

# Executive Summary.....

City leaders have worked for more than a decade with the downtown business community and other key stakeholders to implement a comprehensive set of development strategies that accomplish the vision of the City's guiding policies. These strategies are designed to encourage economic growth while maintaining the small town charm and quality of life that makes downtown so desirable. The strategies fall into four categories: **Economic Vitality**; **Urban Design**; **Community Enrichment**; and **Transportation, Circulation and Parking**.

In the area of **Economic Vitality**, activities have included small business training sessions, lowered development fees, and a higher level of city/business dialogue that encourages business retention. The Davis Downtown Business Association and local arts organizations have organized an aggressive program of sales promotions and special events. The Davis Redevelopment Agency has helped facilitate new commercial development including the recent Fifth and G Project. Private sector investment such as the Davis Commons project has also increased economic activity downtown. The Chamber of Commerce, DDBA, and City have developed a Visitor Attraction program. The City recently initiated a downtown retail recruitment strategy.

In the area of **Urban Design**, the City has funded extensive streetscape amenities that have improved the downtown's appearance and pedestrian-friendly character. The City's financial incentive programs encourage enhancements and historic preservation of existing commercial buildings. Design guidelines are

being developed to conserve neighborhood character and ensure that the designs of new developments capitalize on downtown's unique character while providing for individual expression.

In the area of **Community Enrichment**, the City and the business community have proactively included culture and the arts in the downtown strategies. Public art, performing arts spaces, and coordinated gallery promotions make downtown a local and regional arts center. The community has recognized the importance of a residential base in the



Core, and is continuously working toward increasing downtown housing opportunities. Thirty-seven single-family homes and 21 second units were recently built at the Aggie Village site.

In the areas of **Transportation, Circulation and Parking**, the City has improved traffic flow while actively promoting bicycle and transit use. New parking has been added in surface lots, parking structures and on the street. Parking use and enforcement is regularly monitored to ensure that the existing parking supply is being managed most efficiently.

Like a good business, downtown is constantly looking for a competitive edge that will result in regular increases in

sales and business activity. If a business' progress is slower than expected, or reversals of fortune are perceived, people want to know why and they want solutions. Davis' Core Area is no different.

As the city grows, the Core Area is changing, according to discussions with business owners, commercial property owners, residents, and community leaders for this report. Today's go-go economy, and national consumer trends play a role as well. For instance the recently-developed Davis Commons and Fifth & G projects have spurred investor confidence and increased pedestrian traffic, but they are reminders that national chains and entertainment uses are taking the place of some independent retailers. More and more office users want to locate downtown to be near the hub of activity as well. Attention has recently been focused on the conversion of ground floor retail spaces to office uses in the Downtown Core. This is a concern because retail uses attract people downtown, maintain pedestrian flow and street life, and generate important sales tax revenues for the City.

While there is renewed interest nationally in downtown shopping, Davis businesses find that the new residents moving into outlying subdivisions are difficult to reach. Many work outside the city, do not read local newspapers, and have not developed loyalty to in-town shopping. Like longer-term residents, they find it easy to drive to out-of-town shopping centers. As a result, the City loses an estimated \$144 million a year in retail sales to stores in Sacramento, Woodland and Vacaville. Davis residents are most often seeking apparel, home furnishings and general merchandise when they leave town to shop.

Architecture in the Core Area is diverse and varies in age. While there are 21 City-designated historic resources in

the Core Area, the Downtown Core is dominated by low-rise 1960s-era buildings. The Core Area is laid out in a grid pattern providing short blocks and wide sidewalks that are friendly to pedestrians. However, many residents and merchants believe the plain buildings and network of streets offers few landmarks and no central "place" that creates a sense of arrival and marks the civic and commercial heart of the city. On a street and sidewalk scale, the flat glass storefronts make window displays, store merchandise and signs difficult to see.

Pedestrian, bicycle and automobile circulation is increasingly important given that the city population and University of California, Davis, enrollment continue to rise. Parking demand in the downtown remains a complex issue that affects, and is affected by, the availability and use of other modes of transportation. Roughly half of the 2-hour parking spaces are taken up by workers who rotate their cars through the day, according to studies by the Davis Chamber of Commerce and Davis Downtown Business Association. Concerns among downtown workers and shoppers over the security of the two parking structures inhibits their full use. Traffic congestion remains a problem at the First Street and Richards Boulevard intersection during peak hours.

*What follows is a list of top priorities for the City and key downtown stakeholders to accomplish in the next five years. The priorities come from a number of sources including comments made by participants in the 1999 City of Davis Downtown Forum, feedback from attendees at the September 1999 California Downtown Association Conference held in Davis, interviews with key stakeholders, and input from the City and the consultant team. A more detailed list is included in Appendices 1 and 2. The Benchmarks for Success included in Appendix 7 provide a means to monitor progress and ensure that downtown continues to meet the clear visions set for it.*