



# CITY OF SANTA BARBARA

## COUNCIL AGENDA REPORT

**AGENDA DATE:** March 9, 2021

**TO:** Mayor and Councilmembers

**FROM:** City Administrator's Office

**SUBJECT:** State Street Subcommittee Recommendations

**RECOMMENDATION:** That Council:

- A. Adopt the vision principles to guide the master planning process for the Downtown State Street Area as recommended by the State Street Subcommittee;
- B. Direct staff to initiate amendments to the General Plan Circulation Element and other actions necessary to transition from temporary to permanent closure of certain blocks of State Street to motor vehicles and other circulation improvements for Downtown State Street as determined during the planning process;
- C. Direct staff to initiate planning and other processes necessary for the preparation of a Master Plan for the Downtown State Street Area, including identification of necessary staffing and resources; and
- D. Establish a Master Plan advisory committee to oversee the master planning process.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

City Council has been discussing how to revive the economic vitality of Downtown for over five years. Council commissioned the Kosmont Companies Downtown Revitalization Recommendations Report, Land Development Audit, and created the Economic Development Manager position. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the City took emergency actions to create the State Street Promenade and to allow the temporary expansion of commercial uses into streets, sidewalks, parking spaces, and other areas citywide. These temporary emergency economic recovery actions were recently extended to March 8, 2022. The temporary State Street Promenade prompted additional discussion about the need to revitalize the downtown area including a redesign of State Street itself.

The Council appointed Councilmembers Harmon, O. Gutierrez, and Sneddon to the State Street Subcommittee (Subcommittee) on June 23, 2020. The Subcommittee directed the staff outreach and community input process that involved public participation and broad representation of City advisory boards and commissions, as well as State Street stakeholders to form a unified vision for a Master Plan to redesign Downtown State Street

and surrounding area. This report contains an explanation of the Subcommittee's recommendations to City Council as well as future milestones for consideration.

### **BACKGROUND:**

The Subcommittee held its first meeting on July 30, 2020 and met regularly until February 8, 2021 when it concluded with recommendations to City Council. The meetings were conducted in compliance to the Brown Act, with meeting recordings, agendas, presentations and minutes posted on the City Council's webpage. The meetings began broadcasting live on City TV in August.

The Subcommittee gave oversight and direction to staff in conducting the outreach effort to gather stakeholder and resident input into the vision of Downtown State Street. This effort involved stakeholder interviews and a community-wide resident survey. Independently, the American Institutes of Architects (AIA) Santa Barbara Chapter issued an online survey in the summer of 2020 seeking feedback on both the State Street promenade as well as housing and parking.

At the direction of the Subcommittee, staff interviewed 15 City Boards, Commissions, and Stakeholder groups representing over 125 individual's perspective and vision regarding the future of State Street. The majority of the meetings included public participation and were televised. Each group interviewed received a presentation on the history of State Street and how it has evolved over time.

The community survey was developed based on, and used to affirm, reoccurring stakeholder vision themes. The survey, in English and Spanish, was open to the public for two months and closed on January 31, 2021. In person surveys were also conducted on State Street by Downtown Ambassadors. The City received nearly 4,600 responses and was taken by a cross section of age groups from various city neighborhoods.

The City survey asked respondents their thoughts on improving Downtown State Street, and what they would like to experience Downtown in the future. Over 70 percent stated that the street needed to address the economic health of retail and restaurants and over 56 percent stated that the street should address the homelessness situation. The majority of respondents stated agreement that State Street is a key component of the City's overall economic vitality. Lastly, slightly more respondents thought that bikes should continue to operate on State Street.

The AIA survey was conducted in late summer 2020 and was asked respondents their opinion on closing Downtown State Street to vehicles of which 93 percent responded support and there was also a 56 percent majority of support for State Street being shared by both cyclists and pedestrians. Also, the AIA survey respondents ranked strong support for dining and retail uses as well as incorporating art and seating. These two community surveys highlight local interest and support for the closure of State Street to vehicles, the need for State Street to support the commercial district businesses, and community interest to have a safe environment with amenities.

### **Downtown State Street Area Master Plan**

The Subcommittee recommended the development of a Master Plan to describe the direction for Downtown State Street and adjacent city blocks. A Master Plan is a holistic and dynamic long-term planning document that provides a conceptual layout of an area and an action plan to create it. It includes analysis, recommendations and proposals for a defined area's population, economy, housing, transportation, and community facilities, and land use. The main focus of this Master Plan effort is to conceptualize Downtown State Street corridor and describe how surrounding elements in the area work together successfully (as described by the vision principles). The Subcommittee proposed area of the Master Plan is from the freeway to Sola Street, Chapala to Anacapa Streets. In addition, it is anticipated that the Downtown State Street Area Master Plan will evaluate connectivity and synergy that the commercial areas of the Funk Zone and waterfront can be enhanced. Likewise, the Master Plan will also take into account connectivity of the surrounding downtown neighborhoods. The goal to include this broader area is to ensure that other areas of the downtown core are addressed in the Master Plan including:

- Streetscape Design and Amenities
- Transportation and Circulation
- Housing and Redevelopment Influences
- Economic Development
- Historic Resources
- Equity and Accessibility
- Homeless Engagement
- Public Art
- Operation and Maintenance
- Funding Strategy

In addition, staff proposed the Subcommittee consider recommending the composition of an advisory committee to provide input into the development of the Downtown State Street Area Master Plan. The Subcommittee also recommended additional stakeholder and community representation on the advisory committee.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

#### Adopt the State Street Vision Principles

The majority of the Subcommittee's work has been to set the vision for the future of the Downtown State Street area. The Subcommittee wanted to be inclusive in forming a vision and took two key approaches: 1) interviews of key board and commission members and Downtown Stakeholders, and, 2) the creation of a citywide survey to affirm the vision direction. The Subcommittee's stakeholder interviews were comprehensive and effective at developing vision themes for Council's consideration. Each City board and commission and stakeholder group was asked the same questions:

1. What do you believe is the reason for redesigning State Street Downtown at this time?  
This question was designed to answer: Why now?
2. If State Street is redesigned Downtown, describe what is going on when you visit.  
What are you experiencing?  
The question was designed to answer: What purpose will State Street fulfill?
3. What role does a redesigned State Street play in the vitality of Downtown? What is your goal for State Street?  
This question is designed to answer: Why does redesigning State Street matter for Downtown revitalization?

Over 125 city board and commission members and stakeholders were interviewed. Once all the interviews were completed, staff summarized the most common vision themes. These themes were presented to the Subcommittee, which also added its input. Because the vision themes are relatively short, the Subcommittee is recommending that City Council adopt the vision themes as process guiding principles (Vision Principles) to be referred to throughout the development of the Master Plan and project development process. The Vision Principles and interview notes are included as an Attachment.

#### Initiate Actions Necessary to Implement Permanent Closure of Downtown State Street to Vehicles

Permanent closure of all or part of Downtown State Street to vehicles requires amendment to the General Plan Circulation Element. The Subcommittee recommends that the Circulation Element amendment and other actions necessary to accomplish a permanent closure be processed concurrently with the development of the Downtown State Street Area Master Plan. The portion(s) of downtown State Street to be closed will be further evaluated and considered during the Downtown State Street Master Plan process. Both the Circulation Element amendment and the Master Plan will require environmental review. Processing the Circulation Element amendment, including environmental review, is expected to take over a year to complete.

#### Initiate the Process for the Development of Downtown State Street Master Plan Including Identification of Necessary Staffing and Resources

The development of a Master Plan and design of any resulting capital project for Downtown Area and State Street Promenade will require both in-house staff and professional services. The plan and project workload is sizeable enough to warrant new staffing assignments and organizational adjustments to ensure the process moves forward effectively, efficiently, and prioritized accordingly to the significance of the initiative. The work involves:

- Developing a master planning process and scope of work;

- Procuring professional service contracts to prepare a master plan and conduct traffic circulation and environmental studies;
- Researching, developing and implementing capital and operational funding mechanisms; and,
- Staffing a new advisory committee.

The Subcommittee recommends that Council direct staff to identify the needed actions, staffing, and budgetary resources required to develop the Downtown State Street Area Master Plan and return to Council for approval.

#### Establish a Downtown State Street Area Master Plan Advisory Committee

The Subcommittee is recommending that an advisory committee be formed to help guide the Downtown State Street Area Master Plan. Staff suggested the advisory committee be both diverse enough to account for a wide variety of professional input, but small enough to be agile enough to complete the task efficiently. The following list includes every suggestion from the Subcommittee for consideration:

- 2 Councilmembers
- 2 Planning Commissioners
- 2 Historic Landmarks Commissioners
- 1 Access Advisory Committee member
- 1 Architect or Design representative
- 1 Coalition for Sustainable Transportation or Santa Barbara Bicycle Coalition representative
- 1 Downtown Parking Committee member
- 1 Downtown Property owner representative or Downtown Business owner representative
- 1 Downtown Santa Barbara Organization representative
- 1 Environmental Sustainability representative
- 1 Trust of Historic Preservation representative
- 1 Homeless Service Provider or Advocacy representative
- 1 Santa Barbara Metropolitan Transit District /Public Transportation representative
- 1 Youth Council representative
- Arts Advisory representative

In their discussion, committee members acknowledged that there is overlap in some of these suggested representatives and wanted the Council to determine the final composition of the committee. Staff recommends that the Council consider a committee of approximately ten representatives. Similar efforts have found that groups of less than ten individuals are most effective at including all participants in the discussions and deliberations. As the advisory committee meetings would be Brown Act compliant, organization representatives not included on the advisory committee will be able to participate and make recommendations to the committee. The key for choosing the right

mix of representation is to consider the decision-making authority needed for the task. All other groups will be included in discussions and community engagement opportunities, but not all are needed for decision-making.

Staff recommends that the Council narrow the list to City boards and commissions. For instance, including an architect or design representative may be duplicative as there are Historic Landmarks Committee members proposed to be on the advisory committee. Similarly, a Downtown Santa Barbara Organization representative could also represent a downtown business owner. In addition, broadening the composition of the advisory committee to outside organizations will have the unfortunate result of winners and losers where one advocacy group's interests are weighted against another's. The only exception to this recommendation is for downtown property owner and business representation. Property owner and business engagement in the decision-making will be critical to the success of the master planning process.

Staff recommends the following representatives needed for decision-making authority:

- 2 Councilmembers
- 2 Planning Commissioners
- 2 Historic Landmarks Commissioners
- 1 Downtown Parking Committee Member
- 1 Downtown Santa Barbara Representative (for business representation)
- 1 Property Owner Association Representative (if created)

#### **BUDGET/FINANCIAL INFORMATION:**

The development of a Downtown State Street Area Master Plan, the facilitation of an advisory committee, and the work product that will likely come from the plan will require staffing, professional services, as well as sizeable capital and operational funding. With Council's direction, staff will return with the resource requirements to accomplish this work.

**ATTACHMENT:** Vision Principles and Interview Notes

**PREPARED BY:** Jason Harris, Economic Development Manager  
Robert J. Dayton, Transportation and Parking Manager

**SUBMITTED BY:** Rebecca J. Bjork, Assistant City Administrator

**APPROVED BY:** City Administrator's Office