.gov/-/media/dot-media/programs/sustainability/documents/dp-37-complete-streets-a11y.pdf>

⁵ Caltrans website: driving down greenhouse gas levels, <https://dot.ca.gov/programs/public-affairs/mile-marker/summer-2021/ghg>
Downtown Watsonville Specific Plan

work that the community has done is important, because if we weren't doing what we're doing this now, then Caltrans likely wouldn't be coming to the table. It has allowed Caltrans to go to the State to say, "We want to support Watsonville in implementing these changes to their Main Street." Having a process that is backed by engagement carries weight and also makes it easier to secure funding.

- What about the alignment on Alexander and Union and providing adequate emergency response?
 - *This should provide the same level of connectivity for emergency vehicles, but it may just be an extra turn at a zig zag.*
- What will be done to create effective bike lanes on narrow streets?
 - *Traffic calming will help to make bike facilities on narrow streets feel safe.*

Design Concepts

Meghan continued the presentation by explaining that the team had developed sample cross sections to illustrate what the various types of bicycle facilities could look like on a range of different Downtown streets. Meghan provided improvement explanations for each of the following design concepts:

- *Main Street (E Lake Avenue to E Beach Street)*
 - Changing the total number of travel lanes from four to three, with a center running left turn lane and one lane in each direction,
 - Reallocating the additional right-of-way to expand the sidewalk furniture zone with on-street parklets and streetscaping adjacent to on-street parking.
 - Curb extensions at intersections and midblock crossings to further improve the crossing for people on foot.
- *E Lake Avenue (at Main Street Intersection)*
 - Allows Lake Avenue to function as a more locally serving street.
 - Shortens crossing distance.
 - Maintains on-street parking where necessary, especially on residential frontage.
 - Provides space for a turn pocket at intersections to keep traffic operations smooth.
- *E Beach Street (Main Street & Union Street)*
 - Allows Beach Street to function as a more locally serving street.
 - Shortens crossing distance at intersections.
 - Adds space for parklets on the north side to expand the sidewalk zone.
 - Maintains on-street parking where necessary.
- *Rodriguez Street (W Lake Avenue to W Beach Street)*

- Simplify the lane configuration at the intersection for a consistent one lane in each direction (continuous from south of Beach Street and further north).
- The additional space accommodates buffered bike lanes.
- Maintain existing ROW and vehicle lane widths.
- Increase northbound bicycle lane from 4" to 6", which is consistent with current design standards.
- Increase east side buffer from 2" to 3" and add vertical separation such as planters.
- Add 3' to west side buffer with flexible posts.
- *Union Street (Maple Avenue and Grant)*
 - Traffic calming elements to create a more inviting shared space for people walking and riding bikes.
 - The City has been awarded transportation funding to install corner curb extensions along Union Street and Brennan Street, which is planned for construction in 2024.
 - Class III sharrows with signage
 - Chicanes with planter boxes placed at midblock locations, designed to minimize impacts to on-street parking.
 - Maintain existing ROW.
 - Maintain vehicle lane widths.
 - Minimize impacts to on-street parking.
- *Walker Street (Lake Avenue to Beach Street)*
 - Enhancing existing bike lane buffers with vertical delineators to further separate vehicular traffic from bicyclists.
 - Bicycle and pedestrian path connecting the Downtown to Watsonville Slough Wetlands and a future trail to Pajaro Valley High School. (Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail Network Master Plan).
 - Additional feasibility and concept development will be necessary to define the proposed rail trail cross section on Walker Street south of W Beach Street.
- *Paseos and Sidewalk Zones*
 - Paseos are the pedestrian-only paths that cut through downtown blocks. Acting as narrow alleyways, they can be highlighted as a pedestrian spaces and part of a more complete network.
 - Sidewalk zones keep room for frontage, through path of travel, and furniture.

- Additional parklet space adjacent to curb would function as an extension of the furniture zone

Questions from AC Members & Public

Following Meghan's presentation, Simran asked the group if they had any questions for the project team. The following questions/comments were raised by AC members and the public.

- I like the traffic calming and connecting bike lanes but was wondering how public transportation like metro bus was considered? Also, on one-lane roads on Main Street, will the buses stopping for passengers be an issue?
 - *The bus system is not working at the capacity where it would be a significant issue. It's functional for busier streets to have in-lane loading. Expanding sidewalk zone helps. If buses consistently have bus stops at the far side of the intersection it can simplify the mixing. A lot can be done to minimize conflict.*
- Can someone define "Bulb Out"?
 - *A bulb out is an extension of the sidewalk at an intersection, these serve to shorten crossing distance for pedestrians.*
- The rail-trail (Monterey Bay Scenic Trail) currently being built should go a long way to help improve safe travel in the area.

Parking and Travel Management

Zachary began the last segment by sharing information about the existing parking system downtown. He explained that previous analysis has revealed nearly all parking facilities within Downtown are significantly underutilized. This indicates that the parking system would be supportive of redevelopment at key opportunity sites on existing surface parking lots and that future parking demand can be met through the more efficient use and sharing of existing supply before investing in new public supply or requiring construction of more spaces as part of new development.

Zachary also explained that the plan would help to find the right-size parking for the Downtown district. He continued to explain that the parking recommendations in the Specific Plan move forward these previous findings by proposing an expansion of the parking district across the specific plan area and providing lower minimum parking requirements for new residential developments. Zachary concluded by explaining the intent of curb management is to minimize conflicts between operators of ride hailing vehicles, commercial freight, and e-commerce deliveries without compromising the safety of people walking and biking. Strategies of the plan include curb-side flexible parking zones, guidelines for off-

street truck loading, consolidation of deliveries through parcel pick-up locations, the use of data to monitor use in real-time, updated guidance on on-street parking time limits, demand-based pricing, signage, and wayfinding.

Questions & Discussion from AC Members & Public

Following Zachary's presentation, he opened the floor for questions discussion about the potential mobility and parking solutions applicable to the downtown. The AC members and public used this time to express their sentiments verbally or in the chat. The following summarizes the comments received during the meeting:

- To clarify, are W Lake and Beach becoming all 2-way?
 - *As one of the recommendations of the SP would be to convert East Lake Avenue and East Beach Street from 1-way to 2-way, the portion of West Lake Avenue that is currently 1-way would also need to be converted to 2-way.*
- Can you please outline what the new recommended lower minimum parking requirements for new residential projects will be?
 - *Those are still being finalized. Those new ratios would impact multifamily new residential focused on the ratio that is supplied by the number of units in the project. Right now, its 2 spaces for a unit. What we have set will allow for an average of 1.4 spaces if you look at a building with a portfolio of mixed unit sizes.*
- Is the recommendation to expand the parking district to the entire Downtown district?
 - *Yes, the DT parking district has been around for several decades and expanded several times. We are recommending expanding the parking district to the Downtown Specific Plan Area.*
- Can we assume the parking requirements will be dictated by the city and state? Will the city oversee these?
 - *The Specific Plan will establish reduced ratios for different types of development, additionally when they use the state density bonus, they can achieve additional reductions.*
- Please define TDM.
 - *TDM stand for Transportation Demand Management. Programmatically, this can include TMA, educational programs, commute trip coordination's, giving out materials at occupancy stage to encourage mode shift behavior.*
- How can we get buy in from residents that have multiple cars in a household?

- *The goal of the Specific Plan is to increase options for residents so they aren't always dependent on vehicles. This can over time change behavior, this is not an overnight shift. Additionally, with the amount of surplus parking there is an opportunity for shared parking agreements or permits that would let them park on site.*
- Could you give us an idea for how long it will take a plan like this to be implemented?
 - *Timing is challenging, due to coordination with Caltrans and the State.*
- Once the plan is done what is the recommendation to make it available to the public?
 - *The team is working on the Specific Plan document and by June we will have a public draft for the public to review and provide comments; we'll also have a community workshop; we'll make changes following that and then take the plan to the Planning Commission and City Council later in the fall. The EIR which evaluated the environmental impacts will be drafted with the plan. The adopted plan is expected by the end of this year.*
 - *The city is also working on a city-wide wayfinding program, survey that community members can currently participate in*

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSefm27rgvprnE_J2xz9khi6LsU_90HKAnLOLIxcxMJM6GjNig/viewform
- I am supportive of the two-way conversion on Lake/Beach and the road diet on Main Street; I also support all increased bike amenities such as the bike repair stations.
- It's great that the plan is thinking of all different ages and stages.
- Paseos and sidewalk zones are important because of our big blocks and some of the alleys aren't accessible, and areas are closed off.
- Shared parking is important because a lot of people have several cars, with people building additional units and adding units to homes, people are having to walk farther.

Public Comments

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

- We should be hopeful the state money for grants funding transportation- some commuter rail specific. I want to see how the rail trail fits in with the three segments being approved
- We must watch and make sure funding goes through. There is something on the ballot that would take away access to rail on the corridor. People are encouraged to study up on Measure D. It could harm the potential of rail and trail in the future.

- Thank you for keeping this online and keeping them accessible.
- Are there other uses aside from apartments that could be introduced along Alexander that could support the downtown area?
 - We've previously discussed a concept behind Plaza Vigil. The Specific Plan isn't defining what happens it just suggests something "like" multi-family might be built. The concept also includes public space in the form of plazas, paseos and courtyards.
- We must be very aware that we don't reduce the parking ratios too much because this a demand on alternative parking space will put a burden on the city parking lots. We must be aware that the state density bonus requirements are higher.
- We might also consider a possible future in which emerging electric bike and on-demand autonomous vehicle technologies radically reduce car ownership.

Wrap-up and Next Steps

Simran closed the meeting, by thanking the Advisory Committee and the public for their time, effort, comments, and questions. She shared that the consultant team will be in touch with the Advisory Committee in the coming weeks to confirm the next meeting date.

Meeting Adjourned at 8:00 pm

Relevant Meeting Links

Project Website:

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

Advisory Committee Meeting #7 Agenda:

- <https://www.cityofwatsonville.org/DocumentCenter/View/18410/DWSP-Advisory-Committee-Mtg-7-Agenda-4-14-22>

Advisory Committee Meeting #7 Full Presentation:

- <https://www.cityofwatsonville.org/DocumentCenter/View/18513/DWSP-AC-Mtg-7-Presentation-Slides-4-14-2022>

Advisory Committee Meeting #7 Recording:

- https://youtu.be/xwgE705J0_0

City Wayfinding Survey:

- https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSefm27rgvprnE_J2xz9khi6LsU_90HKAnLOLIxcxMJM6GjNig/viewform