

MEMO

TO: Sherri Metzker, Principal Planner
Eric Lee, Planner
FROM: Greg Rowe, Planning Commissioner
DATE: November 6, 2019
SUBJECT: Comments on Public Review Draft - Downtown Davis Specific Plan (“Plan”)

The comments below appear in the same order as the draft Plan, preceded by general comments. A list of possible typos is at the end of this memo.

Page	Section	Subject	Comments
NA	NA	Mixed Use	<p>Plan assumes mixed use buildings will generate greater downtown visitation. But more mixed use buildings and visitation should not be equated to greater attraction and retention of retail stores. Plan also assumes dining opportunities will expand. I believe it is overly optimistic to assume an increase in retail shopping will occur on lower floors of mixed use buildings. This is because retail shopping has undergone tremendous change in recent years and will continue to evolve away from “brick and mortar” stores as internet shopping increases. It is simply too convenient to shop on the internet; plus, multiple websites provide in-depth product information and evaluations. As the <i>Wall Street Journal</i> reported on 11-01-2019, “Just this year, chains have announced more than 8,000 U.S. store closings, and several retailers have filed for bankruptcy protection.”ⁱ</p> <p>A better strategy would be to tap into the research strength of UCD by encouraging mixed use space for companies complementary to UCD, some of whose employees may want to live close to their jobs. An example of such a company would be the recent location of a Mars research office in the building at the southeast corner of G and 5th Streets. As such firms and their employees occupy downtown, there will of course be some growth in complementary retail activities.</p> <p>It’s also overly optimistic to assume more restaurants will lure older Davisites downtown. Between the 1999-2000 academic year and the LRDP baseline of 2016-17, UCD 3-quarter average enrollment grew by 50%, from 22,364 to 33,391. During that span most of the “adult-oriented” downtown restaurants closed (notably Soga’s, Monticello, and Our House). Virtually all of the remaining restaurants cater to college students, with the exception of Season’s. Most adult Davisites seeking a mature dinner venue go to Winters, Woodland or Sacramento, and I suspect that will remain so.</p>

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			Finally, the Plan's front cover is faulty in several respects. (1) A cyclist is riding down the center of the street, instead on the right side. (2) a man is walking his dog almost in the center of the street (dog leashes and bikes are not a good mix); (3) the pavement appears to be comprised of large pavers; the seams or cracks between them can catch bike tires.
NA	NA	Housing	The expected increase in downtown housing units may be the best possible solution for accommodating new housing in Davis and meeting RHNA obligations in the context of the limitations imposed by Measure J/R.
19	2.2	Socio-Economic	As Chris Granger stated at the October 24 DPAC meeting, this section should describe (if possible) the % of the overall City and downtown population that is 20-29 years old. It states that the fastest growing group is 25-34 and that the 35-54 age group in Davis is declining, but does not mention the status of those 20-29.
21	2.2	Property Ownership	"Downtown has a collection of bank building sites, many underutilized due to a City ordinance requiring financial institutions to have a main branch downtown." Comment: The City should consider amending this ordinance to allow financial institutions to apply for permission to close their downtown locations. The City could consider such applications on a case-by-case basis. Alternatively, the City could evaluate which downtown bank sites have the greatest alternative development potential, and initiate closure and/or redevelopment discussions with those financial institutions and/or their property owners.
27	2.3	Lack of Identity and Relevance	<p>Plan says 9,000 workers commute daily into Davis but 20,000 leave. As mentioned at the Oct 24 DPAC meeting, about half of the 20K actually commute to UCD; i.e., only about 10,000 leave the immediate Davis environs. If this is true, the Plan should be amended to include this clarification. Plus, it must be realized that many highly educated Davis residents have specialized jobs that do not exist in Davis. For example, I previously worked 13 years as an airport environmental planner, but no such job exists in Davis. A friend is married to a partner in a major downtown Sacramento law firm; he would not find a similar position in Davis. Many people chose to work elsewhere but live in Davis for the quality of life, schools and "small town feel." There's nothing wrong with that. The Davis population could greatly increase, but many people would still travel elsewhere to work.</p> <p>It also states that some residents interviewed travel to Sacramento or Winters for social outings and recreation. As mentioned earlier, this is completely understandable. Most Davis restaurants cater solely to students, so adults often have no choice but to go elsewhere for social and/or recreational outings.</p>
27	2.3	Economy in Transition	"Downtown has the opportunity to establish a mutual beneficial, town-gown relationship with UC Davis." This may be true, but it is common knowledge among most Davis residents that downtown Davis should for the most part be avoided during the UCD school year. The 50% growth of UCD enrollment between 1999 and 2016 means that everything from the sidewalks to the restaurants have simply become too crowded. Even

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			walking in the downtown area is often difficult because many of the students don't practice proper bicycle safety; i.e., running through stop signs and traffic lights, etc.
39	3.2	Sustainable Vision	Granger mentioned during Oct 24 DPAC meeting that she wants to see a separate, strong emphasis on the downtown economy. I concur; much attention is focused on sustainability, but not enough on economic concerns and priorities.
42	3.3	Building Scale Sustainability	Requiring SRI roof materials and permeable pavers is a good idea. Also, solar panels should be on as many buildings as possible.
43	3.3	Sustainable Strategies	Waste Source Separation: The Plan urges conveniently located color-coded recycling bins for landfill, compost and recycling. This appears good in theory, but often fails in practice. At Sacramento International Airport we tried a variety of methods to promote recycling, none of which worked. Regardless of the color of bin, people habitually put trash ("landfill items") in the recycling bins, and vice versa. I typically witness the same thing happening at major public events such as the recent California Capital Airshow. The average person either does not care or does not pay attention. Janitorial staff typically can't be relied upon to separate items that people mistakenly put in the wrong bin.
47	3.3	District-Scale Sustainability	Geo-Exchange: The Plan suffers from the lack of discussion on the cost of installing such a system. How much would it cost for a typical building? How will it be financed? Who will pay for it? Will requiring Geo-Exchange make development in downtown Davis financially uncompetitive with other cities that do not require it?
47	3.3	District-Scale Sustainability	Recessed windows to provide shading sounds like a nice idea, but it also provides ideal perching and nesting locations for birds. Bird nests and waste on window ledges can increase building cleaning and maintenance costs.
52	3.5	Memorable Identity	"A key opportunity to enhance this identity through built form is to address the inadequate hierarchy between different parts of downtown." Please define what this statement is trying to communicate. It comes across as meaningless "consultant planner lingo." (The Plan suffers from such verbiage in a number of places.)
53	3.5 Goal 1	Policy 1.9	"Integrate high-quality, unique public art throughout Downtown..." It is important to identify funds for both providing such art, and maintaining it in perpetuity after it is installed. Example: The County of Sacramento requires new public buildings to devote a percentage of the project cost to public art. In planning the new Terminal B at Sacramento International, the Director of Airports asked the Board of Supervisors to amend the County's public art ordinance to require a certain percentage of the public art budget to be set aside for long-term maintenance of the art after installation. Without such a provision, public art can fall into disrepair over time. Art groups in Sacramento County opposed the amendment, but the Board of Supervisors ultimately concurred with the Director of Airports. The same thing should occur in Davis.
54	3.5 Goal 2	Goal 2	"Compact development in Downtown will enable people to live near where they work, shop and play." This is not universally true, and is a concept that warrants challenge and refinement. For example, in a dual-wage

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			earning family, one partner may work in or near downtown Davis, but the other may commute outside Davis for work. This means sustainability and GHG reduction goals may not be as great as assumed. Also, in some cases, a family may decide to not live in downtown Davis, but instead live in a city midway between where the 2 partners work. (I once worked in downtown Sacramento with a man who lived in Fairfield because his wife commuted from there to her job in downtown San Francisco. Fairfield was a logical midway point for both of them.) Also, for a variety of reasons some people may not want to live near where they work. It's a lot harder for your boss to ask you to work on nights or weekends if you don't live near your job.
55	Goal 2	Goal 2.3	"Incentivize private developers to include sustainability features and energy efficient systems in new development, renovation and expansion projects that exceed minimum City requirements." Comment: this may not be fiscally feasible. While such features may reduce operating and maintenance costs over time, they often entail high initial costs. How will such incentives work? Will it entail lower development impact fees? If so, the fee reductions must equal or exceed the incremental cost increase of such features and systems.
57	Goal 3	Goal 3	The paragraph immediately preceding "Guiding Policies" refers to "...housing units that are affordable by design." This term must be defined, both on this page and in the glossary. Don't assume it is understood by the average, non-planner reader.
60	Goal 4	Introductory paragraph	"Form-based standards rooted in the built heritage and community character of Downtown will shape new development." What on earth does this mean? It sounds like consultant planner "gobbledygook." The Plan should be revised to use "Plain English" wherever possible.
61	Goal 4	Guiding Policy 4.2	"Reflect the intended use, intensity and eclectic character of Downtown's different neighborhoods with building and public realm standards that respond to context." Again, what does this mean? It comes across as just more professional consultant planner "gobbledygook."
63	Goal 5	Policy 5.3	The difference between pocket parks, plazas and parklets should be defined, perhaps with a sidebar.
63	Goal 5	Policy 5.10	Public Art: see previous comment on the need to establish an ongoing maintenance fund for public art.
63	Goal 5	Figure 3.32	Interactive Water Feature: California recently experienced prolonged drought, and it is certain that droughts will recur. ⁱⁱ It therefore makes no sense to waste water through evaporation and spillage by creating water features and fountains. It also makes no sense to operate electric-powered pumps for such unnecessary features. This would be a blatant example of poor sustainability. It will be hard to convince Davisites to conserve water if they see downtown fountains and water features.
65	Goal 6	Policy 6.1	"Make Downtown a place where most daily needs can be met without a car..." In many cases this will be unrealistic. How is a person supposed to get home walking or on a bike with bags of heavy groceries (especially items like milk)? The benefits of biking, walking and transit should not be oversold because in many situations traveling by vehicle is the most practical mode.

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85	4.6	8 – Underground Parking	Below ground parking has many advantages, but may render some projects fiscally untenable.
88	4.6	Transform E Street Plaza	Loss of parking: During the Oct 24 DPAC meeting Josh Chapman expressed business community concern about the loss of downtown parking. Although Davis residents may be able to travel within downtown by means other than cars (walking, biking, transit), it will be difficult to lure non-Davis residents downtown if they find it too difficult to park. This is a valid concern.
91	4.6	G Street	Additional Recommendation 3: Use street furniture, signage and other streetscape elements to create a cohesive image and a “G Street” brand.” Comment: Street furniture could end up inducing occupancy by the homeless and other “street people,” potentially thereby dampening greater visitation.
95	4.6	North G Street	2: Articulate the portions of the building(s) not lining the plaza with residential frontages. Comment: Make this statement simpler and easier to understand. Does it mean that the buildings are now inarticulate?
132	5.3	Conservation Overlay District	A: Eliminate the district as a whole and establish existing neighborhoods as individual conservation districts. Comments: Yes, this will help expedite planning and development.
138	6.2	Thoroughfare Design	<p>The discussion theoretically good, but ignores the fact that many pedestrians in downtown Davis cross streets without looking where they are going. Students run stop signs, make left turns at intersections from the bike lane (thereby crossing in front of stopped cars), and many “blow” right through stop signs without stopping or even looking. I get the impression that many UCD students never rode a bike until arriving in Davis. Bicycle safety courses should be mandatory at UCD. Unless and until bike riders increase compliance with traffic laws, no amount of new downtown street design will increase the intersection safety among bike riders, pedestrians and drivers.</p> <p>And, despite current Davis requirements, downtown streets are often blocked during the day by large delivery trucks (which ironically includes trucks delivering bicycles to downtown bike shops).</p>
140	6.2	Goods Movement	The narrow streets advocated in the Plan will actually inhibit the movement of goods. It is contradictory.
150	6.3	3 rd Street Reconstruction	Some merchants on 3 rd Street may oppose the loss of on-street parking, as shown on Figure 6.11.
152	6.3	Sidewalk Quality	Improving sidewalk quality should be a top priority. Just as many Davis residents are frustrated that the City does not adequately maintain City streets, I believe many residents would place a higher priority on improving the sidewalks over what they could regard as overly ambitious and unrealistic urban design plans.
155	6.3	Bicycling is Social	Figure 6.27 – Bicycling is Social. Comment: When I ride my bike from home to downtown, it is imperative to be mindful of my surroundings. I therefore regard this figure and caption as highly inappropriate. Biking is an inherently dangerous activity regardless in town or in rural areas, and riding side-by-side should be strongly discouraged. If riders want to be social, they should take a break and socialize safely off the road (at a coffee

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			shop, etc.). Besides, I think side-by-side riding is contrary to the CA Vehicle Code.) I strongly advise deleting this figure and verbiage. The Plan should not encourage unsafe biking. What was the consultant thinking?
159	6.3	Transit Priority Measures	What is a “queue jump”? Please define.
169	6.6	Reserve Sites	The Plan says additional parking facilities should not be built until all lower-cost options have been implemented. It also says that if built, future public parking should be designed to allow easy conversion to other uses. Both of these recommendations make sense and should be implemented.
170 And 219	6.7 And 8.4	TMA And TMA, Table 8.E, #3H	<p>Transportation Management Association (TMA) Membership: The Plan says that all non-residential developments should be required to join Yolo Commute and that tenants should remain members in perpetuity. I recommend that this strategy be deleted. Requiring dues-paying membership will impose an uncompetitive cost on downtown Davis development and tenancy. And, based on my experience, TMAs are ineffective.</p> <p>I dealt with a TMA during my 13-year tenure as Senior Environmental Analyst with the Sacramento County Department of Airports (Airports). The CA Air Resources Board (ARB) imposed an air quality management plan on Mather Airport, and delegated implementation and monitoring to the Sac Metro Air Quality Management District. Both agencies periodically criticized Airports because TMA ridesharing goals were continually unmet. The airport had many tenants, which included UPS, other air freight companies, corporate commuting aircraft fleets, aircraft sales and service, etc. The airport belonged to the local TMA and the airport manager served on its Board of Directors. He and I urged airport tenants to join and pay dues to the TMA, and to provide incentives for their employees to commute by modes other than single occupancy vehicles. Our efforts fell short, however, because: (1) The airport could not compel tenants to join the TMA; and (2) employers can't dictate how their employees commute to work. TMAs are a prime example of failed social engineering.</p>
179	7.2	Core Area Drainage Pond	Offering an option for downtown development to contribute an in-lieu fee for maintenance of this facility is a great idea and should be encouraged.
191	7.5	Sewer Capacity Charges	Capacity charges for developers may very well capture ongoing regular maintenance costs for the City, but if not moderated could end up being a factor putting Davis at a competitive disadvantage with other cities.
195	8.1	Phasing Strategy	As Eric Roe mentioned at the Oct 24 DPAC meeting, “breaks” for development impact fees could greatly incentivize downtown development. He said that City staff should be given greater latitude to be creative in helping projects “pencil out;” I concur. He further said the City Finance and Budget Commission should look at the current impact fee structure to make downtown more financially viable; again, I concur.
195	8.1	Demand for Commercial Space	The Plan says on the top of the right-hand column that there is a demand for commercial space downtown, in particular from knowledge-based sectors. There is a pro and con side to this situation. The City (and County

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			<p>of Yolo) will benefit greatly if building owners lease space to private sector employers. However, if past experience is any guide, UCD may seek to lease some of the new commercial space. When this happens, the property owner typically applies for a property tax exemption because UCD is a tax-exempt entity.</p> <p>I recommend that the City press owners of current and future downtown commercial space to refrain from applying for property tax exemptions on any space leased to UCD. And, given that the City and UCD have supposedly entered into a new era of cooperation, perhaps the City should encourage UCD to not lease space downtown, but to instead add more space on campus. Alternatively, if UCD were to lease downtown space, perhaps it could ask landlords to place a clause in the lease(s) whereby the property owner would agree to refrain from applying for a property tax exemption.</p>
195	8.1	Housing Demand	The Plan states “UC Davis...plans to increase enrollment, adding to Downtown’s economic base and adding to the housing demand.” This statement implies that the City bears a responsibility to provide housing for UCD students, which is a concept I oppose. The City should emphasize the attraction of families and workers to downtown housing. That demographic will in all probability have more disposable income to support new commercial and retail uses than would students.
196	8.1	Phase One	Mixed use infill redevelopment of the former Hibbert Hardware and Lumber site should be a top priority. This block, bounded by 5 th , 6 th and G Streets and the railroad, should be “fast-tracked” for development, and should be depicted as such on Figure 8.1.
199	8.2	Table 8.A.	Phase II projects: These are all good, but where will the City get the money to do them?
201	8.2	Table 8.A, #27	Fountain feature and splash pad: see previous comments about water features. Given the certainty of future droughts and ongoing climate change, water features and water play areas simply make no sense. Installing them would be irresponsible.
205	8.3	Funding Sources	This section continually emphasizes grant opportunities, which seems nebulous and overly optimistic. I think this is where the Plan really breaks down. Everything in the preceding chapters seems good for the most part, but the Plan falls down when it comes to explaining how the goals and recommendations will be financed.
205	8.3	Impact Fees	As previously stated, the Plan may be infeasible if developers find it easier and less costly to bring their plans to fruition in other cities.
209	8.3	General Fund	The first paragraph in the left column mentions how increased visitation, among other factors, will generate increased tax revenue. I continue questioning assumptions about how development of the Plan will increase visitation. People arriving in Davis from out-of-town may be discouraged by the parking restrictions the Plan espouses. I think the Plan should focus on improving Davis for people who live here. I doubt that Davis will ever provide compelling reasons for people to visit relative to Sacramento and the Bay Area. Our town simply is unlikely to have sufficient “critical mass” to be a visitor destination. And again, the downtown is now so

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			crowded with students, it is hard to conceive how adding another 5,000 students to UCD will make the downtown any more attractive for adult out-of-town visitors. Do we really want more students from other colleges proliferating downtown on Picnic Day?
212	8.4	Urban Design and Placemaking	One of the really big needs downtown--not mentioned anywhere in the Plan--would be convenient and well-maintained public restrooms. My wife and recently visited the downtown shopping district in Walnut Creek. Attached to one of the department stores were well-signed, large, clean, and attractive public restrooms. We REALLY need something similar in downtown Davis, and in more than one location.
213	8.4	Table 8C, #4	I strongly endorse items 4F, 4G, and 4H (as long as UCD does not lease downtown office space, thereby depriving the City and Yolo County of badly needed property tax revenue).
213	8.4	Table 8C, #5	5E. Public art and landscaping will only be as good as the devotion of resources to maintaining them. The City currently requires developers to install landscaping in public right-of-way areas, but then does a lousy job of maintaining it. There is dead and neglected public area landscaping all over Davis. Don't add any more landscaping in public areas unless it will be maintained properly.
215	8.4	Table 8D, #1	1E: Street Network. Double-parked trucks downtown remain a problem. They block traffic and cause consternation on the part of drivers and bike riders. This problem needs to be solved.
215	8.4	Table 8D, #2	2E, Eliminate driveways and curb cuts. Comment: It would seem that the alley driveways for the recently completed Tim Spenser alley are contrary to this proposed implementation measure. I have witnessed several dangerous interactions between vehicles and sidewalk pedestrians at the 3rd Street Driveway, next to the former Davis City Hall. Also, this may be the best section to insert a clause regarding the need for more downtown public restrooms.
216	8.4	Table 8D, #2	Waste Receptacles: see previous comments. Most people don't pay attention, putting landfill trash in recycling containers and vice versa. Color-coding won't overcome innate human inattention.
216	8.4	Table 8D, #3	Bike facilities. Comment: Poor bike handling skills and vehicle code compliance are likely to remain huge problems, particularly on the part of UCD students. All of the Plan's proposed upgrades in bike facilities will do no good if riders continue to alternate between riding on streets and sidewalks, ride in the wrong direction, pedal past run stop signs, do U turns at intersections or in the middle of blocks, etc. Such problems have grown incrementally worse as UCD's enrollment has risen. Better bike facilities along won't resolve this.
217	8.4	Table 8D, #k5	5F says that VMT should become the primary metric for evaluating transportation impacts, which reflects the changes in CEQA guidelines from LOS to VMT. I suggest that VMT may not be the correct or optimum metric in all situations. Try telling someone waiting in a long traffic jam that they should not be concerned or upset because the road changes they are experiencing have, after all, reduced VMT. They just want to reach their destination in the shortest time possible.

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223	8.4	Table 8H, #1A	<p>Discontinuing natural gas availability in commercial and residential buildings would be poor, short-sighted public policy. Most sources I've consulted indicate that the transportation sector is typically the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions (GHG), and should therefore be the focus of emission reduction efforts. Most experienced chefs prefer to cook with natural gas, and space heating with gas forced air is more efficient than other methods. (I lived in Ohio with electric baseboard heating, and can attest that it does not work well.) Plus, natural gas cooking is still possible when there is a blackout. (Our Davis neighborhood recently lost electrical power for a day, but my wife was still able to cook on our gas cooktop by simply lighting a match to the burners.) Totally eliminating natural gas usage in downtown Davis would do little to reduce GHG emissions in relative terms compared to the thousands of idling vehicles on I-80. Plus, the laws of thermodynamics explain that burning fuel directly on site for heating and cooking is more efficient than burning those same fuels in a central power plant and shipping the electricity over long distance wires.</p> <p>On the other hand, the actions recommended in 1E (solar) and 1F (district heating) make sense.</p>
227	Side-bar	Form-based Codes	The 2 nd bullet mentions Euclidean zoning. The vast majority of readers will not know what this means. Please define; i.e., the 1924 Supreme Court case brought by the City of Euclid, OH vs Ambler Realty, affirmed the ability of a town or community to be divided into areas in which specific uses of land are permitted.
xxvii	Typo	Acknowledgments	Add "er" to "Street," i.e., his last name is Streeter
29	Typo	Opportunity	Insert "is" between "This" and "a"
68	Typo	Special Design	A word is missing between "and" and the word "will"
72	Typo	Building Type	1 st paragraph, right side of page. A word is missing between "designing" and "using"

ⁱ "J.C. Penney Envisions Its Comeback." *Wall Street Journal*, November 1, 2019, page B1.

ⁱⁱ For more drought information see the new book by Mark Arax, *The Dreamt Land: Chasing Water and Dust Across California*. Alfred A. Knopf, 2019.