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I. **Introduction**

**What is a Specific Plan?**

A Specific Plan is a regulatory tool that local governments use to implement their General Plan and to guide development in a localized area. While a General Plan is the primary guide for growth and development in a community, a Specific Plan is able to focus on the unique characteristics of a special area by customizing the planning process and land use regulations to that area. A Specific Plan is enacted pursuant to Section 65450 et seq of the California Government Code.

**Plan Purpose and Intent**

The purpose of the Downtown Gilroy Specific Plan (hereafter, “Specific Plan”) is to create a unique and identifiable Downtown for Gilroy that is economically vibrant, pedestrian-oriented, and a local and visitor destination. This Specific Plan will be a regulatory tool used by the City of Gilroy to guide development in the Downtown for approximately the next 20 years. While the City’s General Plan is the primary guide for growth and development within Gilroy, this Specific Plan focuses on the Downtown area in more detail, organizing land use and zoning regulations by districts.

The Specific Plan seeks to establish a direct connection between the City of Gilroy’s General Plan and revitalization and enhancement opportunities within Downtown Gilroy. An overall goal is the orderly development of Downtown Gilroy in a method consistent with the City's General Plan and, more specifically, with the community’s vision as developed through the community outreach process.

The Downtown will continue to develop with a diversity of public, commercial, civic, financial, cultural, and residential uses that will emphasize its role as the central focal point of the City.
Introduction

Boundaries and Setting

Regional Context

Nestled between the Diablo and Santa Cruz mountains in the Santa Clara Valley, Gilroy is situated in South Santa Clara County at the crossing of U.S. Highway 101 and State Highway 152. The city of 47,000 plus residents is within a short driving distance of Monterey Bay, Santa Cruz, San Jose, the San Joaquin Valley, and the San Francisco Bay Area. The City is also linked to the San Francisco Bay area by the CalTrain Peninsula Commuter train line.

Located in the Silicon Valley region, Gilroy has about one-third of its residents commute to work in the myriad of high tech industries for which the region is named. The skilled, informational-related technology labor of Gilroy is supplemented by the manufacturing trade and a strong local retail community. One of the largest retail outlet centers in the nation is located in Gilroy along US 101, while the historic Downtown area offers a more intimate, old town shopping experience.

Historically, the City’s economy has centered on agriculture. While a variety of crops find prosperous growth in the Gilroy area, the City is most well known for its garlic production and processing. Known as the “Garlic Capital of the World,” the prime weather and soils of the Santa Clara Valley provide optimal conditions for cultivation of the garlic plant. Each year, the Gilroy Garlic Festival is held in late July and attracts over 130,000 visitors to the City. Garlic product development and processing are major employers for the City’s residents.

Gilroy is also known for its extensive parks and recreation opportunities. The City has won more park design awards from the California Park and Recreation Society than any other city in California. A variety of outdoor activities are available and popular in the Gilroy area.

Setting

Over the years, the Downtown area of Gilroy has struggled to compete with the development of retail and professional business services in other parts of the City. Though currently the Downtown has a foundation of antique shops and specialty retail stores and recent revitalization efforts have attracted some new businesses to the area, this Specific Plan seeks to fortify and reinvigorate the Downtown area, enticing new businesses to locate there rather than in other commercial corridors.
The Downtown exudes a friendly, small-town atmosphere. The character of this area is derived from the historic buildings of the area; two notable sites are the Old City Hall and the Gilroy Train Depot. The Downtown core has narrow lots with buildings at the street edge, eclectic and varied land uses, and a consistent human scale orientation.

In contrast, the northern and southern peripheral portions of the Downtown area are characterized by larger, self-contained parcels that are automobile-oriented in nature. Typical sites are designed on a parcel-by-parcel basis, with little continuity between sites. Buildings in the center of a small landscaped area with unscreened parking closest to the street are common sights. These periphery areas serve as entrances to the Downtown core but do not adequately convey the charming nature of the area to which these gateways lead.

The western portion of the Downtown area is an area with historical homes that is beginning to transition into a professional office district. These properties are retaining the historic residential character of the area and act as a buffer to the existing residential regions outside of the Downtown. A large collection of civic uses also exists on the western side of the historic Downtown area while the eastern side of the Downtown, close to the railroad tracks, consists mainly of vacant parcels and large vacant buildings.

Specific Plan Boundary

The Specific Plan area covers over 160 acres in the central portion of the City of Gilroy. The Specific Plan area extends from Leavesley Road/Welburn Avenue on the north end to Luchessa Avenue on the south. The alley on the east side of Railroad Street serves as the primary boundary on the east side of Downtown, and the alley between Eigleberry Street and Church Street is the primary boundary on the west (extending westward to Dowdy Street in the area between Sixth Street and Seventh Street, to include the Civic Center area).

The Specific Plan divides the Downtown area into six Districts. Each District has a particular vision for future development. Land use and development standards, as well as design guidelines, will give direction for each area of the Downtown to help each section achieve the future state envisioned by the community. The six Districts are as follows:

- Downtown Historic District
- Downtown Expansion District
- Civic/Cultural Arts District
- Transition District
- Cannery District
- Gateway District
**Relationship to Existing Planning Documents**

The Specific Plan provides information needed to guide development within the planning area. Future development proposals within the Specific Plan area must be consistent with this Specific Plan.

**City of Gilroy General Plan**

The Specific Plan is consistent with and furthers the objectives of the City of Gilroy General Plan by providing detailed criteria for development of specific sites and public streetscape improvements. The Specific Plan’s vision, goals, and implementation measures are based on direction given in the City’s General Plan. The Specific Plan provides for more precise implementation of the General Plan’s goals, objectives, and policies. The Specific Plan has been prepared to reinforce all elements of the General Plan.

**Gilroy Zoning Ordinance**

The City of Gilroy Zoning Ordinance provides site specific development and land use regulations that govern the size, shape, and type of use for development in the City. This Specific Plan document customizes the standards and regulations found in the City Zoning Ordinance to help achieve the Downtown vision. In any instance where the Specific Plan conflicts with the requirements of the City of Gilroy Zoning Ordinance, the Specific Plan provisions will take precedence. Where the Specific Plan is silent on a topic, the City of Gilroy Zoning Ordinance requirements remain in force.
Introduction

Community Outreach Process

Visioning Charrette

The Specific Plan community outreach effort was centered on a three-day Visioning Charrette with citizens and interested stakeholders.

The Visioning Charrette was held on April 1-3, 2004 at the Historic Strand Theatre and proved to be a collaborative process for empowering individuals important to the project to work together and support the results. The Downtown Gilroy Visioning Charrette focused on local planning, design, future development, and crafting of a sustainable popular vision for the area.

The Visioning Charrette was an intensive planning and design workshop involving a community needs assessment, interviews with community groups and key stakeholders, the prioritization of issues, the identification of key sites and Downtown development projects, and the development of recommendations and implementation strategies.

The Visioning Charrette began with a team organizational meeting followed by several focus group meetings. In the focus group meetings, the consultant staff met with various interest groups to discuss goals and objectives, the vision, opportunities and constraints, and key issues in the Downtown. Specific focus group meetings were held for the City staff and Task Force; Transportation, Housing, and County Agencies; Downtown business owners; and the Gilroy Unified School District.

Also on the first day of the Visioning Charrette, the consultant team held open discussions on “What do we want in Downtown?” and land-use issues, housing, and streetscapes. Banners labeled with various issues of interest were provided to record participant comments.

On the second day of the Visioning Charrette, the consultant staff held one-on-one stakeholder interviews with individuals, agencies, and organizations with strong interest in the Downtown area. The purpose of these meetings was to listen to the issues and observations from key individuals about the planning area. As with the rest of the Charrette, the interviews were quite informative for laying a foundation of background information and identifying many issues and visions for the Downtown area.
Design workshops followed the stakeholder interviews. In the design phase, large maps of the Downtown area were provided and members of the general public and interest group representatives were allowed to offer comments and draw or illustrate what they would like to see in the area. Participants were permitted to be as creative as they felt necessary to depict their vision. Participants were also able to paste images of existing buildings to be emulated onto the map in key locations.

Another interactive exercise at the Visioning Charrette was the completion of a community Visual Preference Survey. During the Visual Preference Survey, participants had the opportunity to rate images of diverse downtown scenes on a scale of 1 (like) to 5 (dislike). The survey revealed an overall affinity for outdoor seating and dining, clean spaces with lots of trees, colorful and well-articulated buildings with lots of storefront windows, good lighting, sidewalks, diagonal parking, and other pedestrian-scaled amenities. The survey also revealed a general dislike for uninviting and cluttered streets, very narrow sidewalks, a lack of trees and other vegetation, stark architecture, and parallel parking.

Also as part of the Charrette, local high school students made presentations to the consultant staff and general public describing their vision and what they wanted to see in Gilroy’s Downtown. The consultant staff also participated in extensive walking tours of the Downtown area. Many photos were taken of the existing conditions to assist in further crafting the Specific Plan. The second day was completed with a briefing by the City staff.

The third day of the Visioning Charrette consisted of a presentation by the consultants that summarized the activities and outcomes that had taken place over the two previous days.

The Visioning Charrette was a cross-disciplinary, community-wide effort that used continual feedback to solicit and gain public support for challenging planning issues, such as supporting increasing density, integrating a mix of uses and a diversity of residences, and creating a healthy public realm. The Visioning Charrette helped to forge strong partnerships between public and private entities and fostered civic spirit in the community. The consultant team used the information collected during the Charrette as the citizens’ vision for the future of the Downtown and as a significant guiding force for the Specific Plan.
Downtown Specific Plan Task Force

At the beginning of the planning process, a Downtown Specific Plan Task Force (hereafter, “Task Force”) was created, composed of various community stakeholders including such interested persons as the Mayor, local developers, business owners, merchants, and concerned residents. The Task Force held monthly televised meetings and dealt with a variety of Downtown issues. The meetings were attended by City Staff and served as an opportunity to introduce and receive feedback on the consultant’s ideas. Each portion of the Specific Plan was presented before the Task Force for suggestions and comments. Public comments were also solicited at the meetings.

The responsibilities of the Task Force included assisting the City and consultant staff to identify goals and objectives of the Specific Plan, identifying preliminary issues to be addressed during the process, acting as a sounding board for ideas, and ultimately approving a number of components of the Specific Plan. The continued in-depth involvement of the Task Force as the coordinators and facilitators of the Specific Plan process ensured that the Specific Plan was a community effort.

Public Hearing

A Joint Planning Commission/City Council Study Session was held on October 10, 2005 to discuss the Specific Plan. At the meeting, the City staff and RRM Design Group presented an overview of the contents of the Specific Plan and the process to date. The document was well received and the meeting concluded without any recommendations for refinements to the Specific Plan.

Following the Joint Study Session, the Specific Plan was presented to the Planning Commission at the regularly scheduled October 20, 2005 meeting, where a recommendation for approval was made to the City Council. On November 21, 2005, the City Council unanimously approved the adoption of the Specific Plan.
DOCUMENT ORGANIZATION

This Specific Plan is composed of nine chapters: I) Introduction; II) Existing Conditions; III) Vision; IV) Districts, Land Use, and Development Standards; V) Architectural Design Guidelines; VI) Streetscape Beautification and Public Improvements; VII) Infrastructure and Public Facilities; VIII) Implementation and IX) Plan Administration. Each chapter is briefly described below.

I. Introduction

The Introduction discusses the purpose, intent, and organization of this document. It describes the project area boundaries and the community outreach process associated with this project as well as outlines this Specific Plan’s relationship to the other pertinent City documents that relate to the Specific Plan area.

II. Existing Conditions

This section briefly summarizes existing conditions within the study area on topics such as existing mobility and circulation issues, urban design, land use opportunities and constraints, and economic development.

III. Vision

This chapter describes the community’s vision for Downtown Gilroy and the guiding urban design principles created through the public participation process.

IV. Architectural Design Guidelines

This section provides direction for private property in the Specific Plan area. It provides guidance for site planning and design, parking lot design and screening, building design, massing and articulation, lighting, screening utilitarian aspects of buildings, landscape and hardscape, and signs. Supplemental guidelines are provided for specific issues that exist within each district in Chapter V (Districts, Land Use, and Development Standards).

V. Districts, Land Use, and Development Standards

This section describes how the Specific Plan area is divided into specific districts, each with unique allowable land uses and site development standards, such as height, setback, parking, and design guidelines.
VI. Streetscape Beautification and Public Improvements

This section provides direction for public improvements for the entire Specific Plan area. Topics include gateways and Downtown identity, public plazas and urban parks, street design treatments such as parking, medians, street trees, lighting, street furnishings, crosswalks, public art, and public right-of-way landscaping.

VII. Infrastructure and Public Facilities

This chapter summarizes the conditions of the infrastructure and public facilities in the Specific Plan area. Subjects addressed include circulation and mobility, water supply, sewer and wastewater, solid waste, storm drainage, energy, police and fire protection, schools, and parks.

VIII. Implementation

This chapter recommends strategic public improvements and identifies key catalyst projects and programs needed to make the Specific Plan vision a reality. Priorities, phasing, potential funding mechanisms, and persons responsible for implementation items are all defined by this chapter. Also discussed are investment incentives, retail recruitment strategies, and business organization programs for creating and maintaining a vibrant Downtown retail environment.

IX. Plan Administration

This chapter describes the authority of a Specific Plan and the administrative procedures required for amendments and/or modifications to the Specific Plan.