

Introduction

I. Purpose of the Plan

The City of Santa Cruz recognizes Mission Street as a key commercial corridor within the overall City framework. Not only is it at the heart of the Westside district, but it is a primary entry corridor that provides many visitors with their first impression of the City of Santa Cruz.



The purpose of the Urban Design Plan is to identify redevelopment opportunities and urban design strategies that will provide a framework for beneficial change and the long-term revitalization of the corridor. The Plan has been prepared in the context of the physical changes that are being implemented as part of Caltrans' project to widen the Mission Street corridor. The intent is not only to beautify the corridor, but also to enhance the economic vitality of the corridor, improve the quality of life for Westside residents, protect neighborhoods adjacent to the corridor, and finally to contribute to the creation of a sustainable environment.

Plan objectives include preparation of:

- A long-range strategy for supporting the redevelopment and revitalization of the corridor;
- An urban design program for improving the overall character of the corridor through improvements to the public and private domains;
- A coordinated strategy for enhancing circulation and parking; and,
- Revised development standards for new and remodeled projects along the corridor

II. Background and Planning Context

A. The Planning Area

The Mission Street Corridor planning area includes the approximately 2.25 mile corridor that extends from the City Limits at Moore Creek (near Shafer Road) on the west, to Chestnut Street on the east, and includes the commercial and residential interfaces to the north and south of Mission Street. Generally, the planning area extends only a parcel or two deep along either side of the corridor, with the focus being on those parcels and development that have frontage on Mission Street.

Land use along the eastern two-thirds of the corridor is primarily commercial in character, including a mix of retail and office uses with isolated pockets of residential uses. Retail uses in this area include a mixture of local, neighborhood-serving stores and restaurants, with more automobile- and visitor-oriented uses such as gas stations, fast-food restaurants, and motels. The architectural character varies widely, from historic Victorian and Bungalow-style residential structures to “strip malls” and corporate design for commercial chain stores.

West of Swift Street, the corridor has a predominantly natural landscape character. No development actually fronts on this section of the corridor, and natural landscaping generally screens development on adjoining parcels.

The planning area is generally bounded by well-established residential neighborhoods. The one exception being the south side of the corridor west of Swift Street, which is bounded by industrially-zoned land.

B. The Corridor's Dual Function

Mission Street is both a local City street, and a part of State Highway 1. As one of the City's primary east/west circulation routes, the Mission Street/Highway 1 corridor is one of the most heavily traveled corridors in Santa Cruz. Not only does it carry local residential and commercial traffic on the City's Westside, it also serves as the primary access route to the University of California's main campus, and the major regional route carrying through coastal traffic north and south along State Highway 1. In addition, it acts as the gateway to Santa Cruz from southbound Highway 1. As part of the State Highway system, encroachment permits are required for any improvements within the Caltrans right-of-way.

The corridor's importance as both a local and regional route contributes to a number of land use and circulation issues that arise directly out of this juxtaposition of the corridor's role in the local and regional circulation systems. For instance, from a circulation standpoint, there is the inherent conflict between the slower travel speeds and numerous turning movements associated with local traffic versus the free flow of through traffic that is more desirable for regional traffic. From a land use standpoint, the corridor's dual local/regional personality results in an incongruous mix of local-serving commercial uses that cater to residents in the surrounding neighborhoods, with more automobile-oriented convenience uses which are geared to the needs of travelers.

The combination of these circulation and land use characteristics with other factors, such as corridor ownership patterns, parcel sizes, and local market conditions, have resulted in a district that has failed to achieve, either economically or socially, the stability or stature that is commensurate with its importance to the community. As the corridor grows busier with traffic, it also represents an increasing threat to the quality of life of residents in the adjoining neighborhoods. Although within the City's Redevelopment Area, the Urban Design Plan has been prepared in order to provide a more comprehensive vision and broad-based strategy for establishing the Mission Street corridor as a safe, attractive and both economically and socially vibrant commercial corridor.

C. Caltrans' Street Widening Project

As Santa Cruz and the region have grown, the historic two-lane configuration of Mission Street (one lane in each direction) contributed to increasing capacity problems and traffic congestion that affected both local and regional circulation, as well as the character of the corridor. For more than 15 years, Caltrans and the City have been pursuing plans to address the capacity issues by widening the Mission Street/Highway 1 corridor from two lanes to four. Finally, in 1997, design approvals and funding for construction of the widening project were obtained, and in 2000 the initial phases of construction commenced.

The approved widening plan represents a careful balancing of circulation needs with the City's desire to minimize impacts on existing landowners along the corridor. Thus, rather than allowing Caltrans to take their typical right-of-way, which would have had significant impacts on existing businesses and landowners, the City and Caltrans agreed to a design solution that maximizes the use of the existing right-of-way for street improvements, with only limited additional widening of the right-of-way. While successfully protecting existing Mission Street uses, this solution results in very little space being provided for non-vehicular improvements such as bicycle lanes, planting areas, or broad sidewalks.

This Urban Design Plan does not seek to modify the Caltrans design (as it had already been approved and implementation has begun), but rather to augment it by identifying opportunities for enhancement of the corridor that are consistent with the widening project.

III. Community Design Process

The Urban Design Plan is based on extensive public input received during the planning process. The structure of the public's involvement in the process included a series of focus meetings with an appointed Advisory Committee interspersed with two Community Workshops. All meetings were advertised and open to the public.

In October 1999, the Santa Cruz City Council formed the Mission Street Design Advisory Committee (Advisory Committee) to work with City Staff and the consultant team to offer guidance in preparation of the plan. In addition to representatives from the City Council and Planning Commission, the members of this committee included a broad cross-section of the Westside community including landowners, local business representatives and residents from the planning area. The committee also included representatives from the School District and Arts Commission, and in order to ensure continuity with the Caltrans' widening project, members of the Mission Street Widening Task Force.

Including a presentation to the Mission Street Widening Task Force in August 1999, the planning process included a series of seven Advisory Committee Workshops and two Community Workshops to present ideas, explore concepts and strategies, and receive feedback related to the Mission Street Corridor Urban Design.

A detailed summary of each of the workshops is included in the appendix but the general purpose of the workshops is summarized below:

Joint Meeting -- Planning Commission & Mission Street Widening Task Force

August 4, 1999 -- Mission Hill Jr. High School

To discuss the purpose of the Urban Design Plan, the proposed scope of work and process, and the project's relationship to the Mission Street Widening Project.



Advisory Committee Workshop #1

November 15, 1999 -- Louden Nelson Community Center

To provide an overview/summary of the Existing Conditions and Constraints & Opportunities Analysis findings.

Community Workshop #1

January 26, 2000 -- Bayview Elementary School

To receive general feedback from the community regarding the perceived issues and opportunities on the corridor.

Advisory Committee Workshop #2

March 30, 2000 -- Police Department Community Room

To discuss feedback from the Community Workshop and categorize the input into major issue areas.

Advisory Committee Workshop #3

May 15, 2000 -- Louden Nelson Community Center

To present and discuss preliminary concept ideas related to the group of issue categories that were generated in the previous Advisory Committee meeting.

Advisory Committee Workshop #4

June 5, 2000 -- Civic Auditorium, Room ABC

To present and discuss preliminary concept ideas related to the second group of issues categories that were generated in the first Advisory Committee meeting.

Community Workshop #2

June 21, 2000 -- Bayview Elementary School

To review urban design concepts which had been developed with the Advisory Committee over the previous two workshops and get wider community input on those concepts.

Advisory Committee Workshop #5

September 25, 2000 -- Louden Nelson Community Center

To present revised concepts based on feedback from the community to the advisory committee in order to get final comments before preparing the draft plan and recommendations.

Advisory Committee Workshop #6

May 30, 2001 -- Police Department Community Room

To review the administrative draft plan with the advisory committee in order to confirm direction prior to identifying implementation programs and preparing public review draft plan.

Advisory Committee Workshop #7

June 28, 2001 -- Main Library

To present the public review draft Urban Design Plan to the advisory committee prior to release to the public.

IV. Use of the Plan

A. Relationship to Other Plans

The Urban Design Plan is intended to complement and be used in conjunction with the City of Santa Cruz's General Plan and Zoning Ordinance. It provides more detailed guidance that is intended to implement City General Plan policies regarding land use, redevelopment, circulation, and urban design in the Mission Street Corridor area.

B. Who Should Use This Plan

The Plan has been prepared for use by property owners, developers, City staff and decision-makers, as well as the general public when considering improvements to or changes in use of buildings, land, or streets in the planning area. The Plan addresses both public and private development, and includes strategies that will require the cooperation of both the City and private landowners and developers to implement.

C. Types of Recommendations

The Plan sets forth a number of different types of recommendations, including:

- Urban Design Guidelines that address the overall character of the corridor, including land use patterns, development character, and streetscape improvements, with the intent of improving both its aesthetic and operational character;
- Development Standards that establish specific requirements relating to the intensity of development, building height and setback requirements, and parking and landscaping requirements;

- Streetscape Improvements that describe specific projects to enhance the corridor, including a Street Tree Program, a sound wall design for Mission Hill School, and a Gateway feature design for the west end of Mission Street; and,
- Implementation Programs that provide strategies supporting beneficial change in the corridor, including public improvement projects and developer incentives.

Each of these types of recommendations is different in the manner in which it will be used. In general the recommendations fall into four categories, those that are:

- general in nature and are intended to provide guidance on areawide issues;
- regulatory in nature and will be used to evaluate future projects;
- strategic in nature and will require on-going implementation; and,
- site specific and intended to provide direction regarding specific improvements.

