

Summary Report West Downtown Community Meetings about Suggested Future Improvements December 20, 2002

Introduction and Background

The City of Santa Barbara's Redevelopment Area encompasses the Downtown, extending to the freeway on the west and south, and much of the Waterfront. This project area, established in 1972, includes the West Downtown neighborhood that is shown in Attachment 1. Several studies have been done over the years that focus on portions of the Redevelopment Area. In 1981, the *West Downtown Community Revitalization Study* was prepared with input from a task force comprised of residents of the West Downtown. The study included recommendations relating to transportation and parking, land use and housing, Mission Creek and the general appearance of the neighborhood. The study included about 60 recommendations, of which approximately 75% have been implemented over the last 20 years.

In November 2002, the RDA held two widely-noticed public meetings that included about 40 participants from the community. Individual notices were sent to all tenants and owners of both residential and commercial properties within the study area, shown in the meeting flyer in Attachment 1. Outlying residents and businesses north to Micheltorena Street and east to State Street were also notified by mail. Local print, radio and television media were alerted through press releases, and advertisement was also regularly run on the City's Government Access channel. All information was translated into Spanish, and Spanish translation was provided at the meetings.

Pat Saley & Associates was hired to coordinate with Redevelopment staff and facilitate the two community meetings, one held on a weekday evening and the second on a Saturday morning. The purpose of the meetings was to present and solicit suggestions that would improve the West Downtown neighborhood and to get feedback and a sense of priority about the suggestions. The suggestions staff presented at the meetings were based on comments made by members of the Westside Community Group and Westside Community Advisory Committee at their meetings held in October 2002. Staff also reviewed the 1981 West Downtown Study and included some of those recommendations for consideration. Participants in this process were also encouraged to offer new suggestions or modify those that had been presented for discussion. The suggestions were grouped into these general categories:

- *Commercial & Retail*
- *Parks & Recreation Facilities*
- *Residential neighborhoods & character*
- *Schools & Other Public Buildings*
- *Streets & Sidewalks*
- *Miscellaneous*

The participants reviewed the suggestions and modified or added to them as a group. Everyone was given four dots to "vote" for their four highest priority improvements by affixing them to the various recommendations posted around the meeting room. The participants were discouraged from "voting" for a suggestion more than once, although that wasn't prohibited, and they seemed to spread their votes out over a variety of categories of projects. At the conclusion of each meeting, the participants' highest priority projects were summarized. It was explained that results would be forwarded to the Redevelopment Agency for their consideration in future budget discussions.

While minutes of both the November 13th and November 23rd meetings are attached, this report is a summary of the input received at both community meetings. About 30 suggestions were considered at the two meetings, and those that sparked the most interest are discussed in this report. Suggestions that are the responsibility of another agency or City department were noted and will be forwarded for their review and action, if appropriate.

Highest Priority Projects – Improving Safety and “Livability” of the Neighborhood

A high percentage of the participants at both meetings had similar concerns relating to the livability of the West Downtown neighborhood. They wanted traffic to slow down, sidewalks to be fixed, and pedestrian-scale lighting to be provided. They expressed concern about walking from their neighborhood to the Central Business District, especially at night. Many people lamented the fact that they felt they had to drive Downtown for safety reasons which, they recognized, is unfortunate given how close they live. Suggestions are presented in declining order of priority and are grouped by subject. The suggested improvements that would make the West Downtown neighborhood more safe and livable included:

- 1. Improved Lighting (22 “votes”)** – A total of 22 people, or over half of all participants, were in favor of improved public lighting. A suggestion made at the first meeting was to provide quality lighting consistent with a historic gas lamp district, similar to the lights along Loma Alta near McKinley School. A total of 16 people heartily endorsed this idea for its safety and aesthetic reasons. Another six wanted more street lighting, especially near Mission Creek and at the Bath Street off-ramp. Other comments made included the need for more tree trimming, especially where there are already street lights. This suggestion has been forwarded to the Parks & Recreation Department.
- 2. Sidewalks, Parkways and Crosswalks (21 votes)** – It was clear that the meeting participants like to walk, as a total of 21 people voted for some sort of walking-related improvement. Eleven (11) people wanted more sidewalks and improvements to existing sidewalks (mostly citing uneven surfaces). Another five people were concerned about the state of existing parkways which often are overgrown and littered. It was suggested that a uniform design for parkways be adopted and that people be encouraged to follow the design. Another five people wanted more painted crosswalks to make it easier to cross streets, especially the one-way streets where drivers tend to speed.
- 3. Open Space and Parks (16 votes)** – There was a lot of interest in having more park space, including possibly along Mission Creek, with a total of 16 votes. While some wanted recreation fields (especially a soccer field with lighting for night play), most recognized pocket parks are probably more feasible. Eight people voted for more pocket parks, soccer fields and/or community gardens and another eight want to see Mission Creek enhancements from Canon Perdido to Victoria Street (above the Flood Control project area).
- 4. Trash Cans (15 votes)** – A total of 15 people wanted the City to install trash cans and “mutt mitt” dispensers and to schedule regular trash pick up, especially next to creek bridges. Providing trash cans and pick up was a priority for 11 people, and another four were in favor of providing mutt mitts to encourage pet owners to be more responsible about their pets.

5. **Art & Architecture (13 votes)** – A total of 13 people wanted to improve the aesthetics of the community through art and architecture. Nine wanted to preserve existing unique homes, especially the Victorians in the area. At the second meeting, four people voted for other aesthetic improvements such as a mural on a public building that could be painted by kids (similar to the mural at Ortega Park).
6. **Affordable Housing (8 votes)** – The RDA’s role in providing affordable housing throughout the City was explained to the participants.
7. **Traffic Calming (6 votes)** - The original suggestion was for traffic calming on de la Vina Street, but it quickly became evident that people want drivers to slow down on Bath and Castillo as well as some of the more traveled cross streets leading Downtown.
8. **Underground Utilities (6 votes)** – Six people were interested in undergrounding utilities throughout the community to improve aesthetics, reduce fire danger, etc.
9. **Kids Programs (5 votes)** – At the second meeting, it was suggested that more after-school programs for kids be provided.

Other Ideas

Two other ideas that received four and three votes respectively were to imprint street names on curbs at street corners to aid pedestrians and to provide a noise wall along the freeway. The participants recognized that the first suggestion would be fairly easy to achieve and the second would be a longer term project.

The other suggestions that got two or fewer votes are summarized in Attachment 4. Participants in the meetings were also provided a large blank sheet of paper to write other ideas that struck them while they were voting. These additional ideas and other suggested ideas that would more readily fall under the responsibility of another City department, division or agency are also summarized in Attachment 4.

West Downtown residents who were not able to attend the meetings were encouraged to email or call with their comments. Additionally, 11 people either called or wrote to convey their views on neighborhood improvements. Many of the ideas suggested mirrored the priority projects outlined above, and some new ideas were presented, including:

- De la Vina Street parcel - Clean up and allow temporary neighborhood use of the vacant parcel on the 400 block of De la Vina Street. This parcel has been used by neighborhood kids for soccer and other recreation in the past, but it has become a trash dump.
- De la Vina Street reduced to one lane – It was suggested that De la Vina Street be made one lane, rather than two. This idea has been forwarded to the Transportation Division.
- Increased permit parking – There was interest in expanding the residential permit parking program, as those streets near the permit areas tend to be used for parking by employees of Downtown businesses. This idea has also been forwarded to the Transportation Division.

Summary

Some of these suggestions endorsed by the community meeting participants would be easy to implement and would go a long way to improving the neighborhood. Improvements that make it easier to walk any time of day or night would help to get people out which, in turn, enhances the feeling of neighborhood. Some suggestions, such as providing parks, more affordable housing and improved pedestrian and street lighting, are harder to implement but would also improve the sense of neighborhood. The idea of a pedestrian-oriented gas lamp district was very enthusiastically received by both groups of participants.

Redevelopment staff and their consultants were very pleased with the level of participation and enthusiasm exhibited at the two community meetings. Redevelopment staff looks forward to continuing to work with the neighborhood, through the two advisory committees, to implement some of these suggestions to improve the West Downtown neighborhood.

Attachments:

1. Flyer sent to all residents, property owners and businesses (mailed November 7, 2002)
2. Notes from November 13, 2002 Community Meeting
3. Notes from November 23, 2002 Community Meeting
4. Low Priority Suggestions, Additional Ideas, and Suggestions Referred to Other City Departments or Divisions