

**Draft Meeting Summary**  
**October 24, 2009 Downtown Plan Steering Committee Meeting #4**  
**Native Sons of the Golden West, First & Coombs Streets, Napa**

**I. Welcome.** Tambri Heyden, Community Development Director, welcomed those present. Chris Beynon, Principal with MIG, described that the purpose of the meeting is to discuss land uses for the three focus areas: the Town Center, Cinedome and Copia, and building heights downtown. He said the Committee members and the public will all be participating in a design charette for the Town Center.

**II. Presentation and Discussion of Downtown Focus Areas.** Beynon introduced Walter Kieser, Principal with Economic Planning Systems (EPS) to provide the economic feasibility overview of the Focus Areas, summarizing the discussion paper prepared for the Committee.

**Town Center:** Kieser said that Downtown Napa is an entertainment-oriented and local market that lacks the physical, locational and demographic attributes to become a major regional shopping center. He said EPS looked at feasibility of 3 options for the center. The first option is for the owner to complete façade improvements and work on re-leasing the center. The firm concluded that façade improvements, which could include limited access improvements, could improve the existing retail environment, but this option probably will not be a catalyst for other development downtown. Rather, as other areas of Downtown are strengthened, it may assist the center. This is a very difficult time for retail. The second option would be to keep the center but also include a partial street grid restoration—it may be only Coombs or it could include other streets. He said that increased visibility for retail on Coombs (by reopening the street) could improve sales, but it is uncertain whether the added benefits would outweigh the costs of potentially losing building sq. footage. The third option is to reconstruct the center with more intensive mixed use development. This option would also include restoration of some streets. Their analysis found that this option could be a viable option for a developer. It would result in a reduction of total retail square footage, but there would likely be catalytic impacts on other Downtown development with new residential and employment opportunities. He said that the loss of retail space is not as much of a concern as providing quality retail space with good visibility and access.

**Discussion:** Paul Wagner commented that the center should include uses beyond retail or residential; in particular it should include a spiritual or cultural focus. It was agreed that land use options aren't mutually exclusive. Craig Smith said we should recognize that redevelopment Downtown won't be around much longer and remaining redevelopment funds are limited.

**Cinedome:** For the Cinedome, EPS reviewed three options. The first, a cinema and entertainment-oriented retail option is only viable if the approved south Napa theater does not proceed, as the City will only support one multi-plex theater. Further, as such uses are “loss leaders” there would need to be a mix of other uses there may need to be subsidies, particularly for structured parking. Option 2, office mixed use is a viable one

longer term, and the opportunity for off-site parking improves the financial performance of this option. High density residential is also viable longer term. Residential uses typically require onsite parking, thus units may be restricted by onsite parking needs.

*Discussion:* Members noted the importance of this site for pedestrian/bicycle connections, and there was discussion around theater viability.

*Copia:* For the Copia site, Kieser said the Copia building is large, attractive and relatively new and appears to be viable for reuse as a conference center or possibly some educational use. A conference center would support valley hotels. On the south part of the property, a resort hotel appears to be a viable option (in addition to existing and planned hotels in the vicinity) as does some kind of residential use.

*Discussion:* Peter Mott questioned the viability of a conference center. Kieser said it would need a strong business plan, but there appears to be enough of a room base in the valley to support a conference center. Gordon Huether was interested in short term interim uses so the building doesn't sit vacant in a weak economy.

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*Town Center Charette:* Beynon said the Town Center focus area is about 11 acres in size. Building heights vary – from one two stories (although a tall two stories - McCalou's, for example, is 43 feet high). The adjacent 5 story Avia Hotel is 59 feet high. Other Town Center buildings are 1-2 stories. There are several historic resources in the focus area, including the Merrill's, Sushi Mambo, Gordon and Ristorante Allegría buildings. There are other historic buildings in the vicinity, such as the 3 story Native Sons of the Golden West building across First Street.

Everyone in attendance was able to participate in the land use/design charette for the center. Beynon said that some urban design considerations are to consider trail connections, public spaces and new streets; to provide active building edges along street frontages; and to integrate new development with existing streets and historic buildings. Participants should identify what land uses are most appropriate for the focus area, and design concepts to incorporate into potential reconstruction plans. How much grid restoration is desired and how tall should buildings be? These concepts will help inform a land use and circulation plan/vision direction for this area. He went over charette instructions – and separated those attending into two committee and two public groups.

*Results of Charette:*

*Committee Group 4:* Facilitator Anchi Mei – This group recommended mixed use throughout --with a retail emphasis on the ground floor. New buildings need to integrate into the downtown and gathering places are important. They recommended a new park on the corner of Main and Pearl, as well as another location, such as First and Main (with a sculpture!) Uses must bring life to First Street, and entertainment uses could be extended down First to some extent if it makes First Street vibrant. Height – could be 7 stories– “whatever it takes to pencil” if architecture is great. Two of the 3 north-south streets (Coombs, Randolph, Franklin) should be extended through as 2 way streets. Some surrounding buildings should “go away” – Carrithers, AT&T.



*Public Group 3:* Facilitator Kevin Gardiner – This group was also interested in mixed uses throughout the area, letting the market decide the exact mix. Housing, entertainment uses and ground floor retail is important, along with gathering places and improved vehicle/ped/bike circulation. They were interested in putting traffic through on Coombs like in Redwood City, with a cobbled paving and a pedestrian emphasis. Building heights should consider the context or match existing buildings- so they could be higher on the west end next to Avia and lower on the east end. Buildings should also step up from the north side and along creek (lower) to the south side (higher). They recommended “green edges” along the creek. The Clay street garage should be expanded, and a building should be on top of the Pearl garage. They were interested in a plaza on First and possibly atop a parking garage.



*Public Group 2* – Facilitator Cass Walker – This group was more specific about placement of various uses in the Focus Area – recommending expanding entertainment uses along the First Street to Coombs, and ground floor retail with residential uses above west of Coombs on First Street incorporating courtyard open spaces. Offices were placed in parts of the interior with mixed uses along Main Street and Pearl Street. They recommended highest heights next to the Avia; with 3-5 story heights elsewhere except the First Street Frontage east of Coombs and Main Street, which should be 2-3 stories. Coombs, Randolph and First Streets should be two way streets, and Brown kept as a public space and ped/bike way. Their proposal incorporated archways providing views and access into the courtyard. Vehicle/bike/ped connections were very important.



*Committee Group 1* – Facilitator Mukul \_\_\_\_ -- This group was interested in including a cultural/spiritual center, as well as entertainment uses, housing and ground floor retail. The general idea was to keep the existing center in the near term; one idea was to expand the plaza in the existing center and improve visibility into the center by removing some building sq. ft. The longer term approach was ground floor retail along First Street with housing above and housing behind. Entertainment uses may be a good use along a reopened Coombs. There should be a new access off Randolph to the Pearl St Parking Garage. Expanded bicycle/ped access east west and north south is important and the enclosed plaza along Napa Creek should be kept, with Napa Creek an amenity to be improved upon. Coombs and Franklin should be extended as slow, multi use streets. First Street needs to be two way. They also talked about a new park at Pear and Main, and the need to remove the Carrithers Building and the parking garage for a park and to provide views of the Courthouse block and the old Courthouse.



*Summary:*

Chris Beynon summarized common themes – context is important for design. There may end up being a range of building heights – generally 3-4 stories but higher heights are ok in some areas.

Doris \_\_\_ representing the Kohl’s site owner said they are interested in the long term vision ideas. She said it is expensive to buy out leases and Kohl’s has a long term lease. Kieser said it would be unusual to buy out a lease unless a business failed. Jim Henry, speaking for the Town Center owners, said they’re working on re-opening Coombs to 1-way traffic and a retailing tenaning plan for the existing center.

**Cinedome.** Beynon introduced this discussion saying the site will be 3.8 acres after the flood project is completed. Trails are planned along the south edge of the site continuing into the Oxbow Bypass, west to Main Street and east to Soscol Avenue. There will be great views. Some urban design considerations for this site include completing planned pedestrian/bicycle connections; possibly expanding connections through the site; taking advantage of the planned open space, views and existing outdoor dining, and designing active building edges along the bypass, street and western edge.

*Discussion:* Beynon asked the Committee what land uses are most appropriate here considering its location and importance as connecting site, and what design considerations are most important? Members wanted to hear from the property owners. Cass Walker said that the City owns much of the land here—and redevelopment has been expected to be a public/private joint venture. Bill Vierra, representing the Cinedome owners said they are developers that like to hold property long term. He said the existing theater format is not viable. They’ve previously considered a variety of uses--hotel, housing, or retail with other uses above but have never settled on one particular use. If it is housing, they would want rental housing to retain control of their site long term.

Wagner said that recreational commercial uses are an ideal use to consider, and that this property is the best hope to strengthen visual and other connections between the Oxbow and Downtown Core. He said that there should be a landmark, taller building close to Soscol –to let drivers know they’re coming downtown and strengthen the Soscol cross connection. Lindberg asked whether the parking garage could be wrapped with residential on the Pearl Street edge to help provide a transition to the neighborhood. Doran said a development might involve a food/wine/art approach, for example, a working winery. A mixed use office development with restaurants and a plaza along the Oxbow Channel especially near Cole’s could synergize with Cole’s and the open views. Uses should attract or provide lots of people. Ryan Gregory said there are policies/law that require the city to consider housing. Jean Hasser said that the Housing Element identifies a number of sites Downtown and that they are important to meet long term city needs without expanding the city outward. Further, looking at Downtown as a whole can help prioritize the best site or sites for various uses—for example, assuming there is a limited market for hotels, a better site may be elsewhere. Dan Worden said this site needs good access and shouldn’t be designed as a superblock. It is a perfect place to put housing near the housing areas to the north. Kevin Teague said if housing works better here, staff should work with owners on this. Walker said there is a housing need and probably not much of a need for additional retail space. Lindberg said a public or private sports complex here makes sense. Mott asked about moving parking structure; Walker said it doesn’t provide the economy of scale the NSD site does.

**Copia.** Beynon said that the entire Copia site and adjacent county property is 14.5 acres. Important ped/bike connections are planned through the Oxbow Commons, the River Trail and a pedestrian/bike bridge south to Third Street. Existing uses in or near this area include two major hotels and a third (The Ritz) planned; the Oxbow Public Market and restaurants, retail. The River surrounding this area is a major asset. Some urban design considerations are to plan new connections to integrate with existing/planned trails; to retain and provide public community space such as the gardens, and active building edges along the streets and trails.

*Discussion:* Jerry Pierforte, representing the bond holders of the Copia site, said that from the studies they have done, their conclusions are similar to the committee’s studies, that the site lends itself to hospitality uses and a destination resort; the existing building does lend itself to an educational facility or conference facility; and perhaps there may be some type of ancillary housing. He said flexibility will be important going forward. They have issued a request for proposals and have informed potential buyers of the Specific Plan process; November 12 is when proposals are due. Gordon Huether questioned Pierforte about the entitlement process timing – he said it could take two years and it is important to have some interim uses in the Copia building sooner. Pierforte said that ACA liability on the site make it challenging to allow interim uses.

Teague said it is important to keep the existing building and to be cautious and not overdevelop the site. There are important community features here like the gardens and it should be somewhat lower intensity/lower buildings than the downtown core;

prospective owners shouldn't bank on needing too much development to make it work. The value of the site is in what exists. Worden said that housing is appropriate on the south part, and maybe a hotel in front of the Copia building on the north side. Gregory said we need to consider that there is likely to be a disconnect between what potential developers see being needed and what the community wants for this site. Wagner said protecting the river and access to the Napa River here is key and that he thinks a conference center reuse of the existing building and a resort would be good uses. Peter Mott likes the idea of a conference center; he felt it would be good for hotels and for downtown but questioned its viability. Kieser responded that there would need to be a business plan developed, but with the lack of facilities in Napa Valley and number of hotels, it appears workable, along with scheduling for other events. Mott said he would like to see "what pencils" but said the community gardens and public access are important. Teague disagreed about cost considerations, saying the important thing for them to consider is not the bankruptcy costs but the current land value, which is low. Beynon asked whether they wanted to wait to provide any direction. Teague said it is important to indicate to those proposing what are the important community aspects relating to this site. Huether said the city should push for interim uses within the Copia building so it does not sit unused for a long period. Beynon asked if the Committee wanted staff to develop a draft "white paper" that would provide some ideas/direction regarding the site to circulate to members; there was agreement this would be a good approach. Doran then asked about the status of the Ritz; Walker said the city understands they are continuing to move forward but are waiting for funding.

**Overall Building Heights.** Beynon introduced the building heights discussion, noting that current regulations, construction technology and design considerations all play into the height discussion. In most of Downtown, there is an existing 50 foot height limit and a height bonus of up to 6 stories/68 feet for residential mixed use, which the Riverfront project took advantage of. The Oxbow area has a 40 foot height limit with height increases to 48 feet allowed for pitched roofs. The south edge of Downtown has a 35 foot height limit, and a Planned Development overlay district allows higher heights case by case if findings can be made for superior design. Construction technology allows less expensive wood frame construction for buildings 4 stories or less; taller steel frame construction costs 20-30% more. Over time, however, the economic feasibility of taller buildings will depend on market conditions. Beynon noted that the relationship of height with number of stories varies by use: residential uses need 8.5-10 feet per floor while commercial buildings typically need 12-18 feet per floor. Thus, a 50' building height limit may allow for 4-5 stories residential but only 3 stories of commercial uses. He also described how buildings can reduce the impacts of height and bulk through building articulation, landscaping, building setbacks and step backs of upper floors. Further, in a Downtown, to achieve a good "street enclosure" it is important to have a minimum building height. For Napa's downtown streets, this is about 30 feet high. Anchi Mei also described the height limits of areas surrounding Downtown to provide further context. Immediately south of Downtown, height limits are 35 feet. Along the Jefferson corridor, height limits are 40 feet. The Soscol mixed use area has a 40-48 foot height limit, while the city's low density residential neighborhoods have height limits of 30 feet.

*Discussion:* Wagner was generally OK with current limits, but recommended that there be higher buildings at key gateways – particularly along Soscol to help improve the enclosure/scale along that wide street. Lindberg suggested there should be a lower transition next to neighborhoods and higher heights in the center. In the interest of saving historic buildings, there could be height bonuses offered. Teague said we should scrap existing limits and offer heights in exchange for providing for providing public amenities. He said developers should be asked to do something for higher heights; going up is fine in the center but he agreed we should be careful about the residential edges. Others said we should be careful to not “overcrowd” landmarks or to lose landmarks – this needs to be a focus. Worden suggested we may need higher heights in the Oxbow to make development viable; Beynon noted there were some differences of opinion on this. Mott said we shouldn’t limit architectural features like towers (similar to current regulations, which exempt such features). There appeared to be agreement among members that providing a lower height transition nearest the residential edges and going up in the center is OK to address needs – however, buildings need to be beautiful and heights should respect historic buildings and park/plaza areas. While going to even 7-8 stories in the center in the right place would be OK, it should be in exchange for providing public amenities. Soscol buildings should be allowed to be higher too. Beynon said staff would draft up a height paper to circulate for Committee comments/approval.

### ***Public Comments***

- Joe Fischer said he liked the Committee coming up with ideas for the Copia site, but we should leave an element of creativity as there will be new owners soon and we will need to discuss ideas with them.
- Alex Shantz encouraged the Committee to think about arts space and affordable housing to meet needs of younger people and others.
- Bernard Krevet, Friends of the Napa River said the City needs to be proactive in protecting views of the river in its planning.
- Students and youth feel ignored; please consider their needs. The Committee should specifically consider providing a water fountain downtown, as well as rest rooms.
- We need to consider the size needed for community gardens at Copia, based on restaurant or other needs.
- Having pedestrian access is key.

### **III. Check in, Summary and Next Steps**

Beynon asked for feedback on the meeting. Huether said he appreciated having Focus Area owners present. Gregory thanked the younger speakers for coming and speaking. Mott said he thought this was a good start always remembering we need to keep the plan “real” and implementable. Lindberg said at some point she would want to see target numbers for housing and other uses.

Beynon said the Community Workshop will be the evening of November 18, also at the Native Sons of the Golden West.

