III. Vision

Introduction

On April 1-3, 2004, a team of urban designers and architects from RRM Design Group conducted a “Visioning Charrette” for the community’s Historic Downtown District. Through the Charrette process, the consultant team solicited detailed information from local residents, merchants, and other appropriate groups in a dedicated effort to establish a clear vision for the Downtown. Through interactive exercises, direct interviews, and walking tours, the community of Gilroy identified aspects of urban design, economics, and social capital that are pivotal in making the current Downtown an eclectic and attractive destination. They also brainstormed as to what components will best act to preserve that traditional role in the future.

Seven main elements were identified and targeted for future attention:

- Planning and General Factors
- Community and Identity
- Land Use
- Urban Design
- Parking
- Economics
- “Sacred Cows”

These seven elements are described below and recommendations for the future state of each element are presented.

Following the Charrette process, the consultant team developed three large exhibits (Land Use Concepts, Urban Design Concepts, and the Vision) that capture the vision of the Specific Plan area. These graphics were presented to the Task Force, and with only a few minor revisions, were adopted as the vision for the Specific Plan area. The exhibits are presented at the end of this chapter. In addition, individual vision concepts, land uses, development standards, and design guidelines were established for each of the six specific Districts and are described in Chapter V (Districts, Land Use, and Development Standards).
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Vision

Planning & General Factors

“Downtown Gilroy” enjoys a diverse history dating back more than a century and remains to this day the broader community’s historic, economic, and cultural core.

Despite this rich history, Downtown Gilroy, as with countless other “main streets” across the United States, has increasingly suffered as a result of the development of contemporary regional malls and “big-box” retail outlets.

Despite intense competition from these sources, the Downtown retains solid advantages when compared to the peripheral commercial development. The unique scale and architecture of Downtown Gilroy, coupled with an eclectic urban design that embraces mixed-use and transit-oriented development, serve as the foundation for a specialty retail district wholly unique when compared to the often monotonous and single-use designs of many modern shopping centers.

As redevelopment occurs throughout Downtown, a continued dedication to these distinctive elements of urban design will go far in seeing that Downtown Gilroy maintains its traditional and vital community role while providing continued alternatives for residence, employment, and shopping.

Recommendations

• Create a Business Improvement District (BID) or similar organization that represents the interests and needs of the Downtown merchants and property owners.

• Draft design guidelines for the Downtown area as a means of protecting existing historic character while helping to focus and ultimately realize future planning and design visions.

• Focus Downtown commercial development on providing primarily specialty retail, restaurants, entertainment and neighborhood services.

• Explore development options for the various opportunity sites that currently exist throughout the Downtown area.

• Continue to embrace the historic and eclectic design pattern of Downtown Gilroy by not requiring new development to adhere to a particular design theme.

• Explore coordinating and extending night-time business hours for downtown retail uses.

• Showcase and provide a full range of services that cater to the daily needs of surrounding residents.
COMMUNITY & IDENTITY

For more than 25 years, the City of Gilroy has held national recognition and prominence as the “Garlic Capital of the World.” The annual Gilroy Garlic Festival attracts over 130,000 visitors to the City for the last weekend in July.

Despite this well-known identification with garlic, contemporary Gilroy ironically possesses relatively few signs of an association with the crop. Downtown Gilroy, in particular, is lacking any visual or economic connections to the City’s poster crop, an oddity that stands as a lost opportunity of both revenue and community identity.

As a cornerstone of any downtown revitalization effort, Gilroy should utilize the “garlic theme”, as part of a larger agricultural history, in artistic and interesting ways to unify elements of urban design as well as in additional opportunities for marketing, eating and tourism.

Efforts could range from simple sign improvements that incorporate garlic imagery to more complex actions such as crafting streetscape improvements that utilize specific and unique public artwork, way-finding systems, etc.

Clearly, the Downtown must serve as the epicenter of these improvements. The Downtown remains the historic core and “face” of the broader community, and any movement to revitalize or establish a theme for the broader community must accordingly begin in that area.

Recommendations

- Implement and foster a subtle “garlic theme” as part of a larger agricultural history for the Downtown area to be articulated in way-finding systems, public art, signs, etc.
- Locate and promote festivals, parades, markets, or celebrations in the Downtown area.
III Vision

Land Use

Traditional downtowns and urbanized areas are defined by their lively and eclectic mixture of uses. Contrary to suburban areas where strict zoning regulations commonly foster pods of homogenous uses separated by landscaping, roads, or other barriers, downtown regions have historically embraced the intermixing of retail, office, and residential uses in an effort to offer a cluster of vital services in a pedestrian-oriented format close to the local residential population.

Downtown Gilroy must continue to support traditional land-uses as much as possible. The redevelopment of structures to incorporate additional housing and office space above retail uses, the addition of new (downtown) plazas in the historic core, and the presence of enough retail and service development to provide for the complete daily needs of local neighborhoods and residents should all be strongly encouraged. These steps will go far in maintaining the Downtown’s historic and unique development role in the broader community, while inviting exciting redevelopment throughout the area.

Recommendations

- Create new downtown uses that complement rather than compete with peripheral big-box retail outlets.
- Give high priority to issues of perceived crime and safety in Downtown Gilroy.
- Encourage higher density projects if the projects are consistent with the existing character and feel of Downtown Gilroy.
- Encourage the creation of outdoor dining as a high priority for Downtown Gilroy; these dining areas should have a high quality appearance with pleasing furniture settings, shade elements, heating and lighting, etc.
- Phase out existing non-conforming uses within Downtown Gilroy.
**Urban Design**

Downtown Gilroy possesses inherent functional and aesthetic advantages when compared to other areas of the City. As a “traditional downtown,” the region enjoys narrow lots, eclectic and varied land-uses and a consistent human-scale that favors pedestrian activity over automotive circulation. Ready access to alternative and mass transit opportunities makes the Downtown accessible to a greater portion of the City’s population.

Traditional downtowns are dense, and intense development historically provided residents a “critical mass” of services and activities within a short walking distance. Structures characterized by shallow front setbacks, higher allowable structure heights (when compared to rural areas), a consistent rhythm of façades, and a strict pedestrian orientation and human-scale in all aspects of urban design and architecture are all key to achieving a dense urban environment. The design of structures within Downtown Gilroy currently adheres to these principles of design and should be maintained or intensified as redevelopment occurs.

To best realize a safe, diverse, and “full-service” Downtown, Gilroy should foster mixed-use development to the greatest extent possible. Structures which incorporate residential and/or office uses above retail shops will create a 24-hour atmosphere and will inject new life into Downtown in the form of increased pedestrian traffic, safety, and consumer dollars. New retail markets will also be potentially opened for local merchants.

In Gilroy, as in other cities, the Downtown has traditionally served as the primary site of community events and gatherings. Parades, festivals, and other events all take advantage of the compact urban design inherent to downtowns and collectively give the region its historic primacy compared with other, less distinctive, areas of the community. To further this historic role, Gilroy should strive to create additional downtown open spaces in the form of “pocket parks” or plazas. These splashes of urban greenery will serve multi-faceted roles as not only necessary and functional gathering areas for festivals or other community events but also as spaces of visual relief and respite for all to enjoy.

In conjunction with parks, public commons, and other open spaces, there must be a dedication to a Downtown streetscape that favors individual interaction and an accommodation of diverse activities, demographics and events. With intensified development, historic architecture, and clear pedestrian orientation, the Downtown certainly stands to evolve as a unique area, different from other regions of Gilroy. Intrinsic aspects of urban design should be protected and furthered in all future redevelopment work. These aspects will solidify the Downtown as a walkable region, diverse in both uses and available services.
Recommendations

- Pursue and implement a Downtown façade improvement program in Downtown Gilroy.
- Showcase a clear pedestrian orientation in storefront façades.
- Establish a community park or commons in Downtown Gilroy.
- Construct entry-way arches or gateways, possibly with a “garlic theme,” at key points in Downtown Gilroy.
- Redesign the streetscape between Third Street and Sixth Street without a raised center median.
- Provide additional Downtown lighting on side streets and in rear parking areas, as well as architectural lighting on building façades.
- Create signs directing travelers from Route 101 to the historic downtown, with the assistance and support of Caltrans if necessary.
- Provide public restrooms in Downtown.
- Explore the creation of new or additional bike routes through and around Downtown Gilroy.
- Prohibit A-frame signs until a set of regulations can be established for appropriate use.
- Protect the character, scale and design of adjacent single-family residential development beyond Eigleberry Street and Railroad Street.
- Landscape, or relocate to the rear, unscreened street fronting parking lots.
- Develop specific visions for key Downtown sites.
- Maintain and enhance Gilroy’s alleys system.
- Make Monterey Street available to accommodate parades and other street fairs.
- Require build-to lines to assure sidewalk adjacent storefronts.
- Consider an increase in maximum allowable building heights in Downtown Gilroy.
• Maintain Gilroy's consistent rhythm of storefront façades.
• Improve Gourmet Alley as a pedestrian pathway, which includes undergrounding utilities.
• Locate the highest density projects at focal points within Downtown Gilroy or on adjacent parcels where connectivity, scale, and texture make these projects appropriate.
• Encourage higher density projects outside of the Downtown area, on the condition that pedestrian elements and connectivity between the proposed land uses and the Downtown are appropriately enhanced.
• Encourage the creation of pedestrian connections within, as well as to and from, the Downtown area.
• Design pedestrian connections as safe transitions between land uses with appropriate lighting, visibility, and signs.
• Encourage enhanced landscaping, including mature street trees, shrubs, and groundcover that provide interest, color, style and flowering characteristics in Downtown Gilroy.
• Encourage decorative and enhanced elements of urban design, such as public artwork in Downtown Gilroy as a means of providing visual interest.
• Integrate exterior building elements, such as signs, awnings, façade design, etc., into the overall design theme or function of neighboring downtown structures.
• Create plazas, courtyards, or “outdoor rooms” to providing public gathering places.
• Encourage and appropriately locate common theme street furniture to provide a sense of place, safety, shade, and gathering opportunities.
• Capitalize on the proximity of the CalTrain commuter population and promote linkages to the Downtown through use of signs, etc.
• Provide a stronger and more cohesive sense of identity to the Downtown by adhering to a common design for public infrastructure such as signs, lighting and other elements.
Parking

Achieving balance in Downtown parking can be a challenging endeavor. Downtown Gilroy has developed with a clear preference for the pedestrian; therefore, addressing the modern realities of travel while maintaining the unique aspects of design that define the Downtown region can be both complicated and frustrating. Certainly multiple forms of transit must be accommodated if the area is to remain efficient and merchant-friendly while maintaining a desired pedestrian orientation and scale.

Alleyways provide a distinct opportunity to oblige this challenge of pedestrian/automobile accommodation. Rear-loading alleyways allow for individuals to find adequate areas to park close to desired shops, while preserving the pedestrian-friendly streetscape design on frontage roads.

Recommendations

- Provide additional Downtown parking as desired by local merchants.
- Adopt more effective way-finding signs to existing parking.
- Prohibit parking between the sidewalk and buildings.
- Maximize on-street parking opportunities between Third Street and Seventh Street.
- Utilize side streets for parking where possible.
- Create parking behind commercial structures and include alley access on the east side of Monterey Street.
- Analyze parking management opportunities, including shared parking, employee parking, a Downtown shuttle/trolley, and metering or timed parking enforcement.
ECONOMICS

Local government and business entities have laid the economic and functional foundations for promoting growth and redevelopment in the Downtown. Earlier efforts such as waiving of development fees for specific areas of the Downtown and adjusting the number of required parking spaces have gone far in sparking growth. This Specific Plan document will build upon these first efforts.

Recommendations

- Focus revitalization plans on implementation.
- Explore waiving development fees for a larger area of Downtown Gilroy as a means of stimulating growth.

SACRED COWS

Gilroy is a community steeped in history and tradition. The presence of several historic structures and a general human scale of development throughout the City give the region its famous charm and infuse the area with a clear potential for revitalization and growth. These “sacred cows” of history and urban design that are manifested in the built environment must not be lost as growth and change occur.

While Old City Hall, the CalTrain Transit Station, and the Strand Theatre are obvious examples of historic urban buildings, it is suggested that the community take an inventory of existing developed Downtown capital, decide which examples best represent the City of Gilroy, and take steps to protect these rich resources.

Equal acknowledgment must be given to the (single-family) neighborhoods that border Downtown. The long established character and historic layout of these areas should be considered as redevelopment occurs.

Recommendations

- Protect and support the character, both historic and contemporary, of single-family neighborhoods located adjacent to the Downtown.
- Protect significant Downtown properties.
Land Use Strategies and Districts Exhibit

The Land Use Strategies and Districts Exhibit offers a bird's eye view of the Specific Plan area. Within this exhibit, District boundaries are established, primary and undesired uses are identified, and the overall desired character of each District is described with photos and narrative. Chapter V (Districts, Land Use, and Development Standards) contains more detailed visions and land use directions for each District.
Urban Design Concepts Exhibit

The Urban Design Concepts Exhibit provides a prospective plan view of much of the Specific Plan area. It identifies many of the concepts described as the vision for the area, including locations for Downtown gateways and entry monuments, urban green spaces and plazas, public parking areas and structures, mid-block crossing locations, and alley access. It also illustrates typical street sections for Monterey Street and Railroad Street and shows where additional streetscape improvements are to take place within the area.
Vision Plan Exhibit

The Vision Plan illustrates the potential buildout of the Historic Downtown in a perspective sketch. An urban plaza is illustrated at the corner of Fifth Street and Monterey Street, and Gourmet Alley is shown with enhanced paving, outdoor dining, and improved façades. Potential streetscape improvements including bulbouts, enhanced crossings, diagonal parking, enlarged sidewalks with street trees, parking structures, and improved vacant lots are all depicted in the sketch. Smaller sketches also illustrate the urban plaza, Monterey Street improvements, a proposed streetscape palette, and a view of a developed Cannery District.