

DOWNTOWN SANTA BARBARA REVITALIZATION STRATEGIES

TOP TEN RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Retain an economic development consultant before the end of the year to develop a comprehensive, up to date Economic Development Plan for the City of Santa Barbara.
2. Hire an economic development person to manage implementation of the Economic Development Plan as well as provide continued direction for the vibrancy and success of our downtown corridor over the long term.
3. The current length of time it takes to get projects permitted and businesses open deters desirable operators from choosing to lease in Santa Barbara and this has a direct impact on vacancy rates and downtown vibrancy. A comprehensive guide needs to be developed detailing the permitting and planning process and the role of all departments and panels (Planning Department, ABR and HLC) including timelines. In addition, all planning department staff should take a Cost of Delay course (successfully implemented in Alameda Co).
4. Once guidelines have been established, create consistent oversight and accountability for permitting and planning process to ensure that all decision makers (and applicants) abide by guidelines, including reporting monthly to City Council on how well city staff is moving permits through the process. This will ensure that projects are handled in a timely manner and are not rejected or arbitrarily delayed based on the changing opinions of decision makers rather than agreed upon guidelines.
5. To revitalize our city, we need to increase the reasons to come downtown, for both locals and tourists. Review rules and regulations to see how we can revise or modify them to allow for more foot traffic downtown i.e. allowing food trucks, live music, simplifying the process for approving street closures, and making it easier to generate income for the city and the business community through weekly or monthly festivals.
6. Some entity, possibly Downtown Santa Barbara, to take responsibility for outreach to and dialogue with property owners on key issues including but not limited to: rating the exterior condition of buildings and assessing what improvements need to be made; ensuring vacant buildings and rented properties are properly lit at night; providing guidelines and rules on alternative opportunities for leasing such as pop ups and collectives.

7. Allocate more funds to mental health services and beds for our transient population, and work on other creative solutions in partnership with the multiple non-profit agencies working on this issue.
8. Increase police presence downtown in key areas, not just with volunteers, but actual officers. Increase enforcement of sit and lie, smoking, stolen shopping carts, aggressive panhandling and other enforceable behaviors. Monitor gathering spots where nuisance behavior is endemic and address with appropriate measures such as removal of benches, increased lighting, increased patrolling, etc.
9. As other cities do, for the HLC (historical Landmarks Community), ABR (Architectural Review Board) and SFDB (Single Family Design Board), assign people to be in those positions for a year or two as part of their licensing instead a 4-year term. Also, have a reserve architect on call in case there isn't a quorum so that projects do not get delayed.
10. Conduct a public dialogue on how to achieve appropriate mixed use development downtown and pave the way for increased residential development in our downtown corridor, including considering removing parking requirements as many other California cities have done.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

PLANNING & PROJECT REVIEW/APPROVAL

11. Develop a short list of items that can be approved over the counter/day of, with appropriate oversight and contractor sign off.
12. Undergo an initiative to improve interdepartmental communication and establish enhanced oversight and accountability at every level of permitting and planning process. This will also ensure that committees and departments are populated by responsible, proactive staff and volunteers committed to the best interests of our city. This could also include instituting some form of accountability for delaying the permitting process.
13. Establish procedure for appeals, either commercial or residential, so that appellants must jump through reasonable hoops before filing a complaint (including reaching out to neighbor or project owner to attempt to resolve issue). If guidelines not followed, appeal is thrown out. Additionally, once a building inspector is involved, this cannot lead to additional items being added to the original complaint.

14. Create a short survey that is completed at the cashier counter prior to pulling a building permit. The survey will ask a series of questions and will ask applicant to grade the experience at the building department. Compile that information for City Council to review twice a year.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

15. Retain a State Street Community Development Officer with an office/store front on State St. to assist with recruiting tenants, maintaining outreach and dialogue with property owners and brokers, acting as a liaison and expediter between operator and the city, and as a point person to assist with State Street activities and issues.

16. Establish a downtown geographic zone (Economic Benefit or Community Benefit Zone) that provides allowances for specific uses (retail, local retail, sit down food and bev, etc). Ordinance and policy allowances to include timeline requirements for city processing, lessened or negotiated ADA improvements, zero parking requirements, dedicated staff member as process liaison. Zone could also include requirements of landlords including - upkeep, signage, window treating, lighting.

17. Reverse — or at least put on hold until vacancy rate is at a healthy level — the Santa Barbara-specific sprinklers requirement which is hurting the ability for spaces to be leased downtown.

HOMELESS

18. Use cannabis tax dollars to establish a mental health facility / shelter in outlying area in partnership with the county and multi-county (Ventura, Oxnard) resources. Establish a day center downtown for homeless so that the police force has a place to direct people.

19. Create State Street signage (as we have for no skateboarding) to educate visitors not to give cash handouts and instead create a Care Not Cash program, where merchants, hoteliers and restaurants would collect Rescue Dollars from visitors or locals who want to give, that in turn would be redeemable for necessities.

VIBRANCY

20. Revise the lighting plan for the downtown corridor so that the lighting is directed down, towards the street, instead of up, and is reflective of current technology including LED, etc.

21. Reverse the proposal to end liquor service at 12am for restaurants. Instead institute a year probationary period to determine which businesses, if any, are causing a problem.

22. Streamline the process for permitting a space to hold popups. In addition to bringing more customers downtown, pop-ups will create the appearance that the vacancy rate has shrunk and will serve to “stage” vacant spaces to attract desirable retailers.

GENERAL

23. Create a process to evaluate the implications for existing vehicular traffic as well as existing and perhaps expanded electric bus fleets for use in the downtown corridor. This would go along with a broader conversation about the circulation elements that would improve pedestrian traffic downtown.

24. Two improvements to vacant buildings would be to consider banning for lease signs or requiring they be a discreet size (such as 2x3 which will cut signs in half) and relaxing signage guidelines so that vacant windows can be used for tasteful display of artwork, information and products.

25. While a long term plan for the underpass is being developed, take immediate advantage of the foot traffic near beach and Funk Zone by: upping patrols of the underpass to control loitering and musicians, undertake sound-reduction measures, increase lighting, slow traffic speed with speed bumps or signage to lower decibel level.