



City of Santa Barbara

PLANNING COMMISSION

MINUTES

APRIL 1, 2021

1:00 P.M.

This Meeting was Conducted Electronically
SantaBarbaraCA.gov

COMMISSION MEMBERS:

Deborah L. Schwartz, Chair
Gabriel Escobedo, Vice Chair
Roxana Bonderson
Jay D. Higgins
Sheila Lodge
Barrett Reed
Lesley Wiscomb

STAFF:

Tava Ostrenger, Assistant City Attorney
Allison DeBusk, Senior Planner
Gillian Fennessy, Commission Secretary

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Schwartz called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m.

I. ROLL CALL

Chair Deborah L. Schwartz, Vice Chair Gabriel Escobedo, Commissioners Roxana Bonderson (until 4:00 p.m.), Jay D. Higgins, Sheila Lodge, Barrett Reed, and Lesley Wiscomb

STAFF PRESENT

Tava Ostrenger, Assistant City Attorney
Allison DeBusk, Senior Planner
Renee Brooke, City Planner
William Russel, Planning Technician II
Jason Harris, Economic Development Manager
Tony Ruggieri, City TV Production Supervisor
Janet Ahern, City TV Production Specialist
Gillian Fennessy, Commission Secretary

II. PRELIMINARY MATTERS

A. Requests for continuances, withdrawals, postponements, or addition of ex-agenda items:

No requests.

B. Announcements and appeals:

Ms. DeBusk announced that Planning Commission will hear the 2 S. Quarantina St. project appeal on May 13, 2021.

C. Review, consideration, and action on the following draft Planning Commission minutes and resolutions:

1. Planning Commission March 4, 2021 Minutes

MOTION: Wiscomb / Escobedo

Continue draft minutes to a later date with verification on items 1 and 6 within the amended motion.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Ayes: 7 Noes: 0 Abstain: 0 Absent: 0

D. Comments from members of the public pertaining to items not on this agenda:

Public comment opened at 1:11 p.m., and as no one wished to speak, it closed.

III. DISCUSSION ITEM

ACTUAL TIME: 1:12 P.M.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The Planning Commission will receive a presentation, and provide comments, on the draft City of Santa Barbara Economic Development Plan (Plan). The Plan lays the foundation for an Economic Development Program with a mission to strengthen the City's economy and enhance downtown vibrancy, while supporting social equity and environmental protection, and celebrating the City's historic character, cultural resources and the arts. The three foundational strategies of the City's Plan to advance the Economic Development Program are as follows:

1. Strengthen downtown as the regional hub of retail, entertainment, art and culture, higher education, and business.
2. Support local businesses and the creation of high wage jobs.
3. Cultivate a business-friendly City government.

Jason Harris, Economic Development Manager, gave the Staff presentation.

Public comment opened at 1:35 p.m., and the following individuals spoke:

1. John Campanella
2. Richard Closson

Written correspondence from Commercial Fishermen of Santa Barbara (CFSB members Chris Voss/Kim Selkoe with CFSB Executive Planning Team representatives Dave Davis/Lesley Wiscomb), Patricia Saley, Dennis Doordan, and Richard Closson were acknowledged.

Public comment closed at 1:40 p.m.

Commissioner comments:

Commissioner Wiscomb:

- Finds that the Economic Development Plan doesn't provide a roadmap to restoring economic vitality to the City.
- The Plan states "it is the responsibility of the City to establish economic foundations" and "the ED Plan equally prioritizes support of all businesses throughout the community," but fails to address and in most cases fails to even mention commercial districts other than downtown. Therefore, it's a plan with exclusivity not inclusivity.
- Finds that action/performance targets provided in the Plan do not produce meaningful, tangible, or measurable results.
- Finds that the verbiage used within the Plan's action/performance targets (e.g. "identify," "support," "meet with," "establish contact with") does not produce tangible and measurable results.
- Finds that the quarterly/annual meetings included in the Plan as performance targets don't provide a stated purpose, goal, or content of what will be discussed or presented.
- Questions the need for the 4 action/ performance targets devoted to providing information through web-based or written materials and questions whether the information will help economic development. Doesn't think there is a need for more handouts, instead would like to see meaningful results.
- The Plan states, "the ED Manager will collect feedback on the City's regulatory and land development processes," but it has already been collected through the Novak Report, Grand Jury Report, and Land Development Team activities. None of these are mentioned in the ED Plan. Finds the Plan only addresses development in our Downtown, the most expensive area of the City and shows no regard or information on the other areas where there are businesses with potentially less expensive economic development opportunities.
- Finds Concludes that the Plan does not equally prioritize support all of the businesses throughout the community as it states.
- Concludes that since there are no specific programs or performance targets focused on commercial districts (e.g. Milpas Corridor, Upper State, Funk Zone, the Mesa, La Cumbre, Coast Village Road) other than the downtown commercial district, it is not an Economic Development Plan for the whole City.
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- Concludes that the Plan should include actions and performance targets that actually represent specific and tangible progress and have inclusivity with recognition and support for the City's diverse business communities.

Commissioner Reed:

- Would like to see the Plan direct the efforts of the City's departments, leaders, stakeholders, boards, and commissions by outlining their respective responsibilities in moving toward a successful economic outcome.
- Would like to see more accountability within the Plan.
- Agrees with Commissioner Wiscomb's comments.
- Would like the Plan to provide direction and accountability to all stakeholders and departments that are going to be involved in the Downtown Master Plan.
- Wishes the Plan could better describe the endgame.
- Would like to see a successful Downtown Master Plan that addresses barriers and opportunities that exist along the way.
- The Plan needs to be inclusive and has to move expeditiously.
- Would like to see this Plan favor all of the City's economic centers.
- Believes the commercial districts have a strong desire to invest in themselves.

- Wishes this Plan better identified the other commercial districts: what are the characteristics of each and what would help them be successful.
- Would like to see the Plan explore partnerships that would breed economic benefits for both.
- Suggests creating commercial district specific plans.
- Thanks Mr. Harris for the effort he is making.

Commissioner Lodge:

- Believes tourism is a major factor in the City of Santa Barbara's economy and it is tied with the historic character the City, its natural environment, and cultural activities.
- Believes that in supporting the qualities that make the City desirable to tourists, more people will want to come to the City to live, work, and visit, which will improve the economy.
- Would like the Plan to consider exploring heritage tourism since heritage cities have become successful by supporting historic aspects of their communities in stimulating tourism and economic vitality.
- Believes retail has been on a decline prior to the pandemic.
- Believes that if we could get people to the City, they will patronize the businesses which will stimulate more businesses opening and vitality.
- Concurs with some of Commissioner Wiscomb's comments on substance.
- Would like to see more concrete and specific activities performed by the City within the Plan.

Commissioner Bonderson:

- Would like to see a clear and concise timeline and an endgame within the Plan.
- Would like to see unemployment calculations be included in the Plan.
- The Plan itself has important highlights and is visionary.
- Recommends building a team of "experts" that have already shown interest in assisting with downtown revitalization.
- The homeless issue is not referenced in the Plan; thinks including it would make it a stronger document.
- Surprised that Paseo Nuevo isn't specifically mentioned in the Plan.
- Believes the Plan is a good start, but it is incomplete.
- Finds that the Plan is lacking policy direction and strategy.
- Would like to see specific target dates, defined goals, and expected outcomes.
- Would like accountability to be addressed.
- Would like this Plan to be able to provide City Council with clear goals that they can utilize when making decisions.
- Believes this plan should support and lead into a future master plan.
- Finds the Plan does not demonstrate directional thinking for a future master plan.
- Would like to see tangible goals with specific plans, timelines with staff assignments, and a focus on expertise, principles of accountability, and best practices to lead the City to success.

*** THE COMMISSION RECESSED FROM 3:00 P.M. TO 3:10 P.M. ***

Commissioner Higgins:

- Likes the parking lot program identified in the Plan.

- Believes the heritage component is missing from the Plan and would like to see it included.
- Agrees with Commissioner Reed's comments about accountability.
- Balancing competing interests is an important aspect and is needed.
- Would like this Plan to come back to the Commission before it goes to the City Council because of how relevant the subjects within the Plan are to the PC (e.g. historic resources, homelessness, housing, food trucks).
- Believes the City places its priorities in historic preservation and environmental protection instead of being business friendly.
- Not surprised that the Chamber of Commerce is not a primary partner to this Plan because the City of Santa Barbara is not a business friendly city compared to what real business friendly cities look like. Chamber of Commerce should be a primary partner in the Plan.
- Would like the Plan to focus on regulatory inefficiencies within the City.
- Believes the Plan is a great start, but would like it to be better.
- Likes that the Plan addresses advocating for downtown housing projects.
- Supports taking a pause on the Plan and would like to see it to come back to the Commission.

Vice Chair Escobedo:

- Agrees with Commissioner Wiscomb's comments.
- Would like the challenges that State Street faces to be more specific.
- Believes there are challenges that other districts are facing that might be specific to their area or neighborhood.
- Would like to know if there are incentives that we could provide to property owners in the re-developing commercial space to provide a space for local businesses that are currently operating there.
- Loves the vision in the Plan but would like goals to be more specific and measureable.
- Would like to have concrete data and references after the vision statement and have the current issues and challenges specifically outlined.
- Would like to include a time table and action steps to address challenges.
- Would like to include more support to the Economic Development Department in the straw poll.
- Suggests that the supporting materials for the businesses be bilingual; do active outreach to Spanish speaking business owners.
- Would like to explore trades programs.
- Supports analyzing the vacant lots for housing.
- Would like to see if there is there a vacant lot that could serve as the commercial fishery facility.
- Would like to explore opportunities to partner with tech companies like Amazon to address housing issues.
- Believes the vision is there and with the comments that the Commission has made, the Plan is on the right track.

Chair Schwartz:

- Believes there is a disproportionate focus on the downtown district.
- Believes that the Plan needs to be more comprehensive and substantive with actionable timelines and items.

- Believes annual reporting isn't frequent enough.
- Doesn't believe this Plan is moving fast enough on process and procedure improvements.
- Would like to revisit what we are going to do to become a local business friendly city government.

MOTION: Wiscomb / Higgins

Consider the majority comments made by the Planning Commission for incorporation in the Economic Development Plan, including:

1. improvement in the progress for regulatory inefficiencies as previously noted in several reports,
2. consideration of heritage tourism,
3. consideration of other business areas in the City to add inclusivity and equity,
4. improve accountability through tangible and measurable performance targets,
5. provide semi-annual reports to City Council on progress,
6. and if resources become available, consider adding personnel to support to the Economic Development Manager.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Ayes: 6 Noes: 0 Abstain: 0 Absent: 1 (Bonderson)

IV. ADMINISTRATIVE AGENDA

ACTUAL TIME: 4:24 P.M.

A. Committee and Liaison Reports:

1. Staff Hearing Officer Liaison Report

No report.

2. Other Committee and Liaison Reports

No reports.

V. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Schwartz adjourned the meeting at 4:24 p.m.

Submitted by,

Gillian Fennessy

Gillian Fennessy, Commission Secretary