

Path forward in tough times

Plan outlines recovery for downtown, SJDA

San Jose Downtown Association has created a Stabilization Plan that takes into consideration 1,254 responses to a “What’s Next for Downtown San Jose” survey and guides downtown and SJDA through disruptions started with the COVID-19 pandemic.

The health threat halted one of downtown’s biggest growth spurts in decades; shuttered offices, museums, conventions and schools; devastated already vulnerable small business and placed those determined to stay open under a cloud of constantly changing operational restrictions.

The Stabilization Plan helps SJDA chart a course so that it can make sense of what actions are needed in the next 12–18 months and the opportunities to be gleaned in a changed future.

“There’s no question the effects from this pandemic will linger,” said **Katia McClain**, president of the SJDA Board of Directors. “We must do all we can to help our local and independent businesses for they are the fabric of our community and represent what energizes the city’s core.”

While supporting the downtown storefront economy, the plan’s other short-term priorities are doubling down on Groundwerx clean and safe services; and marketing and activation programs targeted to local communities, enticing them to return downtown as health safety conditions improve.

Despite the pandemic-caused uncertainty, a longer term framework is outlined in the plan that anticipates the local economy rebounding, the renewal of the Property Based Improvement District and an emphasis on making downtown more equitable.

Brad Segal, founder of Progressive Urban Management Associates (PUMA), the consultant that helped SJDA formulate the plan, called the pandemic an accelerator of trends already in motion impacting retail, housing, mobility and the nature of work. He predicts that while office demand will soften and there will be more work from home flexibility, conventional office formats will continue to be essential for creativity, teamwork and career advancement.

“Downtowns still have the power of place,” Segal said. “Preferences for local, authentic and emotional connections remain strong and younger generations will return to pre-pandemic preferences quickly.”

SJDA presented the plan in public meetings on Aug. 14 and Aug. 28, the latter viewed by more than 300 people on Zoom and Facebook Live. The Knight Foundation provided a grant for the Stabilization Plan after SJDA canceled its major event productions and reduced staff in March. The plan process included stakeholder interviews and a large public survey.

“It is unusual to see such strong alignment in community goals as emerged in downtown San Jose,” Segal said, whose firm is doing similar work in other U.S. cities.

Cleaning and safety efforts were far and away the most important action for downtown and SJDA, according to both stakeholders and survey respondents. The enhanced cleaning program provided by Groundwerx is critical – as is the program’s work experience partnership



Social equity is a fundamental platform for SJDA’s ongoing work.

hiring formerly homeless individuals.

With offices and other downtown venues largely empty, there is a heightened concern about homelessness increasing throughout the center city. The plan calls for SJDA to explore embedding behavioral health workers on its Groundwerx team to help bring more resources to address this vexing challenge.

Segal agrees that it isn’t the mission of downtown associations to solve the homelessness crisis in their cities, but SJDA, with a track record of accountability, is in a position to do more.

“Groundwerx is uniquely on the street every day and knows downtown conditions better than anyone,” he said.

The next imperative in the plan, and one that mirrors recommendations from both the Greater Downtown Task Force and the Silicon Valley Recovery Roundtable, is nurturing the local storefront economy, curating empty storefronts and social efforts to keep entrepreneurial spirits as high as possible. To get even closer to businesses, the plan suggests SJDA open a street-level small business support center, where business services become more accessible and staff can assist in reopening contingencies as indoor commercial operations resume.

A third focus of the plan is around place enhancement and marketing. The urgency to get the word out about downtown has never been greater with communications targeting San Jose residents when office workers, students and business travelers are scarce. Moving toward smaller activations as a facilitator and away from large festival producer is a key recommendation with impacts to SJDA revenue and iconic events like Downtown Ice and Music in the Park, which have been shut down in the pandemic.

There is also strong alignment in both the plan and survey for prioritizing social equity as a fundamental platform in all of SJDA’s work. The plan defines three project management principles: equity and inclusion; innovation and advocacy and action.

“In order for downtown to be more just, affordable and accessible to all,” McClain said, “we will need to be more intentional about equity – and more actionable than ever.”

The plan highlights the importance of the upcoming PBID renewal. The property assessment district, originally formed in 2007 for five years and renewed in 2012 for 10 years, will begin a year-long process next month for another 10-year project. While continuing clean and safe services is the number one priority, Segal points out that many PBIDs around the

country do much more and the renewal process opens the door to rethinking boundaries, types of services and governance.

“Property owners in all four directions have inquired about Groundwerx services – not just in the Downtown West area where Google wants to develop, also east past City Hall, south beyond I-280 in the South of Downtown Area (SoDA), and on the more residential north side of downtown,” said **Scott Knies**, SJDA Executive Director.

The plan encourages SJDA to take risks that might have come more slowly pre-COVID, such as rethinking the uses and management for downtown streets and public spaces; activating vacant real estate; developing better connections between downtown districts and individual projects; new funding models to directly support small business; and increased advocacy around the accountability and solutions to homelessness.

One element of the plan calls for a Local Preference Policy, encouraging public and private sector businesses to buy from downtown businesses. Another suggests the development of a new investment fund to support downtown storefronts.

“There is an opportunity for larger companies to bolster the local economy by assisting small businesses,” Segal said. “That sort of funding actually benefits the larger companies making the investment, because entrepreneurship and small business helps attract and retain talent.”

All the work required to implement the plan’s recommendations will require SJDA to update its business model and realign its staff and board as the organization simultaneously serves immediate community needs while setting up for the future. One key aspect is succession planning for a new SJDA executive director prior to the 2022 elections when a new mayor and downtown councilmember will be selected.



The new #dtsjopen marketing campaign has launched.

Marketing campaign begins

“Yes, we’re open!” is the key message of the #dtsjopen marketing campaign. The campaign connects downtown residents, visitors and employees with the downtown businesses that are open and ready to welcome customers back.

“This recovery effort helps our businesses get their message out so they can focus on what they do best – serving the community,” said **Autumn Young**, SJDA interim managing director.

Look for campaign ads in local newspapers, television stations NBC Bay Area and Telemundo 48, radio stations Mix 106.5, KBAY 94.5 and KRTY 95.3, plus 15 Clear Channel Outdoor billboards over the next few months.

The complete plan

- Go to sjdowntown.com/whatsnext for the full plan, the Aug. 14 and Aug. 28 virtual meetings, and the Stabilization Plan presentation slides.
- Thanks to the Knight Foundation for funding the survey and plan.
- Be sure to read the rest of this issue to see ways the Stabilization Plan is already under way.

A taste of Nirvana Soul

Be'Anka Ashaolu and **Jeronica Macey** are about to open Nirvana Soul coffee purveyors at 315 S. First St. in SoFA. Ashaolu took time in August to answer by email a few questions for *Downtown Dimension*.

You've been promoting your business on social media prior to opening.

For us, social media is very much a part of our business. We decided from the very beginning that we would be transparent throughout this process. We didn't know the first thing about opening our own coffee shop, so we started in the most logical way: we Googled it. From then on, we shared every step we've taken to get funding through friends, family, and the SBA, to find a location for our shop, to closing escrow on Caffe Frascati — now, Nirvana Soul. We connect with other dreamers through our blog and social channels. Follow us @nirvanasoulcoffee!

Will you contribute to the SoFA arts scene with live music and art exhibits?

We certainly plan to as soon as it's safe. We're currently looking for local art to display in our shop, and when we're able, we'll continue the legacy of open mics and live music on our stage.

Caffe Trieste / Frascati had a great deal of popularity. How will you differentiate yourself?



Nirvana Soul's Be'Anka Ashaolu, left, and Jeronica Macey.

How does the location fit your business profile?

Nirvana Soul had to start in

We're a third-wave specialty coffee shop, which is an immediate differentiator. We're also born and raised in San Jose, so this is a hometown thing. What's special about Nirvana Soul is that the people who support us are building this with us. What we hope to bring downtown is a light and vibrant energy and a space that inspires others to pursue their dreams, too.

downtown San Jose. We live here, we're invested here, and it's only right that we launch our business here. With all the residents, students, and professionals, there's just not enough going on to serve them. We're happy to do our part in creating another something to do. We're a big city with a lot of heart and we definitely deserve more.

There are few business openings since the pandemic hit. What is your view of opening now?

We can only go up from here! When we started on this journey, we knew the odds would be against us, but we never anticipated something of this magnitude. The fortunate thing is that there are so many amazing businesses and coffee shops, in particular, that have created a blueprint for us to follow. We'll launch with safety and

additional delivery channels in mind, for example. It's been hard so far, but we've made it through, which keeps us moving forward. We're still optimistic.

Mural tours by pedicab: EcoCityCycles has restarted its mural tours through downtown San Jose. Up to six people can ride behind a pedicab in a COVID-19-safe enclosure featuring a full 360-degree view. According to EcoCityCycles owner **Jennette Arnold**, the ride covers more than 20 murals, including the newest ones on the Third Street Garage and the Convention Center. Tours take more than one hour and cost \$120.



Cycle enclosure keeps riders safe.

EcoCity sold out its mural tours last September during Downtown Week. Book by emailing contact@ecocitycycles.com.

Market offers Peruvian dishes: Jora Peruvian Food is the latest eatery to open in San Pedro Square Market. "We are takeout and delivery," said Executive Chef and owner **Rodrigo Fernandini**. "Now, you can also go

inside the market, order and enjoy outdoor dining on San Pedro Street."

Jora offers traditional Peruvian flavors "from land to sea" of ceviches, seafood, steak, chicken, pork with vegetarian and vegan options. In summer, ceviches and causas are top sellers, Fernandini said.

Jora started as a pop-up business in San Francisco.

Fernandini and co-founder and co-owner **Juan Carlos Sosaya** saved for three years so they could open the permanent spot in San Pedro Square Market. The owners have plans to expand throughout California.

Find Jora on social media and at joraperuviancuisine.com. They also sell hot sauces at uchuhotsauce.com.

New food services at Marriott: The San Jose Marriott has opened Coastal Manor

Mediterranean restaurant with evening outdoor seating, cocktails and food to-go.

The limited menu includes a classic Caesar, burgers and sandwiches, pasta and flatbreads, and filet mignon.

The formal Tanq bar has been replaced by the Cobre and Clay bar, but it remains closed during the pandemic, said **Lilinda Carta-Samuels**, director of sales and marketing.



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Downtown News

Railroad horn blasts to be silenced late-night:

Residents on the north side of downtown can rest more peacefully. The city is in process of creating a Quiet Zone for trains using the Union Pacific Railroad tracks through several greater downtown neighborhoods between Horning and North Montgomery streets from 10 p.m.-7 a.m.

"Over the last year and a half, our residents have suffered greatly from sleep deprivation, and establishment of this Quiet Zone will finally restore the quality of life for residents along the UPRR corridor," said Councilmember **Raul Peralez**, who led the effort.

The city sent a Notice of Intent to establish the Quiet Zone to the Federal Railroad Administration, California Public Utilities Commission, Union Pacific and Caltrans. The public can comment on the notice through September and the quiet zone could be established by November.

Caltrain to ballot: Caltrain, the peninsula transportation connector of San Francisco, San Mateo and Santa Clara counties, may be saved in November by a 1/8-cent sales tax increase, where it needs two-thirds majority to pass in all three counties.

Caltrain governance is currently handled by San Mateo County's transportation agency, overseen by a Peninsula Corridor Joint Powers Board, with representatives from all three counties. More representation from the book-end counties (where most of the sales tax funds, if approved, would come from) became an issue, leaving Caltrain in a stalemate situation in which San Francisco and Santa Clara counties would not agree to the regional sales tax addition.

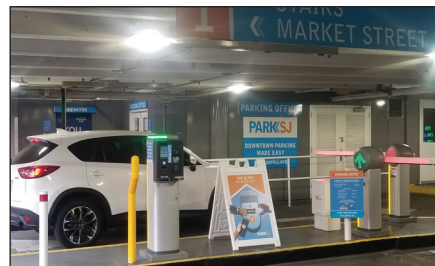
San Jose Mayor **Sam Liccardo** — who isn't on the Caltrain or Joint Powers board — played a key role leading to a compromise on governance issues and landing Measure RR on the ballot in all three impacted counties.

"This agreement to enable the Caltrain measure to move forward was forged as a result of many hours of phone calls, shuttle diplomacy, and redrafting by several of us through nights and weekends," Liccardo said. "I'm grateful that we have been able to reach an outcome that will enable Caltrain to expand its service with long-overdue reforms in governance that will enable greater accountability to taxpayers."

An estimated \$100 million per year would come from the tax. Since the pandemic began, the popular 77-mile railroad's ridership has decreased 95 percent. If Measure RR is approved, Caltrain is likely to provide all-new service levels coupled with the electrification of their trains.

Viva Al Fresco expands into plazas and parks:

San Jose's Al Fresco outdoor business program took a few more steps forward toward helping downtown



Easier and more efficient parking

Five City of San Jose ParkSJ Garages now offer 90 minutes FREE Parking to all visitors, replacing the previous validation program. Benefits of the new program include an easy-to-understand and equitable program, and a reduction of high-touch interaction for merchants and customers during the pandemic. Check parksj.org for garage locations and more details.

businesses facing economic hardships in the midst of the public health crisis.

On Aug. 11, the City Council approved allowing businesses to operate in public parks and plazas. They also now allow businesses to expand their operations on sidewalks as long as their business neighbors give them written approval. In addition, all fees and applications are waived to assist businesses in staying open.

Previous Al Fresco orders allow businesses to operate on private and public parking lots, sidewalks, and public streets.

Downtown now has two street dining areas in San Pedro Square and on South First Street in the SoFA District, with plans to add additional areas in the Historic District on Post Street and along Market Street in the VTA parking lot between Santa Clara and St. John Streets.

Hair salons and barbers, fitness studios and retail shops can use parks of an acre or more and less than one-fourth mile away, plazas at Hammer Theatre Center, Fountain Alley, Parque de Pobladores in SoFA and Circle of Palms, and surface parking lots adjacent to their businesses. Restaurants may also use the plazas and parks as long as they are adjacent to them.

SJDA Business Development Manager **Nate LeBlanc** has been helping to coordinate and set up the program for downtown locations. Email nleblanc@sjdowntown.com for assistance.

Welcoming Spartans: San Jose Downtown Association created the sjdowntown.com/sjsu page to welcome San Jose State students back to Fall 2020 semester. It is linked to the new sjsu.edu/sjsulovessj website, which shows students how to explore and enjoy downtown.

Eight hundred students moved onto campus for the fall semester with another 200 expected.

Groundwerx News

New program manager for Groundwerx: **Chris Kendrix**, a five-year veteran of downtown clean and safe operations, takes over as Groundwerx program manager.

The two previous program managers — **Semu One Bear** and **Rich Mongarro** — were promoted by Block By Block, the vendor hired by the Downtown Property-Based Improvement District to provide Groundwerx services in downtown San Jose.

Kendrix' new assignment is to manage Groundwerx cleaning crews and street ambassadors, leading them to maintain the downtown core to OSHA and County Public Health Order standards.

Groundwerx recently purchased a MotorScrubber Jet, a backpack cleaning tool that disperses a thin mist of disinfectant on street furniture and fixtures. The mist dries and does not need to be wiped down, allowing ambassadors to disinfect street fixtures on a larger scale each day.

Groundwerx also moved pressure washing shifts back to 4 a.m. in anticipation of higher foot traffic in San Pedro Square and SoFA for *al fresco* dining.

From the Archives

10 years ago – September 2010 — Olympic gold medal figure skater **Kristi Yamaguchi** and her Always Dream Foundation partnered with SJDA for the first time to host Downtown Ice.

15 years ago – September 2005 — More than two decades in the making, Guadalupe River Park and Gardens

opened its 250-acre, 2.6 miles of park extending from Interstate 280 to Interstate 880.

20 years ago – September 2000 — The San Jose Redevelopment Agency opened an information center at 118 E. Santa Clara St. The center included a scale model of downtown and meeting room for community groups.

25 years ago – September 1995 — Overhead wires and utility poles on all streets between First, Fourth, San Carlos and I-280 went underground to improve aesthetics and provide a safer, more reliable utilities system.

Next SJDA Meeting

City Council candidates forum Sept. 11: SJDA will host a candidates forum for the Nov. 3 election featuring District 4 candidates **David Cohen** and incumbent **Lan Diep** and District 6 candidates **Jake Tonkel** and incumbent **Devora "Dev" Davis**.

The virtual meeting will be Sept. 11, 8:30 a.m. and simulcast on Zoom and Facebook Live @sjdowntown. RSVP at sjdarsvp@sjdowntown.com.

DOWNTOWN DIMENSION

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