VOL. 35, NO. 9 • MARCH 2023

Ideas for more vibrancy

City Council hears how to create a '365-day city'

Downtowners are asking San Jose City Council to fund a team of urban experts to assist them with bringing more excitement and livability to downtown San Jose.

"San Jose should be a 365-day city," said downtown developer Gary **Dillabough**, who co-chaired the Downtown Vibrancy committee to assist Mayor Matt Mahan and the City Council in understanding the biggest issues facing the city. The recommendations of five different transitional teams including Downtown Vibrancy will also help guide the council in determining where dollars should be spent during the 2023-24 budget cycle beginning July 1.

"We need to try to create some consistency so when people come here they can always expect to have some kind of interesting experience," Dillabough told the City Council at its Feb. 14 study session.

The Downtown Vibrancy team more closely defined its vision of downtown to be filled with active store fronts, and known for its walkability, world-class events, and as a regional center of arts and entertainment. The group came up with 11 recommendations.

At the top of the list, the team recommended that the City Council hire five experts who work with stakeholders "on all things downtown." The team would include a director plus staff experienced in economic development of small businesses and large projects; a leader in social services, homelessness and quality-of-life issues; a team member to instigate and implement ideas for activations and vibrancy; and a brand manager to communicate and amplify downtown's assets.

Other top recommendations from the Downtown Vibrancy team:

- Activate downtown storefronts through leases, pop-ups, and other innovative means by removing fees, permits and other tax burdens.
- Consider a pilot program prototyping "permit free" zones downtown to increase the number of events that are free for participants.
- Ensure the gateways to downtown are clean and welcoming.
- Add additional dedicated police, safety ambassadors and private security guards who create a welcoming environment downtown and respond more quickly to quality-of-life and emergency situations.

"Let's do things that are bold and that we are really proud of and activate this city in a way that it really comes to life," Dillabough said.

- Develop a lighting plan that connects people-centered places including the Arena, Convention Center, Guadalupe River Park, San Pedro Square, Post Street, SoFA, San Jose State and City Hall.
- Identify 25 locations in Downtown San Jose for "interactive, high-impact, high-visibility, and dynamic art installations."
- Create a marketing campaign that draws residents, entertainment and businesses to downtown.
- Develop 10 changes and investments in downtown that add to the built environment and enhance the public realm.
- Identify new sources of revenue, such as fees on rental cars, electric scooter and rental bikes to be reinvested into the arts.
- Relaunch the parking validation program in specific areas to make it more inviting for people to shop and dine downtown.

"It was exhilarating to be part of a committee comprised of so many leaders who are super passionate about our downtown," said Alex **Stettinsk**i, SJDA chief executive officer and team member. "We identified the most pressing issues and made recommendations to create new vibrancy for San Jose's core. SJDA is only one player in the mix of several organizations and community partners and together we will move the needle. I am grateful that the mayor, Councilmember **Omar Torres** and city staff made the health of downtown a focal point, as a strong downtown is the heartbeat of every great city."

The Downtown Vibrancy Committee also included: Adolfo Gomez of Mezcal, Janette D'Elia of Jay Paul Company, Janis Gemignani representing downtown residents, $\textbf{Laura\ Chmielewski}$ of $\bar{\text{Team}\ San}$ Jose, Jonathan Becher of Sharks Sports and SAP Center, Scott **Ekman** of Adobe, **Vincent Delcasino** of San Jose State, **Anjee** Helstrup-Alvarez of MACLA, Frank Nguyen of Academic Coffee and Jimmy Sarfaz of Signia Hilton.

Comments and recommendations impacting downtown were also included in reports by some of the other transition teams:

Homelessness: The objectives established by the Homelessness Committee are to shelter the unsheltered and reduce the impact of encampments on the community. Recommendations include building more permanent and emergency housing; increase budgets for assistance programs; encourage the county to implement the Community Assistance, Recovery and Empowerment Act (SB1338) before the end of calendar 2023; and provide a budget for trash removal and to

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delicacies.'

Town Hall Meeting Topic of Discussion THURSDAY MARCH 9 OPEN SAN JOSE 38 SOUTH SECOND ST. 4:30 - 6 P.M.

Get involved in downtown: Meet March 9

San Jose Downtown Association will host a Town Hall on March 9 at 4:30 p.m. at Open San Jose, 38 S. Second St. Hear about SJDA and what the association does, and how you can get involved in a more vibrant downtown. Everybody is welcome to attend.

Subscribe to electronic Downtown Dimension

Downtown Dimension is going all-digital this spring and subscribers will start receiving it multiple times each month through email when news about downtown San Jose needs to be shared with businesses and residents.

SJDA staff wants to make sure that all businesses and subscribers receiving the newsletter by traditional mail are included on our Downtown Dimension email subscriber list. Continue receiving the newsletter by clicking the **Subscribe** button near the bottom of almost every page of sidowntown.com..

The electronic version allows SJDA to present more information about all things downtown, including the latest about business updates, Groundwerx clean and safe efforts, SJDA marketing and events, and general downtown news. Subscriptions are free.

Send feedback and comments to rjensen@sjdowntown.com.

Cafe Eden, Loft and others pivot and reopen after lengthy closures

Downtown restaurants continue to return to business by pivoting and reinventing themselves after closing for up to three years due to the Covid pandemic and its lingering effects.

Café Eden, The Loft and Opa have reopened in the past six months. In February, Enoteca La Storia repositioned itself as Ancora Vino (story on Back Page) and Erik's Deli and Café reopened after a short period by moving to the opposite corner of Market and Santa Clara streets.

Owners of Café Eden and The Loft shared their stories of what prompted them to get back to business in downtown San Jose:

Café Eden, home of Sweet Cheese desserts

Owner Zaghloul Kadah thought Café Eden was closed for good until the day he stumbled upon Lebanese desserts made by Mohamad Akkari, who started Sweet Cheese with his wife, Noha, out of their home during the pandemic.

"He reached out to us with the idea of a merger," Noha said. "Cafe Eden was always his passion and it was his dream to see his native culture being shared in the Bay Area – as was ours. We are actually partners now."

The Akkaris now manage the entire operation of the bakery/ cafe that reopened in October at 2 N. First St. Their idea for Sweet Cheese stemmed from a longing for their authentic homeland food and desserts.

"Although there are many delicious Mediterranean restaurants/bakeries in the Bay Noha and Mohamad Akkari of Cafe Eden

Area, none of them hit home," they said. "It was a piece of home we wanted to bring to Northern California.

Once travel restrictions lifted, Mohamad trained with top bakers in northern Lebanon for three months, and another six months with a friend who had just opened a bakery in Los Angeles.

Soon after, they were delivering orders all over the Bay Area through sweetcheese.shop. One went



"We just went all in," they said. "We want our community and customers to drive us to where we need to go, because at the end of the day, without them we would

to Kadah, who "was completely

taken with the authenticity of our

The reopening remains a work in progress, with an almost completely new staff, including a long-time baker from Lebanon

not have a purpose."

who moved to California pre-pandemic. They also recruited a previous Cafe Eden prep cook who has helped bring back favorite Café Eden recipes. Mohamad takes care of the restaurant and Noha the back work.

Operationally, they plan to offer their full menu in-house, online, and through third-party delivery services. Café Eden / Sweet Cheese has also put a priority on catering to corporate offices that have not reopened their kitchens. Issues changing their status from "closed" to "open" on Yelp and Google are now behind them. They also hope to get back to the cafe's former hours as more employees return downtown.

"Every day has been a new adventure," the Akkaris said. "But our biggest successes are seeing our restaurant progressing day-by-day; more customers hearing about us and coming in; and being able to branch out to numerous platforms and hundreds of new customers."

A combination of a great offer from his landlord and his own optimism prompted Kam Razavi to reopen The Loft, 90 S. Second St. in December.

"I'm always trying to see things in a positive way," said Razavi, born in Iran, longtime San Josean and also owner of Capers Eat & Drink in Campbell. "Some say I'm crazy, but I've been at this a lot of vears and it's such a beautiful space — I figured I'd give it a try."

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Business News

Slice of heaven: Slice of Homage craft pizza has become part of San Pedro Social games and entertainment venue at 163 W. Santa Clara St.

"The pizza and the vibes mesh well together," said Steven Barrantes, longtime San Jose pizza aficionado and founder of Slice of Homage (SOH). "It's a natural fit."

The Slice of Homage at San Pedro Social collaboration between Barrantes and San Pedro Social owner Mike **Messenger** started Dec. 1 by selling pizza on Door Dash and Grubhub, and for pick-up. A seating room with its own front door and connected to SP Social opened at the end of February and hours were expanded for lunch through dinner. For now, the space will be used for customer orders and takeout. It will transition in spring into a full-service "Slice House" where customers can sit and have a slice, salad and drink, Barrantes said.



Have a slice at SOH.

Slice of Homage moved from a temporary location at Myth Lounge on Post Street, where it built a reputation in regional media for its thick rectangular Detroit-style pizzas featuring crispy bottoms and crunchy cheese-lined edges. Three of the Detroit-style menu items

are the Red Head pepperoni pie; the Detroit vs. Everybody pie with pepperoni, sausage, salami, bacon, mushrooms, and whipped ricotta; and the Spicy D, featuring pepperoni, sausage and bacon, plus green bell peppers, onions, jalepenos, black olives and red pepper flakes.

At San Pedro Social, Sicilian- and New York-style pies plus calzones and salads will be included on the menu. Barrantes hinted that the menu could expand to Chicago deep-dish style and thinner tavern-style pizzas.

"I'm passionate about pizza and want to branch out to as many favorite styles as I can," he said.

Barrantes has worked in the pizza business more than 20 years, including a stint at Patxi's Pizza until it closed in 2019. He has studied pizza-making with some of the greats in the business, including world champs **John** Arena of Metro Pizza in Las Vegas and Tony Gemignani of Tony's Pizza Napoletana in San Francisco

SOH pizzas are made only with the best ingredients, he learned early on from Gemignani and others.

He started SOH out of his home during the pandemic and spent the last year at Myth, where he sold Detroit-style five days a week and New York-style on weekends.

His agreement with San Pedro Social is a perfect next step toward opening his own restaurant, he said.

"Mike is quick and a good business guy," Barrantes said. "I'm learning a lot from him." He added that Messenger's son, **Gran**t, who works in real estate, put the two together

"Detroit-style boomed during the pandemic, and so did the number of YOLO (you-only-live-once) pizza bakers making pies out of their backyard ovens," he said. "San Jose needed a craft pizzeria to come in, and I wouldn't be surprised to see more.

Drool over the menu at sohpizza com and follow @slice of homage; sanpedrosocial.com and @sanpedrosocialsi.

Home sweet wine home: Ty Chandler and Nici Lew have invested in themselves and in downtown's future to open Little Wine House, 350 Julian St., Building 4, in Little Italy.

The pandemic and upheaval it caused to the world and restaurant industry prompted them "to take a step back and create our pipe dream." they said of their first business venture. "Life is short, so we're taking a gamble on ourselves.'

They have made a place where customers can make themselves at home while enjoying the good life: sipping bubbly from Italy and France, reds and whites from California and along the West Coast, plus bottled beers, ciders and seltzers. Beverages can be paired with foods from a menu of caviar crusties, cheese and charcuterie boards, flatbreads, salads and other goodies.

"From the paint scheme, yellow door, furniture, and décor -- it is very reminiscent of our home here in downtown San Jose," they said. "We enjoy entertaining at our home and Little Wine House is an extension of our home to vou.

The casual and welcoming feel of the business itself is also felt at littlewinehousesj.com, where guests are invited to make themselves at home, sit where they want and visit



Ty Chandler, left, and Nici Lew are ready to pour wines. anytime without a reservation.

"People really enjoy our variety of crusties," Lew said. "My favorite is the blistered tomato crustie with whipped ricotta and drizzled Calabrian hot honev.

She has a business/accounting background and worked in the construction industry since moving to San Jose more than a decade ago. Chandler, her partner and San Jose native, complements her business acumen with 20 years in the restaurant industry, including a recent position managing a high-volume cocktail bar downtown.

"Downtown is our home," they said. "We wanted to be a small part of the resurrection in making our downtown as great as other large cities.

In just a few months of operation, Little Wine House has already built a following of repeat customers, "which really warms our hearts," Lew said. "People have been really receptive to our concept."

"Littlest Little Italy" opens: A big change in Little Italy brings five new businesses into the historic 5,000-square-foot former Enoteca La Storia restaurant at 320 W St. John St.

The venture is called "Littlest Little Italy." Each business has its own identity, but customers can order from any of the pay terminals in the building or sit wherever they wish. Combined, the space is full of energy in the late afternoons and early evenings.

Ancora Vino by Enoteca La Storia is the anchor business located in the heart of the building

"We are permanently closed as a full-service restaurant," said longtime friends and partners **Joe Cannistraci** and Michael Guerra on enotecalastoria.com. "We have pivoted back to our retail roots and opened up our retail shop and tasting room, Ancora Vino.

The business features a variety of domestic and international wines for sale. Customers can taste from 30 different wines by the glass or from sommelier-selected

Adjacent to Ancora Vino in the middle of the building is Salumi Bar, also by Enoteca La Storia, which has a selection of all-cured meats and cheeses, caprese and burrata.

Torino Panino Italian deli sells Chicago-style Italian beef sandwiches. Meat and vegetable sandwiches are named The Wrigley, Lincoln Park, True Romance and The Godfather, full of sausages, peppers, mushrooms, marinated eggplant and even chicken cacciatore, served on either Italian rolls or focaccia.

"Business has been good during our soft opening," said **Laeloni Punsalan**, a bartender filling in at the sandwich



Laeloni Punsalan takes orders at the Torino

counter. "We are seeing regulars already, and had our first Sharks game with a lot of families." Visit @ torino_panino on Instagram.

Birre by Pour Decisions Taproom is on the other side of the building at the front. It should be open later in March, offering tastes of craft brews paired perfectly with the other food offerings around the building, including the fifth business in the mix: Bibo's Little Italy Pizza.

Bibo's offers New York-style pizza by the slice or pie, plus Italian wings, fritti (fries),

Loft reopens

traffic at Second and San Fernando streets

Besides pandemic, a fire Jan. 7, 2021, around the corner that destroyed most of the block of San Fernando Street between Second and Third streets and the closure of the restaurant at the corner limited the flow of pedestrian

From Front Page

For now, Razavi is content calling his business Loft Bar and Events, focused mostly on nightlife, social gatherings and team-building events for 25 to 250 people. He is open for dinner on Friday and Saturday nights, when nightlife neighbors Nova, San Jose Bar and Grill and the Improv boost the energy level for the area recently dubbed SoSA (South Second Area).

After dinner on the busiest nights of the week, Loft offers two bars, dancing, and rooftop patio, which avoided damage during the blaze.

Razavi altered the menu to include smaller and shareable plates to cater to Improv patrons and more easily fill to-go orders. Several of his former staff have returned and he borrows employees accordingly from his other restaurant for larger events.

Thankful for the flexibility of his staff, the great business the Improv is doing and the regulars who've returned, Razavi hopes for "better days coming and more action throughout our downtown," he said. "It's like opening a new place. There's a whole new energy here."

Groundwerx Employee of the Month – Mark Michaud

Mark Michaud loves seeing the visible results of his work -- a block cleared of litter, debris and graffiti. Mostly self-motivated to do a great job, he also appreciates the

compliments he receives from the staff at Horace Mann Elementary School and Academic Coffee.

Michaud returned to his hometown in 2021 and joined Groundwerx as cleaning ambassador after being laid off as a heavy equipment operator in Georgia as a result of the Covid



Mark Michaud

Groundwerx is a good fit for him because he enjoys working busy days outside and interacting with his teammates, supervisors and general public

He earned special recognition this month by showing a positive attitude; starting his days on time; racking up cleaning statistics while finishing each task quickly and completely; communicating maintenance and homelessness issues when necessary; taking on special tasks; and still finding time to assist teammates.

Michaud lives in Alviso, is a longtime Music in the Park fan, and enjoys fishing as a pastime and the large tacos

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Downtown vibrancy From Front Page

prevent environmental damage caused by encampments.

"Our report is really about more housing, find more sites, do it faster, and do it at a lower cost. That's your great challenge, " said committee chair David Pandori.

Community safety: Objectives are to lower the crime rate where people feel safer and to lower the number of fatalities, serious injuries and crashes on San Jose streets. This committee echoed the sentiment of the Vibrancy team to increase the numbers of police and community service officers conducting foot and bicycle patrols and participating in community policing.

Planning and Permitting: Objectives are to improve the timeliness, responsiveness, predictability and reliability of planning and permitting services; and be comparable to other cities in the Bay Area and around the state for attracting new business ventures. Changes in processes are reportedly already underway at City Hall. and one measurement of success will be in customer satisfaction. Participants on the committee had downtown business, architectural and development interests. including Ted McMahon, co-chair, of Miro.

Clean Neighborhoods: The committee discussed what might be done to keep all of the buildings in downtown looking sharp. In its report, the committee included in an addendum that the City Council consider a means for the City of San Jose to clean or remove

blight from private property. "Unresponsiveness or ignorance should not be an excuse for absentee property owners to allow the city to look neglected, especially in key economic corridors like downtown San Jose." the committee wrote. SJDA Deputy Director Chloe Shipp was a member of this team.

From the Archives

15 years ago – March 2008 – Shuttered for 20 years, restoration work finished on five historic buildings with entrances off 30 E. Santa Clara St. and Fountain

20 years ago - March 2003 - Renovation was completed of the five-story historic Twohy building at Paseo de San Antonio and South First Street. Offices on the upper floors were converted into 36 modern live/work lofts. Original office doors and marble-lined hallways were preserved.

25 years ago - March 1998 - Workingman's Emporium, 260 N. First St., received the Golden Nail award for seismic renovation and upgrading the 1920s-building's brick facade, roof and utilities. Owners Gary and Sue Wing were praised for their 29 years downtown, opening in 1969. The Wings are still the owners and have been in business 54 years.

30 years ago - March 1993 - YWCA's Villa Nueva opened, adding 63 more residential units to downtown San Jose's housing inventory.



salads and gelato.