



DATE: August 28, 2012

AGENDA ITEM # 7

TO: City Council

FROM: Mayor Carpenter and Councilmember Satterlee

SUBJECT: Revised summary of key conclusions from 2012 Downtown survey

RECOMMENDATION:

Accept the summary of key conclusions from the 2012 survey among City of Los Altos residents regarding Downtown Los Altos

SUMMARY:

Estimated Fiscal Impact:

Amount: None

Budgeted: No

Public Hearing Notice: Not applicable

Previous Council Consideration: December 13, 2011; January 24, 2012; June 26, 2012 and July 24, 2012

CEQA Status: Not applicable

Attachment:

1. Report from Mayor Carpenter and Councilmember Satterlee dated August 28, 2012



REPORT

DATE: August 28, 2012
TO: City Council
FROM: Mayor Carpenter and Councilmember Satterlee
SUBJECT: SUMMARY OF KEY CONCLUSIONS FROM 2012 DOWNTOWN SURVEY

Recommendation to accept this summary of key conclusions from the 2012 survey among City of Los Altos residents regarding downtown Los Altos.

BACKGROUND

During the past six years, several downtown zoning committees were appointed by Council to review various aspects of downtown Los Altos. Comprised of City residents, other key stakeholders including downtown business and property owners, Commissioners, Councilmembers, and City staff, these committees held numerous public meetings, in the course of which they developed specific recommendations for the downtown area. Their recommendations led to Council approval of revisions to the downtown zoning ordinances, to among other things allow taller buildings and a wider range of uses along the north and south ends of First Street and south of Main Street, and reduce the parking requirement for office uses. As a result, five new projects in downtown Los Altos have been approved, three of which are currently under construction or newly completed. Concurrently, the City made significant infrastructure investments downtown.

However, there had not been a comprehensive survey conducted by a professional marketing research firm of a representative sample of City of Los Altos residents to ascertain how the community uses downtown currently, how satisfied residents are with the downtown as it exists today, and what additional changes they would or would not favor. Conducting such a survey was identified as a 2012 Council goal during Council's annual goal-setting meeting on December 3, 2011.

On December 13, 2011, Council authorized and funded this project and appointed an ad hoc Council subcommittee consisting of Mayor Carpenter and Councilmember Satterlee to work with Godbe Research. The research objectives were to: (1) gauge resident satisfaction with the City of Los Altos in general and downtown in particular; (2) assess attitudes and perceptions about shopping, restaurants, entertainment, traffic and parking in downtown Los Altos; (3) gauge resident preferences for future directions of downtown; and (4) identify any differences in opinions due to demographic and/or behavioral characteristics. After reviewing the draft questionnaire during the January 24, 2012 regular Council meeting, the questionnaire was finalized and the survey was fielded between May 20 and May 29, 2012.

A total of 413 telephone interviews among adult residents of the City of Los Altos were completed. Participants were contacted on both landlines and cell phones and were selected from among registered voters as well as those not registered to vote. Once collected, the data was weighted to accurately represent the City's adult population in terms of gender, age and ethnicity as reported in the 2010 census. The margin of error for the entire sample is $\pm 4.8\%$ at the 95% confidence level. The topline report and results were presented by Godbe Research during the June 26, 2012 regular Council meeting. Bryan Godbe, President of Godbe Research, reviewed this summary and concurred that it accurately reflects the survey results.

During the July 24, 2012 regular Council meeting, Council directed the subcommittee to revise this report. Percentages have been restated to represent responses as a percentage of the total sample, and rounded to whole numbers. Upon Council's final approval of this report, Godbe Research will update their final report and submit it to the City.

KEY CONCLUSIONS

Overall, this quantitative survey among a representative sample of City of Los Altos residents provides important insights into the views of the community as a whole and serves as a benchmark of community opinion at a key point in the redevelopment of the downtown area. Current and future Councils, City staff, and the community can rely on the accuracy of this information when setting priorities and making decisions. In addition to this summary of key conclusions, information on statistically-significant differences highlighted in the cross-tabulations should be reviewed as specific issues are considered by Council.

We recommend that another survey be conducted in two years. A survey conducted in the Spring of 2014 can provide Council with an update of residents' views on the topics studied in the 2012 survey, plus obtain their views on any additional infrastructure work on San Antonio Road and First Street as well as any completed private development projects in the downtown area, such as the Packard Foundation, 240 Third Street, Safeway, the residential developments on First Street (old Adobe Animal Hospital and Post Office sites), and the hotel at 1 Main Street.

Specific conclusions include:

1. Satisfaction with the overall quality of life in Los Altos is extraordinarily high. 96% of residents are at least somewhat satisfied and 68% are very satisfied; only 2% are somewhat or very dissatisfied.
2. Satisfaction with Downtown Los Altos is not as high, but this does not negatively impact overall satisfaction with Los Altos. A supermajority of residents (68%) are very (30%) or somewhat (39%) satisfied with Downtown Los Altos; 19% are somewhat (15%) or very (4%) dissatisfied, and 12% are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. In an open-ended question in which the answers were not read to them, the top reasons given by those who are dissatisfied (note that this is a small base of 78 respondents) are lack of variety in shops (6%), parking (3%), and lack of restaurant options (3%).
3. Downtown Los Altos is viewed as a place to shop (46%), eat (38%), meet (32%), relax/hang out (30%), attend community events (29%), and run errands (18%). It is a place where residents

socialize with their families, neighbors and friends, as well as shop for groceries and other items and run errands.

4. Residents visit Downtown Los Altos frequently. Residents generally visit Downtown Los Altos a few times a week (32%). 62% visit at least once a week, and another 26% visit at least once a month. Only 2% never visit Downtown Los Altos; 3% visit several times a day.
5. Their primary reason for going downtown is to eat out or have drinks (29%), followed by shopping for groceries or food (26%). The top other (i.e., non-primary) reason for going downtown is to shop for apparel, gifts, etc. (21%). Attracting and retaining restaurants, grocery stores, and shops in Downtown Los Altos is vital to continuing to effectively serve our residents.
6. Most people drive to Downtown Los Altos, but a significant percentage walk or ride a bike at least some of the time. 59% always drive, and another 32% sometimes drive. 49% walk at least some of the time, and 31% bike at least some of the time. (Note that these percentages accurately reflect respondent answers, even though they add up to more than 100%.) Virtually no one takes a bus or taxi to downtown. When those who always or sometimes drive were asked what would encourage them to walk or bike to downtown, the top responses were living closer (31%) or nothing at all (25%).
7. A convenient connection between Downtown Los Altos and the Community Center campus for pedestrians, bicyclists and drivers is at least somewhat important to 72% of residents.
8. Mountain View is the #1 alternative to Downtown Los Altos for shopping, eating out, meeting friends, getting coffee or dessert, and other activities, followed by Palo Alto and shopping malls such as Stanford and Valley Fair. Only a few mentioned Los Gatos, Santana Row, Sunnyvale or Cupertino; hardly anyone mentioned Rancho, Menlo Park, Foothill, San Francisco, or San Jose.
9. More variety in restaurants, shops, entertainment and activities, and staying open later in the evening, would motivate people to go downtown more often. In an open-ended question in which the answers were not read to them, few respondents mentioned that a movie theatre (6%), a bookstore (5%), a nightclub (4%), more play areas/parks for children (4%), and more places for pre-teens/teens to hang out (less than 1%) would motivate them to go downtown more often; however, these response rates are within the survey's margin of error and therefore may not reflect residents' views accurately.

Of those who said retail would motivate them to go downtown more often (a subset of 127 respondents), a bookstore (3%) was their top choice. Of those who said entertainment would motivate them to go downtown more often (a subset of 108 respondents), a movie theatre (11%) topped their wish list, followed by live entertainment/music (5%).

10. Parking in Downtown Los Altos is not a major concern for residents today, and most are unwilling to pay for parking. 66% think it is at least somewhat convenient to park in Downtown Los Altos, while 30% think it is at least somewhat inconvenient; 29% found parking very convenient, while 13% found it very inconvenient. A majority believe that there is enough parking in Downtown Los Altos today (53%), while 35% believe there is not. There isn't a preference for street (22%) versus plaza (20%) parking per se; whichever type of parking is closest to their destination (49%)

is preferred. However, most people (71%) are unwilling to pay 50 cents an hour to get that close-in parking.

11. In an open-ended question in which the answers were not read to them, few respondents mentioned that changes to parking - whether more (8%), closer to their destination (7%), or more 20-minute (1%) – would motivate them to go downtown more often.
12. No clear preference emerged for an above-ground parking structure versus an underground parking garage below a building. 28% find either acceptable while 25% prefer underground parking and 22% prefer an above-ground parking structure; 21% don't want either. Those who prefer underground parking think it's worth twice the cost to build (15%) versus those who don't (8.1%).
13. The question on maintaining the current parking plazas was not specific enough to draw a clear conclusion. 79% agree at least somewhat that it is important to maintain the current parking plazas; 58% strongly agree. The next survey can probe this topic more specifically.
14. The community is evenly divided on growth in Downtown Los Altos. 43% believe Los Altos needs new office buildings and housing downtown to increase the number of people working and living there to support existing and attract new restaurants and shops; 42% believe that office and housing development and the traffic it would bring would detract from the small town character of downtown.
15. The vast majority (78%) of Los Altans prefer that Main and State remain limited to 2 stories. Even among those who favor growth or have mixed opinions, a higher percentage (25%) prefer that Main and State stay the way they are now (i.e., mostly one story and limited to two-story buildings) than favor allowing 3 or more story buildings (22%). Of the 22% of all respondents who favor allowing 3 or more stories (note that this is a small base of 90 respondents), 6% limited it to 3 stories, and another 6% think 4 stories is OK, 3% think 5 stories is OK, and 5% think 6 or more stories is OK.
16. 77% agree that maintaining the current look or “character” of Main Street is important; only 21% disagree.
17. Most residents (78%) have seen the recent infrastructure improvements in Downtown Los Altos, and of those who have, 40% are in favor of similar additional improvements, while 26% oppose them.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEXT SURVEY

During the July 24, 2012 Council meeting, Council requested that the following areas be further probed in the next downtown survey: (1) connectivity between downtown Los Altos and the civic center; (2) more detail on defining the “character” of Main Street; (3) various payment methods for paid parking; and (4) a larger sample size to enable “drilling down” on key topics.