



CITY OF MARTINEZ

**CITY COUNCIL AGENDA
July 11, 2012**

TO: Mayor and City Council
FROM: Susan Moeller, Consultant to *Downtown Matters*
SUBJECT: Downtown Revitalization—Next Steps
DATE: July 2, 2012

RECOMMENDATION:

The following next steps are recommended to help leverage the private funding needed to support the revitalization of Downtown:

1. Identification of a public/private funding mechanism to retrofit and rehabilitate buildings in the downtown to help maintain the historic character of the area and enhance public safety.
2. Development of long term public space master plan.
3. Work with the community to identify improvements to the Main Street Plaza that will more accurately reflect their vision for the space.
4. Draft a vision statement for the Downtown and commission a rendering to depict that vision to residents, visitors, businesses, and investors.

BACKGROUND:

In November, 2011, the report to the City Council on the *Downtown Matters* process identified a series of action steps that could jumpstart the implementation of the strategies identified by community participants as key to the successful revitalization of downtown. The participants' top priority strategies were (1) encouraging housing infill in a variety of types, and (2) creating a memorable network of public spaces. The "network" of public spaces included active streets, plazas and open spaces intended to provide a memorable and wonderful experience to residents and visitors alike and serve as a powerful catalyst for private investment. The goal of the strategies and the highest priority for the participants was to have more people shopping, dining and living in Downtown. A more visible and accessible waterfront, better transit access and strengthened historic character were additional goals identified.

The specific actions identified were by no means an exhaustive list; nor were they prioritized. Some of the actions were common to many of the successful downtowns visited. Others were unique based upon the experience of this writer. They reflected the principles and practices shared in *Downtown Matters*. These same principles are inherent in the Downtown Specific Plan ("DSP").

The specific actions identified included the following:

- 1) Draft a vision statement for Downtown.
- 2) Commission a rendering to communicate the vision.
- 3) Develop a plan for flexible outdoor dining.
- 4) Develop long term master plan for great network of public spaces.
- 5) Consider banners, wayfinding, connection with younger generations and baby boomers in marketing and promoting downtown.
- 6) Design and install “district” and/or gateway treatments.
- 7) Engage Chamber and Main Street organizations in ongoing educational forums around downtown revitalization and good placemaking.
- 8) Link/connect downtown retail core to key downtown destinations such as Shoreline Park, Intermodal Station, and County Civic Center.
- 9) Review Downtown Specific Plan for needed amendments.
- 10) Pursue funding mechanisms to facilitate seismic retrofit and other building improvements in the Specific Plan Area.
- 11) Develop a marketing piece to attract and support increased private investment.

Several key decisions have been made since the completion of the *Downtown Matters* program. A new outdoor dining policy and flex-space program has been approved and is being implemented. The restoration of two-way traffic on portions of Castro Street, Escobar Street, Estudillo Street and Main Street has also been approved. The Zocchi property is leased and sports programs are operating in two formerly vacant buildings, thereby expanding the downtown customer base. An agreement for the purchase and sale of 610 and 630 Court Street has been approved. This is the first of many steps leading to the revitalization of these key downtown properties. The RCD housing development has also been approved. All of these actions support the community’s primary goal of “. . . more people shopping, dining and living in a Downtown that has a freshened and memorable network of active streets, plazas and open spaces”.

DISCUSSION:

The development, implementation and sustaining of the shared community vision and action plan for downtown is a multi-year, multi-layered process. As noted, the City has taken several steps to move the process forward in spite of limited funds. All of the actions are ultimately intended to leverage and support greater private investment in the downtown.

Some of the action steps suggested are longer term in nature (1 to 3 years); others can be undertaken and completed in the short term (1 year or less). Both the long term and short term steps support the framework for good placemaking needed to attract and sustain private investment. Some of the specific actions recommended are related and can be grouped together for action. Some of the actions imply other activities that were not specifically identified originally. Some are ongoing; others are one time activities. Attachment A re-categorizes the specific actions identified in the November staff report and prioritizes them given their potential to help leverage private investment and realize the community vision. They are discussed below.

The two highest priorities in terms of attracting and supporting private investment and creating a place people want to be are as follows:

- 1) The identification and procurement of both private and public funding opportunities to facilitate seismic retrofit and other building improvements in the Specific Plan area.
- 2) The development of the master plan for a memorable network of great public spaces that includes active streets, plazas and open spaces.

The Council is exploring programs and mechanisms at their meeting July 11th that could assist property owners in financing retrofit and rehabilitation work and enhance public safety.

The development of a long term master plan for a great network of public spaces will require the services of an urban design firm. It is important not only to identify the improvements needed, but to link those improvements together and provide a sense of cohesiveness and connectivity as part of the downtown experience. This will enhance the sense of “place”. This plan could be developed in the new fiscal year.

Strengthening the experience of connectivity between the retail core and other downtown destinations could be examined as part of the master plan for the network of great public spaces. New gateway treatments and wayfinding improvements could also be considered as part of the public space master plan.

The review of the Downtown Specific Plan for needed amendments can occur once the General Plan Update process begins to wind down. However, this will be an ongoing process.

One of the public spaces downtown that the community felt needed improvement is the Main Street Plaza. To keep the community engaged, and follow-up on the *Downtown Matters* process, the City could consider working with the community to identify the improvements needed to better reflect the “Martinez feel” they felt it lacked, and improve both the form and function of the space consistent with the community vision and funding availability. This effort could be a stepping stone to the master plan process for the longer range plan for the “great network” of public spaces envisioned by the community. It also keeps the community engaged in the development of solutions, not just the identification of problems. It could continue to expand their understanding and support of the options available and the choices and commitments available to sustain the implementation of the shared vision.

Drafting a vision statement for the downtown and deciding how to visually depict that vision could proceed immediately. This is also an opportunity to continue to involve the community. A rendering of the community’s vision proved to be one of the most effective marketing tools available in many of the downtowns studied as part of *Downtown Matters*.

The actions related to the marketing of the downtown (5, 7, 11) are longer term in nature and dependent in part on other actions. However, the Chamber and Main Street organizations could offer some educational forums to build upon the *Downtown Matters* process and explore related issues in greater depth with the community.

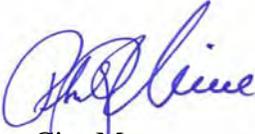
ACTION:

The following next steps are recommended to help leverage the private funding needed to support the revitalization of Downtown:

1. Identification of a public/private funding mechanism to retrofit and rehabilitate buildings in the downtown to help maintain the historic character of the area and enhance public safety.
2. Development of long term public space master plan.
3. Work with the community to identify improvements to the Main Street Plaza that will more accurately reflect their vision for the space.
4. Draft a vision statement for the Downtown and commission a rendering to depict that vision to residents, visitors, businesses, and investors.

Attachment

APPROVED BY:


City Manager

Completed

#3—Adoption of outdoor dining and flex-space program.

Under Review

#10—**Funding mechanisms to facilitate seismic retrofit and building improvements.**

To Do

One Year (#4, 6, 8)

- **Develop long term master plan for great network of public spaces,**
- Design and install new gateway treatments and directional signage.
- Improve linkages/connections (vehicular & pedestrian) between retail core and other downtown destinations. (Note: restoration of two-way traffic on portions of Castro, Escobar, Estudillo and Main Streets approved in June supports this action item.)

One Year (#1, 2)

- Draft a vision statement for Downtown.
- Commission a rendering to communicate the vision.

Ongoing (#9)

- Review Downtown Specific Plan for needed amendments.

Two Year (#5, 7, 11)

- Consider banners, wayfinding elements, younger generations as well as baby boomers in marketing and promotion of downtown.
- Engage Chamber and Main Street organizations in ongoing educational forums regarding downtown revitalization, good placemaking and thriving in the “new realities” of the 21st Century.
- Develop image-making marketing materials to attract and support new private investment consistent with the vision.