



DOWNTOWN BUILDINGS COMMITTEE MEETING
Thursday, April 16, 2015 - 7:00 P.M.
Neutra House
181 Hillview Avenue, Los Altos, California

MEETING MINUTES

Attendance

Committee members present: Thomas Barton, Anita Kay Enander, Hillary Frank, Edward Infante, Par Marriott, Susan Mensinger, Teresa Morris, Jane Reed, Nedis Salmon, Nancy Nealon See

Committee members absent: Deb Hope

City Council: Megan Satterlee, facilitator

City staff: Marcia Somers, City Manager

1. Review recent building developments in CRS and CRS/OAD zones

The Committee members reviewed each of the following buildings and provided comments regarding their individual evaluations as well as comments made to them by other community members. These comments have been summarized with flip chart notations by Councilmember Satterlee and notes provided by Committee member Marriott:

- 1 Main Street – Enchanté Hotel (Attachment A)
- 160 First Street - Safeway (Attachment B)
- 400 Main Street – mixed use (Attachment C)

2. Review 2012 Downtown survey results

Deferred to future meeting

3. Receive 2015 Downtown survey topline results

Deferred to future meeting

4. Future Committee activities

Next meeting will be May 14, 2015 with review of the recent building developments in the CD/R3 and CD zones, including 100 First Street (multi-family residential), 396 First Street (multi-family residential), 343 Second Street (Packard Foundation) and 240 Third Street (mixed use)

FLIP CHART NOTES
from Downtown Buildings Committee meeting
Thursday, April 16, 2015

Attachment A

HOTEL

- Out of scale
- Lack of detail on Main Streets
- Too tall
- Blocks view of west hills
- Doesn't represent what gateway ...
- We aren't France
- Out of character
- Parking (perception)
- Narrow San Antonio sidewalk
- Sidewalks are comfortable around building
- May not support connection that guidelines suggest (easier w/ prior gas station)
- Plaza does not feel public so not pedestrian friendly – private
- San Antonio not as inviting
- Larger than community expected
- Bulk
- Unexpectedly dense
- Signage for public space lacking
- Three stories
- Space between sidewalks & building
- Address w/ public parking
- Sticks out from neighboring buildings
- Safety of outdoor seating
- Atmosphere in evening look inviting > lighting > activity > people in plaza
- Good building signage
- Plantings > will they grow into something?
- Benches
- Awnings & balconies breakup building
- Doesn't connect to neighboring building
- Presence does create entry
- Lacks gateway signage
- Provides balance to building across the street
- Blank wall
 - Plaza height between window/doors
 - San Antonio
- High quality materials
 - Meet community expectations
- Bold statements – New community directions
- Lost opportunity to present something that represents village
- French doors unite plaza to building
- Scale of architecture
- Blocks entrance/doesn't draw in

4-16-15 Downtown Buildings Committee: 1 Main Street

Notes taken by Committee member Marriott

POSITIVES

- Design is lovely, nice building.
- Nice detailing at corner.
- Main St side is inviting.
- Represents high quality of Los Altos
- Speaks to direction Los Altos is going: bigger, bold, makes a statement (Is it true that the town's direction is toward bigger & bolder?)
- Does create a gateway because of its size/presence. Signage (welcome to LA) would help.
- Architectural style is personal, thus some may like it, some may think it's too Bavarian.
- It's no more out of place than Ron Packard building across Main Street. The 2 buildings make 2 towers as a gateway.
- No more out of character than Packard building or Town Crier Colonial. Hard to write guidelines on how to tread when you have eclectic mix. We already have faux chateaux.
- It does make a statement for an entrance. Inviting. Nice at night. Looks historic. Continuous style.
- Signage is appropriate. Simple, scaled to building, supports character of building, quality.
- Better than a vacant lot.

NEGATIVES

- Out of scale. Too big for space. Bulk. Unexpectedly dense use of that space. Doesn't provide much of an open space. Would look better on large lot with landscaping.
- Lack of details on Main St side. Big flat and blank walls Plaza side and San Antonio.
- Too tall. 3 stories. Not so much the stories as the height. Mansard at the top is very large. Larger than the public expected.
- Blocks view of hills (mentioned often.)
- As a gateway, it doesn't represent rest of village. Doesn't fit downtown. Out of character. Stands out like a sore thumb.
- Doesn't draw you into downtown triangle. Stands as a rock. Not welcoming – "Gee let me go down here to see what's beyond."
- Lacks connection with other buildings.

- Out of character. We're not France or Bavaria.
- Truly ugly. This is not Provence. It's not the architecture per se. We have French & other eclectic designs, but not at that scale.
- Grand manse at entrance to town. Opposes most of the rest of what's in town, stylistically and size wise. Lost opportunity to provide a similarly scaled building.
- Not inviting walking on San Antonio. Narrow sidewalk (same width as rest of sidewalk on that block, but walking next to hotel wall is different from walking next to open parking lots). Feels like you're being crushed by the building.
- Plaza: Noisy. Doesn't seem safe. Exposed re traffic. Not clear that plaza is open to the public. Corner doesn't feel like a public space. Feels like you walk through private patio. Two double-door entrances ties plaza to building vs. opening it for public use.
- Bicycle riders at Peet's do not like it. Consider it most dangerous part of town.
- It is pedestrian scale, but not friendly. Green park with statue and benches (at other corner) is more obviously a public space.
- Fussy, over-the-top. Guidelines encourages more simplicity.
- We're supposed to bring in retail. Hotel isn't retail – but it may provide customers.
- Parking (every discussion of hotel includes concern that no parking was required.)

KEY POINT (relating to all buildings): Scale

Small scale allows one to see out and beyond. You don't block *the commons* (hills, treetops, hills, skies and beyond the building). Eye can see beyond individual buildings.

Small scale = 25-foot width rhythm along Main & State and awnings that bring buildings size down.

Small scale = human scale. Don't want to be squeezed in between walls with no sunlight.

Small scale compares to entire landscape.

We all own the view.

Inconsistencies with Downtown Design Plan:

Page	Section	Says
1	Goals	Improve the visual quality of the area (Hills) and create an attractive pedestrian environment
3	Special Character	1 & 2 story buildings, parking plazas, give Downtown low density atmosphere
4	Assets	Small town village character, architecturally and historically interesting buildings
7	Design Concepts	Externalize character of the village to increase awareness of downtown character
10	First Steps	Entries & Edges: appearance consistent with small-scale pedestrian core
11		Pedestrian Friendly
13	Entries	Will be most unifying if all are variation of strong concept & theme
34	Hotel Entry	Respond to the presence of City Hall across the street

Inconsistencies with Downtown Design Guidelines

Page	Section	Says
7	Community Expectations	Community wishes to support & enhance unique character of downtown. Property owners & developers will be expected to fit their projects into that existing fabric with sensitivity to their surroundings, & a recognition that the sum of the whole is more important than any single building or use. Buildings should be seen as unique, identifiable, and distinct from other buildings, but this distinction should be subtle, not dramatic.
7	Intent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Support & enhance unique village character ▪ Maintain & enhance attractive pedestrian environment ▪ Provide adequate, attractive & convenient public parking
17	Core	3. Building mass is articulated to relate to the human scale, both horizontally & vertically. 5. Landscaping is generous & inviting.
23	Core	Continue the pattern & scale established by existing buildings
37	Core	Avoid architectural styles & monumental building elements that do not relate to the small human scale of downtown. PHOTO: Don't use large arches.
68	Architecture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Design to village scale ▪ Avoid large box-like structures ▪ Keep focal points small in scale ▪ Provide substantial small scale details
69	Architecture	Design structures to be compatible with adjacent existing buildings.

FLIP CHART NOTES
from Downtown Buildings Committee meeting
Thursday, April 16, 2015

Attachment B

SAFEWAY

- Working:
 - Parking lot
 - Central location
 - Greater food selection
- Too imposing
- Feels impersonal
- Lacks entrance
- Lacks articulation
- Height
- Parking on top/under ground
- Size/bulk don't related to neighbor
- Not subtle change
- Scale no pedestrian
- Foothill Expwy > single mass
 - No color
 - No change in height
- Sidewalk feels crowded
- Walking down driveway lacks sidewalk (5.1.4)
- Lacks defined ped path in garage
- Length/height contribute to bad ped experience
- Shadows
- Benches weird
- Scale of outdoor seating too small
- Narrow First Street
- Canyon effect:
 - Sunlight blocked
 - Surrounded by buildings
- Looming
- Hated parking below
 - Difficult to navigate
 - Inaccessible
- Parking screened from view
- Materials – hard
 - Do not reflect village
- Can see equipment

4-16-15 Downtown Buildings Committee: 160 First Street (Safeway)

Notes taken by Committee member Marriott

POSITIVES

- Appropriate and handsome. Size and height are appropriate because they back up to the expressway, buffering the noise from the expressway.
- Parking lot works well. Accommodates public spaces (but 90-minute limit).
- Met zoning code, but code changed mid-development. Under current guidelines, it would be 7 feet lower: max height would be 30 feet to flat roof + 8 feet screening/parapet.

NEGATIVES

- Safeway and the building next to it really make the area look confined. Blocks hills. Bronx tunnel. Feel bad for people across the street. Shadows cast. Loss of sunlight is one of the most distressing aspects. It gives First Street the feeling I get in the Financial District in San Francisco.
- Design: mixed bag. Impersonal building. No good entrance. Box-shaped. Not good articulation. Bulky, oversized, few decorations, simply not “home town” friendly. Looming, cold, out of character. Too imposing. Highest part is 43.5 feet. Architecture is dramatic, not subtle look. (Guidelines talk about subtle distinctions with regards to neighbors.) Could be made to look like 3 buildings.
- 45 foot height on both sides of First St. would be bad.
- Not consistent with materials used in Village, though the Town Crier building has stark red brick.
- Better if parking was on top. (Safeway originally proposed parking on top, but people across Foothill had concerns about lights.) Or underneath. Taking an elevator up to the grocery store is not village character. Retail should be on first floor. Would be nice if it had been single story with parking underground.
- I wish we could swap it with Whole Foods re location.
- Not sensitive to surroundings: Size, bulk, shape. Lacks appropriate relationship with other structures in area. Doesn't relate to nearby buildings, e.g., cottages across the street.
- Pedestrian environment – misses re scale. Everything straight up off the ground. Some are losing business because of this. Can't abide by building right up to road. Would benefit from setbacks in proportion to building. Crowded sidewalk on First for pedestrians. Very different from setback on Post Office condos.

- Setbacks from the sidewalk are an example of meeting requirements but not common sense. There also would have been a better visual appeal if there was room on the sidewalks for more sitting/planting areas. Very small seating area above.
- Parking is screened, but dark street level garage is oppressive and uninviting – almost ominous to a pedestrian. A clear violation of the guideline that says, “Maintain and enhance an attractive Downtown pedestrian environment.” Who would want to sit on the benches that are essentially in the parking garage?
- Concern about the recent accidents involving carts going down the up escalator.

Inconsistencies with Downtown Design Plan

Page	Section	Says
1	Goals	Improve the visual quality of the area (Hills) and create an attractive pedestrian environment
3	Special Character	1 & 2 story buildings, parking plazas, give Downtown low density atmosphere
4	Assets	Small town village character, architecturally and historically interesting buildings
7	Design Concepts	Externalize character of the village to increase awareness of downtown character
10	First Steps	Entries & Edges: appearance consistent with small-scale pedestrian core
11		Pedestrian Friendly
13	Entries	Will be most unifying if all are variation of strong concept & theme
23	Public Space	Form, scale design that accommodates pedestrians.
35		Development would be expected to continue the established Main St development patterns... street edge setback & character consistent with adjacent streets. Along Main & First, character should be consistent with that of Main Street...
39	Parking Garages	Garage elevations at street should be harmonious with pedestrian street environment ... reduce scale of the cave-like vehicle entrance

Inconsistencies with Downtown Design Guidelines

Page	Section	Says
7	Community Expectations	<p>Community wishes to support & enhance unique character of downtown. Property owners & developers will be expected to fit their projects into that existing fabric with sensitivity to their surroundings, & a recognition that the sum of the whole is more important than any single building or use. Buildings should be seen as unique, identifiable, and distinct from other buildings, but this distinction should be subtle, not dramatic.</p> <p>A high quality of traditional architectural and landscape design is expected with abundant detail carried out in a manner that is authentic to the architectural style selected by the applicant.</p>
7	Intent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Support & enhance unique village character ▪ Maintain & enhance attractive pedestrian environment ▪ Provide adequate, attractive & convenient public parking
65	First St District	Owners of properties & businesses in this district should review guidelines for Core.
65	Intent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Promote implementation of downtown design plan ▪ Support & enhance downtown village atmosphere

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Respect scale & character of area immediately surrounding existing downtown pedestrian district ▪ Improve visual appeal & pedestrian orientation of downtown
66	Pedestrian environment	This district is very much a part of the downtown village. Guidelines allow larger buildings & onsite parking while doing so in a manner that reinforces downtown village scale & character
67	Integrate w/streetscape	Soft landscaping is required for a minimum of 60% of front setback.
67	Pedestrian	Provide pedestrian amenities
68	Architecture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Design to village scale ▪ Avoid large box-like structures ▪ Keep focal points small in scale ▪ Provide substantial small scale details
69	Architecture	Design structures to be compatible with adjacent existing buildings.

FLIP CHART NOTES
from Downtown Buildings Committee meeting
Thursday, April 16, 2015

Attachment C

400 MAIN

- Large arch – not human scale
 - Does provide vantage point
- Doorway not human scale
- Articulation better than Safeway
 - But insufficient small scale elements
- Massive corner tower
 - Not inviting
- Does not represent entrance to Los Altos
- Out of Scale w/ itself
- Looks like/feels like three stories
- DG – says do not draw attention from Foothill
- Not a gateway – sits wrong way
- Materials pretty, but overall affect is cold
- Like sidewalk & extra space
- Lacks greenery
- Crossing driveway – dangerous
- Entrance to store require ped to walk to front
- Taller than expected
- Lost corner plaza element
- Wall seems too short for building
- Too few trees on Foothill Expwy
- Shop entrances lack articulation
- Roofline too long/straight
- Fountain wall blocks
- Not sensitive to neighbors
- Colors good – too bland

GENERAL COMMENTS

- ❖ Small Scale
 - See treetops/hills
 - See beyond the building
- ❖ Lack pictures of large buildings
 - Towers
 - Tree/landscaping size
 - Low density
 - Two story
 - Draw attention from Foothill Expwy
 - Not enough non State/Main pictures

4-16-15 Downtown Buildings Committee: 400 Main Street

Notes take by Committee member Marriott

POSITIVES

- I'm fine with the building itself, but I absolutely hate how the city narrowed First Street in order to widen the sidewalks on both sides.
- Love extra sidewalk & expansiveness.
- Building will mature. When restaurant and Pharmaca are in, when trees mature, it will be different.
- Gorgeous stone. Nice color.
- If you turn your back to the building and stand under the grand archway as a pedestrian, it provides a vantage point to see buildings across the street beyond the fountain.

NEGATIVES

- Public expectation was that it would be more in scale. Whole line of buildings are in scale of Safeway: long consistent roofline. Big block look.
- Cold and massive. First floor arches are huge and out of scale. Big arches and large doorways don't fit guidelines.
- Not sensitive to scale of downtown. It's its own deal. Large box-like building. Big and disproportionate for the feel of the town. Not human scale. Not inviting. Massive tower. Don't like height. Highest point is 48 feet.
- Guidelines recommend breaking into small elements. Wasn't done. Lacks architectural details.
- Vision was that we'd have small boutiques. There's no articulation for any of the shops (although the restaurant took whole building on one side, so you don't need cute little entrance ways).
- First floor not pedestrian scale. I'd put it out with Santa Clara football stadium. Not presented as built.
- Looks like it's 3 stories. If this is what the design guideline – "Establish a strong sense of entry at downtown gateways" – intended, it would be more appropriate as a bank building in Chicago or some other big city – with another 80 stories sitting on top. Doesn't represent entry to village.
- Bulky, oversized, and simply not "home town" friendly. The loss of sunlight is one of the most distressing aspects. It gives First Street the feeling I get in the Financial District in San Francisco.

- With the street so narrow, the tall buildings block out any sunlight in the afternoon. And it's not helped by the trellis/ pergola added as part the downtown beautification project a few years back.
- Per guidelines, it's not supposed to scream 'come look at me' from Foothill. Sits incorrectly on the land to be a gateway. (But shouldn't a gateway draw people in from Foothill? Guideline not clear. Should the town face outward? Or do we want to draw people into town?)
- Drawings leave one to believe First St. is wider than it really is. In reality, there is no room for a bicycle on the street; and, if there is a large (Safeway) truck coming in one direction, that truck goes over the center line, leaving the oncoming car precious little space.
- Bad corner for pedestrians. Most people will prefer to park on the street vs. in the underground garage. Only one driveway in and out. Plus Safeway parking.
- Parking is in the back, but store/restaurant entrances are in front.
- Materials: Height and coloring are similar to the others, but it extends right to the corner. Overall effect is a very cold building. Is it that there's a lot of stone (gorgeous) or is it lack of articulations? Too much of one color. Too bland.
- Not a lot of greenery to soften things. Foothill: not as wide setback, not as many trees.
- Foothill side looks like a prison.
- Didn't get public space on the corner.
- There was interest in putting fountain in public space (which is not sunny and will be a wind tunnel). Fountain on First Street now blocks entrance to town. Isolated. If it was a round fountain, it would have had more pedestrian community feel.
- Wall sign out front, could have been higher because of scale of building, coming from University side.
- Have you seen 'The Terraces' on Los Altos Avenue? Why didn't the planners just tell the developer of the new building at the corner of First and Main to just copy that look? It is two stories and still has a cozy, friendly, village look.

Inconsistencies with Downtown Design Plan

Page	Section	Says
1	Goals	Improve the visual quality of the area (Hills) and create an attractive pedestrian environment
3	Special Character	1 & 2 story buildings, parking plazas, give Downtown low density atmosphere
4	Assets	Small town village character, architecturally and historically interesting buildings
7	Design Concepts	Externalize character of the village to increase awareness of downtown character
10	First Steps	Entries & Edges: appearance consistent with small-scale pedestrian core
11		Pedestrian Friendly

13	Entries	Will be most unifying if all are variation of strong concept & theme
23	Public Space	Form, scale design that accommodates pedestrians.
35		Development would be expected to continue the established Main St development patterns... street edge setback & character consistent with adjacent streets. Along Main & First, character should be consistent with that of Main Street...

Inconsistencies with Downtown Design Guidelines

Page	Section	Says
7	Community Expectations	<p>Community wishes to support & enhance unique character of downtown. Property owners & developers will be expected to fit their projects into that existing fabric with sensitivity to their surroundings, & a recognition that the sum of the whole is more important than any single building or use. Buildings should be seen as unique, identifiable, and distinct from other buildings, but this distinction should be subtle, not dramatic.</p> <p>A high quality of traditional architectural and landscape design is expected with abundant detail carried out in a manner that is authentic to the architectural style selected by the applicant.</p>
7	Intent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Support & enhance unique village character ▪ Maintain & enhance attractive pedestrian environment ▪ Provide adequate, attractive & convenient public parking
17	Core	<p>3. Building mass is articulated to relate to the human scale, both horizontally & vertically.</p> <p>5. Landscaping is generous & inviting.</p>
23	Core	Continue the pattern & scale established by existing buildings
37	Core	Avoid architectural styles & monumental building elements that do not relate to the small human scale of downtown. PHOTO: Don't use large arches.
65	First St District	Owners of properties & businesses in this district should review guidelines for Core. 50-foot module (width), except for lots in CRS zone.
65	Intent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Promote implementation of downtown design plan ▪ Support & enhance downtown village atmosphere ▪ Respect scale & character of area immediately surrounding existing downtown pedestrian district ▪ Improve visual appeal & pedestrian orientation of downtown
66	Pedestrian environment	This district is very much a part of the downtown village. Guidelines allow larger buildings & onsite parking while doing so in a manner that reinforces downtown village scale & character
67	Pedestrian	Provide pedestrian amenities
68	Architecture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Design to village scale ▪ Avoid large box-like structures ▪ Keep focal points small in scale ▪ Provide substantial small scale details
69	Architecture	Design structures to be compatible with adjacent existing buildings.

THEMES/IDEAS FOR DISCUSSION

Vision of the Downtown Future : As we look at buildings and possible changes ...

- What's the downtown style today, e.g., Hodgepodge, Eclectic, Village, Low key, Old-fashioned, Modern, Diverse, Leafy, Sleek, Family-oriented, Quaint, Funky, Artsy, Boring, Vital, Unique, Vibrant ... ?
- Which of those qualities should be preserved? Which should be changed?

Requirements for Developer Presentations

- In addition to showing the building in context, at human height, require 3D Google Earth type presentations, not just architect's renderings or story poles.
- Do story poles make sense? Do they show enough to be worth the effort?
- Do PTC commissioners have a literal checklist when they review plans? Should we provide one, which could be handed off to the city council after the PTC review?

Zoning: Commercial & Residential

- Too many zones?
- First Street is part of the Village. Why should zoning be different from State & Main?
- Why dictate ceiling height of first floor as 12 feet in Mixed Commercial District? If the purpose is to keep retail on ground floor, then make that a rule, but let developer decide on ceiling height. If a developer has to start with a 12-ft first floor, it naturally means a taller building.
- Pros & Cons of specifying height vs. stories.
- Daylight plane required for Commercial?

Form & Function/Design

- Where retail/service is required on first floor, how does design support that? Is 12-foot height essential?
- How can we best define "quality"? Some folks I spoke to thought that the condos at 360 First look "schlocky." What about descriptions like "makes a statement" or "bold"? How can we assure those describe good things?
- Towers should be limited, not just height, but width.
- Second story setbacks.
- Distance from sidewalk.
- Consider street width.
- Follow up on Jane's and Anita's suggestion that we provide more examples for larger buildings.

- No more parking mitigations. (Packard Foundation deal is OK because they set aside fallow land for parking in case their mitigations doesn't work out.) Paying into a fund doesn't help if there are no garages. Yes this has to do with buildings, because if there's no mitigation, developer will have to provide parking on site.
- Parking should be underneath or on top (screened).

Landscape

- Should we demand mature trees?

"The Commons"

- *"The commons"* (hills, treetops, hills, skies and beyond the building) is a wonderful concept that Teresa Morris mentioned at our 4/16 meeting. Can/should this be baked into all development plans?
- Implies human scale, public good

Data

- Does anyone have data on customer spending vs. feet on the street? Neither LAVA nor the Chamber of Commerce have any info. One of the speakers from the first walking tour said some merchants were considering suing the city because of lost business. But was this just because of construction?
- What do "vibrancy" and "vitality" really mean? Is in feet on the street or revenue?
- Is downtown for residents or visitors? Dry cleaners, shoe repair, HW, other services for locals or posh boutiques & restaurants (also serve locals, but draw others to town)?

Future Plans

- What sort of outreach do we conduct once we have recommendations?
- Could we contact people who took part in 2014 phone survey?
- How do we overcome apathy? (Create an image of First Street as it would look if every property on both sides was developed according to current zoning?)