

Downtown Vision and Policy Goals

Summary

Downtown San Jose should be dense, bustling, and vibrant. More people living and working in the center of the city will be necessary to create a downtown that is representative of the 10th largest city in the United States. Downtown should be:

- A home for a wide variety of businesses;
- A transportation hub;
- A fantastic arts, dining, entertainment, and nightlife destination;
- And have more housing for all levels of income

Our Downtown Vision

The downtown San Jose we envision in the next 20 years will be defined by transportation options, yet the core of the city will be treated as a destination and not a mere pass through. The planning happening now around traffic flow and circulation is critically important and burdened by an uncertainty regarding which of the grand projects under discussion will actually be built. One thing seems certain, in 20 years the downtown core will be more urban and denser -- serving more people as a home and job center. People will traverse the region on BART, electrified Caltrains, and some type of airport connector. They will use their cars less, while using rideshare services and “last mile” solutions like electric scooters and dockless bikes more. Downtown will be more pedestrian friendly and include better activation of public spaces like the paseos and the re-designed St. James Park. Residents will demand richer arts and culture establishments, as well as highly acclaimed restaurants. Diridon Station will be a hive of constant activity, with workers embarking in the morning and departing in the evening, grabbing a bouquet for their partner, and a snack for their journey. Apartment dwellers will use the plaza at San Pedro Square Market and the linear park in the North San Pedro area as their backyards. Murals and art crosswalks will define the visual environment and provide opportunities for long-time residents of San Jose to make marks and help new residents understand our agrarian past and cultural diversity. **More than anything, our vision for downtown San Jose is that we need more of everything, and the policies and practices we set in motion now, with strong leadership from the City government and business community, will help us grow to assume our place as America’s safest, most technologically advanced, and best-connected big city.**

Goals and Suggested Policies

In order to build the type of downtown described above, we need more people living, working, and visiting downtown San Jose. To reach the levels of density imagined, we need the following: 1) create a dynamic employment center, 2) build more housing for all income levels, 3) an extensive public transportation network, and 4) curate a downtown that will attract and retain arts, retail, and entertainment. We recommend pursuing the following actionable strategies.

Dynamic Employment Center

In order to achieve the density needed to create a bustling downtown San Jose, we need to attract more businesses and jobs to the area. This will increase foot traffic into and through downtown, which will in turn enable the tertiary sector, including retail, restaurants, and entertainment, to flourish.

- Define a more active City role in marketing downtown to local and out-of-town businesses
- Provide incentives to encourage commercial development downtown
 - If a commercial linkage fee is being considered, make sure a thorough evaluation of the fee structure is done so that we are not discouraging commercial development
- Provide opportunities for light industrial use, such as brewing, in downtown
- Allow for more flexible zoning/mixed use by designating areas currently on the periphery of the downtown as “Downtown Primary Commercial (DC)” zoning.
- Support small business start-ups and expansion by connecting resources
 - Enlarge the small business ally team so can focus on business recruitment
 - Create a downtown business recruitment team or point of contact within the City that will focus on recruiting all types of business (medium-large)
- Prepare preliminary studies for priority development sites in advance of development so the permitting process is more efficient
- Push for CEQA reform at the State-level
- Use tools to improve the economic and social health of downtown, such as establishment of a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) or Community Renewal Area (CRA)
- Create a Business Interruption Fund (BIF) to cover operating expenses for businesses that will be impacted due to potential lost revenue from BART construction
- Job training programs for local youth, especially in tech and other high-paying jobs
 - City and SJSU partnership on business/start up accelerator
 - Work with local tech companies to increase the hiring/apprenticeships/pathways for local and disadvantaged workers

More Housing for All Levels of Income

As we are already in the middle of a housing crisis, we need to identify ways to stimulate the development of housing. While we are unable to manipulate the cost of labor, materials, and land, the City can institute policy changes that would have an impact on the time, certainty, and cost of development. Downtown San Jose should be used as the area to test innovative projects to spur the development of housing.

- Provide incentives (e.g. fee reductions, faster permitting process, streamlined CEQA process for downtown projects) that encourage residential and commercial development downtown, including both the rehabilitation of existing structures and new development
- Right-size the complete fee structure for development
- Promote high-density housing downtown

- Make the downtown high-rise fee reduction program *permanent*
 - Remove the back date for qualification into high-rise program which will increase access to financing
 - Eliminate parking requirements
- Facilitate the development of innovative types of housing types in downtown that fit a range of incomes and lifestyles
 - Seek out companies with creative solutions to help alleviate the housing crisis e.g. co-living, micro units, etc.
- Create a team within the planning section, a one-stop shop, to expedite the development process for residential projects in downtown San Jose
- More resources dedicated to permanent supportive housing for the homeless, as well as the creation of a navigation center downtown and more services for the homeless, including mental health services
- Leverage the use of public lands for housing projects, especially for below market rate housing

Transportation Hub

Ensuring San Jose becomes a transportation hub will be essential in the success of our vision for downtown. Having a viable transportation network will not only bring more people into and through downtown, it will have a major impact on reducing road congestion and commute times, as well as helping ease the housing crisis by increasing the area that would be commutable to San Jose.

- Offer multiple transportation options to help reduce car trips and traffic congestion
 - Ensure the renovation of Diridon Station is state of the art and completed within a reasonable amount of time
 - Diridon should be a destination, filled with retail and restaurants
 - There should be a transport connection between Diridon and the San Jose airport
 - There needs to be seamless connections between rail, BART, light rail, busses, etc.
 - We need to rethink and study the most effective route for light rail downtown – e.g. less stops; only one stop at Diridon that connects to other modes of transportation; one stop at Diridon and connection to airport?
 - Study needs to be given to what do to with the section of highway 87 that runs through downtown. Can it be put underground to better connect the westside to the downtown core?
 - Maximize the space around Diridon and BART for Transit Oriented Development
- Pilot programs for last mile transportation options (e.g. bikes, scooter, etc.)
- Facilitate ride sharing/curb management – plan for drop off and pick up areas throughout downtown, but especially near Diridon Station and BART

- Establish a funding mechanism to create attractive entry corridors into downtown from Diridon Station and BART, including wider sidewalks and separate lanes for bikes and micro-mobility options
- Interactive, digital wayfinding to help visitors find their way around downtown
- Create a Transportation Management Association to work with businesses to help expand knowledge of alternatives to commuting in a single passenger vehicle

Dining, Entertainment, and Nightlife Destination

- Create a safe pedestrian environment: wide sidewalks, narrow travel lanes, trees, planter strips, and underground utilities
- Use Downtown Transportation Study to:
 - Determine best streets to make pedestrian/bike only. Give serious consideration to First and Second streets if there will be changes to light rail in downtown.
 - Activate the main paths into downtown and the westside from Diridon Station
 - Art cross walks, art, trees, interactive digital wayfinding, protected bike lanes, etc.
- Include art in parks, sidewalks, roundabouts, public buildings, and alleys
 - Require new developments in downtown have a public art component
- Create more protected bike lanes in downtown
- Create pedestrian and bike only streets
- Activate parks/more outdoor public space
 - Determine the best governance of downtown parks – including administration by private/third parties
 - Revitalize St. James park
 - Better highlight and invest in the Guadalupe River Park, making it more accessible and active with trail enhancements, wayfinding, and programming
 - Encourage the activation of rooftops – public gardens, bars, restaurants, etc
 - Encourage popos (privately owned public spaces) at ground level and roof tops
 - Amend City policy to allow for blanket approval of outside seating permits in downtown
- Focus on recruitment/curating of businesses
- Create more dynamic public meeting places and markets, like San Pedro Market
- More murals and street life projects
 - Expand MOMENT
 - Better use of parking lots and garages and alley ways – e.g. container activations, community gardens, beer gardens
- Run pilot programs to shut down streets (e.g. Post St. and San Pedro) and facilitate permits to allow for food and drink in the street
- Start a program to take advantage of empty retail space – opportunities for them to host artwork or pop-up (restaurants, stores, etc)