DOWNTOWN & DIMENSION

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Lighting the way

Nighttime aesthetics and safety are keys to new comprehensive illumination plan

SJDA's Street Life team has unveiled a strategic and comprehensive community lighting plan that brightens the downtown core, creates more vibrant streets and provides a greater sense of security for pedestrians at night.

The team will start with two concurrent pilot projects. One will focus on a yet-to-be-determined block or intersection where colored filtered (diffuse) lighting will shine from building interiors along the street, and where additional accent lighting or artistic projections may highlight

other buildings. The second project will include artistic lighted elements glowing from a rotation of vacant storefronts that will give life to otherwise dark spaces.

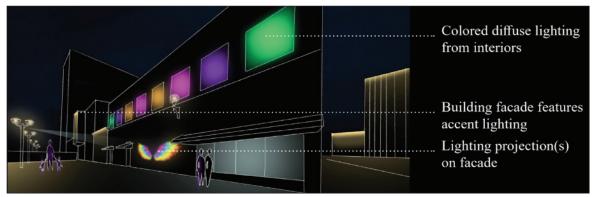
ARUP lighting consultants worked with the Street Life team and groups of downtown stakeholders, from which emerged numerous specific street-lighting concepts and dozens of creative and interchangeable lighting ideas. The study was funded mostly by property owners plus support from the **John S. and James L. Knight** Foundation, and overseen by the Property-Based Improvement District (PBID) board.

The goal of the program: "Create opportunities that support growth and diversity of the nighttime economy, as well as improve quality of life for urban citizens."

"This lighting project potentially makes a big difference for us," said CEO **Alex Stettinski** at the SJDA Town Hall on March 9. "Downtown already has a lot of areas that are activated and some areas in between where people are not encouraged to walk or do not feel as safe or comfortable. The lighting should help create more social and economic impact between our activated spaces."

The report allows for flexibility of various lighting applications as conditions change and downtown evolves. Possible locations in the report that could be lighting-enhanced in the future include:

• First and Market streets at the entrance to SoFA near Parque de los



The Street Life team will start on demonstration projects that will make strolling down a block, above, or past vacant spaces, right, more appealing.

- Parking lot facades along North San Pedro and Market streets;
- West St. John Street underpass leading to Little Italy and other barriers caused by Highway 87;
- St. James Park and the Heritage Walk of downtown's history;
- Barack Obama Boulevard and the SAP Center plaza;
- Fountain Alley:
- The plaza on Paseo de San Antonio;
- North Fifth Street and City Hall.

"Static light poles provided by the city mostly light those areas," said **Sarah Billings**, SJDA street life manager. "The beautification lighting aspect would also provide a layer of safety by being so cool that they serve as an attraction for people. That adds more foot traffic and a greater sense of security with the art in place. Also, the art and look of the street become a way-finding tool for everyone."

A group of local artists, business owners and property owners toured downtown after dark and commented on what they liked and didn't; artistic preferences of tones, colors and textures; and offered ideas of how each street they walked down could be improved. Throughout downtown, the group saw the impact of white and/or warm lighting

on downtown's numerous historic buildings.

ARUP representatives also brought out projectors and other temporary lighting tools to show the group some of the possibilities and the fluidity of moving lighting features from one temporary location to another. Stakeholders noted they could feel their emotions changing with the additional, colorful and interactive lighting.

Previous piecemeal efforts down - town such as the lights on San Pedro Square arch, the trees at Circle of Palms and light curtain on Post Street laid the foundation for a more thought-out and comprehensive lighting plan. Many of the tactics from the report come from best practices in other cities. The plan also calls for local artists to create memorable features pertinent

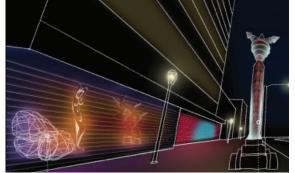


"We heard a lot about the need for quality over quantity," Billings said. "All the while, our lighting plan will stay inclusive and keep in mind ecological and environmental impacts of the lighting."

The PBID and Street Life team will start immediately to plan the pilot projects. If pedestrian numbers increase and survey respondents confirm they feel better walking past the additional lighting, PBID will commence with future larger projects that will require community collaboration and funding.

Per a request by Mayor **Matt Mahan** in his March budget message, the City Council requested the city evaluate the report and add investments in downtown lighting to near- and longer-term budget consideration.

"High-quality lighting is an integral component of successful events, activation, and public safety," Mahan said.



City considers downtown vibrancy ideas

San Jose City Council unanimously supported several initiatives that would enhance downtown vibrancy during a Fiscal Year 2023-24 budget session in March.

"A vibrant downtown can become a greater source of tax revenue that can fund higher staffing levels and quality service delivery across our entire city," said Mayor **Matt Mahan** in his March budget message.

Foremost, Mahan expressed the need for the city to hire two permanent full-time employees to augment SJDA's efforts toward downtown's post-pandemic revitalization. Mahan's budget message emphasized the positions focus on downtown's economic development to "ensure consistent 365-day programming, expand marketing efforts and help coordinate responses to safety concerns."

Said Mahan at SJDA's March 9 Town Hall: "I want to have one person whose time is protected, whose sole job is to coordinate with our many stakeholders downtown to ensure that we're coordinating our emergency and public safety response; we're working closely with the county on behavioral health issues; we're coordinating all the different venues and cultural associations to have consistent 365-days-a-year programming; and we're beefing up our marketing."

Heeding the recommendations in February of the Downtown Vibrancy Transition team, the City Council also supported:

- Providing financial assistance to the struggling arts community and allowing more events by reducing permitting red tape and relaxing security requirements for lower-scale events
- Requesting more police foot patrols throughout the city, and adding more downtown community service officers such as officers, ambassadors and private security to create a greater sense of safety.

• Reducing the number of vacant storefronts by reducing fees; simplifying permitting processes, especially for pop-ups; and allocating staff to focus on citywide business recruitment

In addition, the mayor and council requested support of the Downtown Association's lighting plan (see story above).

"We must invest in our small businesses and arts organizations to see our downtown continue to grow and thrive," said **Omar Torres**, District 3 councilmember.

The mayor's budget message focuses on big-picture citywide issues to increase community safety, reduce unsheltered homelessness and clean up neighborhoods. Downtown vibrancy is included in the fourth focus area, grouped with jobs and housing programs.

Analyses and funding details won't be available until late May, and the budget for next year will be approved in June.

Era of printed *Downtown Dimension* ends

This is the final monthly printing of *Downtown Dimension*. Starting in May, SJDA's newsletter will be sent to subscribers via email when news needs to be shared with downtowners.

The newsletter's subscription base of more than 5,000 is a mix of businesses, residents and visitors keeping up to date on downtown happenings.

The electronic version allows SJDA staff to present more information and photos about all things downtown, including business updates; SJDA initiatives, marketing and events; Groundwerx efforts; downtowners; and general information. More space can be devoted to pictorials; key milestones and anniversaries; business need-to-know content; and links to other media stories.

Dimension articles will be presented with the most important information, and readers can click to the full story posted on sjdowntown.com to take a deeper dive into the material. This is the preferred way people want to receive news in our increasingly fast-paced society.

Downtown Dimension was first published in June 1988. Subscriptions more than doubled a decade ago when the newsletter was also offered digitally.

Subscribe at sjdowntown.com or rjensen@sjdowntown.com.

Downtown events return for spring awakening

With record-setting rainfall and a three-year pandemic finally in the rear-view mirror, downtown event producers are gearing up for big crowds this spring event season. To keep pace, planners will add more of everything to events that had scaled back during years impacted by Covid-19 anxiety.

Viva Calle kicks off downtown's spring awakening April 23, when pedestrians, bicyclists, skaters and others on people-powered wheels take over the streets. The first of three Viva Calle events covers San Jose State to The Municipal Rose Garden to Willow Glen with minimal stops along the route for participants. Downtown serves as a connector between the university and garden along St. John Street, the route focusing mostly on Little Italy and San Pedro Square Market businesses. Up to 100,000 people are expected on the route between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m.

SoFA Street Fair returns April 30, this year partnering with MACLA to make it an all-day, family-oriented event. **Fil Maresca**, who has been putting on the SoFA festival since its inception more than two decades ago, says the combined events will extend the celebration by two hours.

MACLA Family Art Day will be from 10-2 p.m. at Parque de Los Pobladores, and the music festival will run from 4 p.m. until 8 p.m., with a performance by the Latin



The April Viva Calle route traverses downtown along St. John Street.

rock band **Firme** at 2 p.m., which caps off one event and kicks off the other.

Combining the two events proved serendipitous, said Maresca, who was having difficulties finding a date for the SoFA fest.

"I had tried to book Firme for years at the festival without success," he said. "But my association with MACLA finally got the band's attention. One of the band members has a daughter on MACLA's staff."

Block Parties by Urban Vibrancy Institute begin May 18 in downtown's Historic District.

"As the sun reappears, workers continue to return to the office and the city moves forward with its recovery, we thought it would be a good time to bring people and businesses together, listen to some music, enjoy some great food, and show off

the various neighborhoods and their personalities," said UVI's **Eric Glader**.

The May Block Party is the first in a series, with each event planned for a different downtown site. "Our hope is that block parties will connect people and communities, while increasing sales at downtown businesses," Glader continued. "We will host multiple block parties throughout 2023 to focus on distinct neighborhoods and be additive to other great events taking place throughout San Jose over the next months."

Downtown News

Input needed for sports facilities: The San Jose Arena Authority seeks volunteer candidates for four vacancies on the Arena Authority Board of Directors. The authority is a community-based nonprofit organization that supports the City of San Jose in overseeing operations of SAP Center, Sharks Ice and Excite Ballpark. The total 17-member board usually meets at 4 p.m. the fourth Wednesday of each month. Three of the board vacancies are "at-large" representative positions. The fourth is a San Jose Downtown Association position held by **David Buchholz**, who terms out June 30. If interested, send your resume and contact information for two references to board@sjaa.com. Email questions to Arena Authority Executive Director **Chris Morissey** at morissey@sjaa.com.

From the Archives

15 years ago – April 2008 – Sobrato House Youth Center opened at South Third and William streets, temporarily housing hundreds of youth aged 12-21 each year.

20 years ago – April 2003 – Librarians moved books and collections from the SJSU and San Jose Main libraries into the new Martin Luther King, Jr. library.

30 years ago – April 1993 – Businesses in the San Pedro area began marketing their neighborhood as the "historic dining and entertainment district" of San Jose.

SJDA News

Resiliency personified: She didn't know it at the time, but Brenda Zendejas trained for her new position as SJDA Business Resiliency Coordinator by volunteering to help small businesses on San Jose's East Side through hardships during the Covid pandemic.



Brenda Zendejas

Starting in 2020, she met with businesses faced with closing and struggling to make the rent, or victimized by robberies, on occasion assisting their families at home with food and basic prode

Now, she supports businesses through issues about rent, ADA compliance and permit issues, helps with grant appli-

cations and gets answers to questions facing owners.

"My job is about listening and connecting the dots to help people," said Zendejas. "I enjoy talking to everyone."

Zendejas is in a temporary role paid by a federal grant that comes through the City of San Jose but is overseen by SJDA Business Development Manager **Nate LeBlanc**. She replaces **Omar Torres**, who was elected to the District 3 City Council seat and began his term in January.

Zendejas divides her time serving small businesses along Alum Rock Avenue, East Santa Clara Street, as well as downtown. She also logs vacancies and empty storefronts so that they might be filled quickly with new tenants. While downtown, Zendejas also includes an overview and lesson on how easy it is to report messes or request pressure-washing services on the Groundwerx app.

Zendejas is a single mother of two boys, 8 and 13. She is from Coahuila, Mexico, and moved to San Jose as a young child. Three of her six siblings — two sisters and a brother — live nearby. She has previous work experience at Ocala STEAM and Hubbard Media Arts academies.

Though the federal grant expires in August, Zendejas is confident she will find new opportunities to help businesses and create a career track for herself

"Resiliency means overcoming challenges and surviving," she said.

Business News

Why? Why not?: While tenants sign leases and move into Miro high-rise residential towers at 181 E. Santa Clara St., WhyHotel by Placemakr has taken up temporary residence for temporary residents.

Since May 2022, Placemakr has partnered with Miro developer Bayview Development to open a pop-up hotel offering stays in furnished apartments ranging from one night to one year. The Placemakr business model allows developers to monetize their vacancy during their lease-up phase. Guests are allowed to enjoy the building's amenities, including wi-fi, fitness center, on-site support and in-room amenities including full kitchen.

The contract for the hotel continues through May 2024,

with a possible extension to November 2024, said **Ellaine Cuenca**, senior sales manager, who added downtowners can use code: SANJOSE20 for a discount.

The company also operates pop-up hotels in Washington, DC, New York City, Houston, Nashville and Columbia, Md.

Hula Bar + Kitchen opens: Food-truck and sports-venue sensation Hula Truck opened its first brick-and-mortar location, Hula Bar and Kitchen, at 30 E. Santa Clara St

Sister and brother **Pamela** and **Ryan Gorospe**, and Ryan's wife **Angela** started their business serving "Pacific Island flavors with a NorCal twist" from a food truck based in Santa Clara in 2014. Hula Truck's popularity grew immediately with menu items including the Bayrito which includes crispy tater tots, shredded cheese, pico de gallo and choice of meats such as chicken adobo, kalua pig and pork tocino; and the adobo omelet stuffed with garlic adobo fried rice.



Ryan Gorospe, left, and Shelvin Sinha

throughout the Bay Area and a push from landlord Urban Community, they chose downtown San Jose to open their first full-time location.

Head chef **Shelvin Sinha** of Fiji continues to help develop and expand the menu — each dish reflecting the Filipino-Hawaiian and Mexican influences of the owners. The pork belly lechon, "My Mamas Lumpia" and spicy ahi poke nachos are becoming fast favorites.

"I fell in love with this space, the feel of it, and the history of it," said Ryan Gorospe, who has modified the interior of the 1880s-built building that includes the 1920s Firato Delicatessen "Ravioli" sign on its exterior.

During the pandemic, Gorospe got into plant-cultivation, developed a crop of about 50 and moved several of the more tropical-looking flora into the restaurant.

"We're bringing the island vibe and aloha spirit here," he said. "I hope that when people walk into Hula Bar they feel like they are somewhere else."

Music of the islands and local artists will play on weekends, Gorospe said. And Hula Bar will have craft brews — including an exclusive — from neighboring Fox Tale Fermentation on tap.

Gorospe likes the timing of the opening after a winter of torrential rains.

"We're ready for summer," he said. "Downtown is shifting and change is coming. We want to be a part of what downtown brings next."





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Groundwerx Employee of the Month – Javier Montoya

Javier Montoya has made a big impression since joining Groundwerx at the start of this year. In a matter of weeks, the Barranquilla, Colombia, native was named Groundwerx Employee of the Month. "Javier quickly showed us how awesome an employee he is," reported his supervisors.

Hired to help cover expanded Groundwerx coverage areas, in March he became Groundwerx's first full-time painter and has been busy covering tags and street utilities with fresh paint. His assignments come primarily from a combination of orders from the Groundwerx App and street-level graffiti that team members were unable to clear with graffiti remover. The work has included several bigger paint jobs in the newer boundary areas on downtown's four sides.

His efforts resulted in a complementary email from a Little Italy resident that was printed and displayed in the Groundwerx headquarters.

During wet weather when the paint wouldn't dry, he stayed busy clearing gutters, picking up fallen scooters and clearing weeds. He also shows compassion for unhoused individuals by providing large plastic bags to help keep the water off their clothing.

Montoya also assists visitors with directions and restaurant suggestions. A longtime regular of La

Victoria's, he also recommends Mezcal to out-of-towners.

His experience performing huilding maintenance and grounds keeping proposed him for the duties

His experience performing building maintenance and grounds-keeping prepared him for the duties he now undertakes with Groundwerx. After stressful stints as a banker and bartender, he enjoys once again working outside in a less stressful environment, he said. He has developed the ability to meditate in short spurts while on the street if he becomes too anxious.

He learned of the open positions at Groundwerx while talking with a safety ambassador, decided to apply as a cleaning ambassador and hasn't looked back. Working in expanded areas in February, he cleared weeds, removed graffiti, cleaned 217 blocks, and collected 3.5 tons of trash.

