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Sent via email

I appreciate the opportunity to submit comments on the draft Downtown Davis Specific Plan and accompanying draft Zoning Code sections. My comments and questions address one important component of the plan, the protection of historic resources.

Understanding a primary goal of the downtown planning process has been to enhance the economic vitality of the downtown area, I was pleased to see the draft plan and zoning code contains general policy language and standards in support of historic preservation. Of the six Specific Plan Goals, Goal 4 directly addresses historic preservation: "A sense of place reinforced with appropriate character, balanced historical preservation and thoughtful transitions to context" (p. 60-61).

The plan provides a commendable outline of policies aimed at revitalizing the downtown with improved circulation and increased housing opportunities. I am confident the development of this draft plan is well-intended as it has many strengths. But a careful review of the detailed policies and standards addressing historic preservation raises questions and concerns about the policy intent, thoroughness and accuracy of the draft plan and zoning code with regard to historic preservation. For reasons that are not entirely clear, it appears that issues related to historic preservation have not been provided equal attention and analysis.

What follows is a summary listing of issues evident from my review of the draft plan and zoning code. I hope my comments and questions are of some value in the process of developing documents which acknowledge and appropriately protect our community's historic resources.

QUESTIONS/COMMENTS ON PLAN CHAPTER 3.5 – GOALS AND GUIDING POLICIES

Page 53, Guiding Policy 1.5: "Protect existing historic and cultural resources, and provide built form guidelines to shape new development adjacent to protected sites."

- What is meant by "adjacent to protected sites"? Is that limited to a property that shares a property line with a designated historic resource? Would property across a street or alley constitute adjacent? Consistent with the requirements for a Certified Local Government, city code includes HRMC review of projects within 300 feet of designated resources. Reasonable protection of historic and cultural resources should include guidelines for new development in close proximity not just adjacent to a protected site.

Page 55, Guiding Policy 2.2: “Promote the rehabilitation of historic buildings for adaptive use...”

- What mechanisms does the plan and/or zoning code include to ensure rehabilitation for adaptive use protects the historic integrity of a designated structure? Should the language of this guiding policy specify the importance of protecting a resource’s historic integrity?

Page 60, text discussing Goal 4: In discussing the surrounding Old East and Old North neighborhoods, the plan reads “Development will respond to this context through thoughtful transitions at the edges of Downtown, that will be regulated through standards for building massing and height.”

- Why are building massing and height the only elements for ensuring “thoughtful transitions”? Should items such as building placement (setbacks), materials, façade articulation standards, frontage types and some of the other features of form-based zoning be identified as appropriate or inappropriate in transition areas or in close proximity to protected sites?
- Should streetscape design be identified as an important component of the “thoughtful transitions at the edges of Downtown”? For example, a defining feature of the Old North neighborhood is its streetscape: a scored sidewalk pattern and planter area with large canopy trees between the sidewalk and curb. Should the plan include language endorsing this streetscape design along Fifth Street and along G Street as a part of the “thoughtful transition”?

Page 61, text discussing Goal 4: The plan reads “Historic resource classification will be clarified and streamlined.”

- What is the intent of this statement? Information presented elsewhere in the plan makes it appear the intent is to eliminate the conservation overlay district within the downtown area and rely upon the specific plan and form-based zoning code instead. Is there analysis documenting the rationale for the elimination of the overlay district?

The text here implies further study will occur to determine if the conservation overlay approach should be modified, yet the plan later calls for further study of the conservation overlay district only in the context of application to the adjoining neighborhoods of University Avenue-Rice Lane, Old East and Old North (see page 132). This inconsistency between the text on page 61 and later in the plan should be addressed.

Page 61, Guiding Policy 4.4: “Promote rehabilitation and adaptive use strategies to guide reinvestment in existing buildings and redevelopment of sites with historic or cultural resources.”

- Does the term “redevelopment” indicate acceptance of the removal, either by relocation or demolition, of designated historic resources? Should language be added indicating the importance of retaining the historic integrity of a designated resource?

QUESTIONS/COMMENTS ON PLAN CHAPTER 5 - HISTORIC RESOURCES

Pages 112-115, Introduction and Approach

- Should the language of the specific plan, particularly in the chapter on historic resources, give emphasis to the community's desire to protect the historic integrity of designated resources? Should the plan contain policies and standards specifying the goal of development compatible with designated historic resources?

The emphasis seems to be on providing opportunities to develop properties – for reuse, additions, redevelopment and the like. While the plan calls for “balanced historical preservation,” the text of the plan does not reflect a balanced approach. It promotes new development of a larger scale, an important goal with benefits for the community. But the plan lacks strong policy language in support of compatibility with designated resources.

Page 116, Figure 5.3 Historic Resources in Downtown (Current Survey): There appear to be some errors in showing the location of designated historic resources.

- The Richards Underpass/Subway is not shown. The on-line city inventory (dated 3/23/2010) lists it as a Landmark Resource (see Ord. #2003)
- The Anderson Bank Building at 203 G Street is shown as a Merit Resource, but the on-line city inventory (dated 3/23/2010) lists it as a Landmark Resource (see Ord. #1282). It is also shown as a Merit Resource in Figure 5.13 (p. 121).
- The Barovetto Home is shown, but there is no indication the Barovetto Tank House is also designated (see Ord. #1363) On Figure 5.31 of the plan (p. 129), the address is listed as 201 A Street, but the address at the time of designation was 209 and 209 ½ Second Street. Which address is accurate for the house and for the tank house?
- The McDonald House not accurately shown on either Figure 5.3 or Figure 5.31 (p. 129). When the house was designated (see Ord. #1360), its address was 337 B Street. However, with the new development in the 300 block of B Street, new addresses were assigned. The McDonald House, located at the corner of B Street and Fourth Street, is now assigned the address of 397 B Street. Since a street address may change, the plan should list a designated resource by a name, when available, and an address.
- Is the communication tower at the SP Depot also a designated resource? It is not shown in Figure 5.3 or Figure 5.11.
- Figure 5.3, as well as the figures for each neighborhood, shows potential historic sites. I support the identification of these potential historic sites, understanding that the HRMC will have the opportunity to carefully review and reach a decision on whether each property merits designation.

Pages 116-130, 5.2 Neighborhood Character and Historic Resources: This section of the plan looks more closely at the different parts of downtown, describing the character-defining features of each neighborhood. The plan reads “The Specific Plan seeks to protect historic resources and preserve Downtown’s neighborhood character, balancing historic preservation while encouraging adaptive use and sensitive redevelopment.”

- For each neighborhood, do the policies and standards balance the two goals of protection of historic resources and sensitive development? To assess whether a balance has been achieved, it is necessary to examine the potential for development on parcels near designated resources. But no such examination or discussion is found in the plan. Without such analysis, how can the appropriateness of policies and standards for protecting designated historic resources be determined?

Pages 118-119, Heart of Downtown

- Are 4 and 5 story buildings, with Neighborhood-Large and Neighborhood-Medium designations appropriate on adjoining lots and across Fourth Street from the historic resource at 619 Fourth Street, the First Presbyterian Manse? Would the block-form buildings permitted in Neighborhood-Large be appropriate next to a smaller scale house-form historic resource with sizeable front and side setbacks?
- Are 5 and 7 story buildings, with a Main Street-Large designation, appropriate on the properties surrounding the designated resources of Old City Hall? Dresbach Hunt-Boyer? The Varsity Theater? The Brinley Block? The SP Depot? The Boy Scout Cabin? The potential resource at 216 F Street? Are block-form buildings with limited to zero setbacks appropriate next to some of the smaller form buildings?
- The text of the plan inaccurately describes a 5-story height limit in the area “immediately west of the former City Hall...” The area west of Old City Hall is shown on the Regulating Plan, Figure 4.13 as Main Street-Large (up to 7 stories).
- Are additional policies and standards needed to protect the integrity of the SP Depot site? The plan rightly recognizes the opportunity presented by the land near the historic depot. The plan identifies the area as a “designated special area” with special standards (see p. 85). For example, the plan calls for a “landmark feature or building that terminates the view from Second Street.” Such a feature may be appropriate provided its compatibility with the historic resource. Policy language and standards addressing compatibility with the historical integrity of the site should be included.
- The plan indicates “...features such as street and façade setbacks may factor into compatibility with existing resource” but it does not include strong language promoting compatibility. Vague, permissive wording does not provide great assurance that protection of the historic integrity of a designated resource has been balanced with an entitlement process that will permits 5 to 7 stories with block-form next to smaller historic resources.

Pages 120-121, G Street Character:

- Are 5 story buildings, with a Main Street-Large designation, appropriate on the properties surrounding the designated resources of the Anderson Bank Building (at Second + G)? The Masonic Lodge (221 G Street)? The Bank of Yolo (at Third + G)? The potential merit resource the Davis Lumber building (at Third + G)?
- While the designated resources in this part of downtown have a block-form, are standards addressing other features such as façade treatment or materials needed to ensure compatibility with historic structures? This question is relevant to each of the neighborhoods within the downtown area.
- The plan makes a direct statement on page 120 that “some resources could receive additions and retain eligibility...” Which resources are considered appropriate for potential additions?
- Should 340 G Street be shown as a potential merit resource on Figure 5.13 and Figure 5.3? Figure 4.13, the land use map (p. 74), shows the structure at the southeast corner of Fourth and G streets as a potential resource. The survey form completed on 340 G Street, as a part of the inventory update (August 12, 2019 memo and attachments), indicates the structure with its unique storybook architecture “meets the criteria for listing in the City of Davis Register (local register) as Merit Resource and retains overall historic integrity.” The HRMC should have an opportunity to review and take action on whether it should be designated.

Pages 122-123, North G Street Character

- Why does the text describing the character of the North G Street neighborhood omit the streetscape design (a scored sidewalk pattern and planter area with large canopy trees between the sidewalk and curb) which ties this area to the Old North traditional residential neighborhood? Language should be added to the plan describing this feature and supporting its continuation.
- How does the proposed elimination of the conservation overlay district and its “contributing resource” designation affect the historical integrity of the Old North neighborhood? Many of the structures on the west side of 600 block of G Street are identified as “contributing resources.” Should this block remain in a conservation overlay district for Old North? Would such inclusion serve as a “thoughtful transition” at the edge of Downtown as called for in Goal 4 of the plan?
- Are 4 story buildings, with a Main Street Medium designation, appropriate on lots adjoining the potential historic resources in the 500 block of G Street? This designation allows both house-form and block-form buildings. Would block-form buildings be appropriate next to a smaller scale house-form historic resources that have sizeable front and side setbacks?
- Should 526 G Street be shown as a potential merit resource on Figures 5.19, 5.3, and 4.13? The survey form completed on 526 G Street, as a part of the inventory update (August 12, 2019 memo and attachments), indicates the structure “retains overall historic integrity” and “remains eligible for listing” as a Merit Resource. The HRMC should have an opportunity to review and take action on whether it should be designated.

- Are additional policies or standards needed to address potential development of the former Hibbert Lumber yard property relative to the protection of potential historic resources? The large parcel presents an important opportunity for new development. Sensitive design will be needed to ensure compatibility with the smaller house-form buildings along their shared property line. Should the lumber yard be identified as a “special designated area” with accompanying policies and standards to guide compatible development?

Pages 124-125, North-West Downtown

- As noted in questions and comments on the previous neighborhoods, it is difficult to judge whether the plan maintains the appropriate balance between protection of a designated resource and new construction as there is no discussion or analysis of the issue. Is the designation of Neighborhood-Medium, with 3 to 5 story buildings, appropriate on parcels in close proximity to designated and potential resources?
- Is it appropriate to add the Lincoln Highway marker in Central Park to the city’s historic inventory? The HRMC has considered the designation of resources that are not buildings – the Avenue of the Trees and the Third Street Bike lane being two examples. Is there an appropriate way to officially recognize the Lincoln Highway route and marker? (There is a second Lincoln Highway marker in the Avenue of the Trees near its terminus at Arthur Street.)
- Is it appropriate to add the WPA/former restroom structure in Central Park to the city’s historic inventory?

Pages 126-127, South-West Downtown

- Is the suggested commemoration of the historic 1967 Third Street bike lane with “signage, paving, public art or other landscaping treatment” an appropriate approach? The plan calls for Third Street to be a “shared street.” Figure 6.11 shows a cross-section of a “shared street” which would eliminate the on-street bike lane as the travel lane would be shared by vehicles and bikes (p. 144). While this street design may be desirable given Third Street’s role in connecting downtown to the university, how the historic bike lane should be addressed within that new street design should not be an after-thought. The plan’s language is imprecise, reading Third Street “could commemorate the historic bike lanes.” Stronger language requiring a design that appropriately recognizes the historic importance of the bike lane is needed.
- Again, it is difficult to assess whether the scale of development to be permitted in close proximity to historic resources is appropriate as no discussion or analysis is provided. Is the Neighborhood-Medium designation with 4 story house-form buildings appropriate around the Jacobson-Wilson House at 232 B Street? Are Neighborhood-Medium with 4-story house-form buildings and Main Street-Medium with 4-story block-form buildings appropriate around the Clancy House at 137 C Street? Are Main Street-Medium, Neighborhood-Medium, and Main Street-Large designations adjacent to the Hamel House at 505 Second Street appropriate?
- Have the McNeil Apartments at 118-120 C Street been evaluated for potential designation? The most recent survey completed as a part of the specific plan process makes no mention of this property. Does it warrant a careful look by the HRMC?

- Should the plan include policies or standards aimed at protecting the remaining WPA sidewalk markings in the downtown area? In a driveway cut in front of 315 First Street there are two “WPA 1938” markings.

How can such markings be included in the city’s historic inventory? Just as the HRMC has identified the Davis Cemetery and the Avenue of the Trees, is there an appropriate way to officially recognize role of the WPA in Davis by incorporating these sidewalk markings into any reconstruction or repair of sidewalks and curbs? It does not appear that an inventory of these markings has been completed, although a quick look at on-line resources includes photographs of such markings in Old North and Old East. The intent would not be to preserve a crumbling, cracking sidewalk or curb but to investigate the feasibility of saving these small links to an important historical event.

Pages 128-129, University Avenue-Rice Lane

- Have the Davis Townhouse Apartments, occupying most of the block bounded by Russell Blvd, B Street, Fourth Street and University Avenue, been evaluated for potential designation? The most recent survey completed as a part of the specific plan process makes no mention of this property. But a previous survey indicated it was one of the first apartment complexes in Davis. Does it warrant a careful look by the HRMC?

Pages 130-132, Conservation Overlay District

- What are the suggested boundaries of the new conservation overlay districts? While the text on page 132 indicates a new overlay district for each of the older residential neighborhoods, Figure 5.34 is unclear. Figure 5.34 seems to show 5 new districts: University Avenue-Rice Lane; Old North; Old East; Downtown Commercial Core; and G Street/Depot.

Would the west side of the 500 and 600 blocks of G Street remain in the same conservation overlay district as Old North?

The text on page 132 further indicates the boundary for the University Avenue-Rice Lane district has been adjusted. How?

- Recommendation B calls for developing design guidelines for each district. What changes are being contemplated? The plan’s text on page 131 indicates the existing DDTRN guidelines have largely successful in meeting their stated purposes.

Furthermore, recommendation B reads “Areas with special characteristics can be further developed with considerations to the Regulating Plan.” What does this mean? Are these the same “special areas of interest” mentioned in Recommendation D? Clarification is needed.

- Recommendation C considers the elimination of contributing resources. The rationale given is that alteration or demolition would be reviewed holistically. What is meant by this “holistic review”? What are the benefits of keeping the designation of “contributing status,” and what are

the benefits of the more “holistic” approach? Again, the plan seems to lack analysis or discussion of the rationale underlying this recommendation.

- Recommendation D calls for the establishment of “special areas of interest to encompass the transitional areas” between Downtown and Old East and Old North. This language is reiterated in Chapter 8 implementation actions. Why aren’t these transitional areas identified in the plan? Why is the plan lacking in policies and standards specifically addressing these “thoughtful transitions”? Transitions between new larger scale development and the smaller scale traditional neighborhoods are of critical importance.

The text further reads “These special areas of interest...would allow for more nuanced conservation and development in these areas as shown in Figure 5.34.” What is meant by “more nuanced conservation and development”? It is unclear what areas being referred to as Figure 5.34 shows the possible overlay districts. Clarification is needed.

- The plan’s text on page 132 reads “These recommendations would not change the purview of the HRMC, but would clarify and streamline the design review process.” With the elimination of the conservation overlay district, wouldn’t the HRMC’s advisory role for new construction, significant renovation projects and demolitions within downtown be diminished?
- Under the existing code, the HRMC’s purview includes rendering judgement on a certificate of appropriateness for a designated resource and performing an advisory review of new development, significant alteration and demolition within 300 feet of a designated resource. Under the new plan and zoning code, would the HRMC retain these two responsibilities?

COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS ON PLAN CHAPTER 8 - IMPLEMENTATION

Page 221-222, Implementation Actions: Historic Resource Management

- Several actions are recommended but the plan never discusses the rationale for these steps, never explains how these steps promote the plan’s goals. In Action 1, the implementation plan calls refinement of Section 40.23 of the city code, specifically to clarify the distinction between a Landmark and a Merit Resource. What confusion exists regarding a Landmark or a Merit Resource?
- In Action 2, elimination of “possible redundancies and extraneous processes” is recommended. What discussion or analysis has concluded there are redundancies and extraneous processes?
- Why in Action 3 is design assistance to current and potential owners of historic resources to be provided “in advance of design guidelines?” What types of design assistance are anticipated?
- Action 4 calls for reviewing and refining the existing design guidelines. Clarification is needed as to whether, under the draft plan and zoning code, these design guidelines apply to the downtown area or only to the adjacent neighborhoods of University Avenue-Rice Lane, Old North and Old East. Are these design guidelines meant to be applied to designated resources or to properties in close proximity to designated resources? To ensure compatibility between new downtown

development and historic resources, design standards beyond the few zoning code sections on setbacks and stepbacks seem warranted.

- Action 7 reads “consider conservation overlay district approaches for suitability for downtown.” Is this language consistent with the plan’s language on page 132 to eliminate the conversation overlay district in downtown?
- Action 7 has three components, labeled 7A, B and C. Yet the recommended implementation actions in Chapter 5 on page 132 includes an A, B, C and D. Why is item C from page 132 addressing contributing status omitted from the Chapter 8 implementation steps?

COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS ON THE DRAFT ZONING CODE

- Section 40.13.030 contains a Quick Code Guide aimed at assisting an applicant understand how to use the code for a new or modified building. There is no mention of historical resources or the HRMC’s review role in this Quick Code Guide. Should language be added about new construction in proximity to designated resources? Such language might alert the user to the code’s standards for adjacency to a historic resource. Should language be added about the potential for review by the HRMC if within 300 feet of a designated resource?
- Why did the consultants not provide an analysis, discussion or presentation of the relationship between the form-based zoning and the city’s designated resources?

The draft zoning code is a very detailed document. As noted in comments and questions about the draft plan, without an analysis of what new construction is permitted near designated resources, it is difficult to evaluate whether the code adequately balances the goal of historic preservation and the promotion of appropriate development.

The zoning code details building types, height, setbacks, encroachments, frontage types, massing and façade articulation standards for each zone. But the only standards specific to historic resources as the Historic Resource Adjacency Standards in Table 40.14.080C. These standards deal with ground floor height, side setback, and stepbacks for upper floors for new construction next to a historic resource and do not address other important considerations:

- The standards do not address adjacency along a rear property line.
- The standards do not address new construction across a street or alley.
- The standards do not address building type, materials, façade articulation, frontage types, encroachments, signs or any of the other components of the form-based zoning approach.
- Page 115 of the plan suggests new construction be oriented in a manner compatible with the existing access and orientation of a designated resource. But the zoning code does not appear to address this.

Are the Historic Resource Adjacency Standards in Table 40.14.080C adequate for protecting designated resources? Are more comprehensive standards addressing other design components needed?

CONCLUSION

As has occurred in the downtowns of other communities, a legitimate concern is that historical structures will appear engulfed by larger scale newer buildings whose massing, façade treatments, and materials are discordant. In such instances, the smaller scale historic structure may look out-of-place. It is unclear if the policies and standards in the plan and zoning code have adequately addressed this concern. The plan and code create the potential for 4 to 7 story structures, with a 10-foot side setback for a depth of 25 feet and setbacks for construction above a second floor, next to a smaller often house-form historic structures. I am not confident the limited zoning standards included in the draft are sufficient to protect the integrity of our community's historic resources.

The plan provides a forward-looking vision for the downtown area. Throughout the draft plan, numerous illustrations show a wide mix of possibilities for the downtown – such as building scale sustainability strategies, streetscapes for shared streets or raised cycle tracks, and renderings of potential future development in different parts of downtown. These help the community envision the plan's direction and assist in showing the potential consequences of specific policies and standards. However, both written analysis and illustrative diagrams and renderings that address the treatment of historic resources is lacking. Therefore, it is difficult to envision how such resources will be affected by the plan. It is my hope this omission can be addressed before the next steps in the review process are taken.

I offer these comments in the spirit of enhancing this important document. It is not meant to be an inventory of criticisms as the plan identifies many beneficial goals for the community. My comments are meant to help identify important policy and regulatory issues that should be considered in advance in order to improve the ultimate implementation of the plan.

Respectfully submitted,
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