

# Taking stock of ambitious agenda

## Peralez reflects on his 8 years as councilmember

Outgoing downtown representative **Raul Peralez** held himself accountable for managing eight campaign pledges he made at the start of what turned out to be an extraordinary eight years on San Jose City Council. But he wishes he could have done more to make a difference regarding homelessness.

“Homelessness was a priority when I began my term, too,” Peralez said during a recent in-person interview with *Downtown Dimension*. We were able to get started with Villas on the Park, which was our first 100 percent supportive housing project, the Second Street Studios and Tiny Homes, but unfortunately it was not enough and the homeless issue has only grown. As I leave office, it is still the No. 1 priority for the city.”

That issue aside, he's proud of other accomplishments from his list of campaign priorities including:

- ◆ Helping to rebuild the depleted staff at San Jose Police Department by more than 300 officers, from a low of 850 to 1,170;
- ◆ Working with colleagues to ensure smarter, greener and more sustainable development and growth;
- ◆ Supporting mural making downtown to eliminate the “Tan Jose” moniker;
- ◆ And raising building height limits so that planes taking off and landing at San Jose International can do it safely and making possible Google's plan to develop Downtown West.



*Raul Peralez pauses to reflect on his two terms at City Hall.*

Personally, during his eight years on San Jose City Council, Peralez married and started a family. When he leaves office at the end of the year, he will resume his career as a police officer for SJPd.

SJDA asked Peralez to take a deeper dive on the following questions, which have been edited for space considerations.

### Talk about the tactical project work you've done and what you are most proud of.

I have lived all my life in San Jose. What originally attracted me to downtown were the taller buildings, vibrancy, nightlife and restaurants. As councilmember, I've enjoyed trying to create more of a “there” there for our downtown. The only way to do that is further investment, whether it's in new busi-

nesses, office buildings or residential towers.

The Google project is the single largest private development investment in the city's history. Making sure it was beneficial for downtown and the entire city and that we had a good partner was exciting. A decade from now when that area looks completely different and we've doubled the size of downtown, I will be proud to say that I was involved in laying the groundwork.

Other projects like Miro did come to fruition from approval to construction and development to grand opening completely over my eight years. Here we see new residents, a beautiful high-rise tower — the tallest in the city — that gets people excited about the vibrancy and growth of downtown and I'm proud of being part of that process.

### What do you consider your biggest win for the downtown core?

The BART single-bore tunnel. The alternative twin-bore cut-and-cover construction tunnel would have created a hole essentially closing Santa Clara Street from between San Pedro and Market streets to Fourth Street in the heart of downtown, cutting off traffic and diverting light rail and buses. No doubt it would have shuttered businesses along that entire gap because it would have been detrimental during BART construction and through a lengthy rebuilding and revitalization period of that area that would have lasted a decade.

I worked closely with SJDA on that. And as a member of the VTA Board, I was able to educate my colleagues to get them to also support the single-bore option that will allow us to do the construction completely underground.

What we avoided was our biggest win for downtown San Jose.

### What surfaced during the course of your tenure that you hadn't expected?

We had two very big things happen during my eight years that nobody could have planned or predicted. The first was the floods in 2017, a major hit to the community and district. People lost their homes and livelihoods. We had to focus on the crisis at hand. Lawsuits are still pending.

The other major challenger was the pandemic, a once-in-a-lifetime event that turned our world upside down. None of us had prior experience and we were trying to figure out day-by-day how to navigate it, not knowing what was in store for us, if our jobs would still be there, what the future will look like. COVID took everything we were working on previously and threw it out the window. We put a lot of projects on the back burner to focus on saving lives and keeping people employed and businesses open.

There are lingering effects on our families and hybrid workforce impacts on our local economy. All the challenges of homelessness that were there before grew in size and magnitude, such as the size of encampments and people living in cars and parks.

### What would you tell Omar Torres, your successor on the City Council, about working with us?

Having a monthly check-in with the SJDA director and president has proven extremely helpful. It's important to be on the same page working collaboratively on bettering the downtown. Also, it's no secret that District 3 is the busiest district in the city. You need to go into the job with that in mind.

### You will be returning to active duty at the San Jose Police Department. How do you

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## Holiday schedule

- ◆ Christmas in the Park  
Open daily through New Year's Day
- ◆ Aloha Downtown Skate  
Open daily through Jan. 8
- ◆ Winter Wonderland  
Open daily through New Year's Day
- ◆ **Ren Geisick's** Annual Winter Wonderland: City Lights Theatre, Dec. 4
- ◆ San Jose Dance Theatre's The Nutcracker: Center for Performing Arts, Dec. 9-18
- ◆ A Child's Christmas in Wales: Tabard Theatre, Dec. 9-24
- ◆ Carols in the California with Symphony San Jose Choral, Dec. 10
- ◆ Santa Run Silicon Valley: Dec. 11
- ◆ New Ballet's San Jose Nutcracker: California Theater, Dec. 16-18

## Non-profits join CreaTV in Second Street space

Open San Jose — a project 10 years in the making — opened Nov. 19, giving the community a first opportunity to see the large Second Street space that is a combination co-working office hub for partner non-profits, art gallery and flexible space for events, meetings and rehearsals.

CreaTV is lead on Open San Jose, but anchor partners are Works/San Jose, Chopsticks Alley, LEAD Filipino, Northern California Public Media and SJ Spotlight.

Located in the space formerly occupied by Zantotto's Market and Tech Shop next to The Improv and across from Fountain Alley, the facility includes state-of-the-art equipment for streaming, recording, making presentations and holding hybrid events.

**Chad Johnston**, CEO of CreaTV, points to the flexibility of the space, which required re-thinking the way they use their studio assets.

“In the old days, we would have an editing room filled with equipment and large studios for filming a show that might only need the space one day per month for three hours and another that needed it for two hours a week,” he said. “Plus, many shows are now shot on



*Chad Johnston, CreaTV CEO*

“We have a lot of storage space in the new location, so we can keep mobile studio equipment and editing stations in storage when not in use, and set up studio space on an as-needed basis in any room that is not in use at the time,” Johnston said.

“The fact is studio space makes great meeting and event space, or rehearsal space for a fledgling dance company, and small non-profits have struggled to find

location, so the production truck gets more use than the studios.”

Open San Jose is almost four-times larger than the space occupied by CreaTV for almost 15 years on the ground floor of 255 Julian St.

space to accommodate their needs in pricey Silicon Valley,” he added.

Works and Chopsticks Alley Art are using front-facing spaces on Second Street and the adjacent alley between Second and Third streets as permanent exhibit space. A lobby at the entrance to the building is where Johnston envisions pop-up or incubator retail space, similar to the MOMENT shops on San Pedro Square.

Major support for the project came from Knight Foundation and the Davidson Family Foundation, in addition to CreaTV capital funds.

The idea for Open San Jose came from a visioning exercise imagining a world without television, Johnston said.

“Younger people are not watching broadcast or cable TV the way they used to, and it's a very real possibility that community-based public television could be obsolete in the foreseeable future,” he said.

“As part of our visioning exercise, we looked at different models for utilizing our talents as facilitators and community connectors. The future is as exciting as it is terrifying.”



Raul Peralez
From Front Page
think your experience will help you as an officer?

I have extensive knowledge now of City resources available to the community. All of those things I will have a better grasp of — the relationships I have with community members, city staff and other stakeholders, plus a better understanding of the public's perspective of community policing and community relations — will help me to be a better police officer. I will be well-equipped to be a good resource for community members and fellow officers.

You became a father during your council term. How does downtown look to you as a parent of young children?

I have been coming downtown since I was a kid, going to the Children's Discovery Museum and the Tech. As a young adult, going to bars and nightclubs as a San Jose State student. As an adult, I chose to live downtown.

Being a parent has brought a whole new perspective. Now I'm taking my son (Jorge, 4) and daughter (Sofia, 9 months) to Children's Discovery Museum and very kid-friendly events or shows. We're riding our bikes around downtown and enjoying the parks.

Now my son is old enough to verbalize what he's seeing and thinking, which has a profound impact on me. He'll ask about a homeless person when we're walking — what's happening to this man or why he is sleeping outside. This is a priority I've been working on since before he was born. And now I see it through a different lens and it has a different impact. The new perspective I have on this work is how important it is to our future generations. And how important it is to have a safe community and clean parks that families can go to, where strollers can enter, and all the things we experience as parents. It has been a tremendous experience.

Business News

Welcome Mommy's Banh Mi: Curtis Lai has elevated Vietnamese food tastes with his Mommy's Banh Mi business, now one of the food choices at Fuze nightclub, 58 S. First St.



"We're willing to work harder to take Vietnamese food a step higher," said Lai, born and raised in San Jose. All menu items are made fresh and to the customer's order."

- Top sellers include:
◆ The Medallion, with a chicken-and-pork lemongrass patty, crispy fried onions, cucumbers, sweet pickled carrots and daikons, cilantro, Mommy's signature sauce, chicken pate, and jalapeños in a fresh baguette.
◆ The Porchetta, with slow-roasted pork belly and all the fixings.
◆ The meatless Banh Mi option is made special on ciabatta bread with mixed shredded tofu, yams, taro, mushrooms, carrots, jicama with crispy fried onions, sweet pickled carrots, daikons, cilantro, jalapenos and an optional aioli.

Lai started in 2019 with a food trailer traveling to local farmers' markets four or five days a week — doing the best business at the Rose Garden market. He closed in 2020 due to COVID and reopened as a ghost kitchen in 2021, gaining more customers handling online orders, pickups and catering.

At Fuze, he works early mornings during the week preparing Banh Mi for his corporate and regular catering clients. He's open late on most weekends when Fuze, becomes a 21-over club. Under-ages can order online until 9:45 p.m. and pick up their meals outside.

"It's one of the few healthy food options late at night downtown," Lai said.

Find the menu at mommysbanhmi.com.

All in the family at Casa Guzmania: Casa Guzmania specializes in artisan, savory, and handmade empanadas still made in the traditional Mexican way. Sister and brother Cecilia and Pedro Melendez have turned their business into a family operation, starting with the name Guzmania, which honors their Mother Guzman, who passed away from COVID.

Selecting empanadas as the specialty was simple —



Making new memories!

All ages are ready to lace up their roller or inline skates and take some laps around Aloha Downtown Skate, open daily through the holidays at the iconic Circle of Palms. Skaters can also use the inner circle to show off their best moves. Like always, friends and families can make new memories and keep their holiday skating tradition alive. Details at AlohaDowntownSkate.com.

since Cecilia and her husband, Rafael Vazquez, chef, honed their ability to create upscale pastes for their band mates and crew back home in Mexico, in which they played brass instruments.

The difficult part was obtaining an investor visa for Cecilia, who brought along her husband and two daughters. Pedro came to the U.S. 11 years ago, first to work for Cisco and currently at Google.

Besides customers in 360 Residences, they attract business from SoFA district and the Convention Center.

Top sellers include the mole, and beef with potato options, though the Tinga chicken with tomato, onion and chipotle pepper and Cochinita Pibil (barbecued pork) are also listed on the lead menu board. Italian smoothies and coffees are also available in the brightly decorated space.

The menu also keeps up with the seasons, offering a pumpkin empanada during Halloween and a turkey empanada for Thanksgiving. For December, the owners plan to sell a special hot chocolate. Check casaguzmania.com and @casaguzmania on social media.

Egg sandos: Vinh Ha loves South First Street and wants to be a part of downtown's post-pandemic comeback. He and partner Rosaline Chen have opened Egghead Sando Café at 80 S. First St., which serves quick grab-and-go egg-based sandos (Japanese sandwiches) with all-organic ingredients.

"I was familiar with 55 South and Paper Plane and just happened to be walking by when I saw this space, contacted Nick Goddard (of Colliers International) and the rest is history," said Ha, a San Jose resident who has opened eight other restaurants, including another Egghead Sando on West Capitol Expressway.



Rosaline Chen, left, and Vinh Ha

Ha and Chen utilize respective Vietnamese and Taiwanese roots to meld rich flavors with American tastes for their unique creations. Egghead's top seller is the Eggy, a poached egg on top of a smooth potato puree with bacon and chives served in a jar with a toasted baguette on the side. On the sando side of the menu, Chen likes The Chic with Taiwanese-style hand-battered fried chicken and arugula with house sauce and bun.

Other sando choices include the B.E.C., which includes thick cut bacon over-medium egg and cheddar cheese with ketchup and house sauce on a brioche bun as well as the self-described Scramble, Breakfast Burger and Hawaiian Morning with Spam. Cultural drinks on the menu include hojicha, a double-roasted Japanese green tea, and drinks served with latte and matcha.

"We have something for everybody," Ha said.

He feels better about the timing of their first downtown

venture than their previous investment leasing a space in Cupertino just prior to the onset of COVID and shelter-in-place mandates.

"A lot of companies are coming back now," he said. "Staying at home was great, but I miss traffic and people."

Normally opening their businesses near schools and hospitals using a design concept of blues and whites, Ha and Chen are easing into their new location and clientele.

"We're in a historic building, so we're keeping the original industrial look," said Chen, who takes care of interior design at all their businesses.

"And we're getting to know our neighbors," Ha added. "We're looking forward to helping to revamp our street and all of downtown."

Downtown News

New Centerra owner: Centerra apartments has been purchased by a Beverly Hills investor for \$185 million. The average price per 347 units works out to \$533,100. The buyer is 3D Investments of Beverly Hills, headed by Joseph Daneshgar, who acquired the 21-story tower from the AFL-CIO Building Investment Trust.

Simeon, with Swenson as general contractor, finished the building in 2016. It is located across Almaden Avenue from San Pedro Square and bounded by Notre Dame

Avenue and Carlsyle and West St. John streets.

The building has 184 one-bedroom units, 156 two-bedroom units and 7 three-bedroom units. Monthly rental prices range between \$2,534 - \$4,889, according to liveatcenterra.com.

Centerra also has more than 8,000 square feet of retail. Current tenants include Dr. Ink and Bank of the West.

From the Archives

15 years ago – December 2007 – VTA acquired the Mitchell Block bounded by Santa Clara, Market, St. John and First streets, to serve as staging area for future BART construction. Previous owners Warren Holmes and E.B. Gross held the property for more than 50 years.

20 years ago – December 2002 – The first new city-owned garage in 17 years opened at Fourth and San Fernando streets. The last construction on a city-owned garage occurred in 1985 when the Market-San Pedro Garage was expanded from three to six floors.

25 years ago – December 1997 – Office vacancy rates for Class A space dropped below 2 percent and hovered around 2.7 percent for Class B space.

30 years ago – December 1992 – Christmas in the Park refurbished the Little Train donated by Don Lima.

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Groundwerx Employee of the Month – Sandy Gomez

Sandy Gomez joined the Groundwerx team in 2020 after running into childhood friend Christina Ruiz (August Employee of the Month) at the Grocery Outlet on Santa Clara Street. Gomez had just started working part-time at the store while she continued her search for a full-time job with benefits. Ruiz told her about openings at Groundwerx and offered to help her apply for a job as a cleaning ambassador.

Her duties include cleaning leaves and drainage areas at the curb, clearing bike lanes, removing graffiti and training new hires. Every Wednesday during spring and summer, she cleared the street for the Farmers' Market in the SoFA district. Besides her normal job responsibilities, co-workers have come to know her as someone they can count on to pitch in with larger jobs.

Last month, Gomez got a fist-bump from Mayor Sam Liccardo who said she was doing a good job. Although it's nice to have the mayor notice your work, Gomez is most proud of the feedback she gets from homeless individuals she encounters who appreciate the treatment she gives them. Gomez learned as a child to treat everyone the way you want to be treated.

Raised in San Jose, she migrated here from Mexico with her parents who came for migrant work in the valley. Gomez herself worked the fields in Morgan Hill, where she learned a work ethic that stays with her today. At the age of 23, she took a job as a cashier at Rite Aid and stayed on that job for the next 30 years.

Gomez raised four kids as a single mom, all while working full time. Her youngest son is now at SJSU majoring in civil engineering, and was a high school valedictorian. She is very proud of the accomplishments of her children and her grandchildren, and likes taking them to holiday events like Christmas in the Park and Winter Wonderland. Her favorite downtown event this year was the last Music in the Park of the season featuring WAR.



Sandy Gomez