

2.1 Design of Existing Development in the Downtown

Community Vision

Community members want to maintain the eclectic and diverse nature of the Core Area, embodied by the diversity of architecture, which includes many buildings from the 1950s and '60s, but also 22 City designated historic resources in and around the Core. Six of these resources are designated as Outstanding Historical Resources. Policies to preserve this unique mix include:

- Creating clear and reasonable design guidelines for the downtown that take into account its heritage. Guidelines should maintain pedestrian-oriented storefronts and ensure that second and third story additions are of the proper scale and proportion. The guidelines should cover the rehabilitation of historic resources, infill construction and remodeling.²¹

Issues/Challenges

- ▮ **Central Plaza or Civic Space.** Citizens point to the lack of a defined retail/commercial center downtown or an urban design plan designating it. People interviewed for this report, as well as attendees at the statewide California Downtown Association conference and the 1999 Downtown Forum said

the downtown needed a central focus, or heart, to create a sense of arrival and an orientation point.


- ▮ **Storefront design.** Many downtown commercial buildings are single-story and were constructed during the 1950s and 1960s. These buildings have flat, all glass storefronts that make window displays, merchandise, and signs difficult to see. It is often difficult to determine what type of business is located within. These buildings, by virtue of their low height, often do not have the density necessary to create



a concrete sense of place. The attendees of the California Downtown Association conference interviewed for this report echoed this sentiment.

- ▮ **Signs.** Signs on most storefronts are difficult to read. Some are blocked by low-hanging trees. This creates a lack of understanding of the retail mix downtown.

²¹ General Plan Goal UD 5, Specific Plan

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Size and configuration of internal building spaces. Because inventory can be delivered via UPS and FedEx in just a matter of days, keeping large amounts of inventory is not necessary anymore. Store owners no longer need the large rear storage spaces found in many older commercial buildings. As a result, some buildings may need to be reconfigured to make them more economically viable. Back areas can be turned into separate business spaces, possibly with rear entrances. Skylights and additional windows can be added to allow light into these rear areas to improve their use as retail display areas.

Current and Recent Actions




- Commercial Rehabilitation Loan Program.** This City program provides low-interest loans as incentives to property owners or tenants to improve their buildings. Priority is given to projects in the downtown Core Area. Funds may be used for interior or exterior rehabilitation. Loans range from \$3,000 to \$50,000.
- Storefront facade improvements grant program.** The Redevelopment Agency offers low interest loans and/or grants for facade improvements to commercial property within the primary commercial areas of the downtown. The program offers a maximum of \$5,000 for mid-block buildings and \$7,500 for corner buildings on a 1:1 matching basis. Owners of buildings with multiple storefronts may apply for grants for each individual storefront within the building, up to a maximum of \$20,000. The program was established in January

1999. Applications have been received for approximately \$30,000 of assistance.

- Design guidelines.** In June of 1999 the City issued a *Request for Qualifications* for a consultant to prepare design guidelines for a proposed Historic/Conservation Overlay District for the 1917 Davis City Limits. (See section 2.3)

Future Actions

HIGH PRIORITY ACTIONS FOR 2000-2004

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Investigate Central Focus Issue. Examine the significance of and possible solutions for the lack of a central space and retail focal point in the downtown core. Analysis could look at the configuration of the retail building facades, number of offices in ground floor spaces, building architecture and the grid layout of the downtown.
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Provide architectural assistance. Retain the services of an architectural design consultant to advise business owners on facade improvements. Fund rehabilitation of a demonstration block of buildings to show property owners and tenants examples of storefront improvements that can improve business.
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Develop sign design guidelines. Develop sign design guidelines in order to streamline the permit process and reduce fees for new signs. Actively encourage merchants to replace signs that don't comply with the new guidelines.

FURTHER ACTIONS FOR 2000 AND BEYOND

- ▶ **Simplify loan applications.** Applicants for rehabilitation loans have to submit an inspection report, a proposal, an appraisal, estimates, and an economic land use analysis. Some applicants do not want to make such information public. Others may be unwilling to prepare so much paperwork. Applications should be simplified to the extent possible.
- ▶ **Provide funding to the DDBA.** Consider allocating city funds to the DDBA to expand the private sector's role in fostering quality urban design. This is common among downtown programs using the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Main Street approach to revitalization.

2.2 Design of New Development in the Downtown

Community Vision

New development in the Core Area should be sensitively designed to fit cohesively into the current environment with appropriate scale, character and visual links that ensure a continuity among new and old throughout the core. Policies include:

- Formation of clear and reasonable design guidelines that speak to building size, mass, set backs, store-front treatments, second and third story commercial architecture, new residences and residential additions, amenities and site design. The

guidelines will clarify the City's expectations and reduce uncertainty for developers and property owners preparing applications.²²



Issues/Challenges

- ▶ **Good design can be subjective.** People often have different opinions about what constitutes good design. This is especially true for infill construction in an existing commercial or residential area. Even design guidelines are subject to different interpretation by those using them to develop projects and those using them to review projects.

Current and Recent Actions

- ▶ **Design guidelines.** In June of 1999 the City issued a *Request for Qualifications* for a consultant to prepare Design Guidelines for a proposed Historic/Conservation Overlay District for the 1917 Davis City Limits. (See Section 2.3)

²² General Plan Chapter 3, Specific Plan, 1999 Downtown Forum



Future Actions

HIGH PRIORITY ACTIONS FOR 2000-2004

- ▶ **Utilities in the ROW.** Work with the utility companies and Building Department to identify alternatives to locating utility boxes, meters, and backflow devices in the right-of-way within the Core Area. As infill development increases this will become more and more critical in order to preserve the appearance and functionality of the streetscape.

- Offering design assistance and incentives for property owners for maintaining and/or rehabilitating the community's historic resources.²⁵



2.3 Historic Preservation and Neighborhood Conservation

Community Vision

The community wants to capitalize on and preserve the Core Area's individuality and heritage. The Core and surrounding neighborhoods add the complexity and richness that is so important in creating a sense of place and community. Policies and directions include:

- Protecting the unique character of downtown neighborhoods, most specifically the neighborhood bordered by Russell Boulevard, A, B, and First streets. The adaptive reuse, renovation and/or rehabilitation of existing historic homes is encouraged.²³
- Possibly designating the Core Area as a historic district.²⁴

Issues/Challenges

- ▶ **Commercial impacts on residential uses.** As the downtown continues to grow, there needs to be careful mixing of uses to provide for the needs of the community without diminishing the residential character of existing residential neighborhoods in the Core Area.
- ▶ **Preservation of historic buildings.** Preservation of historic buildings as increased commercial investment occurs in the Downtown.

Current and Recent Actions

- ▶ **Design guidelines.** In June of 1999 the City issued a *Request for Qualifications* for a consultant to prepare Design Guidelines for a proposed Historic/Conservation Overlay District for the 1917 Davis City Limits. The consultants will develop design guidelines for the University Avenue, Old East Davis, Old North Davis, and Downtown Commercial Areas. These guidelines will aim to conserve historic character and plan for compatible new design and construction.

²³ Core Area Specific Plan

²⁴ Specific Plan

²⁵ General Plan Chapter 16

- ▶ **SP Depot Restoration.** Through Federal and State grants, the city purchased the Southern Pacific Depot building and surrounding property. In the 1990's, the Depot building has been restored and an adjacent 135-space parking lot installed. This project was designed to be compatible with the historic character of the building, and included paving and lighting details. Additional improvements to both the building and surrounding area will be completed in 2000.
- ▶ **Dresbach-Hunt-Boyer Pumphouse & Patio.** The City is considering a proposal for a retail/residential project at 604-B Second Street, the existing site of the Dresbach-Hunt-Boyer Pumphouse. The proposal calls for tearing down and building a new structure in keeping with the existing pumphouse.

Future Actions

HIGH PRIORITY ACTIONS FOR 2000 AND BEYOND

- ▶ **Adaptive Reuse.** Encourage sensitive adaptive reuse and protect historic buildings from demolition or insensitive remodeling.
- ▶ **Historic preservation funding.** Create a program to financially assist in the preservation of historic buildings.
- ▶ **Police Station reuse planning.** Initiate a process to determine how the existing Police Station should be reused. (i.e. retail, restaurant, museum, performing arts, entertainment, or art venue.)

FURTHER ACTIONS FOR 2000 AND BEYOND

- ▶ **DDBA funding.** Consider allocating city funds to the DDBA to expand the private sector's role in fostering historic preservation.

2.4 Public Improvements/ Streetscape

Community Vision

The vision calls for physical improvements to the Core Area to enhance the sense of community, discovery and adventure, and to make it a pleasant pedestrian experience for people of all ages. Directions and polices include:

- Adding amenities such as mid-block pathways, public art, temporary displays and activities, more night lighting, benches, landscaping, street trees, sidewalk cafes, drinking fountains, public restrooms, kiosks, educational plaques, and preservation of the city's Landmark Trees and Trees of Significance.²⁶



26 Specific Plan, 1996 Community Design and Planning Services (U.C. Davis) survey

tains. The old library/teen center building was relocated to the park and turned into the Hattie Weber Museum.

- ▶ **Teen Center.** A new 8,000 square-foot Teen Center was constructed in 1992 on the corner of Third and B.
- ▶ **Jennie Read Walk.** The existing pedestrian alleyway was renovated with new landscaping, trees, and pavers.
- ▶ **Fourth and G Street intersection.** This project included the construction of sidewalk bulb-outs to shorten the crossing distance for pedestrians, as well as curb ramps, curb and gutter improvements, brick paver crosswalks, and landscaping and irrigation.
- ▶ **Core Area drainage.** This project included the installation of drainage pipes, laterals, and inlets. It also included the repair of curb and gutter, sidewalks, access ramps, and pavement.
- ▶ **Downtown and Community Directory Kiosks.** Artist-designed directory kiosks with downtown directory and community wide maps are planned for installation. A prototype kiosk has been installed at the corner of Fourth and G Street. Five additional kiosks are to be installed throughout the downtown in the spring of 2000.
- ▶ **Pedestrian crosswalk improvements.** Install additional pedestrian intersection improvements with bulbouts, enhanced paving, trees, landscaping and street furniture.
- ▶ **Pocket park.** A “pocket park” has been conceptualized at the front of the Pacific Bell building on Third Street. The park would include public seating, art, lighting and outdoor dining tables.

- ▶ **SP Depot landscaping improvements.** As part of the Southern Pacific Depot parking lot project, pedestrian amenities are to be installed. The project includes pathways leading from the parking lot to the platform, landscaped waiting areas, shade trees, benches and drop off areas.

Future Actions

HIGH PRIORITY ACTIONS FOR 2000-2004

- ▶ **Street lighting.** Analyze lighting levels in parking lots/structures and street/sidewalks. Upgrade lighting to improve the perceived safety of problem areas consistent with the Lighting Control Ordinance.
- ▶ **Newsrack Ordinance.** The City is considering adopting an ordinance to address the negative visual impact and physical damage resulting from the proliferation of open air vending machines containing editorial and advertising publications on sidewalks downtown. Consolidated vending racks would be installed and design standards enforced to improve the appearance of the racks
- ▶ **Urban Forest.** The City, in conjunction with the U.C. Davis Department of Environmental Horticulture and the USDA Forest Service Western Center for Urban Forest Research, should consider a “Downtown Davis Urban Forest Research Demonstration Site,” and develop and adopt an “Urban Forestry Master Plan” for the Core Area.
- ▶ **Construction of entry/welcome treatments.** The Davis Arch was built in 1916 and became a



symbol of unity between the U.C. campus and the community. The Arch was removed in the 1920's due to increasing automobile traffic. The *Core Area Specific Plan* recommends constructing a new arch as a way to bridge the past and the future. Attendees at the 1999 Downtown Forum and California Downtown Association conference suggested stronger streetscape elements could mark the southern and northern entries to downtown.

- ▶ **Third Street sidewalk and bicycle enhancements.** Third Street between A and H streets should be enhanced as a bicycle and pedestrian way. Consider installation of a gateway/welcoming treatment.
- ▶ **Vandalism prevention.** The City needs to increase the visible police presence downtown. This will become increasingly important when the Police Department moves to its new facility. A substation downtown should be considered. A more proactive approach to vandalism prevention should be considered and studies of how other cities prevent vandalism, graffiti and theft conducted.
- ▶ **Maintenance.** Discussions need to be held between the City, the DDBA and the downtown maintenance contractor to identify maintenance problems and develop solutions.
- ▶ **Pedestrian Intersection Improvements.** Install additional pedestrian intersection improvements with bulbouts, enhanced paving, trees, landscaping and street furniture.

FURTHER ACTIONS FOR 2000 AND BEYOND

- ▶ **Mid-Block Pedestrian Passageways.** Within the downtown it is desirable to encourage the provision of pedestrian passageways/arcades at mid-block locations to provide access to parking, connections to the Discovery Walk, and connections between streets and alleys. An incentive program would encourage private developers to provide mid-block pedestrian passageways/arcades within their projects. The City's zoning ordinance requires new structures or additions to provide an easement for such passageways along specific blocks in the downtown.
- ▶ **Create a Discovery Walk.** The Discovery Walk would take people on a tour past shops, plazas, public art, historic and cultural resources, landmark trees, and other points of interest. Amenities such as benches, shade structures, drinking fountains and educational plaques would be provided along the way. The Discovery Walk would be a good complement to the existing Public Art Walking Tour, History Bicycle Tour, Downtown Map, and Old North neighborhood tour. It would also be an educational tool for children.