



## Planning and Transportation Commission STAFF REPORT

**MEETING DATE:** April 7, 2025  
**ITEM TITLE:** Adopt a Resolution recommending the City Council adopt the Downtown Streetscape Master Plan.

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### **RECOMMENDATION:**

Staff recommends that the Planning and Transportation Commission adopt a Resolution recommending the City Council adopt the Downtown Streetscape Master Plan.

### **BACKGROUND:**

Approximately four years ago in 2021, the City Council advanced the idea of creating a new plan for downtown San Carlos. It had been 12 years since a vision statement and accompanying policies for the downtown were established in the 2009 General Plan. In addition, the 2020 pandemic gave rise to new expectations for downtown, including its management and operations. Around the same time, other efforts were at play, including creation of a brand-new Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan (approved in 2020) and a new Climate Mitigation and Adaptation Plan (adopted in 2021). Together, with the temporary closure of the 700 block of Laurel Street to pedestrian-only access, new ideas and a robust discussion about Laurel Street began to emerge. Thus, it became the ideal time to address the future of downtown Laurel Street and its surroundings. For these reasons, in 2021 the City Council established the following goal in its 2021 Strategic Plan:

*“The City of San Carlos will work with residents, property owners, business owners, committees, commissions, the Chamber of Commerce, and all other interested members of the community to develop a plan to understand and ensure that the downtown meets the needs of the community and businesses now and into the future.”*

Subsequently, the Downtown Specific Plan project began in spring 2022. Just over a year later, in the summer of 2023, preparation of a Downtown Streetscape Master Plan was added to the scope of work to address the calls from city leadership to fast-forward transformation of the downtown streets.

In nearly one year, from November 2023 to September 2024, the project team refocused its efforts to develop multiple design options for the design and functionality of downtown streets. Community input was received across many channels, including the 18-member, Council-appointed Downtown Advisory Committee (DTAC) and the broader community including residents, downtown property owners and businesses, bicycle advocacy groups, and SamTrans. Design options were also evaluated by City boards and commissions, including the Economic

Development Advisory Commission (EDAC), the Parks, Recreation and Culture Commission (PRCC), and the Youth Advisory Council (YAC). Ideas were also vetted across many City of San Carlos departments, involving staff from Community Development, Public Works, Parks and Recreation, Fire, Police, and Administrative Services and the City Manager’s Office. In addition, valuable feedback was received from the two-member City Council Downtown Subcommittee, the Planning and Transportation Commission, and the City Council.

The culmination of these efforts to prepare a new vision for downtown streets led to endorsement by the DTAC on March 19, 2024. Thereafter, DTAC’s endorsement was presented to the Planning and Transportation Commission and City Council in May and June 2024 respectively, followed by additional input from the business community in August 2024, and reviewed again at an all-City commissions meeting held on September 3, 2024. On September 23, 2024 a major milestone was reached when the City Council officially endorsed the new designs for downtown streets (see Attachment 3, City Council Resolution No. 2024-111) – this became the foundation to prepare the final **Downtown Streetscape Master Plan** (see Attachment 1).

## **THE DOWNTOWN STREETSCAPE MASTER PLAN:**

### *Location*

The Downtown Specific Plan and Streetscape Master Plan will share the same study area. This study area runs along the El Camino Real and Laurel Street corridors and is framed by Holly Street at the north end and Greenwood Avenue on the south end, with El Camino Real to the east and Walnut Street to the west. As shown in Figure 1 below, the downtown streets addressed by the Downtown Streetscape Master Plan include Laurel Street, Holly Street, San Carlos Avenue, Cherry Street, Olive Street, Arroyo Avenue, Morse Blvd., Brittan Avenue, Greenwood Avenue, and El Camino Real. These streets were designed with a holistic perspective to provide the community with improved access within and through the downtown, including desired improvements.

**Figure 1. Downtown Specific Plan and Streetscape Master Plan Study Area**



### *The Vision and Guiding Principles*

Founded upon DTAC and community input, the Vision for San Carlos' downtown is to be...:

"... the heart of San Carlos that provides a vibrant, pedestrian-friendly, safe, charming, futuristic, and accessible destination for the community and strongly expresses its unique culture and heritage. It is a place for celebration and gathering that offers diverse and authentic experiences through a draw of food, retail, services, art and music in a visually attractive environment for the growing community. Downtown is an inclusive place with easy access for all, opportunities for housing and businesses of all types, and inviting spaces for all users. Downtown San Carlos is a sustainable district, with landscape that supports ecological and community health & well-being."

The street designs were guided by shared principles that were established with the DTAC and the community. These principles include:

1. **Mobility & Connectivity:** Downtown should have a balance of mobility modes that emphasize pedestrian, bicycle, and public transit circulation along with effective parking management strategies, to support a socially vibrant pedestrian-oriented environment and to minimize auto-dependence to access downtown.
2. **Character & Identity:** The Downtown Specific Plan should strive to create distinctive character and identity unique to San Carlos' culture, history, and context; defined by the physical form and experience of the downtown.
3. **Downtown Vibrancy:** The downtown should achieve a level of vibrancy and vitality that consistently attracts users and shoppers through enhancement of local businesses and diverse programming, in a setting that is distinctive, safe, and attractive.
4. **Equity & Resiliency:** The [downtown] should strive to be an equitable place offering social, economic, housing and recreational opportunities at varying levels of affordability for all users along with being resilient to address evolving climate adaptation needs.

These shared principles helped create the intended function, design, and experience of downtown's streets and public spaces that will not only bring new life to downtown San Carlos, but will also rebalance mobility options and functions. Both the Vision and Guiding Principles will also help shape policies and standards in developing the upcoming Downtown Specific Plan, which is on schedule for completion in September 2025.

### *The Downtown Streetscape Master Plan*

The San Carlos Downtown Streetscape Master Plan (Plan) establishes a strong public space network in the downtown core providing essential ingredients to fulfill its role as described in the Vision.

The Plan is organized into four basic sections:

1. Introduction

2. Existing Traffic Network and Street Character
3. Proposed Streetscape and Public Space Design
4. Implementation

The Downtown Master Plan includes illustrative plans, sections and renderings, and details of planting, materials, street furnishings, amenities, street lighting, parking, curbside management and programming recommendations.

Chapter 3, Proposed Streetscape and Public Space Design, includes design proposals for San Carlos Avenue, 700 block of Laurel Street (including Harrington Park), 600 and 800 blocks of Laurel Street (plus a new public plaza on the 600 block), El Camino Real, Arroyo Avenue, Cherry Street and Olive Street, Laurel Street south of Arroyo Avenue, Brittan Avenue, and the alley network. In addition, materials and landscaping (including trees) palettes are provided for each street according to character type.

Key features include a pedestrian priority zone, wider sidewalks, adjustments to vehicle lane width, protected bicycle lanes, retractable bollards, gateway features, new paving, public seating, water feature/fountain and pavilion in the 700 block of Laurel Street, new street trees, landscaped areas to capture rain water aka “rain gardens”, improvements to Harrington Park, a new plaza on the 600 block of Laurel Street, and an entirely redesigned pedestrian plaza closed to vehicle (and dismount zone for bicycles) on the entire span of the 700 block of Laurel Street. All of these features have been tested to accommodate the city’s established public programming events, such as Art and Wine Faire and the farmers markets. In addition, the dining parklets from the On-Street Dining Pilot Program of 2016 and the parklets that have appeared during the Covid-19 pandemic are envisioned to be revert back to the City’s original outdoor dining regulations, but with more space than before (i.e. an 8-foot outdoor dining adjacent to the building façade is proposed).

In anticipation of these design changes, studies were conducted to evaluate future traffic conditions and parking needs over the 20-year horizon intended for the Downtown Specific Plan. Tradeoffs were discussed at previous study sessions with the Planning and Transportation Commission and City Council in 2024, and the Streetscape Master Plan refers to these studies. The Downtown Specific Plan will, among other things, present supportive strategies to address vehicular circulation and parking management strategies.

The Plan concludes with a proposed initial phasing strategy and offers funding sources for future consideration. At present, design/engineering drawings are being developed for the 700 block of Laurel Street and Harrington Park – a move directed by the City Council during its October 28, 2024 meeting.

The outcomes of the street design changes include an enhanced pedestrian experience, safer bicycle routes, more space for downtown activities, and people spending more time downtown.

### *Civic Engagement*

A civic engagement strategy was developed by city staff and the consultant team and included

working closely with the city's Communications Division. This included 18 meetings with the community and city leadership, plus an additional 8 meetings with the DTAC. These are summarized below and available on the project website at [www.sancarlosdowntown.com](http://www.sancarlosdowntown.com) under Past Events and Get Involved tabs.

#### Community and City Leadership Engagement Meetings and Events:

1. Stakeholders Focus Group Interviews: August 2022
2. Survey 1: August 2022 – January 2023
3. Workshop: August 2022
4. Workshop: February 2023
5. Coffee and Comments Open House: March 2023
6. Survey 2: March 2023 – April 2023
7. Project Updates to PTC and CC: April 17 and 24, 2023
8. Downtown Business Stakeholder Meeting: May 2023
9. Ideation Workshops: December 2023
10. Survey 3: December 2023 – January 2024
11. EDAC Meeting: January 2024
12. PRCC Meeting: February 2024
13. YAC: March 2024
14. PTC and CC: May, June 2024 (Presented DTAC-endorsed street designs)
15. Downtown Business Stakeholder Meeting: August 2024
16. All Commissions Joint Meeting: September 2024
17. Survey 4: August 2024
18. CC Endorsement: September 2024

#### *Implementation*

Following its anticipated adoption by the City Council, the Downtown Streetscape Master Plan will be an Appendix to the upcoming Downtown Specific Plan.

With this Plan, the city will be better positioned to advance transformation of the streets in downtown. This will depend upon City Council direction and the availability of funding. Future work would include preparing engineering and construction drawings for street segments selected by the City Council.

Currently, design-engineering drawings are underway for the 700 block of Laurel Street and Harrington Park. The City Council met on February 10 and March 10 of this year, and will convene again on April 28 where the Council will review the designs for the pavilion and water feature. An additional meeting is anticipated in June to wrap up the schematic design for the entire span of the 700 block of Laurel Street plus Harrington Park. Staff is working towards the City Council's goal to break ground on construction for Harrington Park in fall 2025.

#### **California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)**

The Downtown Streetscape Master Plan is exempt under the State of California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines Section 15301 (c) – existing facilities, and 15304 (h) – creation of bicycle lanes on existing rights-of-way.

### Next Steps

Should the Planning and Transportation Commission adopt a Resolution recommending the City Council adopt the San Carlos Downtown Streetscape Master Plan as presented or with changes, the City Council would consider formal adoption of the plan during its regular meeting on Monday, April 28, 2025.

### Motion:

Should the Planning and Transportation Commission choose to make a recommendation to the City Council to adopt the San Carlos Downtown Streetscape Master Plan, the recommended motion is:

*“I move that the Planning and Transportation Commission adopt a Resolution recommending the City Council adopt the San Carlos Downtown Streetscape Master Plan.”*

Respectfully submitted by:

Lisa Porras, Planning Manager

### ATTACHMENT(S):

1. Draft Resolution
2. Draft San Carlos Downtown Streetscape Master Plan
3. City Council Resolution No. 2024-111 Endorsing the Street Redesigns for the Downtown Streetscape Master Plan
4. City Council Resolution 2024-067 Affirming the Street Designs for Testing and Modeling of Traffic and Parking Outcomes
5. Downtown Advisory Committee Meetings – [link here](#)
6. Community Engagement – [link here](#)
7. Public Notice – Proof of Publication