



AGENDA REPORT SUMMARY

Meeting Date: February 14, 2023

Subject: City Council Priority #9: Business Communities

Prepared by: Anthony Carnesecca, Economic Development Administrator

Reviewed by: Jon Maginot, Assistant City Manager

Approved by: Gabriel Engeland, City Manager

Attachment(s):

1. City of Los Altos Downtown Vision Plan

Initiated by:

City Council directed staff to bring the Downtown Vision back to them for review and implementation as one of their strategic priorities for this calendar year.

Previous Council Consideration:

August 28, 2018

Fiscal Impact:

The individual fiscal impact of each item will be assessed and provided to City Council prior to implementation.

Environmental Review:

Not applicable.

Policy Question(s) for Council Consideration:

- Does City Council agree with the phasing of objectives?
- What concurrent long-term projects from the Downtown Vision would City Council like staff to research while working on the other objectives?

Summary:

- City Council approved the Downtown Vision Plan in August 2018 and the City has implemented a few items from the Downtown Vision.
- City Council directed staff to bring the Downtown Vision back to them as one of their strategic priorities for this calendar year.
- The downtown landscape has significantly changed due to a global pandemic so the specific action items for the Downtown Vision need to be reassessed and incorporate a new perspective on the Downtown Vision.

City Manager

GE

Reviewed By:

City Attorney

JH

Finance Director

JD



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Staff Recommendation:

Provide staff with direction on the organized action items from the Downtown Vision.

Purpose

The goal of the Los Altos Downtown Vision Plan is to provide a safe, clean, and attractive downtown for residents, businesses, and visitors.

This report provides a comprehensive update regarding the status of the various Downtown Vision objectives and seeks to receive Council feedback regarding the direction for both the short-term and long-term.

Background

On August 28, 2018, the Los Altos City Council adopted the Downtown Vision, which provides the City of Los Altos with many approaches, short-term programs, and long-term improvements that would increase vibrancy in the downtown triangle.

Discussion/Analysis

The City Council has requested that staff present objectives from the Downtown Vision along with a clear timeline for implementation. Some items have been incorporated into other plans or will be incorporated into future plans so they have been omitted. For example, bicycle enhancements will be incorporated into the Complete Streets Master Plan.

Completed Objectives

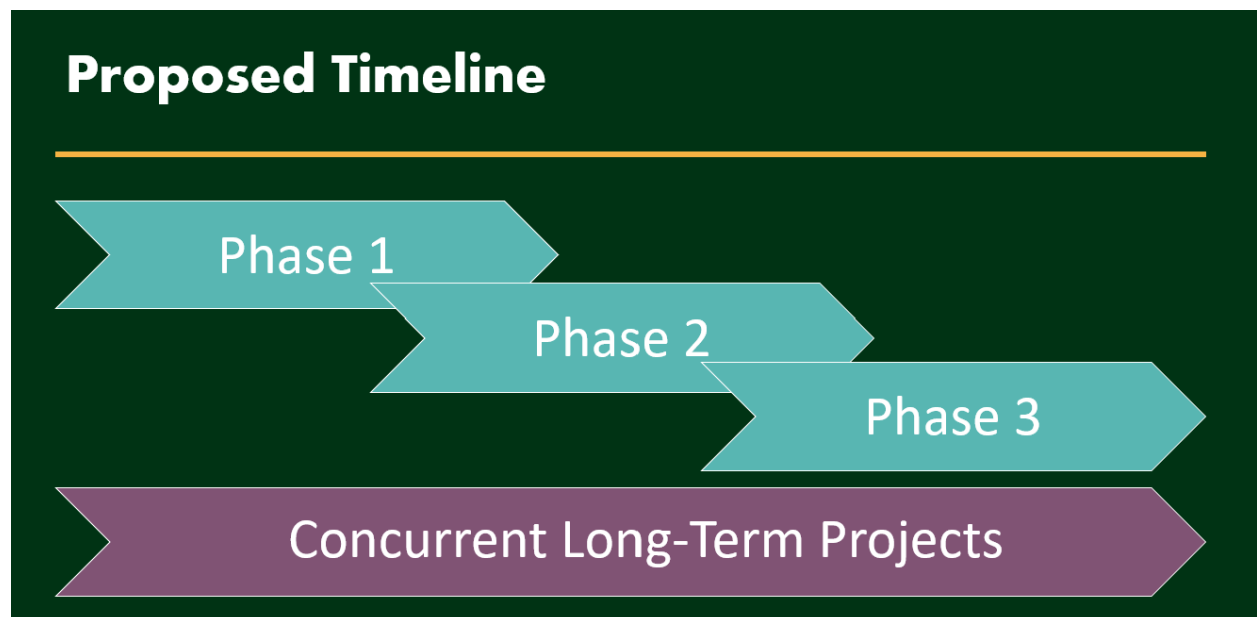
- Allowed contemporary service uses in the Downtown CRS core – On August 27, 2019, City Council approved Ordinance 2019-462, which updated the permitted and conditional uses for the Downtown Core in the Los Altos Municipal Code. Per the suggestions in the Downtown Vision Plan, this ordinance allowed contemporary service uses in the Downtown CRS core: Fitness studios and day spas, Yoga and Tai Chi, Martial arts, Kinder gyms, Wine bars and beer gardens, and allow office behind Main and State frontages.
- Implemented Temporary Parklet Program for restaurants – The City created the COVID Parklet Program that was approved under the emergency powers of the City Manager with the support of City Council. City staff allowed restaurants to continue outdoor dining in the public right-of-way with the installation of protective wine barrels filled with five hundred pounds of water, sand, or concrete along the perimeter of the parklet.
- Allocated funding for the Downtown Theater Working Group – City Council allocated funding to the Downtown Theater Working Group to conduct a study on the potential for a downtown theater, including a survey of residents’ opinions on a downtown theater.



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City staff recommends that City Council address the immediate downtown infrastructure needs in a phased approach of objectives while researching concurrent long-term projects as you can see from the proposed timeline below.

City staff will begin working on Phase 1 before slowly incorporating Phase 2 while wrapping up Phase 1 and so forth until the completion of Phase 3. Concurrently, City staff can research and evaluate concurrent long-term projects from the Downtown Vision that will take a more significant amount of staff resources.



Phase 1

- Implement a Permanent Parklet Program for restaurants – On November 30, 2021, City Council approved the Parklet Program to go into effect thirty days after the end of all the emergency health orders. At this point in time, City staff has identified improvements to the parklet program that are being presented to the community for outreach before returning to City Council for review. City staff recommends keeping the current temporary parklet program in place through some time in 2023 to allow restaurants time to apply and build their parklets to the new standard.
- Install Public Wi-Fi – There are a number of no signal zones in downtown where residents and visitors cannot access their cellular devices while visiting businesses. Staff is working to develop proposals for low-cost options to install public Wi-Fi and will return to City Council with a formal proposal.



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- Standardize trash receptacle enclosures – Our trash receptacles in the parking plazas and behind businesses are in less than ideal conditions more often than not. The City should create a standard dumpster enclosure to secure waste and prevent any vector issues.
- Vector control issues in partnership with County – City staff have partnered with Santa Clara County Vector Control to ensure that vector issues identified in downtown are being addressed appropriately and quickly. There are already a number of vector control measures that have been implemented in various locations to control the potential spread of vector issues.
- Explore increasing amount of EV charging stalls – Our community has a significant demand for EV charging stalls that is not currently met by the amount of stalls in our downtown.

Phase 2

- First Street Streetscape Plan – Public Works staff has hired an experienced streetscape design team lead by civil engineering consultant BKF Engineers. This summer, staff worked with their team to carry out Phase I of the S. 1st Street Streetscape Design, which included doing field walks and providing 1st Street infrastructure background documents and data and establishing the scope of work (SOW) and project schedule for the streetscape planning, design, and construction phases. That work has been completed and staff is reviewing BKF's proposal for carrying out the SOW for community outreach, design/construction documents, and cost estimating, and bidding and construction. Staff plan to return to Council in early 2023 to recommend awarding a contract amendment to implement the plan.
- Increase and improve lighting along sidewalks, in Veterans Community Plaza, and in parking plazas – The sidewalks, Veterans Community Plaza, and parking plazas are not extremely well lit in some locations. As well, streetlamps in downtown are not uniform either so staff recommends the city create a standard look and feel for all lighting within the downtown. City staff is working on a pilot installation of one solar streetlamp that will be installed in Veterans Community Plaza and evaluated for efficacy. If this pilot installation is successful, City staff can return with a staged plan over a few years to replace all lighting in the downtown core. City staff can return to the City Council with contracts or proposals that will improve lighting throughout the downtown that can be funded through the Downtown Maintenance Fund.
- Improve electrical service along sidewalks, in Veterans Community Plaza, and in parking plazas – There is no standard for electricity at the tree wells as some trees have electricity while others do not so it would be good to create a standard outlet at all tree wells with the same current so that all trees may be lit properly. City staff can return to the City Council with contracts or proposals that will improve electricity throughout the downtown that can be funded through the Downtown Maintenance Fund.



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- Short-term pothole improvement plan – As City staff aim to improve all of our parking plazas in the long-term, there are smaller issues, such as potholes, that need to be addressed on a regular basis. These pot holes can be addressed comprehensively if staff takes a wholistic review of the parking plazas under this pothole improvement plan.
- Develop a comprehensive downtown parking plan – As apart of the adopted 6th Cycle Housing Element 2023-2031, the City of Los Altos has committed to prepare a downtown parking plan and update to citywide parking regulations in Program 3.A. The housing program as required within the adopted housing element requires the City to complete this process by December 2024; it is anticipated that this work will commence later in the year (2023). At the January 24, 2023 City Council meeting, the Council agreed with the recommendation of the Development Services Director, that the downtown parking and citywide parking requirements should be completed by an Independent Third Party Consultant in order to provide a non-biased review of the existing parking demand and anticipated future need of parking. Additionally, the City of Los Altos has committed to facilitating alternate modes of transportation for residents in Program 4.J of the adopted housing element. The approved housing program 4.J requires the City to further implement the adopted Complete Streets Masterplan, which makes improvements to the transportation network throughout the City. For example above head pedestrian crossing signals adjacent to downtown on San Antonio Road will be funded and completed no later than December 2027. Lastly, the downtown parking plan and citywide parking requirements will consider all existing plans such as the General Plan, Complete Streets Master Plan and Downtown Vision Plan when developing a Parking Plan and Citywide Parking Regulations.

Phase 3

- Improve wayfinding signage at entry points and directing to plazas – Visitors to downtown have difficulty finding the parking plazas when there is not adequate signage for individuals who do not know about our free parking plazas.
- Install activity node for community use – The vision calls for the installation of an activity nodes along Main and State Street area, which could include small event spaces for interactive activities. This would potentially include the installation of activity spaces in the bulb-outs at intersections along our two major downtown thoroughfares.
- Downtown safety and circulation study – It is integral that the downtown area be safe for individuals visiting our downtown by all transportation methods.

Concurrent Long-Term Projects

- Park space – The vision proposes utilizing a plaza as a flexibly-programmed park space for special events.



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- Play structures – The vision calls for a play structure in the redesign of a plaza that would allow children of all ages and abilities to have a space for their needs and accessibilities within the downtown area.
- Downtown Theater Working Group – Per City Council direction, the Downtown Theater Working Group is working on a feasibility study for a potential theater located in downtown. City staff has not spent time on this initiative and does not have an update at this time.
- Publicly available restrooms – Current visitors to downtown must request to use a private restroom from businesses while downtown. Publicly available restrooms will allow visitors to be able to spend more time downtown because they can visit different shops and not worry about needing to find a restroom.

Recommendation

Provide staff with direction on the organized action items from the Downtown Vision.