



**CITY OF LOS ALTOS  
CITY COUNCIL MEETING  
May 26, 2015**

**DISCUSSION ITEM**

**Agenda Item # 6**

**SUBJECT:** Consider options for development of a Downtown Plan, and direct staff accordingly

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**BACKGROUND**

At its annual retreat in January 2015, the City Council identified four major priorities for the year. One of those priorities was development of a Downtown Plan.

**EXISTING POLICY**

The City currently has several studies, plans and guidelines that address land use in the downtown area that express Council policy relative to the Downtown area. These documents include:

1. City's General Plan Land Use and Economic Development Elements (adopted in 2002)
2. City's Zoning Ordinance
3. Downtown Zoning and Vision and Purpose Statements
4. Downtown Design Plan (adopted in 1992 and revised in 1993, 2005 and 2009)
5. Downtown Commercial Design Guidelines (adopted in 2009)
6. Downtown Parking Plazas Opportunity Study (adopted in 2009)
7. Downtown Parking Management Plan (adopted in 2013)

**PREVIOUS COUNCIL CONSIDERATION**

Council considered a related topic at the November 25, 2014 City Council meeting by directing staff to update the Downtown Design Plan and when doing so, to seek input from the community.

**DISCUSSION**

Communities throughout California utilize a variety of documents, such as Design, Master, Precise and Specific Plans, to serve as policy and implementation guides for a defined geographic area. Regardless of the type of plan that is adopted, its policies and/or regulations need to be consistent with the City's General Plan.

Two primary approaches have been identified to address the Council's desire to update the goals and policies for downtown Los Altos, which are outlined below.

Both approaches will include significant public input and dialogue throughout the process. A Steering Committee is proposed to consist of key stakeholders, including City Council (2), Planning and Transportation (2), business owners, property owners, downtown residents and the public-at-large.

Option 1: Visioning and Policy Update

This approach would include a review by an outside planning/land-use consultant team of the inventory of existing downtown documents to determine the extent to which they address current issues or concerns.

Additionally, at least one community-wide charrette would be conducted to engage a broad group of stakeholders and community members to identify a common vision for downtown Los Altos that encompasses residential, commercial and retail uses.

The results of the document review and visioning effort could result in updating the existing policies and standards which may then be incorporated into a Downtown Master Plan. This plan would be a policy document that builds upon the underlying zoning and provides more detail than the General Plan.

A proposed timeframe could include:

<b>Tasks</b>	<b>Time needed (in weeks)</b>
Prepare RFP	3
Solicit proposals	4
Select consultant team	4
Project kick-off	4
Planning process	36
Adopting of Master Plan	4
Total	55

This timeline estimate results in a process that will take approximately 14 months and cost up to \$300,000.

Option 2: New Specific Plan

A Specific Plan is a comprehensive planning process for a large area such as the downtown that includes an environmental review. Similar to a City-wide General Plan, a Specific Plan is a land use plan called out in the Government Code (Sections 65450-65457). The Government Code provisions detail the planning process/plan content, but the State doesn't certify the plan or involve itself in the process other than the environmental review document being filed with the State.

The City Council can decide the scope of the work for the plan, but it must include certain provisions to be considered legal and complete as noted below:

Section 65451 of the Government Code mandates that a specific plan be structured as follows:

(a) A specific plan shall include a text and a diagram or diagrams which specify all of the following in detail:

(1) The distribution, location, and extent of the uses of land, including open space, within the area covered by the plan.

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*Consider options for development of a Downtown Plan, and direct staff accordingly*

- (2) The proposed distribution, location, and extent and intensity of major components of public and private transportation, sewage, water, drainage, solid waste disposal, energy, and other essential facilities proposed to be located within the area covered by the plan and needed to support the land uses described in the plan.
- (3) Standards and criteria by which development will proceed, and standards for the conservation, development, and utilization of natural resources, where applicable.
- (4) A program of implementation measures including regulations, programs, public works projects, and financing measures necessary to carry out paragraphs (1), (2), and (3).

A typical consultant team for a Specific Plan includes experts in urban planning, community engagement/participation, architecture with expertise in resource planning and surveying, civil engineering, economics, parking and environmental review. Council can accomplish adoption of a Downtown Specific Plan by resolution or ordinance and the decision regarding the means of adoption has different implications regarding policy versus regulation.

A Specific Plan will result in a comprehensive document addressing land use and related matters (for example: vision for the area, streetscape and open space, design, circulation and parking, public spaces, infrastructure, economic opportunities and implementation). This plan can be used by the City to make land use and development-related decisions going forward, including zoning. It should be noted that, while comprehensive, there might still be a need for additional policies while implementing the Plan. There are specific provisions in state law regarding the Plan amendment process and ability for the plan to be challenged.

Attachment 1 provides a more detailed description of the contents of a Specific Plan as provided by the Governor’s Office of Planning. An overview of the planning process undertaken by the City of Burlingame for its Downtown Specific Plan is provided in Attachment 2 as an example from a comparable municipality.

A proposed timeframe could include:

<b>Tasks</b>	<b>Time needed (in weeks)</b>
1. Prepare RFP	3
2. Solicit proposals	4
3. Review proposals	4
4. Select consultant team	5
5. Project kick-off	4
6. Planning process	84
7. Environmental review	12
8. Adoption of the Plan	4
Total	120

This timeline estimate results in a process that will take approximately two and a half years and cost \$500,000-\$800,000. With a Specific Plan, there is a provision in Government Code Section 65456 for potential future cost recovery from land owners/developers under specified circumstances.

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Some members of the community are advocating for a Downtown Specific Plan that includes the Civic Center site. The Civic Center Master Plan was adopted in 2009 and included a certified Environmental Impact Report. An updated Civic Center Master Plan and Community Center conceptual design was approved in March 2015, and the City Council is committed to moving forward with the Community Center project and currently evaluating the timing of a bond measure to partially fund those improvements.

#### Other downtown planning

Currently, there are two ad hoc citizen committees reviewing matters related to the downtown – the Downtown Buildings Committee and the City-wide Parking Committee. These working groups will likely be presenting their recommendations to the Planning and Transportation Commission and City Council in the next few months. It is expected that these recommendations will address design guidelines and zoning codes related to the downtown. Therefore, it is recommended that the initiation of a Downtown Plan effort begin subsequent to the conclusion of the Committees' work.

Furthermore, staff believes that the planned Council discussion regarding vibrancy of the downtown including defining what that means for Los Altos, identifying the desired level of vibrancy as well as evaluating ways to achieve that vibrancy should be incorporated into whatever Downtown Plan effort is selected rather than as a stand-alone discussion item.

#### **PUBLIC CONTACT**

Posting of the meeting agenda serves as notice to the general public.

#### **FISCAL/RESOURCE IMPACT**

None

#### **ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW**

Not applicable

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

Consider options for development of a Downtown Plan, and direct staff accordingly

#### **ALTERNATIVES**

1. Continue to utilize the existing planning guidelines and policies.
2. Identify an alternative to the options noted in the report.

Prepared by: Marcia Somers, City Manager

#### **ATTACHMENTS:**

1. Model Specific Plan Outline
2. Overview of the Planning Process used by the City of Burlingame

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## **MODEL SPECIFIC PLAN OUTLINE**

While state law specifies the mandatory specific plan contents pursuant to §65451, it leaves the format to the discretion of the local legislative body. Many of the specific plans reviewed as part of this report utilized an approach to organization similar to that of the individual elements of a general plan, covering information relating to land use, housing, circulation, open space, and so on. The following model outline is intended as a guide to the organization of a specific plan which is effective, efficient, and statutorily complete.

### **I. Introductory Plan Information**

- A. Title Page
  - 1. Name of the plan
  - 2. Name of local agency (Project proponent and/or public agency)
  - 3. Date of adoption
- B. Credits, acknowledgments and participants
- C. Table of Contents
- D. List of Tables
- E. List of diagrams and maps
- F. Copy of Adopting Resolution and/or Ordinance

### **II. Summary**

- A. Purpose statement and range of issues
- B. Location
- C. Acreage
- D. Summary of preparation process

### **III. Introduction**

- A. Detailed specific plan purposes
- B. Development and conservation issues addressed in the plan
- C. Project location, including influencing jurisdictions
  - 1. Written description
  - 2. Regional location map (See Figure 2)
  - 3. Vicinity map (See Figure 3)
  - 4. Site Location Map (See Figure 4)
- D. Planning area information and environmental description
- E. Statement of whether the document is policy or regulatory by application (If the plan is both policy and regulatory by design, explain the relationship between the policies and regulations.)
- F. Statement of how the plans policies and/or regulations accomplish the objectives of the plan.
- G. Relationship of the specific plan to the general plan.
- H. Relationship of the specific plan to neighboring plans and those of other jurisdictions, regional agencies, and the state.
- I. A list of projects required by law to be consistent with the specific plan (e.g. rezonings, tentative sub- division maps and public works projects).

#### **IV. Land Use Planning and Regulatory Provisions**

- A. The land use plan - a statement of development policies (opportunities, issues, and analysis of data) pertaining to the planned type, intensity, and location of land uses consisting of:
  - 1. Objectives
  - 2. Policies
  - 3. Programs
  - 4. Plan proposals
    - a. Diagram and written description of planned land uses (See Figures 4 and 5).
    - b. Characteristics of each land use designation (e.g. single family residential, neighborhood commercial, open space for conservation).
      - 1) Development Standards
      - 2) Standards for conservation, development, and utilization of natural resources.
- B. Land Use Regulations
  - 1. Statement of purpose or intent
  - 2. Applicability
    - a. Statement of applicability of the regulations to the planning area and designations on the specific plan land use plan diagram.
    - b. Effective date of the regulations
  - 3. Statement of relationship between the specific plan regulations and the zoning, subdivision, and other local ordinances.
  - 4. Development standards.
- C. Design Standards
  - 1. Building design, massing & height
  - 2. Parking ratios/standards, location & orientation
  - 3. Garage door size & type
  - 4. Entrances, access, & on-site circulation

#### **V. The Infrastructure Plan**

- A. Transportation: Development policies pertaining to the planned distribution, location, extent and intensity of public and private transportation consisting of:
  - 1. Objectives
  - 2. Policies
  - 3. Discussion of the relationship between the objectives, policies and how they are implemented through the individual plan proposals.
  - 4. Plan proposals
    - a. Diagram(s) and written description of proposed transportation components, including improvements that support the planned land uses. (See Figure 6 and 7)
    - b. Development standards for the primary components of public and private infrastructure (street cross-sections and material requirements).

- B. Public Service Infrastructure (water, sewer, and storm drainage): Development policies pertaining to the planned distribution, location, extent, and intensity of water, sewer, and storm drainage consisting of:
  - 1. Objectives
  - 2. Policies
  - 3. Discussion of the relationship between the objectives policies and how they are implemented through the individual plan proposals.
  - 4. Plan proposals
    - a. Diagram(s) and written description of pro- posed water, sewer, and drainage systems, including the improvements which support the planned land uses. (See Figures 8 and 9)
    - b. Development standards for the primary cents of public infrastructure (See Figure 9)
- C. Solid Waste Disposal: Development policies pertaining to the planned distribution, location, extent, and intensity of solid waste disposal facilities and services consisting of:
  - 1. Objectives
  - 2. Policies
  - 3. Plan Proposals
    - a. Description of the type and location of pro- posed solid waste disposal facilities and serving necessary to support the planned land uses.
    - b. Description of the proposed facilities and services to be provided (e.g., transformation station and recycling).
- D. Energy: Development policies pertaining to the planned distribution, location, extent, and intensity of energy facilities and services consisting of:
  - 1. Objectives
  - 2. Policies
  - 3. Plan proposals
    - a. Description of the type and location of proposed energy facilities, transmission lines, and easements necessary to support the planned land uses.
    - b. Description of the proposed facilities and services to be provided (e.g., distribution of natural gas and the regulation of pressure).
    - c. Proposed land uses (e.g., schools, fire stations, street lighting and landscaping).

## **VI. Program of Implementation Measures**

- A. Description of the regulations and ordinances, which will implement the specific plan.
- B. Capital improvement program
  - 1. Estimated cost of capital projects identified in the specific plan’s infrastructure plan.
  - 2. The measures by which each capital project will be financed.
  - 3. Identification of parties responsible completing each proposed improvement

- C. Financing measures necessary for implementation of each of the specific plan’s proposals other than capital improvements.
  - 1. List and description of projects needing financing.
  - 2. Cost estimates
  - 3. The measures by which each specific plan proposal will be financed.
  - 4. Identification of parties responsible for completing each proposal.
- D. Phasing plan for the specific plan proposal including capital improvements (See Figure 10)
- E. Subsequent development entitlements
- F. Other Programs

**VII. Relationship of the Specific Plan’s Environmental Document to Subsequent Discretionary Projects**

- A. Projects that will be exempt from additional environmental documentation based on the plan’s EIR.
- B. Projects that will require additional environmental documentation.

**VIII. Specific Plan Administration**

- A. Specific plan cost recovery fees authorized by §65456
- B. Specific plan amendment procedures
  - 1. State requirements
  - 2. Local requirements

**IX. Specific Plan Enforcement X. Appendices**

- A. Precise description of the specific plan area boundary.
- B. Summaries of key specific plan background data and information.
- C. Glossary of specific plan terms
- D. Other essential facilities necessary to support the plan

SOURCE: Governor’s Office of Planning and Research: “The Planners Guide to Specific Plans”

## OVERVIEW OF THE PLANNING PROCESS

### Downtown Specific Plan

The planning process extended over two and one-half years, and was completed in the Fall of 2010. The process was organized into five phases:

1. **Project Kickoff and Civic Engagement Plan (Summer 2007)** – The first steps were to assemble existing background materials, and organize the community participation/civic engagement activities.
2. **Opportunities and Constraints Analysis (Summer 2007)** – A thoughtful and methodical assessment of existing conditions and constraints was prepared so that decisions could be informed and made with confidence. This include a full overview of historical resources, existing parking and traffic issues, economic adnd market issues and opportunities, infrastructure issues, and planning and design issues.
3. **Creating of a Downtown Vision (Fall 2007)** – Before the plan, there must be a vision. A multi-faceted, engaging public participation process allowed the community to consider the many options for downtown, and goals and objectives were formulated for how the community wants downtown to be in the future.
4. **Consideration of Alternatives (2008-2009)** – There are many alternative directions downtown Burlingame could go. Informed by the visioning process, a series of plan alternatives were prepared so that the community had tangible options to consider and choose from. Each plan alternative was supported by analysis by the consultant team to allow informed decision-making.
5. **Preferred Alternative: The Specific Plan (2010)** – The process culminated in the creation of the specific plan document and its related environmental review. These were built on the input and analysis done over the course of the project so that the plan is now uniquely tailored to the community's needs.