

City of San Carlos

Downtown Specific Plan



December, 2023

Downtown Specific Plan Ideation Workshops

Community Input

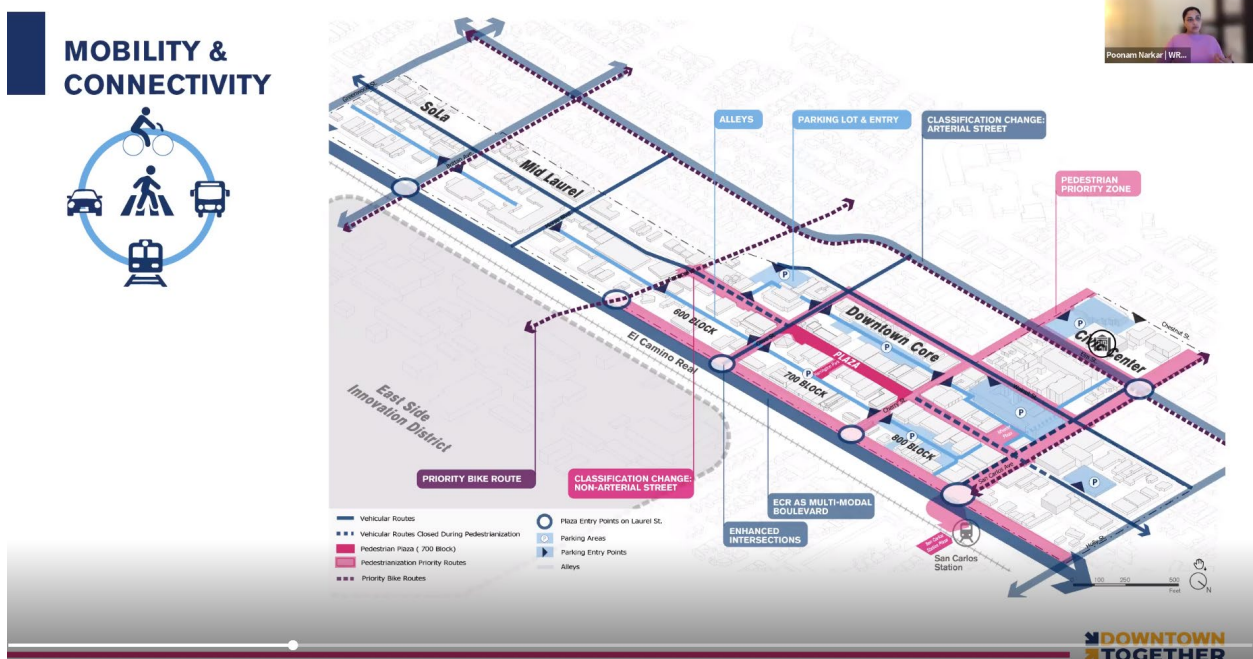


San Carlos Downtown Specific Plan Ideation Workshop: Summary Notes from Virtual Workshop on December 6, 2023

Meeting Agenda:

- Welcome and Introductions
- Presentation by Project Team
- Break-out Group Discussion
- Report Back
- Next Steps

The meeting included a presentation by the project team; followed by a break-out discussion in small groups to provide feedback on concepts for public realm and street design. The participants then reported back the summary of their group discussion.



Poonam Narkar, Senior Associate at WRT, presenting the Vision, Guiding Principles and Urban Design Framework.

The presentation was opened with a welcome note and team introductions by Lisa Porras, Planning Manager, City of San Carlos, and Mayor, Adam Rak. Following that, WRT (the lead consultant for the San Carlos Downtown Specific Plan) presented an overview of the existing conditions analysis, draft concepts for the public realm design of 700, 600 and 800 blocks of Laurel Street; and other key streets such as San Carlos Avenue, El Camino Real, Arroyo Street, and Brittan Avenue. The presentation was followed by a facilitated break out group discussion and a report back from each group at the end.

Board 1: Public Realm Design: 700 Block (Laurel St) – Concept 1 “The Promenade”

- A recurring theme was the interest in specific design elements like outdoor dining, tree shading, and balancing retail and restaurant space.
- Participants expressed concern for retail stores' struggles, suggesting a need for a mix of retail and restaurant offerings to support local businesses.
- Safety and accessibility were highlighted, especially in terms of one-way streets and pedestrian-friendly designs.
- Participants expressed preferences for both the concepts, indicating the need for a hybrid design approach.
- Concerns about the financial feasibility and impact on local businesses were raised, suggesting a need for careful consideration of the economic aspects of the Plan.
- Reinforcement of the idea of integrating bicycles into the Downtown Specific Plan was mentioned, pointing to a need for safe and accessible bike paths within the City.

PUBLIC REALM DESIGN: 700 BLOCK (LAUREL STREET)
CONCEPT 1 - "THE PROMENADE"

1. Which program or design element included here, would you see in downtown San Carlos?
2. Please share additional ideas that may not have been captured here.

Flowchart notes (from top to bottom, left to right):

- How will events space be encouraged to be used?
- The difference is primarily the distinction between the two concepts?
- More a hybrid approach be possible between 700 and 600 blocks?
- Let's focus on the 700 block and see how we can integrate the 600 block into it.
- It's a mix of both concepts. We can have a mix of both concepts. We can have a mix of both concepts.
- Having a 600 block with a mix of both concepts. We can have a mix of both concepts.
- Let's focus on the 700 block and see how we can integrate the 600 block into it.
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Board 2: Public Realm Design: 700 Block (Laurel St) – Concept 2 “The Gardens”

- There was an interest in exploring more open and spacious outdoor seating arrangements.
- The need for pedestrian paths and the accommodation of bicycles in the downtown area was discussed.
- Questions were raised about the city's financial reliance on downtown and the potential impact of the plans on retail businesses, highlighting the need for a balanced approach.

Board 3: Public Realm Design: 600 Block (Laurel St) – Wheeler Plaza (Laurel St)

- Groups continued to suggest ideas for the downtown area, emphasizing the importance of accommodating different modes of transportation and diverse activities.
- The need for a more holistic approach that considers various stakeholders, including businesses, pedestrians, and cyclists, was evident.

Board 4: Street Cross-sections – 600 & 800 blocks (Laurel St)

- Discussions focused on creating a pedestrian-friendly downtown area.
- Community members talked about the transition from pandemic solutions like parklets to more permanent structures and how this transition might affect local businesses.
- The importance of ensuring fire access and emergency routes was mentioned, along with the need for public seating and amenities for outdoor activities.

Board 5: Street Cross-sections – San Carlos Avenue & El Camino Real

- There was a focus on enhancing pedestrian accessibility and safety.
- The ideas included practical considerations for street design, such as accommodating emergency vehicles and providing ample public seating.

Board 6: Existing Street Network & Potential Circulation Scenarios

- Groups discussed potential circulation scenarios to support a pedestrian-friendly downtown.
- The role of alleys in downtown circulation and their contribution to placemaking goals was a point of interest.
- There was a concern about the integration of different transportation modes, ensuring seamless and safe movement throughout the downtown area.

San Carlos Downtown Specific Plan Ideation Workshop: Summary Notes from In-person Open House on December 9, 2023

Workshop Program:

- Drop-in style Open House (10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.)
- Presentations by Project Team- 10:30 a.m. & 1:30 p.m.

Venue:

677 Laurel Street, San Carlos

The in-person Ideation Workshop was held at a vacant storefront on the 600 block of Laurel Street for ease of access and for encouraging ample participation by community members. The workshop was attended by approximately 200 community members, who attended the presentation and engaged with the project team to ask questions and provide feedback in one-on-one discussions and on comment cards and sticky notes. The project team also made a temporary installation on the sidewalk to demonstrate the sidewalk expansion concepts and gathered community feedback.



Workshop Venue: 677 Laurel Street



Temporary sidewalk installation for demonstrating sidewalk expansion concepts for the 600 & 800 blocks.



Open House with presentation boards

INPUT

Vision & Guiding Principles

The recurring themes on this board were:

- Preference for independent businesses over chain stores focusing on authenticity and diversity.
- Importance of supporting small, local businesses.
- Emphasis on catering to diverse consumer needs and cultural preferences.

Additional feedback:

- Strong desire to avoid becoming overly commercialized like Burlingame.
- Suggestions for more diverse businesses, bookstores, family restaurants, co-working spaces, and events.
- Concerns about parking availability and the need for a large parking structure.

Public Realm Design: 700 Block

Concept 1: The Promenade

The recurring themes on this board were:

- Emphasis on collaboration between the city and local merchants for the project.
- Desire for more greenery and informal design to create intimate spaces.
- Suggestions for more outdoor dining options.
- Preference for water feature and benches.

Additional feedback:

- Concerns about mixing bikes into the pedestrian plaza, citing safety issues for children.
- Suggestion for skateboard facilities and careful selection of water features to avoid maintenance issues.
- Preference for non-allergy causing trees and plants.
- Appreciation for the Bosque (grove of trees) approach, combining natural elements with sun and shade.
- Suggestion to push buildings back to create more pedestrian space and ensure adequate bike parking.

Concept 2: The Gardens

The recurring themes on this board were:

- Favorable feedback on integrating more gardens and hangout spaces downtown.
- Strong preference for a linear water feature with benches, while some expressed concerns about maintenance and safety.

Additional feedback:

- Calls for diverse business types, not just food-related, to attract a wider audience.
- Discussion on the feasibility of additional pedestrian space and the potential risks associated with water features.
- Suggestions for interactive play fountains, unique street lighting, and considerations for bike rules, especially for teenagers.

Laurel Street 600 & 800 Block Public Realm Design Concepts

Public Realm Design

The recurring themes on this board were:

- Strong preference for diversity in retail offerings was noted, with an interest in seeing different kinds of retail rather than more food pop-ups, as there are already many food & beverage businesses.
- Strong desire for the establishment of a food or beer garden pop-up.

Additional feedback:

- There's a safety concern about Wheeler Plaza parking lot being dangerous and lacking monitoring.
- A call for clear regulations governing pop-up venues to ensure proper management and community benefits.
- Suggestions included a community gaming center where board games, chess, and puzzles can be played.
- Enthusiasm for board games cafe and sports area.

Laurel Street Cross Sections at 600 & 800 block.

The recurring themes on this board were:

- Suggestions for one-way streets adjacent to these blocks for public safety and comfort.
- Reservations against parallel parking due to its potential to slow down traffic and create congestion.
- Attention to best street trees selection was recommended.

Additional feedback:

- Community members were leaning more towards the sinuous (concept 2) for traffic calming.
- Consideration for directing drivers to use parking garages to keep cars off Laurel Street.
- Mixed views on building heights along Laurel: some prefer low-rise buildings, while others are open to moderately taller structures (up to 3 stories).

Other Street Cross Sections

The following comments were received regarding other street cross-sections. None represented significant recurring preferences unless otherwise noted.

Proposed San Carlos Avenue Concept

- Concerns about trees obstructing visibility, particularly with jaywalking.
- Potential for traffic backups East and West during heavy traffic times.
- Support for parking arrangements that prioritize safety for bicyclists.

Proposed El Camino Real Concept

- Support for making El Camino Road pedestrian and cyclist-friendly, enhancing its role as a gateway to downtown.
- Support for pedestrian overpasses or alternatives, from train parking to downtown and over El Camino Real highlighting a need for traffic calming measures on El Camino Real.
- Suggestion to remove the third southbound lane on El Camino Real.

Proposed Arroyo Avenue Concept

- Feedback to include a separate bike lane where possible.
- Queries about whether improvements will extend beyond the immediate area, specifically to the other side of El Camino Real (ECR)/train tracks.

Proposed Brittan Avenue Concept

- Suggestions for two-way bike lanes to save space and remain functional.
- Support for a middle turn lane.
- Questions about the 56' Right of Way (ROW) & how it will be achieved as existing ROW is 46'.

Potential Circulation Scenarios

Option 1

- Concerns about the impact of a parking garage on delivery and traffic flow, particularly on Walnut Street.
- Emphasis on the need for safer pedestrian and bike connections from Greater East San Carlos to downtown.
- Desire for more enforcement of traffic and moving violations.
- Suggestion to make Walnut a one-way street in the opposite direction.

Option 2

- Concerns for elderly pedestrians, especially if there's traffic on Laurel Street.

- Proposal for a pedestrian bridge across El-Camino to improve connectivity.
- Resistance to directing traffic to Elm Street due to its narrow widths, residential context, and proximity to schools.
- Emphasis on considering school pick-up and drop-off patterns.
- Caution against making Elm Street a main arterial route and suggestions for bikes safely.

Option 3A

- Proposal for making Walnut and Elm one-way streets in opposite directions between San Carlos and Olive.
- Calls for improvements in pedestrian visibility, particularly at Walnut and Holly.
- Concerns about the confusion and danger posed by additional traffic lanes and 'swing' lanes.
- Suggestions for a shuttle service for the elderly to visit downtown and careful consideration of traffic impacts on pedestrian and senior citizen safety.

Option 3B

- Support for one-way streets on Elm and Walnut Street, or other traffic calming measures.
- Concerns about traffic flow during events when San Carlos Avenue is closed.
- Preference for one-way streets for Holly and San Carlos Avenue for smooth-flowing traffic.
- General resistance to the idea of one-way streets in or near downtown San Carlos unless traffic is significantly calmed.

General Comments

- Suggestions for public parking to be behind the businesses and supported with better wayfinding and signage.
- Suggestions for speed control measures on the streets.
- Input on accommodating different demographics, including children, young adults, seniors and cyclists in mobility planning and street design.
- Suggestion to envision Walnut Street as a bike boulevard.
- Suggestions to improve overall street lighting, and especially in “SoLa” and “Mid-Laurel” which tend to be dark at night.
- Suggestions for 4-way stops and pedestrian bridges to improve accessibility and mobility.
- Requests for more public restrooms, community spaces, outdoor game areas, flood mitigation, and public art.

- Emphasis on keeping the area kid-friendly and exploring alternative housing models like tiny homes.
- Concerns about traffic flow and lighting, especially for pedestrian safety.
- A couple of people expressed that retail stores in downtown San Carlos are expensive and there is not enough diversity of products available. So, while they would like to support local businesses, they don't end up shopping as much downtown.
- One of the downtown business owners expressed concerns about how frequently the 600 block gets closed for events. With permanent closure of the 700 block, they expect that the city would leverage the 700 block as a venue for events and festivals and minimize closure of other blocks so that it doesn't impact the businesses there.





Community member writing feedback during the Open House session

