

Advisory Committee Meeting #9

July 21, 2022

Summary Notes

Meeting Objectives

- Overview of Draft Specific Plan
- Discuss Public Comments
- Next Steps

Attendees

Advisory Committee Members

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

City Staff

- Rene Mendez (City Manager), Suzi Merriam (CDD Director), Justin Meek (Principal Planner), Maria Esther Rodriguez (City Engineer / Assistant Public Works Director), Celia Castro (Permit Technician), Elena Ortiz (Administrative Analyst), and Carlos Landaverry (Housing Manager & Interpreter)

Consultant Team

- Simran Malhotra (Principal), and Jasmine Williams (Senior Planner), Raimi + Associates
- Peter VanderWal (Principal), Sargent Town Planning

Total Meeting Attendees

- 32

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 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, followed by introducing city staff and thanking the Advisory Committee for their efforts in planning for Downtown's future.

Specific Plan Context

Simran followed the Introduction with information on the Specific Plan context. She reminded attendees of the purpose and components of a Specific Plan, a review of the Specific Plan Area, an overview of the planning process, and a breakdown of the community engagement efforts for the project. She concluded the section by quickly identifying the plan's structure including associated chapters and appendices in addition to the key objectives of the plan.

- <https://www.cityofwatsonville.org/1626/Downtown-Specific-Plan>

- <https://www.cityofwatsonville.org/DocumentCenter/View/19285/Draft-DWSP-06-24-22>

Public Comments Received

Simran continued by describing some of the public comments collected at the Joint Workshop/AC meeting on June 30, 2022, Online (168 comments from June 30 to July 15, 2022), and via email (10 comment letters). She explained that comments at the Joint Workshop and Advisory Committee Meeting #8 focused on workplace industrial, chicanes, trees, planned Caltrain stop at Pajaro, connections to edges and the Slough trail, the historic depot, seating, nightlife, antique and thrift stores, and EV charging stations. She also mentioned that most online feedback was grouped into the following themes: Land Use, Mobility, Arts & Culture, Streetscape, and Implementation. Last she identified that most email letters focused on climate change, trees, wide sidewalks, bike safety, building height, parking minimums, Mansion House opportunity site, Union Street closure, the Main Street street wall, parking standards, workplace industrial, and the regulatory plan. A comprehensive list of comment can be found using the following links:

- Email Letters: <https://www.cityofwatsonville.org/DocumentCenter/View/19460/Draft-DWSP---Public-Comment-via-Email-7-18-22>
- Online Feedback
 - DWSP Chapters 1-4: <https://bit.ly/3I7krpf>
 - DWSP Chapters 5-8: <https://bit.ly/3ywxzRE>

Topics for Further Discussion

Simran continued by explaining that based on the feedback received, the project team was looking to have further discussions about the following topics before taking the plan to Planning Commission and City Council for review:

Workplace Industrial

Simran continued by stating that most comments received about the Workplace/Industrial character area which were focused on changing the plan to allow all industrial uses, including manufacturing, as a principally permitted use, without an Administrative Use Permit (AUP) or Special Use Permit (SUP).^{1,2} Similarly, feedback suggested reduced frontage requirements, and modifying parking locations. Simran followed by explaining the use table and that the general industrial zone in the city is unchanged and that the frontage standards are generally in line with current setbacks. She mentioned that the team is suggesting modifying the Specific Plan to allow all industrial uses, including manufacturing, as a principally permitted use, without an AUP or SUP, in the Downtown Industrial Zone. Additionally, the plan will add requirements for residential uses to provide additional screening and buffers. Frontage requirements and parking locations will remain unchanged.

Questions & Comments from AC Members & Public

Simran opened the floor for discussion and the following questions/comments were raised by AC members and the public.

- Existing office is allowed as long as it is in conjunction with the industrial use.
 - Yes, *office is an allowed use in the industrial zone. The Downtown Industrial flex is intended to expand that a little and allow flexibility.*
- Many of my tenants (a mix of industrial businesses, such as wood, metal, tea, and coffee) in the area will no longer have a permitted use. Please change the language so manufacturing and heavy industrial is principally permitted. Additionally, new uses need to adapt to existing uses not the other way around.

¹ An AUP is a conditional use permit issued by the Zoning Administrator (WMC § 14-18.230).

² A SUP is a conditional use permit issued by the Planning Commission (WMC § 14-18.234).

- *Yes, we intend to make that change and add requirements for residential uses to add additional screenings and buffers. We will explore if deed restrictions could be added to residential projects to acknowledge presence of adjacent industrial uses. The City will seek legal counsel on this matter.*
- We need to protect industrial uses and limit residential that is adjacent to it.
 - *The team can add policy language on how residential is appropriately integrated.*

Regulatory Plan (Use List)

Simran continued the presentation and highlighted feedback about allowing thrift stores, antique stores, and art galleries everywhere in the Downtown. She started by providing clarification of the definition of “Antique Shop” and “Thrift Store” to clarify any confusion and was supported by Peter, who explained that to create an active Downtown, it was important to define metrics that help evaluate uses appropriate for a downtown. Simran continued and explained that existing thrift stores and antique stores are permitted to remain, new thrift stores and antique stores are allowed in Downtown Neighborhood and Downtown Industrial zones, and art galleries fall under general retail and are permitted everywhere in downtown. She stated that the team recommended “no changes” to this section.

Questions from AC Members & Public

Following the regulatory plan presentation about antique store, thrift shops and art galleries, the following questions/comments were raised by AC members and the public.

- Mixed income populations depend on these uses. I think side streets should accommodate them but not Main Street.
 - *Please also note that these uses will still be allowed in other parts of the city.*
- The market will dictate how many antique and thrift stores should be located in downtown.
- If we continue these uses it won’t bring us forward with business diversity and entertainment uses. Avoid doing the same thing and offer variety.
- There is a market for new uses to come into downtown, however some of these thrift store uses become the deterrent. Please protect our Main Street.
- I’m concerned that if these uses aren’t permitted outright, then they go away and will then remain vacant sites. At minimum we should have an AUP and/or SUP.
 - *The code is set up with several dials to build flexibility, this may be worth being calibrated with one of the overlays.*
 - *The plan is forward looking towards change, varied choices, and experiences, and promote economic prosperity and attract new uses (e.g., retail, restaurants, and office).*
- Perhaps they can be regulated like alcohol with a defined distance between them.
- This will significantly constrain low-income business trying to come into the downtown as well as low-income shoppers.
- We’re in a climate and environmental crisis and it seems like prioritizing new retail over reuse is not in line with the climate action goals the city has previously expressed.
- I shop at the thrift stores downtown, but what we need in downtown is whatever use is going to entice people to come to downtown.

Regulatory Plan (Frontage Requirements)

Simran transitioned into a discussion about the overlay and frontage requirements. She shared that the feedback received stated that the Downtown Core & Downtown Industrial standards should be lowered and more flexible, residential and office uses on the ground floor in the Main Street Overlay should be allowed and that vehicle access should be permitted off Main Street. She explained that the Main Street Overlay had a requirement for ground floor active uses and is limited to the Historic core (only 6 block frontages), additionally,

it reflects the vision for an active and vibrant downtown environment which is why the team has recommended “no change”. Similarly, she expressed that the team anticipates “no change” to the frontage requirements and exceptions. She communicated that vehicle access is not allowed in the Main Street Overlay but is allowed in the Gateway Overlay and elsewhere in Downtown and vehicular access is encouraged off alleys. These approaches reflect current City policy. Peter followed with clarification on that there are exceptions (such as forecourts, passages, and paseos) in all the zones.

Questions from AC Members & Public

The following questions/comments were raised by AC members and the public in response to the frontage requirement segment of the regulatory plan presentation:

- Will Main Street be built to 100%?
 - *Yes, the standards for Main Street are to build at 100%.*
- We need more access off of Main Street for parking lots or else they are land locked. Several of the lots on Main Street are not big enough for only rear access.
 - *The intention is to prioritize access in the rear while keeping Main Street a pedestrian environment. To do so, limiting driveways is key, while still encouraging access to happen from other locations to make sure that projects are feasible.*
- I don't agree with allowing residential on Main Street. Once you build residential it will be hard to convert back to residential. I support residential that is not street facing.
 - *Main Street residential would be accompanied with retail ready spaces. “Retail ready” is a retail and housing flexible space that is designed like a retail space so that the ground floor is the same height as retail floors, rather than residential floors. These would be more like live/work loft spaces.*
- Ground floor residential in the Downtown Core will create appearance issues on the ground floor. The current standard doesn't allow it so why add it? Please maintain this as a commercial core not a residential core. The community is saying no residential on the ground floor and the optics won't look good if the plan allows it.
- Allowing residential on the ground floor and then converting it back to retail would create displacement issues in the future.
- We can't predict the future, so I support the plan as it is written. Some of the opportunity site parcels are huge, so there could be shallow retail space(s) with residential behind them.
- When you bring in residents it's also important to bring in needed services. If you're taking the ground floor, then you won't have the space to add those services. It defeats the purpose of the plan.
 - *Housing would be an interim use and wouldn't count towards affordable housing.*
- Live/work spaces for art studios, often multi-use spaces, would be unique to Watsonville. It's worth trying to make Watsonville a draw for artists. There are so many local cultural influences that should be showcased.

Regulatory Plan (Design Standards)

Simran transitioned into a discussion about Design Standards where she explained the comments received. She stated that the feedback asked to loosen requirements for massing increments and façade design, and façade materials. Feedback also suggested modifying shopfronts to allow more business flexibility in addition to the city reducing requirements and allowing for more creating and active design. Simran clarified that the State has

a requirement for Objective Design Standards and for the ministerial review of all residential and mixed-use projects. She also mentioned that there is flexibility built into the Specific Plan design standards by establishing suggested design standards, providing options for how to meet standards, exceptions, and additional discretionary pathways available to the project proponent, if so desired. Simran stated that at this time the project team anticipates “no changes” to this section of the plan.

Regulatory Plan (Building Height)

Simran continued her presentation by explaining the details of the regulatory plan’s building height requirements. She stated that the comments received highlighted that building heights should not be limited to 6 stories in Downtown, especially in the Downtown Core. She addressed the feedback by suggesting that the recommended heights are based on the current market conditions, construction techniques, and Building + Fire Codes. She also explained that the States Density Bonus Law allowed height exemptions for affordable units through incentives and concessions, such as lower threshold requirements to qualify, decreases in the maximum ratio of required vehicular parking, and up to 33 feet or 3 stories near a major transit stop for 100% affordable projects. She concluded by highlighting that the project team recommended “no change.”

Questions from AC Members & Public

The following questions/comments were raised by AC members and the public in response to the design standards and building height segments of the regulatory plan presentation:

- With a 6-story density bonus we would get 9 story buildings or just 5 floors.
- Above 5 stories you’re looking at steel, so construction costs and materials might not pencil out if we go from wood to steel.
- The city building and parking lot is 6 stories. There should be an ability to go higher with an SUP.
- If the community is agreeing to a denser future, we shouldn’t limit it now. If a business wanted to build 8 stories, I think we should support them.
- If you put a 4-9 story building next to a single story one, it might result in a downtown that doesn’t look cohesive. I think 4-5 stories is more of a sweet spot because you also run into parking issues with higher stories.
- A vibrant downtown with plenty of ground floor retail/services could potentially support taller buildings in the future. We need lots of new housing and limiting potential units by imposing relatively low height limits is a wasted opportunity.
 - *The Specific Plan is supposed to be a bridge to a potential future. If a developer approached the city and wanted to build taller buildings, the city would probably entertain it, but the city has yet to be approached with any proposals.*
- If the Specific Plan is to be a bridge to the potential future of a more urban downtown, how about allowing taller buildings and requiring less parking with AUPs and SUPS, instead of hard maximums with no flexibility?

Regulatory Plan (Parking Standards)

Simran continued the presentation by explaining the details of the parking standards. She mentioned that the comments received focused on reducing parking requirements overall and eliminating parking minimums for residential uses. Simran expressed that the parking standards were intended to address some of the neighborhood parking issues by taking a right-sized parking approach in addition to a commercial shared parking approach through the expansion of the Parking District. She also shared that onsite residential parking requirements were already being significantly reduced from current standards. Similarly, she mentioned that new parking spaces will not be required when adaptively reusing a nonresidential building as lofts or another form of housing. Based on the team’s reasoning, Simran stated that “no change” was recommended.

Questions from AC Members & Public

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

- Zero spaces should be required for studios. Please make sure these fits with tax credit.
 - *State law will trump the city requirements and those laws also change regularly.*
- SRO requirement for studios is 0.5. I would split the difference between studios and a 1-bedroom. We want to build a project without a sea of parking. Studios at 0.5 and 1-bedrooms at 1 space. Going to 0.8 would push parking onto the street.
 - *Please keep in mind this plan also requires the unbundling of parking and no guest parking requirements.*
- If we want a walkable and livable downtown, we shouldn't make it car based. I think we should lower requirements by-right or require an AUP or SUP so that we aren't left with a bunch of unused parking down the road.
- We need to be aware that future transportation will be oriented to cars on demand, so we should lean toward less parking rather than more. That will allow more units in each development. I agree on less spaces for studios.

Parklets

Simran briefly expressed that feedback was received in relation to parklets. She stated that the community wanted parklets to be open to all public, not just in association with a business. Simran explained that the Plan will follow the City of Watsonville's Parklet Program which is business sponsored for maintenance purposes. Additionally, she stated that Caltrans has requirements for the public use parklets in their right-of-way. Simran stated that the team recommended "no change."

Historic Resources

Simran transitioned by highlighting questions received during the public review period. She stated that questions such as "Why celebrate history if the past has been discriminatory?" and "Are there any restrictions to what can happen to property if it is designated as historic?." Simran followed by identifying the designated resources in the Plan Area. She highlighted that there were seven (7) Federal, four (4) State, and 10 Local resources. She also identified that there were 75 eligible resources:

- **Tier I resources (58)** are those that have a high degree of historic integrity, and
- **Tier II resources (17)** have less integrity.

She highlighted that there are four Historic Districts proposed in the plan which include the Main Street Commercial District, East Beach Street Residential District, West Beach Street Residential District, and East Beach Street Residential District.

Public Comment

Simran opened the floor for public comments; however, no public comments were raised.

Wrap-up and Next Steps

Simran closed the meeting by identifying that the EIR and technical studies are currently underway, and that the City Council is anticipated to review the Specific Plan sometime in the Fall of 2022 (tentatively scheduled for October 25, 2022). Following next steps, Simran thanked the Advisory Committee and the public for their time, effort, comments, and questions. Simran thanked the Advisory Committee and community members for their feedback over the years which was a symbol of the engaged community which makes for a good plan. Simran handed the floor over to Justin Meek and Suzi Merriam, with the City of Watsonville who thanked everyone for their thorough and agreeable conversation and their two-year dedication to, and passion for downtown.

Final AC Comments

The Advisory Committee provided the following final closing comments:

- Doing a Specific Plan is a lot of work, and the Plan is well done. There are always questions about what should be added or removed, but I want to compliment the city and consultant team on a job well done.
- Great discussion with an emphasis on civility. Thank you for all your efforts.
- Thank you to everyone who participated in this process. Hopefully, this will lead to a great Specific Plan that allows Downtown to grow and thrive.
- Great team leadership from everyone.

Meeting Adjourned at 8:00 pm

Relevant Meeting Links

Project Website:

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

Public Draft Comment Pages

- DWSP Chapters 1-4: <https://bit.ly/3I7krpf>
- DWSP Chapters 5-8: <https://bit.ly/3ywxzRE>
- Appendices: <https://cityofwatsonville.org/DocumentCenter/View/19286/Draft-DWSP-Appendices>

Advisory Committee Meeting #9 Agenda:

- <https://www.cityofwatsonville.org/DocumentCenter/View/19458/DWSP-Advisory-Committee-Mtg-9-Agenda-7-21-22>

Advisory Committee Meeting #9 Full Presentation:

- <https://www.cityofwatsonville.org/DocumentCenter/View/19466/DWSP-AC-Mtg-9-Presentation-Slides-7-21-2022>

Committee Meeting #9 Recording:

- https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Vqlo0lc7SVinVs3E8vkQm9_0a6JAvZ/view