



**CITY OF MARTINEZ**

**CITY COUNCIL AGENDA  
November 9, 2011**

**TO:** Mayor, City Council, and Planning Commission

**FROM:** Susan Moeller, Consultant to Martinez  
Terry Blount, AICP, Planning Manager

**SUBJECT:** General Plan Workshops on Downtown Matters

**DATE:** November 3, 2011

**BACKGROUND:**

The City has been hosting a series of workshops and tours designed to “refresh” the vision and implementation approaches for Downtown Martinez. This series is part of the General Plan Update process and was put together to help identify the choices, trade-offs, priorities, and strategic actions required for the Downtown to prosper in the 21st Century. It was a response to the large number of comments received about Downtown during the first round of community outreach for the Update conducted last fall. The community feels that Downtown is important and that making it a more successful gathering place and commercial center should be a top priority.

The series was kicked off with a tour of Downtown Redwood City June 17<sup>th</sup>. Two workshops were then held June 22<sup>nd</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>. The first workshop focused on examples of suburban downtowns that were in decline and have been revitalized. The second took a look at the new realities that we face in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The second tour, to Livermore and Lodi, took place July 16<sup>th</sup>. The theme of the third workshop, held July 19<sup>th</sup>, was the art and science of placemaking. The final workshop, entitled *Making it Happen: New Opportunities for Downtown Martinez*, was held Tuesday, September 20<sup>th</sup>. Workshop participants engaged in a group consensus building activity aimed at determining what parts of Downtown and the surrounding area were most in need of attention and what the goals should be for those parts of the City. The final part of the workshop included the prioritization of a list of strategic action items that will assist the City and its citizens, property and business owners, and other stakeholders in moving forward.

The primary idea underlying the Downtown Matters workshops and tours was to engage the community in a conversation based upon an informed and educated review of revitalization principles and the new demographic and economic realities facing communities in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. An overview of the entire series follows and includes a brief review of the Downtown Specific Plan. This overview was presented to the General Plan Update Task Force on October 26<sup>th</sup>. A summary of the questions and comments from that meeting (which included community members who had participated in the workshops and tours) is included as Attachment 7 to this report. The entire workshop series was also videotaped and can be viewed on the City’s website. In addition, the workshop series has been running on City Channel 28 several times a week.

## **DOWNTOWN SPECIFIC PLAN:**

The Downtown Specific Plan was adopted by the City in 2006. It is a tool for implementing the General Plan but is not specifically a part of it. A specific plan is a hybrid that can combine policy statements with development regulations. It is often used to address the development requirements for a single project such as urban infill, a planned community, or a specific area such as a downtown. Specific plans must be consistent with all facets of the general plan, including the policy statements. In turn, zoning, subdivisions, and public works projects must be consistent with the specific plan.

The primary focus of the discussion at this joint meeting is on the results of the final Downtown Matters workshop. However, some background information on the Specific Plan is provided below for your information.

### **Specific Plan Area**

The Specific Plan study area covers about 220 acres and is bounded on the north by the Martinez Regional Shoreline and Martinez Waterfront Park; on the east by the Shell Martinez Refinery and a hillside residential area accessed from Miller Avenue; on the south by Susana Street; and on the west by cemeteries, Rankin Park, Talbart and Richardson Avenues, and by Thomas Hill, the bluff to the west of Berrellesa Street.

The Specific Plan study area includes:

- Downtown retail commercial core along Main and Ferry Streets,
- Immediately adjacent service and office commercial areas,
- Nearby service commercial and industrial areas adjacent to the railroad,
- County's civic core along Court Street, and
- Adjacent residential neighborhoods surrounding the above commercial, industrial and civic areas.

### **Specific Plan Purpose**

The purpose of the Downtown Specific Plan is to guide public and private investment to:

- Enhance the quality of life for Martinez residents; and
- Bring back commercial dynamism to the Downtown business area.

These principal goals are complementary and are meant to be mutually reinforcing. Thus the Specific Plan is intended to simultaneously:

- a) *Protect and perpetuate the small-town character and quality of life of Downtown Martinez;* and
- b) *Revitalize its economy by strengthening the Downtown business district as a shopping and dining destination.*

The Specific Plan's focus is to improve the business environment through the creation of potential development opportunities for new residential growth in areas that were previously designated for non-residential uses. The vision is that the new residents would drive demand and increase business opportunities and potential.

This potential for new residential growth (up to approximately 950 new housing units) conforms to the Bay Area Region's planning goals of fostering smart growth and sustainable development

in Downtown Martinez by:

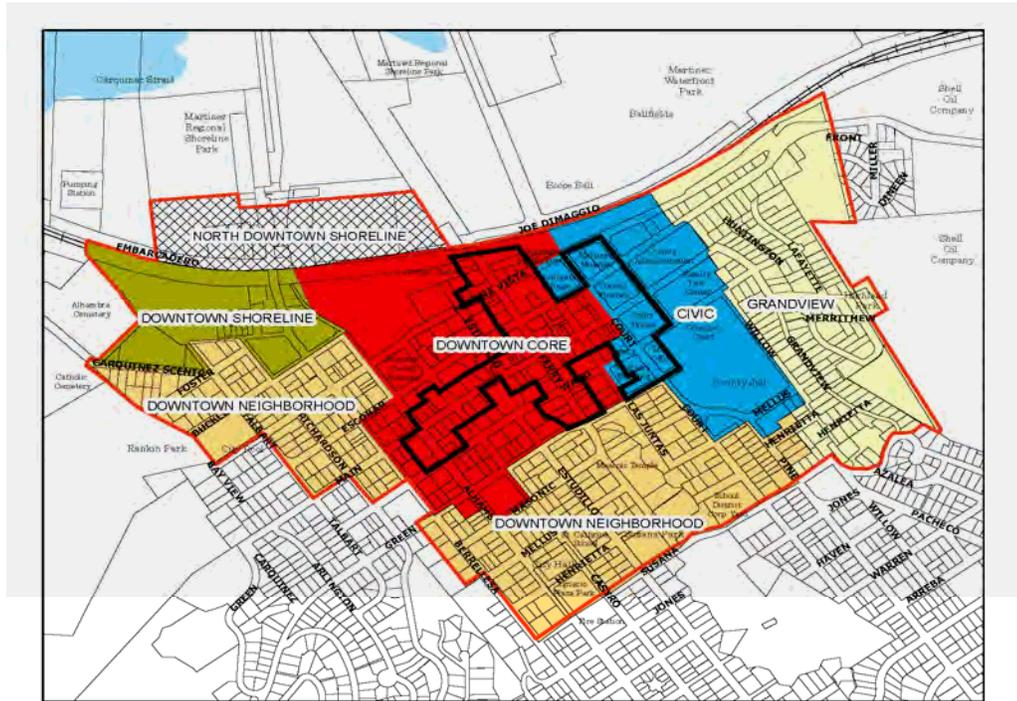
- Providing for compact, pedestrian-oriented development.
- Providing for denser housing within walking distance of transportation centers.
- Taking advantage of existing infrastructure.
- Providing for mixed land uses.
- Requiring attractive, distinctive design for new development.

### **Key Land Use Policies**

The Plan divides the Downtown area into five Land Use Areas and one Overlay District:

- **Downtown Core:** This is the traditional business center of the Downtown area, generally bounded by the railroad to the north, Green Street to the south, Alhambra Avenue to the west and Court Street to the east. The Plan modified prior regulations so that in addition to the existing retail and office uses, the development of ground floor residential development would be possible within this area. Previously, only residential development “above the second story” was possible (the prohibition of ground floor residential development was retained for the retail core with Main and Ferry Street frontages). Residential potential was further increased by increasing the maximum permitted density from 29 units/acre to 43 units/acre, and increasing the maximum permitted height from 30’ to 40’. While increasing the potential for residential development, the existing service commercial uses (mostly auto-oriented) that are north of Main Street nonconforming became nonconforming.
- **Downtown Shoreline:** This industrially developed area is located south of the railroad and west of the Downtown Core. The Plan modified prior regulations so that the existing industrial uses (primarily Telfer Oil) became nonconforming, and the area is now designated for medium to high density residential development (17 units/acre to 29 units/acre). Development standards and Design Review guidelines require *development that is in keeping with the traditional Downtown character*. The City Council’s approval of the 49 unit RCD Senior Housing project (yet unbuilt) is the most significant entitlement enabled by the Specific Plan.
- **Downtown Neighborhood:** This designation covers the established mixed density residential areas immediately to the west and south of the Downtown Core areas. Except for small areas where the allowable density was increased (such as at the 8 unit “Villa del Sol” project, built at the corner of Berrellesa Street and Marina Vista and where maximum permitted density was increased from 29 units /acre to 34 units/acre), development standards were largely unchanged from previous zoning regulations.
- **Civic:** This is the established County Civic Center/Court “campus” around Court and Pine Streets. Beyond extending this mixed use district farther south along Pine Street, the Plan made no substantive change to previous regulations.
- **Grandview:** Grandview is a distinct single family residential neighborhood located at the eastern edge of the Downtown area, located between the Civic area and the Shell Refinery. Generally, the Plan made no substantive change to previous regulations.

The General Plan Land Use designations for the Specific Plan study area are displayed on the attached map (see Attachment 1).



## LAND USE

### Downtown Martinez Specific Plan

- CIVIC - County Offices, Courts, other public uses
- DOWNTOWN CORE - Commercial, Retail, Office and Residential 29-43 Units/Acre
- DOWNTOWN NEIGHBORHOOD - Residential 12-35 Units/Acre
- DOWNTOWN SHORELINE - Residential 17-35 Units/Acre
- GRANDVIEW - Residential 7-17 Units/Acre
- Study Area Boundary
- Downtown Historic Overlay District
- North Downtown Shoreline  
(Not adopted, reserved for future action)



Revised Figure 3-1

### Specific Plan Implementation

Chapter 16 of the Specific Plan provides the framework for implementing the Plan. It includes a variety of specific infrastructure improvements and ongoing programs, known as catalyst projects or catalyst actions that will help achieve the goals and policies of the Plan. Attached is a table that indicates the progress made towards implementing the various measures contained in the Plan as well as a list of completed capital projects in the downtown since 1999 (see Attachment 2).

One of the implementation measures relates to improving the electricity and gas infrastructure. The City received a technical study grant from ABAG. Specifically, the study evaluated the infrastructure requirements for achieving a revitalized Downtown with dense residential, mixed use, and commercial development, as outlined in the Specific Plan. Property owners have indicated that the infrastructure serving Downtown may be insufficient, and in some cases individual property owners have experienced high costs to upgrade the existing infrastructure to accommodate new businesses in the Downtown area. Addressing this possible disincentive to develop in Downtown – in contrast to areas with newer infrastructure – was a key objective of the study.

The study found that sufficient capacity exists for both electricity and natural gas delivery to satisfy existing and projected future demands under the Specific Plan. There is no reason to expect the existing electric and natural gas delivery systems would impede development. The study did however find that there is some deficiency with the existing Alhambra Avenue trunk line, as well as with the line located in Foster Street. Full build-out with the Specific Plan area would require upgrades at these two locations. The executive summary of the study is attached (see Attachment 3).

## **DOWNTOWN MATTERS OVERVIEW**

The overall emphasis consisted of a series of workshops and tours designed to review the fundamentals of successful downtown revitalization and consider what might be the “next steps” for a thriving Downtown Martinez in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Specifically, the series was designed to address the following questions:

- 1) What does the community need to know to move ahead and make the vision for Downtown real?
- 2) What are the fundamentals that make a good downtown?
- 3) How have other communities succeeded in transforming their downtowns?
- 4) Does the vision for Downtown Martinez need to be refreshed? What about the goals and policies in the Downtown Specific Plan?
- 5) How can Martinez realize its potential and sustain community support for making the necessary choices, trade-off s, and decisions to insure Downtown is successful and thrives in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?

The series consisted of four workshops and two tours. The tours included Downtown Redwood City, Livermore, and Lodi. Approximately 25 people attended each tour. Detailed notes from the tours are included as Attachments 4 and 5. The Redwood City tour notes were provided by a member of the General Plan Committee. The Livermore tour notes were provided by Susan Moeller, consultant to Martinez for the Downtown Matters series.

The four workshops are summarized below. The workshops were videotaped and edited versions of the presentations are available for viewing on the City’s website. The workshop videos can also be seen on City Channel 28.

### **Workshop 1**

**Transforming Suburban Downtowns** featured Dan Zack, Downtown Revitalization Coordinator, Redwood City; Greg Tung, Principal, Freedman, Tung + Suzuki, urban designers; and Susan Moeller, former Redevelopment Director of Redwood City and Cathedral City and consultant to Martinez for the “Downtown Matters” workshop series. The presentations

highlighted specific revitalization successes in a number of cities in addition to Redwood City, and featured both large and small scale improvements, public and private. In addition to Redwood City, the cities referenced included Livermore, Claremont, Yuba City, Mountain View, San Leandro, Cathedral City, and Lodi.

The importance of the public realm in creating a sense of place, catalyst projects, maintaining the historic integrity with compatible new development, and incentives for both private investment and activity-generating uses was supported by the discussion of principles to stimulate and guide positive change.

The basic principles or fundamentals of revitalization reviewed included:

- compact clustering and ground-level density of entrances;
- anchors—retail, civic, educational, and other institutional uses, as well as entertainment (night time) and supermarket (day time) uses connected to each other and Main Street;
- high concentration of people and activities—workers, residents, evening activities, special events;
- district structure—core—greater downtown—outside downtown;
- mechanisms for getting the form desired for mixed-use; and
- network of great public spaces—streets, plazas, walkways, parks that help broaden the range of destinations.

There was a detailed discussion of the necessity of synergy among (1) private investment, (2) strategies and policy tools, and (3) catalyst projects. It was also stated that today’s changing economic and demographic landscape may be a “recession” in terms of what we are used to, but could be a potential opportunity for downtowns. The importance of the precise or specific plan and program Environmental Impact Report as policy tools to help provide certainty to prospective investors was also emphasized.

Finally, on a broader scale, success was achieved where there was a shared vision that was big, bold and compelling; political will; a champion; the ability to identify and broker opportunities; and a **focus on creating a “great place” rather than just building projects.**

## **Workshop 2**

**New Realities in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century** encouraged the community to prepare for the significant changes that will be coming our way in the years ahead—and that will greatly impact our lives and those of our children and future generations. The presenters were Don Wedin, a 34-year veteran with Santa Clara County Planning, recently retired; and Matt Vandersluis, Senior Field Representative with Greenbelt Alliance for the East Bay. Demographic, economic, and environmental trends all indicate challenges for communities in terms of mobility, continuing, and expanding competition for resources, housing options, and economic viability and sustainability. Both presenters emphasized the importance of communities setting aside differences to identify and implement strategies to become “intelligently more urban” and plan for “livable, green urban neighborhoods” within existing boundaries that provide desirable and convenient alternatives for those young and old who would prefer (or may need) places to live that aren’t dependent on owning an automobile and that are more sustainable for the environment.

The need to become intelligently more urban includes recognition that we are at a critical transition point between being predominantly suburban communities to becoming somewhat more urban; and, we need to make the transition successfully and intelligently for our sake and for the sake of future generations. We can plan to become more intelligently urban by:

- 1) Focusing on livability—not just density.
- 2) Focusing on placemaking—not just planning.
- 3) Creating great neighborhoods—not just building good individual projects.
- 4) Focusing on higher densities—not scattering higher densities.
- 5) Making compatible land uses—not separating land uses.
- 6) Planning for people—not just planning for cars.
- 7) Increasing housing and mobility choices—not limiting choices.
- 8) Protecting and enhancing existing neighborhoods—not threatening existing neighborhoods.
- 9) Putting traffic into its proper perspective—not letting it dominate decision making.
- 10) Planning for diversity—not exclusivity.
- 11) Allowing for community-by-community customization—not one-size-fits-all solutions.
- 12) Making it easier to get good development approved—not treating all development proposals the same.
- 13) Provide flexibility in meeting City parking standards.

Through our planning and land use decisions we are creating a legacy that will significantly impact the lives of future generations. How will future generations judge the wisdom of the decisions we will be making as we update and revise our Housing Element, General Plan, or prepare specific plans for selected areas of the City?

### **Workshop 3**

**The Art and Science of Placemaking** featured Greg Tung, Principal, Freedman, Tung + Suzuki, urban designers. Highlighting the importance of the public realm as a catalyst for private investment, key principles as well as terminology were reviewed. Key concepts included: (1) often the “there” there is a network of great public spaces; (2) the hierarchy of streets is important to help people know where they are and include gateway corridors, focal streets (with pedestrian priority), typical downtown core streets, and parking and service streets; (3) wayfinding includes both directional signage and landmarks; and (4) the basic concepts of the “sharing of streets” among bikes; cars; and pedestrians; buffering; furnishings; active uses; and critical linkages or connectivity.

The workshop participants then proceeded outside to tour Downtown, stopping at key points and intersections as indicated on the following map.



The gathering spaces evaluated included Main Street Plaza, the 600 block of Court Street, and the Alhambra/Marina Vista Park. Intersections evaluated included Main/Ferry, Escobar/Las Juntas, Marina Vista/Ferry, Ferry/Amtrak tracks, Alhambra/Ward, and Ward/Castro.

At each stop the group was asked to determine what traits the location had. There were specific categories such as: *type of street or space, current activities, features, to what extent do the amenities/design match the place type, visitor/user impression, ability to encourage private investment, and the Martinez feel.* For example, under *visitor/user impression* the possible choices were *welcoming, neutral, or unappealing.*

**The evaluations completed by those in the tour indicated that only one gathering space met most of the criteria—the park at Alhambra/Marina Vista; and, only one intersection met all of the criteria—Marina/Ferry.**

Upon completion of the tour and the return to the Willows Cabaret Theater, participants were asked to consider a series of questions regarding the effectiveness of important Downtown linkages and connection points; the importance of better coordinated way finding; and, to rate the on-street gathering spaces (e.g. the 500 block of Main Street).

The participants stated that it was difficult to get around Downtown and that one way streets were confusing and lacked predictability; that the Marina/Downtown/Amtrak linkages did not work; and, that way finding could be improved with consistent, color coded signage. Participants also recommended looking at flexible spaces for outdoor dining and parking that could change with the seasons or new businesses.

#### **Workshop 4**

**Making It Happen: New Opportunities for Downtown Martinez** included presentations by Dena Belzer, President, Strategic Economics (*Downtown: Why the Time is Right*); Dan Zack, Downtown Revitalization Coordinator, Redwood City (*Delightful Density*); and Erik Calloway, Associate with Freedman, Tung + Suzuki, urban designers. Erik developed and led a series of individual and group interactive exercises focused on *The Envisioned Future Downtown Martinez*.

Workshop participants received information on population, household, and economic trends consistent with the information presented in Workshop 2 regarding the dramatic aging of our population and the importance of planning “age-friendly” neighborhoods and communities that enable people of all ages to live active, interesting, and productive lives without having to own an automobile.

The importance of both design and location in terms of higher density, mixed use projects was demonstrated and the “guess the density” game debunked myths about what density looks like and where it should go.

Concluding thoughts by Dena Belzer on why the time is right for Downtown included:

- Downtown offers a huge opportunity to house the next generation of City residents, who will most likely want a walkable, transit oriented community.
- More housing in the Downtown will catalyze new retail activity there, as well.
- City investment in Downtown will, in the long run, pay off in many ways!
- The time is ripe to build off of the adopted Specific Plan by; (1) “refreshing” the implementation strategies in the Specific Plan; and, (2) move forward to be prepared for the new housing market, as it emerges.

#### *Interactive Exercise for the Envisioned Future Downtown Martinez*

The final part of the workshop engaged the participants in individual and group assessments to determine which parts of Downtown were most in need of attention, which goals were of the highest priority and what strategies could best improve the priority areas and achieve the goals identified.

Participants were asked to rank:

- 1) geographic areas in the Downtown that should receive the highest priority to improve as part of Downtown revitalization;
- 2) the most important goals for the future Downtown; and
- 3) strategies that would have the most (or least) impact by helping the City achieve the most important goals in high priority areas.

They were asked to first rank these individually, then, to meet in groups and rank them as a group. The composite rankings of both individuals and the groups are shown in Attachment 6. The overall summary of the rankings follows.

### Overall Summary

#### **Geographic Areas**

- 1) The large majority of workshop participants and tables felt the highest priority areas of Downtown to improve are the retail core and surrounding Downtown neighborhoods.
- 2) The second highest priority area of Downtown to improve was the Marina combined with, to a lesser extent, the Waterfront Park area.

#### **Goals**

- 1) The highest priority goal was to have more people shopping, dining, and living in a Downtown that has a freshened and memorable network of active streets, plazas, and open spaces.
- 2) Additional goals were to have a more visible and accessible waterfront, better transit access, and strengthened historic character.

#### **Strategies**

- 1) There was a wider variety of opinions both for individuals and for tables about how to improve these priority areas and achieve these goals.
- 2) There was general consensus that encouraging housing infill in a variety of types and implementing streetscape/plaza improvements would have the most significant impact on Downtown revitalization.
- 3) There was general acknowledgement that zoning policy revisions (such as the addition of a form based code or removing the requirement for a use permit to obtain the highest residential density permitted in certain areas of Downtown) would be required to encourage housing infill and to achieve new development that is compatible with Downtown's historic character.
- 4) Both individuals and tables saw a variety of ways to encourage investment led by increasing available parking, streamlining the development application process, and improving the visual quality of Downtown through building renovations and streetscape/plaza improvements.
- 5) There was some acknowledgement that, although historic integrity is a very important characteristic of Downtown, focusing on historic regulations is not a strategy that has significant revitalization impact.

#### **Conclusion**

The conclusion that the most significant impact on Downtown revitalization would be (1) infill housing of a variety of types, AND (2) a memorable network of active streets, plazas, and open spaces is consistent with the goals in the Downtown Specific Plan of enhancing the quality of life and bringing back commercial dynamism to Downtown. Good places make economic sense!

New people living in Downtown will expand the customer base for both existing and new businesses, as well as activate the streets and public spaces. A public realm that is memorable and wonderful to be in can serve as a powerful catalyst for private investment, as demonstrated in Redwood City, Livermore, Lodi, and other cities highlighted in the workshops.

The conclusions of the Workshop 4 participants provide a focus for moving ahead. The investment required by the private sector to upgrade and rehabilitate blighted buildings will be supported and enhanced by the strategic upgrading of the public realm. Increasing the number of people living in Downtown will support the new businesses in the renovated buildings. Improvements that honor the historic fabric of Downtown will help preserve and enhance the small-town character so important to the community plus contribute to a sense of place. Emphasis on the form as well as the uses inherent in new development and improvements will also contribute to the sense of place. This can be accomplished via the standards and regulations contained in the Specific Plan, and periodic reviews of the Specific Plan to insure that amendments required to keep it current are considered.

A memorable network of wonderful streets, plazas, and open spaces can connect Main Street to other destinations in Downtown such as the Marina and Intermodal Station, the County Civic area, the creek, and parking facilities. Done correctly, parking simply blends into the “memorable network” and becomes part of the positive experience because it is attractive, convenient, and connected via memorable sidewalks and paseos.

### **Next Steps**

Infill housing and a memorable public realm as key strategies for revitalizing Downtown provide a powerful focus for identifying specific action steps to move ahead. Integrating the principles and good practices shared in Downtown Matters and inherent in the Specific Plan will help create a sense of “place” in terms of form and function and support both the public and private investments required. A list of actions that could jumpstart implementation of the strategies identified by the community is proposed below. This is by no means an exhaustive or final list, nor is it prioritized at this time. It is simply a list of ideas that have made a difference in the revitalization of other cities and might prove effective in Downtown Martinez.

### **Specific Actions**

- 1) Draft a vision statement for Downtown.
- 2) Commission a rendering (black and white line drawing or watercolor) that powerfully communicates the vision. Include depictions of the following:
  - Network of great public spaces linking Downtown destinations.
  - Gathering space with people in it.
  - Parking choices and options.
  - Age-friendly environment.
  - Delightful density.
- 3) Develop a plan for flexible outdoor dining/parking on Main Street from Alhambra Avenue to Court Street that provides for two-way traffic. Develop and implement criteria for outdoor dining improvements. Consider contribution to improvements. Consider charging rent for use of public space if used for dining.
- 4) Develop long term master plan for great network of public spaces. Use **parking fund** by incorporating parking choices and weaving parking facilities with network of public spaces.

- 5) In terms of “marketing and promoting” Downtown, consider banners, wayfinding, appeal to younger generation, as well as baby boomers.
- 6) Design and install “district” signage or gateways.
- 7) Engage Chamber and Main Street organizations in ongoing educational forums around Downtown issues and solutions (i.e. San Leandro).
- 8) Link/connect Downtown retail core to Marina, Shoreline Park, Intermodal Station, County civic center; continue effort for ferry service, new uses such as restaurants.
- 9) Review Downtown Specific Plan for needed amendments.
- 10) Support/consider various funding/lending institutions to facilitate seismic retrofits and other building improvements in the Specific Plan area.
- 11) Develop marketing piece that visually depicts vision and describes the steps taken/to be taken by the City that will support private investment Downtown.

### **Funding Mechanism**

A funding mechanism for implementing the strategies and priorities identified in this report is key to keep the momentum going. The Downtown Specific Plan references redevelopment as a tool, among others. Realistically, however, that tool may no longer be available. Staff has been exploring other options and will return to the Council at a later date to discuss one or more implementation strategies.

### **ATTACHEMNTS:**

- 1) General Plan Land Use Designations – Downtown Specific Plan Study Area
- 2) Downtown Specific Plan Implementation Progress
- 3) Downtown Infrastructure Study – Executive Summary
- 4) Notes from the Redwood City Tour – Harlan Strickland
- 5) Notes from the Livermore Tour – Susan Moeller
- 6) Workshop 4 Interactive Exercise Results
- 7) General Plan Update Task Force Meeting Summary (October 26, 2011)

**APPROVED BY:**



City Manager