

From: Donald Morrill <donaldrmorrill@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, January 14, 2020 12:00 PM
To: City Council Members <CityCouncilMembers@cityofdavis.org>
Subject: Davis Downtown Specific Plan comments

Dear Councilmembers,

Below please find a copy of Parkview Place Association members' supportive comments on the DDSP. It highlights our own four year experience in building a senior friendly, five unit, three story, zero net energy project with suggestions for improvement in that process. Thank you all for taking a look, and your many hours of dedicated service.

Don Morrill
for Parkview Place Association

Re: Comments on Davis Downtown Specific Plan

We at Parkview Place all enthusiastically support the goals of the Draft Davis Downtown Specific Plan (DDSP) and its overall goal of a "memorable, pedestrian oriented, multimodal, and mixed-use downtown with an emphasis on sustainability and an identity that is uniquely Davis." Indeed, needs for increased affordable housing, living space density, and preservation of vital agricultural land make success of the DDSP vitally important to our community and our planet.

We remain pleased that our Parkview Place building at 444 4th Street reflects that vision, as an owner-occupied, senior-based, zero net energy, LEED Platinum building. Our project has two upper stories with four- two bedroom apartments, and a first floor one-bedroom rental unit that is ADA compliant and designed as a live-work space. Over our six years of occupancy, we have averaged more than 18% annual energy surplus in our all-electric building. Just as importantly, we have established a small community that greatly enjoys downtown living and each other's company!

We understand the vital purpose of the DDSP as a prescription for necessary growth, and with a new form-based zoning code to streamline the project approval process. In support, these comments will chronicle our difficult application experience, to reinforce the importance of a simplified planning process to accelerate our downtown's progress toward the DDSP's goals.

We endured three significant hurdles on our four-year path toward a building permit:

1. Lengthy review by the Historical Resources Management Commission (HRMC)
2. Rejection by the Davis Planning Commission
3. Insistence by the Fire Marshall that we install a large gurney-sized elevator

We hope most Davisites agree that our project has been good for the downtown, but we note that it has not been duplicated; in part, we suspect, due to our application difficulties. On our three issues, more rapid conclusions might have been reached. However, it is not clear that the causes

of our long delays would necessarily be remedied under the DDSP. Here are our summaries and suggestions on each issue:

1. **HRMC Review:** The existing home was dilapidated and had been neglected too long for restoration. Further, no building of its small size could any longer be justified given the value and prices of downtown lots. The HRMC hired a consultant at our expense, who recommended designation as a Landmark project; with no conceivable way for it to be saved or managed going forward. After lengthy and confused review and discussion, the HRMC did allow our project to proceed. (We publicly offered to give the home away, including the cost of moving and building foundations, but no party expressed interest.) Not all proposed projects face the historical hurdle; but when they do, we suggest this **Better Approach:** Require that the City and HRMC first work with owners to assess whether there is an economically-viable path forward in the event the City should later accept a consultant's revised historical designation. Such a process could quickly determine whether it is worth investing time and money in further historical review.
2. **Davis Planning Commission (DPC):** The DPC appeared not to recognize that our project was within zoning restrictions and aligned with stated City goals by increasing density, owner-occupancy, and senior living; and by targeting zero-net energy performance. Instead, the DPC objected to our "non-cottage" design style and 3-story height. Our design goal of complementing the historical Community Church and limiting height to less than the nearby Church and fraternity house was not credited. After DPC rejection, our appeal to the City Council resulted in unanimous approval. **Better Approach:** The form-based code may eliminate erroneous DPC rejections in the future, but a better process might simply assess whether a project aligns with downtown plan objectives and whether the design fits with nearby buildings, rather than trying to force a match with an arbitrary "neighborhood design style."
3. **Elevator:** Senior Living downtown is not adequately addressed in the Plan, and our "elevator story" provides one example of how approval of senior projects might be streamlined. Our project was delayed approximately 8 months by the Fire Marshall's initial requirement of a (~\$250,000) gurney-sized elevator, based on his interpretation of state code. Our dismay with this interpretation was supported by local Emergency Medical Technicians' confirmation that they would not use or wait for an elevator in an emergency situation, and that our 5' wide main stair was ideal for emergency descents. After much time, effort, and key City Council support, we ultimately circumvented the over-sized elevator requirement through designation of our ADA-compliant live-work unit on the first floor. We were allowed to install an economically practical "Limited Use, Limited Accessibility" (LULA) elevator that was just right for our project and that we feel is a necessity for senior living. **Better Approach:** Add a section to the DDSP that focuses on the value of adding owner-occupied senior housing downtown, and establishes guidelines and incentives that streamline the approval process. Such a section could, among others, provide guidelines that clarify appropriate elevator size in relation to project size, and also extend to safety and transportation options.

Aside from our own application challenges, we'll chime in on transportation and parking issues that affect our downtown. We know both that downtown parking will be reduced by the DDSP, and that transportation issues outside of downtown are not addressed. Bringing workers,

shoppers, and tourists to downtown stores and entertainment venues from nearby towns, the Sacramento region, and the Bay Area are likely vital to the initiation and financing of downtown development. Regional transportation choices including light rail, Amtrak, and buses could reduce stress on parking and, in conjunction with a local shuttle system from perimeter parking lots, facilitate a more pedestrian downtown. Expansion of transportation options will require the active participation of regional leaders – City Council and Board of Supervisors, State Legislators, and perhaps members of Congress, to achieve. We look forward to supporting that effort. We also reject free parking downtown as an asset for the future, but we would support free perimeter parking and a free downtown shuttle service as contributors to achieving key goals of the DDSP.

Thank you for considering these comments and suggestions!

Respectfully submitted,

Parkview Place Associates

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