

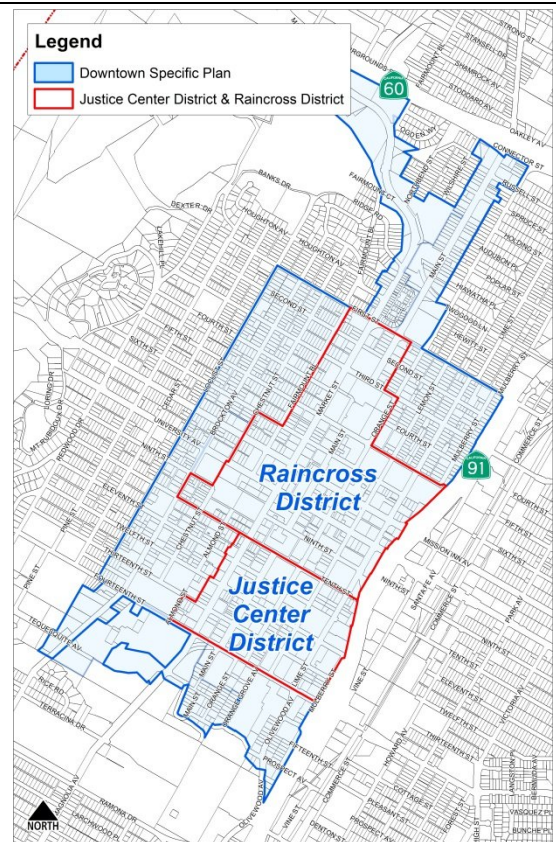


PLANNING COMMISSION WORKSHOP DATE: MAY 7, 2015

AGENDA ITEM NO.: #6

## PROPOSED PROJECT

Case Numbers	N/A
Request	Downtown Specific Plan Workshop and Discussion Regarding Urban Design Concepts and Trends
Applicant	City of Riverside, Community & Economic Development Department - Planning Division
Project Location	Downtown Specific Plan Area, Raincross District and Justice Center District
Project area	Approximately 250 acres
Ward	1
Neighborhood	Downtown
Specific Plan	Downtown Specific Plan
General Plan Designation(s)	DSP-RC – Downtown Specific Plan Raincross District DSP-JC – Downtown Specific Plan Justice Center District
Zoning Designation(s)	DSP-RC – Downtown Specific Plan Raincross District DSP-JC – Downtown Specific Plan Justice Center District
Staff Planner	David Murray, Senior Planner; 951-826-5773; dmurray@riversideca.gov



## WORKSHOP PURPOSE

The purpose of this workshop is to provide the Planning Commission with an update regarding the Downtown Specific Plan, and to engage the Commission in a discussion about urban design and land development. This workshop is intended to explore topics such as land use trends, transit and urban mobility, parking demands, walkability, and pedestrian amenities.

## BACKGROUND

### Downtown Specific Plan

Adopted in 2002, the existing Downtown Specific Plan (available for review at <http://www.riversideca.gov/planning/cityplans-csp-downtown.asp>) was created to facilitate development and improvements that realize the community's vision for Downtown, and reinforce Downtown Riverside as the cultural, arts, retail, and entertainment center of the Inland Empire. The Specific Plan also seeks to strengthen the Downtown as a distinctive center for citizens and visitors by encouraging attractive design, enhanced public spaces, mixed-use developments, historic preservation and a variety of housing options. Based on a community-developed vision, the Specific Plan strives to meet these goals with detailed development regulations, design standards, design guidelines, and land use regulations, intended to create a tool for public improvement projects, promote development, evaluate development proposals and facilitate historic preservation.

The Downtown Specific Plan (DSP) area consists of approximately 640 acres. It is divided into eleven primary Land Use Districts, each with their own unique development patterns and character (see Exhibit 1). The Raincross District and Justice Center District are the heart of Downtown, and are historically the social, cultural and civic core of the City. These two districts are the focus of this staff report, as they will be the focus of a future (anticipated) update to the Downtown Specific Plan.

The Raincross District encourages a concentration of retail, office, cultural, residential, and visitor serving uses that generate activity during both daytime and evening hours. These uses may be within a single-use or mixed-use building. The center of the District is occupied by the Mission Inn Historic District, which is an "overlay" zone that contains Riverside's most important historic buildings. This overlay (sub-district) has been created to maintain a scale of development that is compatible with the established historic fabric of the area. The Mission Inn Historic District contains additional development standards that have been carefully crafted to achieve this goal.

The Raincross District is further characterized by the numerous local and national historic landmarks that define the areas character, including the Mission Inn, Fox Theater, Stalder Building, Municipal Auditorium, Municipal Museum, Unitarian Church, Congregational Church, Post Office, Loring Building, and Riverside Art Museum. Preservation of these structures, along with careful and compatible design of new development, is important in maintaining the areas character and unique identity.

The Justice Center District is anchored by the historic Riverside County Courthouse. This District provides a center for the existing and future expansion of major judicial uses, including Federal, Appellate, State and County courts. This District allows for a concentration of office uses and business supply retail uses to maintain Downtown as the City's employment center. Under the existing Specific Plan, the Justice Center is intended to encourage medium to high density office

uses to support and complement the retail, cultural, entertainment and residential uses of the nearby Raincross District.

### Development Trends Downtown

Consistent with the City's "Seizing Our Destiny" effort to make Riverside a city of choice, Downtown Riverside has experienced a series of improvements in the past few years. This includes the openings of the renovated Fox Performing Arts Center, the Fox Entertainment Plaza, the Municipal Auditorium, the expansion and renovation of the Riverside Convention Center, the Culver Center for the Arts, the Citrus Tower office building, and the Hyatt Place Hotel. As a result, Downtown has also seen a recent influx of exciting new dining and entertainment venues and more people to the area. This investment in the Downtown core is expected to continue, as demonstrated by the residential and mixed-use developments currently under review by Planning staff, the construction of Riverside Community College District's Culinary School (located at the corner of Market Street and University Avenue), countless informal discussions with developers and investors who see value in the urban center, and the trends of Millennials to live in vibrant urban lifestyle.

### Downtown Retail & Entertainment Strategy

In 2012 the City Council approved a Downtown Retail & Entertainment Strategy, which included an analysis of Downtown's strengths and opportunities for growth. This strategy laid out the following recommendations, which are intended to be included in a future Downtown Specific Plan update:

- a. Encourage expansion of eating, drinking and entertainment establishments; concentrate entertainment venues in a compact area
- b. Encourage the expansion of existing business and recruit local and regional retailers
- c. Increase linkages within and to the Downtown
- d. Improve linkages to public transportation and the Downtown
- e. Discourage additional social services from locating or expanding in the Downtown
- f. Integrate multi-family housing into the Downtown land use mix
- g. Streamline and make user-friendly the process for opening a business in Downtown
- h. Conduct an annual contest to attract unique and experiential concepts to the Downtown
- i. Increase events and programming to activate the street scene
- j. Improve signage and wayfinding systems, reduce perceived hassle of parking in the Downtown, and improve appearance of arrival gateways to Downtown
- k. Implement a more visible and cohesive branding program

Furthermore, the City Council has given the following direction:

- Update the Downtown Specific Plan and consider:
  - Clustering of "like" uses
  - Improve downtown linkages
  - Focus future development around centerpieces such as Main Street Riverside (pedestrian mall) and the Convention Center; and
  - Improve Downtown circulation
- Develop a plan to bring more rooftop gardens to the Downtown; and
- Monitor impacts of improvements on Downtown parking and new garages

## Downtown Specific Plan Visioning Workshops

In 2012 Planning Division Staff also organized a series of visioning sessions intended to define the types of dining, entertainment and public amenities desired by residents, business owners, and visitors of Downtown. The results of these sessions revealed a strong desire for a wide variety of businesses and amenities. Generally speaking, participants expressed interest in creating a vibrant and active Downtown that appeals to a wide variety of patrons, by maintaining a balance of family-oriented activities and nighttime entertainment activities, and by clustering like uses. Additionally, it was recognized that there are a number of sensitive receptors within and adjacent to the Downtown core, such as residential and hospitality uses. This was identified as an important consideration when establishing location and development standards for nighttime entertainment venues.

Given the recent interest in developing residential, dining and nighttime entertainment uses in the Downtown, and the City's desire to encourage such uses, the City Council and staff have identified a need to take a proactive look at the Downtown Specific Plan and develop a vision that accounts for development trends and housing needs, while remaining sensitive to the Downtown's historic fabric. Additionally, there are opportunities to revise the development standards, design guidelines, and permitted uses within the Raincross District and Justice Center District to facilitate growth while achieving the stated community vision.

### Housing Element

As required by state law, a Housing Element was prepared as part of General Plan 2025. The Housing Element establishes goals, objectives, policies, and programs to facilitate the development, improvement, and preservation of housing. It is intended to create livable neighborhoods that offer a high quality of life; facilitate a diversity of housing choices for different lifestyles; increase housing opportunities for very low, low and moderate income households; and support the provision of adequate housing and supportive services for those with special needs.

California law requires Housing Elements to address the housing needs of projected population and employment growth. The Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) prepares growth forecasts for the region, and identifies the amount of housing Southern California will need to accommodate as it grows. Per the California Government Code, SCAG is the agency responsible for implementing the Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA), a State mandated program that requires each City to accommodate a fair share of housing opportunity. The way the RHNA works is that SCAG forecasts the amount of housing needed to accommodate region growth, and then assigns portions of the forecasted housing to each of the local jurisdiction based on their anticipated growth forecasts. Cities (and Counties) then must verify that they have zoned enough land to accommodate the number of housing units required. Furthermore, it is important to note that the RHNA allocations included different economic levels of homeownership, including housing for families of low and very low income. If a local jurisdiction does not have enough residentially zoned properties to accommodate the forecasted growth, then they are required to develop proactive policies and programs to accommodate new housing construction that achieves the State's housing goals. At a State level, the primary objective is to ensure that there is enough land available to accommodate the housing needs of lower income families.

For the City of Riverside's 2014-2021 Housing Element, the City's total allocated housing need for lower-income households is 6,077 dwelling units. After accounting for projects that are "in the pipeline", and the underutilized sites currently zoned for residential development, the City has a

remaining RHNA obligation of 4,767 lower-income household units. This means that the City's current zoning is inadequate to meet the minimum level of State mandated housing, and therefore the City is obligated to amend its Zoning regulations and maps to allow for higher density housing. To accommodate the 4,767 units of lower-income households, the City must identify at least 191 acres of vacant or underutilized land at an average density of at least 25 units per acre that was either, (1) currently zoned for residential development and not previously identified in the 2012-2021 Housing Element, or (2) can be rezoned to a residential zone that achieves this density.

An important distinction, and often a misconception, is that the RHNA obligation for 4,767 units is a requirement to "accommodate" lower-income housing. The City is obligated to zone for, encourage, and remove barriers that prevent the construction of these units; the City is not obligated to have 4,767 units physically constructed.

Because of the densities associated with the RHNA allocation, and the number of units that need to be accommodated, the Downtown and the adjacent Marketplace Specific Plan area will be crucial in meeting the City's obligation, since these areas can accommodate the greatest densities in the City, and will likely have the least impacts to established lower density neighborhoods. Assuming an average density of 40 units per acre within these areas, staff seeks to identify roughly 60 acres of vacant or underutilized property within the Downtown and Marketplace areas that will accommodate as many as 2,400 additional units. While the City can encourage additional residential units in the downtown areas, it is important to understand the RHNA criteria only allows 50% of the required units to be within mixed-use zones. The other 50%+ units must be located on property that is zoned exclusively for multi-family residential use.

It should be noted that adding 2,400 dwelling units in Downtown is not a new prospect, as the City Council has previously established policy that the Downtown is to accommodate "thousands" of additional housing units. To achieve the Council directive and comply with State Housing Element law, city staff has initiated an effort to identify vacant and underutilized commercial, office and industrial properties in the Downtown that could be adaptively reused or demolished. While the City's current zoning allows residential units in downtown, either as multi-family housing or mixed-use developments, it is clear that the existing Zoning Code or Downtown Specific Plan needs to be amended to eliminate barriers that hinder residential investments.

#### Development Standards

New residential, retail, office and mixed-use development prescribed by the Specific Plan can bring increased populations into the area. This additional population drives a demand for support services, which spurs further economic investments. Furthermore, new development that is done well, and furthers a sense of place, can draw new visitors, occupants and investors to an area that otherwise would not have seen the Downtown as a desirable location.

Although the current Downtown Specific Plan lays a foundation for a 10 to 20 year growth in Downtown, there are opportunities to refine Specific Plan development standards to simplify and incentivize economic development. Specifically, staff recognizes the need to evaluate the permitted uses, conditionally permitted uses, residential densities, building heights, and parking requirements, as well as public improvements such as pedestrian enhancements, bicycle amenities, and inviting public gathering spaces.

## Land Uses

A vibrant Downtown provides for a multitude of uses that cater to diverse users. Residential, retail, and office uses are vital components of a dynamic downtown, but must be logically integrated to create a healthy and successful environment. With this in mind, staff continues to look at ways to retain cultural facilities and established businesses, while encouraging restaurant, entertainment, and residential investment that generate a higher saturation of evening and weekend activities, increase revenues and act as a catalyst for future investment.

While the Downtown Specific Plan currently allows for a variety of uses, and the City has seen Downtown investment in recent years, the current levels of investment are far below the Downtown's potential.

To reach its potential, staff believes there is a need to streamline the approval and permitting process to accommodate desirable activities in key locations, and to consider revisions to the uses allowed within the Raincross and Justice Center Districts. Over the coming months staff will begin to explore an update to the DSP to consider issues such as...

- Identify the potential boundary for an Entertainment District. This area would potentially encourage dining and entertainment uses through reduced permit requirements or streamlined approval process;
- Identify and remove existing barriers to dining and entertainment uses;
- Evaluate the permitting requirements for entertainment uses, particularly within the Justice Center District;
- Identify necessary restrictions to entertainment businesses to ensure they remain compatible with residential and office uses, and don't generate a negative perception of Downtown or burdens on downtown investment;
- Explore opportunities for residential projects within the Justice Center District;
- Identify appropriate locations to encourage residential uses as part of mixed-use developments, in order to meet the needs of the Housing Element;
- Explore and identify adaptive re-use opportunities of historic and underutilized properties;
- Ensure visitor safety through urban design and programmatic community watch programs;
- Identify opportunities for place-making in public and quasi-public spaces through land use development; and
- Investigate opportunities to complement and enhance public parking programs, including the "right-sizing" of private parking requirements, shared parking concepts and parking management principals.

## Densities and Scale

In anticipation of the continuing growth of Downtown and the desired mix of uses, staff must carefully consider appropriate densities along with the massing and scale of new buildings, while remaining sensitive to the historic fabric. With continued mandates from the State, such as the Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA) allocations, the City is consistently under pressure to identify sites for high density residential uses that could accommodate low- to moderate-income housing needs. It is apparent that the most logical place for dense residential is within Downtown, and as such, staff is actively exploring opportunities for rezoning and intensifying residential densities to satisfy the mandated requirements.

Currently the maximum density for residential units within the Raincross District is 60 units per acre (residential is not permitted within the Justice Center District). Although there are also density

bonuses available, there may be other opportunities to increase this density limit to accommodate more units.

For office and commercial uses, density is measured using Floor Area Ratio (FAR), which is calculated by dividing all the building square footage on a site by the property's square footage. Within the Raincross District, the maximum FAR is anywhere from 3.0 to 4.5, depending on location; and within the Justice Center District the maximum FAR is between 4.0 and 6.0. Staff will evaluate the current standards and look for ways to encourage growth to these limits, and possibly increase the maximum FARs within these districts.

In conjunction with increased densities and FAR, staff will need to explore the appropriate scale or height for the Downtown to adequately accommodate increases in existing limits. Currently, depending on the location, and possibly with the granting of a Conditional Use Permit, the maximum height within the Raincross District is between 50 and 100 feet, and between 60 and 140 feet within the Justice Center District. Additionally, the Justice Center District includes a minimum height of 45 feet for at least 50% of the building footprint for properties outside the Mission Inn Historic District. This standard is based on a strategy to more specifically guide development and density, and achieve the desired "form" where it is most appropriate. Where appropriate, staff may explore additional opportunities to establish "minimum" heights or densities throughout the Downtown Specific Plan update.

### Parking

One of the most significant challenges to economic development within Downtown is parking. Although parking requirements are exempted for uses in an existing structure designated a historic resource, or contributor to an historic district, new development and expansions to a historic structure must provide on-site parking per the ratios outlined within the Downtown Specific Plan. In some cases, as is the case with residential uses, the parking requirement in the Downtown Specific Plan defers back to the City's Zoning Code. This means that the City requires parking in Downtown at the same rate as that required in the suburban areas, without consideration of the unique factors of downtown urban living.

As the City moves toward a more mixed-use urban core, and strives to reduce the reliance on the automobile, air pollution, and greenhouse gas emissions, accommodations for reduced parking standards need to be considered in those areas that have a walkable environment and are served by public transit, such as the Downtown Specific Plan. What is normal in a traditional multiple-family residential project in the suburbs of the City is not the same fit for what is needed in Downtown.

Unlike most areas of the City, Downtown Riverside is a composition of uses that are within easy walking distance of each other. Downtown is also well served by RTA's bus service, which has connections to shopping, dining, education and employment centers throughout the City. Additionally, the City is currently studying the feasibility of a streetcar system that could provide linkages to other areas of the City; and the Downtown Metrolink Station is within walking proximity to the Downtown core, providing direct connections to the La Sierra and Hunter Park areas of the City, as well as Los Angeles, Orange and San Bernardino Counties.

Taking these facts into consideration, along with an emerging trend for Millennials to embrace urban living and alternative modes of transportation, staff intends to explore opportunities to "right-size" the parking requirements during the Downtown Specific Plan update. This is consistent with the Downtown Specific Plan itself, which recognizes the need to periodically review the parking requirements with an emphasis on the "park once" concept.

Additionally, if it is the City's intention to facilitate and encourage private investment in downtown, the City will need to adopt parking regulations that meet the needs of the public while addressing the realities of the real estate market. Because of the nature of downtowns, which achieve higher densities through compact development, excessive parking requirements have significant implication on whether a project is economically viable. As an example, the cost of one parking space generally ranges from \$10,000 to \$40,000, depending on whether it is a surface lot or in a subterranean garage (and costs can range significantly depending on soil conditions, figurations in material and labor costs, etc.). If the City requires a developer to build one parking space per unit than is needed to achieve the public's parking demand, and the project has a density of 40 unit per acre, then the developer could easily be spending millions of dollars on infrastructure that is not needed and may not be used.

As the City moves forward with "right-sizing" parking in Downtown, staff intends to evaluate the actual parking demands for downtown developments (resident needs, construction loan requirements, sell-ability, etc.), and identify methodologies to improve parking efficiencies and provide personal transit options . Some of these potential methodologies include shared parking arrangements (i.e., office use during day and residential parking at night), parking management programs, unbundling, automated facilities, and car and NEV sharing.

### Summary

As the City continues to see increasing interest for development Downtown, and attempts to facilitate and encourage development to achieve state and regional requirements, the Planning Division must revisit the standards of the Downtown Specific Plan. To accommodate growth the City must look toward densification and intensification of uses and structures. Additionally, focusing development and growth within the core reduces the demands and impacts on other areas of the City, reduces the need to expand infrastructure and utilities, and results in a more sustainable environment. Providing an environment where there are options to personal automobiles encourages more compact and efficient development, encourages a walk-able and bike-able place, and ultimately reduces the negative products associated with vehicle miles traveled.

Perhaps most importantly, having a focused vision and clear, logical development standards will result in increased economic development within Downtown, which will in turn attract more investment and provide for a quality environment.

## EXHIBITS LIST

### Exhibit 1 – Downtown Specific Plan Districts

Report Prepared by:	David Murray, Senior Planner
Report Reviewed by:	Jay Eastman, Principal Planner
Report Approved by:	Emilio Ramirez, Interim Community Development Director



