

Los Altos City Council

DOWNTOWN BUILDINGS COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

Tuesday, May 24, 2016 - 7:00 pm

Los Altos Community Development Department



Downtown Buildings Committee Recommendations



- Established in November of 2014

***Determine Next Steps to Ensure New
Buildings in the Downtown Meet
Community Expectations***

Downtown Buildings Committee Recommendations



- 11 Citizens Appointed By Council
- Have Held Numerous Meetings Since the First in March 2014
- Including –
 - 1 Study Session with the Planning & Transportation Commission
 - 3 Study Sessions with the City Council

Downtown Buildings Committee Recommendations



GOAL OF COMMITTEE –

- Recommend changes to codes and policies that will produce development aligned with community expectations
- Improve predictability in future downtown development
- Make commercial development process smoother for all
- Expedite the process by clearly defining community expectations.
- Get the quality development

Downtown Buildings Committee Recommendations



WORK ORGANIZED INTO THREE CATEGORIES

- 1) Documents, Process, & Procedures;
- 2) Height, Bulk, Mass; and
- 3) Pedestrian Experience

Downtown Buildings Committee Recommendations



Committee has Completed its Work

Findings and Recommendations are Divided into
Twelve Topics, Contained in the Committee's Report

City Council is Considering the Committee's
Recommendations and Will Direct Staff Accordingly

Downtown Buildings Committee Recommendations



***PRESENTATION BY
DOWNTOWN BUILDINGS COMMITTEE***

Downtown Buildings Committee Recommendations



Recommendations Requiring Administrative Action

Downtown Buildings Committee Recommendations



1. DOCUMENTATION

1. A. Revise the Design Guidelines.

1. B. Revise and update existing planning documents to ensure consistent terminology throughout.

1. C. Discard obsolete documents and keep all documents current.

1. D. Make zoning code the single source for explicit, measurable requirements. Don't duplicate requirements across multiple documents.

1. E. Make more use of illustrations and diagrams in all documents.

1. F. Put all documents online and make them interactive with links to each other and relevant city codes

Downtown Buildings Committee Recommendations



2. ACCESS AND TRANSPARENCY

2. A. Revise the existing planning page on the city website to include all steps in the process and provide links to relevant documents ...

2. B. As a long term goal, provide the means for developers to make submissions online.

3. PROCESS/PROCEDURES

3. A. Provide detailed checklists for developers at every step of the planning process for consistency and accountability.

3. B. Attach the completed Design Guidelines checklist to each staff report.

3. C. Create a standard template for staff reports

3. D. Require an early stage design review for new commercial and multi-family projects and major remodels in the downtown triangle. This design review to be done with consulting professional having specific expertise, paid for by the developer.

3. E. To ensure that Council-approved DBC recommendations are implemented in a timely way, create a workplan with measurable milestones for each to track progress.

Downtown Buildings Committee Recommendations



**Recommendations Requiring Administrative
Action and/or Approvals**

Downtown Buildings Committee Recommendations



8. LANDSCAPE

8. A. When full landscape plans are submitted for city review, city staff should convene a small group composed of a landscape designer or architect, arborist (if plan involves trees), and city maintenance employee with plant-care expertise to review the plan and provide input to the planning staff and subsequent reviewers.

8. B. Task the city arborist to develop a list of recommended trees and minimum sizes for each.

8. C. Require that plans for care and maintenance be submitted along with landscaping plans.

8. D. Implement companion plantings that will contribute to the desired Downtown Guideline that recommends an appearance of abundant and substantial landscaping.

8. E. Enforce current Design Guidelines (Section 3.1.2a) that recommend “use [of] abundant landscaping” for wall covering and store front landscaping. Provide “now” and “later” (+5 years) landscaping photos plus photos of desirable landscapes and those that are unattractive.

8. F. Increase landscaping in the front of buildings. (Also refer to Recommendation 7B.).

8. G. Create a list of suggested plants for the developer to consider when creating the landscape design. The suggested list should be developed by the city arborist and gardening staff, with experience derived from caring for plantings in downtown.

8. H. Incorporate requirements for amenities and landscaping in the setback and along building fronts in any future streetscape plan for First Street between Main and San Antonio, and encourage additional setbacks for landscaping

Downtown Buildings Committee Recommendations



12. DIGITAL AND PHYSICAL MODELS

12. A. Undertake a project to identify 3D modeling software.

12. B. Develop digital and physical model of the downtown triangle using parameters specified by Council.

12. C. Require developers to provide data necessary to model their proposal to the digital system described above.

Downtown Buildings Committee Recommendations



Recommendations That Would Benefit from Community Vision and Policy Guidance

Downtown Buildings Committee Recommendations



4. HEIGHT, BULK, and MASS

4. A. Amend the height limits for the CD and CD/R3 zones so that commercial and mixed-use structures do not exceed 30 feet in height and entirely residential projects do not exceed 35 feet in height.

Planning and Transportation Commission Opposed this Recommendation

4. B. Adopt an ordinance establishing a temporary moratorium on new construction in the CD and CD/R3 zones that does not meet the height limits recommended above, pending completion of the process needed to act on and implement the zoning changes.

5. HEIGHT EXCEPTIONS PER 14.66.240

5. A. Amend 14.66.240 (A) and (E) to group structures that are related to building design, equipment or mechanical screening separate from other structures (e.g. flag pole and antennae). Make the maximum height for such structures 8 feet instead of 15.

5. B. Remove language in guidelines and plans that encourage towers (Downtown Design Plan p. 11, 22, 35). Direct staff to prepare and add definition for "penthouse" and "tower" to the general definitions at 14.02.070. Specify that penthouse is not a habitable or commercial space but is intended to provide an architecturally pleasing cover to stairwells, elevator equipment, etc.

Planning and Transportation Commission Opposed this Recommendation

Downtown Buildings Committee Recommendations



6. ARTICULATION

6. A. Amend Design Control to require articulation for every building over 50 feet wide and require changes of plane in the horizontal and vertical aspects.

6. B. Through development requirements and guidelines, encourage variation in building-entrance configuration and other aspects of the front of the building, upper levels, and roofline, to avoid a “tunnel” that would result from having all buildings constructed to the minimum setback. Instruct Staff and the PTC to encourage creative articulations at street level rather than building to the minimum setback.

Planning and Transportation Commission Opposed this Recommendation

7. SIDEWALKS

7. A. Require minimum sidewalk width of 6 feet that is generally clear of all obstructions such as signage and utility poles (consistent with streetscape plan previously implemented for the north end of First Street).

7. B. Where sidewalks are not more than 6 feet wide, prohibit walls or any obstructing hedges or similar plantings within the first two feet of setback. This is advisable because pedestrians avoid the 24 inch area next to a wall of any height and also avoid 18 inches near the curb. This effectively leaves only 18 inches of a 5-foot wide sidewalk for walking. (See *EXHIBIT 7.2.*)

7. C. Where code currently requires side or rear setback of 2 feet where property adjoins public right of way, change language to require setback of at least 2 feet and as much as 5 feet if needed to create safe pedestrian walkways, supplemented with suitable landscaping.

Downtown Buildings Committee Recommendations



9. QUALITY OF BUILDING MATERIALS

9. A. Modify the required finding as follows:

“Exterior materials and finishes convey high quality, integrity, permanence and durability, and materials are used effectively to define building elements such as base, bay, parapets, bays, arcades and structural elements. Materials, finishes, and colors used serve to reduce perceived appearance of height, bulk and mass, and are harmonious with other structures in the immediate area and in the downtown village.”

9. B. Amend “Submittal Requirements Commercial or Multi-Family Design Review, item 7 Color Renderings and 3D Model” and/or the Design Guidelines to require that proposed buildings in the Downtown district be modeled using 3D and other forms of digital simulation that depict the Materials Board and allow for closer consideration of proposed colors and textures of exterior finishes in context.

9. C. Require submission of a physical Materials Board of samples of colors, materials and finishes in the submission requirement checklist.

9. D. Require submission of larger scale samples and/or examples of uses of the materials and finishes in prior projects for materials and finishes not in common use in the Downtown district.

Downtown Buildings Committee Recommendations



10. SHADOWS

Planning and Transportation Commission Opposed this Recommendation

10. A. As neither staff nor PTC have such expertise, the city should engage a specialist with knowledge of standard practice for evaluating daylight/shadow impacts in a commercial setting. Scope of work should include identifying the tools and recommending a process for evaluating the impact of proposed developments on the streetscape, sidewalks, adjacent/opposing buildings, and landscape plans. Create a process for including such evaluation in the decision making process.

10. B. Generalized modeling should be done of the light and shadows for the downtown area as currently built and at full build-out under specified zoning. (See Section 12, Physical and Digital Models.)

10. C. If warranted based on the full-city model, establish light plane guidelines for commercial development. [Note: There are light plane guidelines in place for residential buildings.]

11. VIEWS

Planning and Transportation Commission Opposed this Recommendation

11. A. Make preservation of existing views of the surrounding hills and downtown tree canopy a part of the Design Review process for buildings in the Downtown triangle.

11. B. Specify views to protect, with emphasis on the foothills as seen from Southbound San Antonio Road and treescape from State and Main. Document the selected views in the design guidelines and include photographs. Specify how submittals should address the issue of views.