

Downtown Together | Downtown Merchants Meeting, October 8, 2026.

Overview and update from:

Al Savay, Community and Economic Development Director, and Kathy Kleinbaum, City Manager

Attendees: 48 individuals signed-in (does not include city staff in attendance)

City of San Carlos Staff Responses to Questions and Comments (October 22, 2026)

Communications

1. Concern over a lack of engagement with business and property owners downtown. Establish better collaboration between the businesses and the City.

City staff acknowledges this concern and wants downtown businesses and property owners to be informed, heard, and included in any process affecting the immediate environs of downtown San Carlos. Many community engagement opportunities for the downtown have been offered since 2022, including community meetings, surveys, door-to-door notifications and invitations to meetings specifically for the business community, ideation workshops, and multiple study sessions with the Planning and Transportation Commission and the City Council.

Community input and feedback received through these efforts were considered by the City Council as part of its deliberations and decision-making. While not everyone's individual perspective or suggestion may ultimately be reflected in the final decisions, the opportunity for community participation was provided, and the Council weighed the information and feedback available to it in determining how to proceed.

Staff remains open to constructive feedback on how to strengthen engagement moving forward, and the City will continue to reach out and engage the downtown business community on key decisions facing the downtown.

2. Businesses need a reliable process from the City to share information and maintain an open dialogue with the downtown business community.

The City has established a Downtown Prosperity Team (DPT) to coordinate information-sharing with the Downtown business community. DPT updates the business community via emailed alerts, updates to the Downtown Revitalization webpage, and communications through the Downtown Revitalization E-News group. In addition to email and webpage alerts, City staff routinely mail important updates to Downtown addresses and distribute fliers door-to-door to raise awareness of upcoming events. Businesses emails and addresses are collected from the annual

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business license renewal process. Businesses are encouraged to email questions or comments to the DPT at downtownconstruction@cityofsancarlos.org.

3. Suggestion to use business license contact information for communications to businesses.

The City utilizes both contact information shared on business licenses as well as supplemental contact information provided directly by business owners. In addition to email, direct mailings, and door-to door notifications, the City shares key updates via the Downtown Revitalization webpage, City social media accounts, and Downtown Revitalization E-News channel.

4. Need answers to questions, ensure questions are answered and sent to businesses.

The responses to these questions are being shared with meeting participants and posted on the Downtown Revitalization webpage.

5. Treat Downtown businesses as primary stakeholders. Establish a continuing working partnership with meaningful consultation, documented responses and accountability.

The City considers the Downtown business community to be important stakeholders and has solicited their input throughout the Downtown Specific Plan process, including through focused meetings specifically with downtown merchants that have been organized and hosted by City staff, such as the meeting on October 8. The outcomes of these meetings have been documented and are available to view at: <https://www.sancarlosdowntownplan.com/past-community-workshops>. In addition, the City is happy to attend meetings with the business community at any time and welcomes invitations to engage more frequently.

6. Designate a City point of contact responsible for coordinating responses and tracking follow-up.

The City has established a Downtown Prosperity Team (DPT) to coordinate information-sharing with the Downtown business community. DPT updates the business community via emailed alerts, updates to the Downtown Revitalization webpage, and communications through the Downtown Revitalization E-News group. Andrew Douglass from the DPT will serve as the primary point of contact for coordinating responses. Businesses are encouraged to email questions or comments to the DPT at downtownconstruction@cityofsancarlos.org.

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- 7. Hold a follow-up working meeting with Downtown business representatives and relevant City staff to agree on priorities, responsibilities and a recurring meeting schedule.**

City staff intends to do follow-up meetings with the business community once there is additional information to impart to them. The City staff values the business owners' time and do not believe it is beneficial to them to convene a meeting when there is no further information or Council direction to share. City staff is committed to communicating with the business community. We will make sure the business community is informed of all upcoming Council deliberations prior to the meetings so that they can share their comments and feedback. In addition, City staff will reconvene a meeting with the business community once there are action items to share.

Parking

- 1. Concerns over parking loss, insufficient parking. Solve parking and access based on actual demand. Examine customer versus employee parking needs, circulation, convenience and utilization.**

A key study supporting the Downtown Specific Plan and Streetscape Master Plan process addressed parking in the downtown. To access this report please visit <https://www.sancarlosdowntownplan.com/>. This report, titled "San Carlos Downtown Parking Management Plan", represents the City's efforts to address current and future parking challenges within Downtown. The existing parking conditions in Downtown San Carlos are documented in this report, including an inventory of the parking supply and demand through a study of parking occupancy and turnover in public and private on- and off-street parking facilities. The results of this parking report recommend "mid-term" and "long-term" strategies.

- 2. Can the EV charges in Wheeler parking garage be removed? Not in good use.**

The Wheeler Plaza development project was required to provide a percentage of EV-capable and EV-installed parking spaces as part of the City's approval process. Requirements for EV charging have increased in recent years based on state mandates in the California Building Code.

EV charging spaces in the Wheeler parking garage are an essential part of the EV charging services provided by the City. In terms of their usage, they are extensively used and relied on. Based on the statistics from Chargepoint's EV stations dashboard for this site, they have reported 600 - 750 sessions/month or 8700 sessions/year. Our community, especially residents of multifamily properties, rely heavily on these for their charging needs. Additionally, increasing and maintaining public EV charging

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infrastructure is consistent with meeting the City of San Carlos climate action goals adopted under the CMAP.

3. The City's parking spaces at the Caltrain lot should be used for employee parking.

The City has negotiated with Caltrain to make use of Caltrain parking lot spaces 99 through 197 between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m. on weekdays and all day on Saturdays and Sundays. Since the City does not have access to these spaces during peak weekday hours, the lot is not the ideal location for employee parking. The City is working to raise awareness of the Caltrain parking lot spaces so that residents, visitors, and employees needing to park Downtown during off-peak evening or weekend hours can make use of the facility. Additionally, the City has implemented a temporary pilot program offering free parking permits for Downtown San Carlos employees. The permits are available on a first-come-first-served basis and are valid on either the second floor of the Wheeler Plaza Garage or the top floor of the SamTrans Garage. Eligible businesses were notified of the program by email.

4. The City should build a parking garage at Clark parking lot.

The City does not currently have plans or funding to construct an additional Downtown parking garage. Utilization rates at the existing parking garages at Wheeler Plaza and the Samtrans garage (where the City leases spaces for employee use) indicate that there is adequate supply. We will continue to work on efforts to encourage use of these existing off-street parking resources.

5. Parking is necessary for the food delivery economy.

The City of San Carlos' Downtown Specific Plan and Streetscape Master Plan aim to balance convenient access to downtown businesses with a safe, pedestrian-friendly environment.

For deliveries and service vehicles, the plans emphasize using the existing alley network and rear business entrances where feasible to reduce conflicts with pedestrians along primary streets. Clear signage, designated loading zones, and potentially scheduled delivery windows can further support efficient business operations. Specific locations are proposed in the plans, however not all possible locations are set in stone. Operating rules may require additional planning and coordination as improvements are implemented over time.

In the meantime, the City Council retains the authority to adjust short-term parking limits, as these limits are governed by the San Carlos Municipal Code. City staff are developing a streamlined approach for processing requests to change on-street parking time limits. The proposed approach will be presented at a study session with

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the Planning and Transportation Commission on November 2, 2026, and to the City Council in early 2027.

6. Bianchini's parking lot is public and private combined; more enforcement here is needed.

The City is only able to enforce for parking that exceeds the posted time limits. Enforcement of public parking on private property is the responsibility of the property owner.

7. More enforcement of parking and security.

The Sheriff's Office recognizes the importance of maintaining a safe and accessible downtown for residents, businesses, and visitors. We will continue to emphasize regular patrols and consistent enforcement of parking violations and applicable criminal laws. The Sheriff's Office will make every effort to increase its presence in the downtown area as resources and operational demands allow.

We also greatly appreciate our collaboration and ongoing connection with downtown business owners. These partnerships are essential in maintaining open communication, identifying concerns, and addressing issues that impact the safety and wellbeing of the downtown community. We encourage residents and business owners to continue reporting parking concerns, suspicious activity, and criminal incidents so they can be addressed appropriately.

8. What is happening with building where SamTrans and Caltrain used to be? Could they become parking lot? Maybe a better use of money.

The City coordinates with SamTrans to make use of 75 parking spaces on the top floor of the SamTrans Garage. Prior to 2026, the City offered these spaces as paid Downtown Employee Parking Permit spaces. Now that SamTrans has vacated the building, the City and SamTrans are negotiating a modification to the existing agreement to swap the City's parking spaces to the ground floor. Staff will update the community on this change if and when it is complete. In the long term, SamTrans plans to redevelop the existing facility at San Carlos Avenue.

City Activities

1. Can the farmers market be moved out of the 600 block and onto a parking lot, or in the Caltrain parking area?

The Farmer's Market is located on Laurel Street as part of the City's strategy to encourage residents and visitors to come to the Downtown. The location on the 600 block allows the City to use the Wheeler Plaza parking lot to provide space for

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additional vendors. Any decision to relocate the Farmer's Market would need to be at the direction of the City Council.

700 Block Laurel Street - Closure

- 1. Concerns over street closure (700 block Laurel Street) and its impact on businesses. Downtown is an asset and can generate sales tax; city should focus on increasing sales tax by helping businesses directly. The City should re-open the 700 block of Laurel Street. Can we open the 700 block temporarily?**

Sales tax revenue data for Downtown San Carlos shows that downtown businesses experienced a significant decline during the COVID-19 pandemic, followed by a recovery in subsequent fiscal years. Beginning in FY 2021–22, downtown sales tax revenue rebounded to pre-pandemic levels but have been relatively flat since then.

The City of San Carlos' Downtown Specific Plan and Streetscape Master Plan support creating a more vibrant, pedestrian-oriented downtown to strengthen economic vitality and improve the shopping and dining experience. A pedestrian plaza can help achieve these goals by creating a welcoming public space where people can gather, socialize, enjoy outdoor dining, attend events, and explore nearby shops and restaurants. By making downtown more comfortable and inviting for pedestrians, the plaza can encourage visitors to spend more time in the area, increase exposure for adjacent businesses, and generate foot traffic throughout the commercial district. The plans' vision for the 700 block of Laurel Street, along with wider sidewalks, public seating, landscaping, and spaces for events, reflects this approach.

Any decision to change course on the permanent closure of the 700 block rests with the San Carlos City Council.

Outdoor Dining

- 1. Clarify standards for outdoor dining when the plaza is completed.**

Outdoor dining and retail standards are outlined in the Downtown Specific Plan. When the plaza is completed, as the design is set forth in the Specific Plan, the City will provide 10 feet of its right-of-way to restaurants or retailers for use immediately adjacent to and consistent with the width of their storefronts. Any extension beyond 10-foot zone is at the sole discretion of the City and would be considered only after one year after the plaza is constructed. As mentioned during the October 8 meeting, staff are planning to seek City Council direction, in early 2027, on how to address the existing parklets that were put into place during the pandemic.

Business Vitality

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1. Is the City collecting data on how downtown businesses are performing?

The City receives quarterly sales tax data from our consultants and monitors the trends both citywide and by specific districts, including downtown. In addition, the City monitors business license data for both new business openings and business closures.

2. Does the City have funds to assist downtown businesses during construction? The City went through downtown construction before – what will the city do to help businesses stay afloat, provide grants, pay the rent?

The City will evaluate measures to support downtown businesses during construction. The City formed the Downtown Prosperity Team to work with the businesses to develop these measures and work with the business community during this time period. To date, measures that have been taken include establishing the Life on Laurel program to bring more people to the downtown, making employee parking permits free and leasing spaces in the SamTrans garage for additional employee parking capacity, and working with Caltrain to make their parking spaces available to employees and customers during the evenings.

3. Reflections and interest in forming a downtown business association.

The City would be happy to support the business community in the formation of a downtown business association, if there is interest in moving forward with one. We can assist with providing business contact information and locations for meetings and are always available to participate, if that is desired.

4. Landlords noted challenges of pulling in new businesses to vacant spaces.

The City's 2025–2028 Economic Development Plan identifies several strategies to address vacant commercial spaces and the challenges landlords face in attracting tenants. These include activating vacant storefronts through allowing temporary retail and restaurant pop-ups, conducting outreach to property owners to identify barriers to occupancy, connecting available spaces with prospective tenants, and improving business outreach and marketing. As part of this effort, the City is exploring revisions to our Formula Business Ordinance.

5. Can the sign at the corner of Laurel & San Carlos Ave. be updated to represent the businesses that exist today?

The City is in the process of updating Downtown wayfinding signage. The plan is to install a digital information board near the intersection of Laurel Street and San Carlos Avenue to replace the existing static sign.

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Future Construction Impacts

- 1. What is the City's plan for access to, and allowance for, businesses to stay open during future construction? There needs to be a plan for storefront access during construction. Protect businesses before major construction. Develop and fund a Business Continuity and Mitigation Plan covering access, parking, signage, phasing, communications, marketing and appropriate financial support.**

In the project specifications, the contractor is required to maintain safe pedestrian access to every storefront during business hours. When temporary closure of access to an individual storefront is needed, the contractor shall coordinate the closure with the affected business in advance. The construction will be phased, with underground utility work in phase 1 and connections, paving and surface restoration in phase 2.

- 2. What is the construction timeline for the 700 block of Laurel Street?**

The construction timeline is unknown pending full project funding.

Cleanliness

- 1. Concerns over cleanliness, aphid droppings from infested trees, street cleaning schedule and impacts (the sidewalk cleaning process impacts parklets and outdoor dining with mud). City needs to clean at least every week.**

Public Works conducts sidewalk scrubbing twice a week and street sweeping on Mondays and Fridays.

Street sweeping is scheduled for Mondays and Fridays, except for the 700 block of Laurel Street due to the closure. See link to a map of the street cleaning areas: <https://www.cityofsancarlos.org/Document%20Center/Public%20Works/Streets/San%20Carlos%20Sweeping%20Commer.pdf?t=202305290318000>

Sidewalk Scrubbing Schedule

Sidewalk scrubbing takes place on Tuesdays and Thursdays at the following locations:

Tuesdays

- San Carlos Avenue: 1100 block, north and south sides; 1200 block, south side
- Laurel Street: 600 block, east and west sides

Thursdays

- Laurel Street: 700 and 800 blocks, east and west sides

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The cleaning equipment recovers approximately 75 to 80 percent of the wastewater generated during cleaning. Filters are also installed at storm drain inlets to help prevent debris from entering the storm drain system. Public Works will review sidewalk cleaning practices to address concerns about mud and potential impacts to parklets and outdoor dining areas.

Street Sweeping Schedule

Street sweeping is scheduled for Mondays and Fridays throughout the City, except for the 700 block of Laurel Street due to the current street closure.

Additional Downtown Cleaning

Until seasonal leaf drop is complete this year, Public Works has increased cleaning frequency at downtown locations particularly affected by aphid droppings and other debris. Priority areas include locations near U.S. Bank, Starbucks, Orchid Room, Town, Nepali Momo, and Tandoori Kitchen, among others

To address aphid droppings from infested trees, the City follows an Integrated Pest Management Program and consults with an arborist to identify the least toxic effective treatment methods. This past year, the City contracted with Mayne Tree Service, which recommended injecting Safari, a systemic insecticide, at the base of affected trees. This targeted application minimizes overspray and potential impacts to nearby parklets and outdoor dining areas. Applications typically occur between February and April, depending on bud break. After the season, the City will consult with the arborist to identify areas with persistent aphid issues and determine whether to adjust treatment rates or use an alternative treatment the following year.

2. The City should hire an arborist to deal with aphid infestation.

As part of the City's Integrated Pest Management Program, arborist Ellyn Shea provides monthly reports and recommendations to help guide tree pest management using the least toxic methods available.

Pest Control

1. Concerns over proliferation of rats.

The City has a contract with a pest management company in order to address City-owned and maintained properties (i.e. Harrington Park, public streets, and public sidewalks). Rodent control on private property is the responsibility of the property owner/tenant business. The San Mateo County Vector Control District maintains resources for businesses (<https://www.smcmvcd.org/rodent-prevention-and-control-for-businesses>).

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Beyond the Downtown Core

- 1. The City's focus is on the downtown core; focus should also be on south Laurel Street and other parts of the downtown.**

The Downtown Specific Plan and Streetscape Master Plan establish a vision for downtown improvements while recognizing the importance of connectivity to surrounding areas, including south Laurel Street. The City will continue to evaluate opportunities to improve pedestrian safety, streetscape quality, accessibility, and support for local businesses throughout San Carlos. A coordinated, citywide approach helps ensure that investment and revitalization benefit the broader San Carlos community, not just the downtown core.