

DYETT & BHATIA

Urban and Regional Planners

M E M O R A N D U M

To: City of Santa Cruz
From: Dyett & Bhatia, Urban and Regional Planners
Re: Incorporation of Previous Studies into Santa Cruz Corridors Planning & Zoning
Date: June 18, 2015

BACKGROUND

The Santa Cruz Corridors Planning & Zoning Code Update project is one of the first major implementation actions following adoption of the City's new 2030 General Plan. The 2030 General Plan provides guidance for the city's primary mixed-use corridors (Soquel, Water, Ocean, Mission), which were identified as "change areas" served by transit. The ultimate objective for this project is to help implement that vision—by producing innovative and integrated corridor planning and zoning ordinance amendments that will serve as effective tools to realize the transit-supportive intensification envisioned in the General Plan, and to identify associated transportation system and parking improvements, while remaining compatible with and supportive of existing adjacent residential neighborhoods.

Santa Cruz has long recognized the challenges presented by these corridors, and the City has engaged in a number of related planning efforts over the years. Rather than "re-inventing the wheel," this study aims to build on the body of prior work with the end goal of codifying the most successful strategies into enforceable development standards and priority capital improvement projects that will have the power to directly influence development projects and streetscape improvement efforts moving forward.

The following summarizes the key plans and studies completed to date that directly and/or indirectly relate to the four corridors under study. Descriptions of the plans and studies are accompanied by an explanation of the relationship to the current effort.

It is important to note that at this point, Phase II of the Corridor Planning and Zoning Code Update is just getting underway. Stakeholder interviews have been conducted, and a series of community outreach activities are scheduled for the summer. Phase I of the study, which focused exclusively on physical site assessment of the study corridors and background research on real estate economics, did not result in formal recommendations; rather, it identified issues and set the stage for Phase II during which development feasibility and testing of potential zoning regulations will occur. The findings and recommendations of the plans and studies referenced below will be critically considered when this next stage of analysis takes place.

SUMMARY AND APPLICABILITY OF PRIOR STUDIES AND PLANS

Mission Street Urban Design Plan (2002). Adopted in 2002, the Mission Street Urban Design Plan establishes a long-range redevelopment and revitalization strategy for the

corridor. Through extensive outreach efforts conducted for this project, the community expressed a vision for Mission Street to serve as “Main Street” for the Westside, providing locals and visitors with an attractive and pedestrian-friendly mixed-use commercial district. The Mission Street Urban Design Plan provides a number of development standards and design guidelines that encourage the development of appropriately scaled buildings, create consistent building setbacks that help define the corridor, relocate parking behind buildings and in structures, reduce the number of driveways on Mission Street, and create a broader and more protected pedestrian environment that is well-linked to surrounding residential areas.

Following adoption of the plan, a Mission Street Urban Design Overlay District was established in the Zoning Code to implement these development standards and design guidelines. This is the only corridor of the four under study to have specific regulations in place. The role of the study, therefore, will be to compare the regulations currently on the books to the findings of the forthcoming development prototyping and feasibility analysis, to identify any areas where the standards could be adjusted in order to result in better or more feasible projects.

Ocean Street Area Plan (2014). Recently adopted in 2014, the Ocean Street Area Plan aims to revitalize the Ocean Street Corridor, creating a vibrant “front door” to Santa Cruz that reflects the city’s unique character. New land uses and more intensive development are intended to transform the automobile-oriented thoroughfare into a more attractive and functional urban environment that respects the scale of surrounding residential neighborhoods. The Ocean Street Area Plan incorporated a robust community outreach component in which the community voiced a desire for the corridor to become a well-designed, pedestrian-oriented boulevard with a strong connection to the San Lorenzo River and its levee trails.

As the Area Plan resulted in a set of guidelines and recommendations, this corridor planning and zoning effort study will take the next logical step: build directly on the recommendations to create specific amendments and street improvement designs in order to codify the Plan’s vision and ensure implementation.

Climate Action Plan (2012). The current study draws a direct relationship to the Climate Action Plan (CAP) through its objective of planning for higher density, mixed use, transit-supportive development, and parking reduction measures to support lower carbon emissions. The CAP’s Sustainable Transportation & Land Use Planning chapter addresses these matters directly; its goals includes “Promote land use strategies that encourage higher density development along transit corridors and activity centers to support efficient, accessible, and sustainable transportation options.” The CAP also heavily references the City’s 2008 Bike Plan, which is currently being updated in the form of a new Active Transportation Plan. The Active Transportation Plan and the Corridor Planning and Zoning efforts, being prepared concurrently, will be closely coordinated, especially with regards to streetscape improvements and pedestrian-oriented building design.

DYETT & BHATIA

Urban and Regional Planners

2014 – 2023 Housing Element (underway). The Housing Element currently being updated will identify sites for housing suitable for the entire income spectrum, and it is highly likely to include sites on the corridors. (The current 2009-2014 Housing Element does identify sites in several nodes along the corridors. In fact, all of the eight major “Opportunity Areas” identified in the current Housing Element are located on the corridors in question.) This study will need to ensure that zoning for the corridors is consistent with assumptions about allowable density in the Housing Element for sites needed to meet the City’s Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA), that densities are maintained or increased.

Housing Strategy (2008). Prepared to assist with preparation of the 2009-2014 Housing Element and the Redevelopment Agency’s Five-Year Implementation Plan, the Santa Cruz Housing Strategy focused on ways to realize higher density housing in the Downtown and along key corridors, address parking challenges in mixed use districts, and how to create incentives for projects that would further the City’s housing goals. Moreover, the Housing Strategy specifically recommends that the City prepare “corridor strategies” that would help transition major auto-centric arterials into more pedestrian-friendly, mixed use streets.

Following identification of housing values and needs, the study presents example case study development programs of infill housing on corridor sites and concludes with potential planning and zoning strategies that could help facilitate this type of development. The recommendations that the Strategy makes for the Mission, Soquel, and Water corridors will be reviewed and utilized in this effort, bearing in mind that recommended actions that rely on the Redevelopment Agency will need to be reconsidered in light of this Agency’s discontinuation, and current economic conditions.

Retail Market Analysis (2011). Prepared for the Redevelopment Agency by the Gibbs Planning Group, this report looked at viability of additional retail establishments in several subdistricts of the city. East Commercial Zone corresponds with Soquel Avenue corridor; West zone corresponds with a large portion of the Mission Street corridor. The study found potential for substantial new retail development on Soquel Avenue, notably apparel, restaurant, drug store, and home furnishings categories; on Mission, the study found potential for up to 171,000 square feet of new retail development, possibly for such large retailers as Old Navy, Target, Lowes, and other large format stores. Strong market support will need to be reexamined in current economic conditions – though as the economy has generally strengthened between 2011 and now, it would hold that the market support still exists – but perhaps equally important will be the consideration of how these potential tenants and their desired store types and configurations (including parking) can be compatible with neighborhood desires and available site locations and sizes, and a mixed use environment.

Parking Code Recommendations (2010). This study, prepared by Wilbur Smith, made specific recommendations for how parking standards may be handled for mixed use sites in particular, considering shared parking amongst other tools for parking man-

DYETT & BHATIA

Urban and Regional Planners

agement. Planning and Public Works jointly worked with Wilbur Smith to review the City's current parking standards, recommend new standards citywide, and develop a model for mixed use development. While the project was tabled for further study, the work completed is expected to help inform the corridor planning process and could inform City parking revisions going forward.

Eastside Business Improvement Plan (1996). This study looked specifically at Water and Soquel corridors not just from a market perspective, but also from the experiential quality for users of the roadways/corridors. It defines character zones and nodes, many of which are carried forward in the General Plan, and that we still see as relevant areas for this effort: such as the "triangle" where the two streets meet, and the "Water Street entry zone" at Ocean. Urban design guidelines will be reviewed for their relevance and applicability today, and revised and then codified as appropriate.

Bike Plan (2008). This document lays the foundation for the existing and proposed bicycle network in the City's current planning; currently being updated as part of the Active Transportation Plan. As this is occurring simultaneously with the corridor planning and zoning project, the two can be closely linked in both technical research and community involvement.

Corridor Design Study (2008). This short report presented case studies of mixed use corridors in other comparable communities. It includes typical standards and guidelines and covers topics such as rear setbacks, parking location and screening, daylight and shadows, building mass/"360 degree" design, landscaping, and land uses. It considers Palo Alto, Berkeley, Ventura, Oakland, Riverside, and Sacramento. Case studies provide useful information on what types of standards have been applied in other similar areas; however, a context-sensitive approach in Santa Cruz, which considers the unique characteristics of the corridors in question, will be critical to developing new zoning regulations.

River/Front and Lower Pacific Design Guidelines and Development Incentives (2010). While this study considers a different geographic area, similar issues considered. The task will be to discuss with Staff which of the recommendations in the plan were carried forward, and whether any of the development incentives were offered/used. Experience from this plan may provide lessons for what may or may not work in the current study corridors.

Wayfinding Analysis (2011). This comprehensive analysis addresses signage and wayfinding citywide, making recommendations for standardization and improvements at major gateways and destinations in particular. The current study should apply these findings to the corridors as appropriate. Signage and wayfinding improvements should be considered in the context of capital improvement prioritization for the corridors. In addition, signage on the corridors needs to specifically support Complete Streets, providing guidance to major destinations along safe and convenient routes for pedestri-

ans and cyclists as well as cars. In some cases, the best routes may not be on the corridors themselves, but must still be apparent to travelers along them.

Beach and South of Laurel Area Plan (1998). The Area Plan covers two neighborhoods of Santa Cruz that are further south than the corridors currently under study. However, areas of overlap may include recommendations for streetscape and entries, connections to study corridors (particularly Ocean), and consistency in architectural compatibility where appropriate.

Downtown Recovery Plan (1991, as amended through 2009). The more recent amendments to the Downtown Recovery Plan (initially prepared to respond to earthquake damage) address issues brought up in the stakeholder interviews for this project, which the new zoning regulations for the corridors will need to address as well: ground floor uses and design, floor area ratio for residential uses, and other related design considerations. Numerous participants in the stakeholder interviews referenced the Downtown Plan and the design of the buildings that resulted from it—both positive and negative aspects—so it will be an important document from which to apply lessons learned.

Arts Master Plan (2008). The Arts Master Plan is citywide and broad in scope, but may have some applicability to the corridor study. Some key aspects to consider include the potential for public art on the corridors, directional signage, overlap with potential City Arts and Entertainment Districts in the zoning code, and consideration of allowing for live/work artist spaces in development standards.

Historic Context Statement (2000) and Historic Property Zoning Ordinance Amendments (2012) and Historic Building Survey Volume III (2013). The four study corridors are home to numerous historic structures, several of which are located in key nodes identified for intensification (e.g. Branciforte). The Historic Building Survey identifies these resources, and the zoning ordinance provides tools and regulations for their preservation. Any new development on the corridors that involves a historic structure will have to comply with the ordinance; moreover, new development standards written as part of this process should make compatibility with historic structures and architectural styles a priority.