

Davis Downtown Specific Plan

Preliminary Comments 12/09/19

Yolano Group Sierra Club

The draft Davis Downtown Specific Plan (DDSP), available for public comments through 1/15/20, is a long and complex document that covers a wide range of topics, some of which are of interest or concern to the Yolano Group Sierra Club. These preliminary comments are based solely on the draft plan itself, not the detailed standards and codes proposed as Article 40.13. We will provide more extensive comments after we have reviewed the relevant documents in greater detail.

The underlying issues that guide our review of the DDSP are climate change, resource conservation, open space, and environmental justice. These issues are relevant to most sections and elements of the DDSP. We applaud some sections and elements and encourage you to retain and perhaps enhance them. We are concerned about other sections and elements.

We are pleased that the DDSP emphasizes sustainability, specifically including energy, mobility, water, waste, food, and social equity. Compact development, listed as one of six goals, is essential to achieving sustainability. The goal of increased housing access and choice and the specification of 1000 additional new housing units in the downtown area are important for reducing emissions from commuting and promoting social equity. The emphasis on “complete streets” and priority given to walking, biking, and public transit (and strict limits on vehicle parking) are necessary for reducing carbon emissions and making downtown more “public friendly.” The entire Mobility and Parking element is excellent, as is the Infrastructure element (green infrastructure, storm water management, water conservation).

Despite the emphasis on sustainability, we are disappointed that the DDSP makes no mention of specific targets for reducing carbon emissions. The City of Davis adopted a goal of becoming carbon neutral by 2040. Promoting walking, biking, trees, and compact development will contribute to this goal but quantitative targets would be desirable. The Built Environment element describes size, density, and location of buildings extensively but says little about construction design. Brief mention is made of drought tolerant vegetation, passive cooling, energy savings incentives, solar panels, etc. The DDSP should go beyond these platitudes and specifically call for new buildings to be net zero energy and designed for net zero carbon emissions.

Finally we are concerned about the inadequate attention to timing. If Davis is to become carbon neutral by 2040, enormous progress in this direction must be made by 2030. Buildings and infrastructure, once developed, will endure for at least 50 years. We cannot allow “business as usual” to proceed past 2030 and then begin working toward sustainability. Yet the Implementation element lists capital infrastructure improvements of \$5,090,000 through 2030 and then \$54,430,000 after 2030. Of course it takes time to plan infrastructure projects and

building developments but the pace must be greatly accelerated to make meaningful and necessary progress by 2030.