January 14, 2020

Ashley Feeney, Assistant City Manager
City of Davis, Community Development & Sustainability
23 Russell Blvd, Suite 2
Davis, CA 95616

Re: Comments to Downtown Specific Plan and Form Based Code

Dear Ashley,

I would like to share with you some comments and suggestions relating to the Draft Downtown Davis Specific Plan and Form Based Code. First of all, as an owner of 5 buildings in the downtown, including the two buildings abutting the south side of E St Plaza (Brinley and Quessenberry Buildings), Cinema Buildings with Philz Coffee and Acacia Wellness and the Red Brick building with Froggy’s, we are excited to participate in this process and we are impressed by the amount of hard work and community input that has gone into this process already. We believe this Specific Plan and Form Based Code along with some new and significant job growth in Davis have the potential to transform downtown and create a more vibrant urban environment for citizens to live and work. With this in mind, I would like to provide the following comments for consideration by the members of the DPAC, Planning Commission and City Council.

Specific Plan Section 3.3, Sustainability Themes in the Specific Plan

The last sentence of Page 40 states the following: “The Specific Plan recommends that sustainability strategies for Downtown be developed in a separate process, resulting in a Sustainability Implementation Plan for Downtown.” While we support incorporating sustainability measures in new developments, having a separate discretionary process outside of the Specific Plan to determine sustainability could undermine the Specific Plan and the point of form based code which allows for developments to move forward if they meet certain criteria dictated in the form based code and the intent of the Specific Plan. All sustainability requirements should be listed in the Specific Plan and projects that meet these requirements and the form based code should be allowed to move forward without a separate sustainability review.

Specific Plan Chapter 4, Built Environment

This chapter discusses the transformation of E St Plaza into Davis Square. In the first year, it is proposed to remove significant parking from E Street Plaza to expand the open space. Given the demand for parking in and around E Street Plaza, we are very concerned about losing any more parking in the near term as it could negatively impact the businesses in the immediate area. Stabilizing an already shaky tenant base, and continuing to attract high quality retailers and restaurant operators is a critical part of a vibrant future for Downtown. Further, redevelopment of the neighboring properties will require the E St Plaza property for staging of construction materials and equipment. The best time to build Davis Square is after most or all of the neighboring properties have been redeveloped.
Form Based Code – Main Street Large

We suggest the following adjustments to the standards of the Main Street Large Zone:

- In general, minor deviations from the standards in the zone should require an exception to be approved by the Planning Director or equivalent.

Main Street Large Zone (MS-L 40.13.130) & Main Street Large Zone: Up to 7 stories (MS-L 40.13.130)

- Table D:
  - Residential – Requiring residential units to be raised 12” above ground eliminates the possibility of live work units. Consider eliminating this requirement or creating a carveout for live work.
  - Non Residential – “Entry” flush with sidewalk
  - Ground Floor Ceiling 14’. Consider reducing this to 12’ or at least an average height of 14’.
  - Footprint – Revise depth to 30’ to provide more flexibility in design. This could also help create smaller spaces for more pop up style tenants.
  - Lot Coverage: Required interior walkways should be deducted from the lot coverage of a development.
  - Setbacks – Setbacks require more flexibility and/or a waiver on encroachments for architectural elements to allow for articulation of the building elevations.

- Table F:
  - Parking – Revise to 1 stall per studio/1BR and 1.5 stalls per 2BR+

- Table J – Signage:
  - Directory – 1 per building may be insufficient to help people navigate around the building to shops/residential entries and through a pedestrian corridor. Suggest a maximum of 4 directory signs per building or no maximum.

Allowable Uses

- Health and Fitness uses should be Permitted Uses (P) in this zone. These tenants have become a standard component of a healthy tenant mix in any shopping center or downtown.

Davis Square Requirements (Fig 40.13.070.B)

- Suggest including a provision whereby the City may dedicate portions of civic space as part of development in exchange for community benefit. This is ultimately the city’s decision and it will need to determine if the community benefit is worth the dedication. The city should be allowed to make this determination without amending the Specific Plan and/or Form Based Code.

- Dimension requirements:
  - B/C – Suggest deleting the setback requirements in the E Street Plaza. The city owns and controls the land and should be able to determine the proper size of Davis Square without requiring an amendment to the Specific Plan and/or Form Based Code.
  - D – Suggest deleting the 60’ setback requirement above 4th story as the 5th floor and above will be too inefficient to build economically.

- Pedestrian connection: These required connections should count towards public space and should not count towards FAR.
- This plan needs to consider operation functions like driveway access, trash enclosures and utility access. There need to be placeholders and flexibility so that the form based code can work as intended.
- The diagram shows required shopfront frontage along 100% of the building frontages. There needs to be a percentage of minimum linear storefront required which allows for utility rooms, driveways and other service areas. (See also Shopfront 40.14.090.J)

Passage 40.14.100.E

This provision requires the entire pedestrian passage to be non-residential shop fronts or residential ground floors and pedestrian entries; In practicality this is typically a logical location for some portion of non-glazed back of house uses like utility areas with tasteful wall treatments. We suggest allowing for flexibility for utility rooms, service areas, etc.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on these documents. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Jim Stephens
Vice President
Browman Development Company, Inc