Cover art by Dyett & Bhatia.
LAND USE

Downtown Santa Rosa is envisioned to become a lively, modern regional hub and a prime destination for urban living, business, civic, and social life. As an inclusive and diverse community, Downtown Santa Rosa will feature a range of different housing types and an array of public spaces that offer residents, employees, and visitors opportunities to socialize and connect with one another. New development will be focused near transit and integrated into Downtown Santa Rosa’s fabric in a way that respects historic character and celebrates local heritage, culture, and natural resources as key aspects of a unique sense of place while encouraging the Downtown Station Area to evolve consistent with the Vision and Guiding Principles of this plan. The core area, centered around Courthouse Square, will provide a diverse mix of places to shop and socialize, nightlife and entertainment, and amenities that support daily needs, such as grocery stores, childcare, and pharmacies. Surrounding the core will be a mosaic of pedestrian-friendly, mixed-use village centers, each with their own character, where any need can be met within easy walking distance.

This chapter provides a land use and development framework to guide the evolution of the Downtown Station Area. It includes land use designations and standards for development intensity, as well as policies to support economic vitality and the creation of new housing for all income levels, lifestyles, family types, and ages.
EXISTING LAND USES

EXISTING LAND USE PATTERN

The 720-acre Downtown Station Area is comprised of residential neighborhoods, commercial districts, and industrial areas. Chart LU-1 summarizes the relative acreage of existing land use and Map LU-1 shows the distribution of existing land use throughout the Downtown Station Area. Reflective of the historical development pattern of the community, the two principal Downtown commercial districts are located at the heart of the area, surrounded by residential neighborhoods. US 101 bisects the area in a north-south direction, with the central business district around Courthouse Square to the east and the historic commercial core around Railroad Square to the west. Industrial development generally flanks the railroad tracks, which further divide the Downtown Station Area in a north-south direction, separating residential areas on either side from one another.

Within the Downtown Station Area, residential uses account for 184 acres or 26 percent of the land, concentrated primarily in established neighborhoods. In general, multi-family residential land uses are interspersed throughout the residential neighborhoods.

Commercial land uses, including retail and office uses, account for 138 acres, or 19 percent of the land in the Downtown Station Area. These are primarily concentrated in the core of the Downtown Station Area around Courthouse Square, Railroad Square, the Santa Rosa Plaza Mall, and east of E Street as well as corridors like Santa Rosa Avenue and College Avenue. These areas include a mix of bars, restaurants, retail stores, and hotels depending on the location.

Industrial land uses, representing seven percent or 50 acres of the Downtown Station Area, are generally located adjacent to the railroad tracks west of US 101. Whereas Maxwell Court has active manufacturing businesses, the industrial uses in Roberts Avenue consists of auto body shops, vacant land, and commercial at the corner of Sebastopol Road and Dutton Avenue.

Institutional land uses make up 52 acres, or seven percent of the Downtown Station Area. This includes a variety of public or semi-public land uses, such as Santa Rosa City Hall, the Postal Service, the Federal government buildings, Santa Rosa Middle School, Saint Rose Catholic Church, the Museum of Sonoma County, the Sonoma County Library, and the Santa Rosa Police Department.

There are also nearly 25 acres of parking lots, or three percent of the Downtown Station Area, which are generally accessible to the public. Vacant land makes up 20 acres or approximately three percent of the Downtown Station Area. Several large sites account for a large portion of this vacant land, including the SMART site west of the Downtown Station between West Third and West Sixth Streets and several properties in the east of the Downtown Station Area around Imwalle Gardens.

Parks and green space account for another 44 acres or seven percent of the Downtown Station Area and are generally spread throughout Downtown Santa Rosa. These parcels include a variety of parks and green spaces, including major community focal points, like Courthouse Square plaza, Juilliard Park, and the Santa Rosa Creek Trail, along with neighborhood parks like Luther Burbank Home and Gardens, Fremont Park, and Olive Park. The remaining 207 acres or 29 percent of the plan area is occupied by public streets and roads including US 101 and SR 12.

Chart LU-1: Existing Land Uses

Source: Sonoma County Assessor, 2018; Dyett & Bhatia, 2020
Map LU-1: Existing Land Use

- Single Family Residential
- Multi Family Residential
- Commercial
- Light Industrial
- Industrial
- Public / Institutional
- Parks and Open Space
- Right-of-Way
- Vacant

Source: MTC, 2019; City of Santa Rosa, 2018; Dyett & Bhatia, 2020
DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL

OPPORTUNITY AREAS AND CATALYST SITES

While vacant land represents about three percent of the total Downtown Station Area, there is a significant number of properties which are underutilized. Underutilized properties are those where the value of the land is worth more than the buildings and structures on it, giving the owner an incentive to redevelop with new uses that command higher rents or sale prices. City-owned parcels also present opportunities, particularly when located adjacent to vacant and underutilized land. Areas where vacant, underutilized, and City-owned properties are clustered present the best opportunities for redevelopment as they are locations that can accommodate significant physical change. As shown in Map LU-2, there are eight “Opportunity Areas” within the Downtown Station Area:

- Courthouse Square,
- Juilliard/Santa Rosa Avenue,
- Roberts Avenue,
- SMART Station area,
- North Railroad Square,
- Maxwell Court, and
- College Avenue.

Within these “Opportunity Areas” there are catalyst sites that are important for advancing the DSASP vision. Shown on Map LU-2, these include privately owned properties that are large enough to accommodate significant higher-density development or where interest in parcel assembly and redevelopment has been expressed. There are also several City-owned catalyst sites in key locations within the Downtown Station Area that could serve as demonstration projects to “prove” the market for higher density multi-family development, with a view to catalyzing similar projects and attracting institutional capital. Pursuing a public-private partnership can be a vehicle for realizing “pioneer” multifamily residential projects that otherwise would not be financially feasible without public subsidy and support. The DSASP land use framework seeks to facilitate development in Opportunity Areas and on catalyst sites in order to move the vision toward reality.

RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

Santa Rosa has significant unmet housing needs. A Citywide needs assessment conducted to inform the 2016 Housing Action Plan determined that the City would need to add approximately 1,000 housing units per year through 2023 to satisfy unmet demand. Downtown Santa Rosa Opportunity Areas have the capacity to accommodate more than enough housing to meet unmet demand, and to allow for the addition new higher density multi-family housing that caters to people of all income levels, lifestyles, family types, and ages. Concentrating new housing in the Downtown Station Area, with its central location, proximity to transit, and concentration of jobs and services would promote vitality in the area and align with City goals for sustainable development. Since the 2007 DSASP was adopted, however, relatively little residential development has occurred, in spite of an extended period of robust economic growth following the Great Recession.

One of the key challenges for multi-family residential development has to do with the rents and sales prices that the market will bear. Achievable rent or sales price is one of the key factors used by developers and lenders in evaluating the feasibility of new residential development. Available data indicates that average rent per square foot in Santa Rosa is significantly below rents in other benchmark Bay Area communities, and slightly below that in the neighboring Sonoma County communities. In the larger context of rising construction costs in the Bay Area, this means that developers are more attracted to other communities where the margins are better and profits are higher. Even within Santa Rosa, average citywide rents are similar to those downtown and there is no fiscally compelling reason for a developer to incur the higher costs associated with infill development downtown. Further, existing multi-family development downtown largely occurs in small developments of four units or less, with relatively few larger multi-family buildings that might offer an indication of comparable rents for that type of construction. This tends to discourage institutional investors such as insurance companies and pension funds that have significant capital to invest in large-scale real estate developments.

In order to address these challenges and to fast-track housing development following the Tubbs and Nuns fires of October 2017, the City has already put in place a number of important measures to streamline the development
process and reduce development fees. These measures have reduced project approval timelines by up to 70 percent and cut time for planning, engineering and building review from 18 to 6 months. By providing clear standards for new development downtown, flexibility to encourage creativity and innovation in project design, and incentives for downtown development, DSASP goals and policies seek to close the competitive gap between downtown Santa Rosa and other Bay Area communities.

**NON-RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT**

The Downtown Station Area encompasses approximately 9.5 percent of the office space in Sonoma County, and the Old Courthouse Square is a regional center for financial and government offices. Market demand projections anticipate that the Downtown Station Area will capture a commensurate share of new office development as long as there is a sufficient amount of housing that is attractive and affordable to a growing workforce. With the planned departure of some industrial businesses in the area, the total amount of industrial square footage will decrease; however, there are opportunities for small-scale maker-oriented businesses dedicated to creating and selling a wide range of self-made products to establish in the area. The biggest challenges for non-residential development downtown relates to retail, particularly given the rapid evolution of that sector with the rise of e-commerce. Across the nation, the demand for physical retail space is declining as consumers choose to buy more online. At the same time consumers are demonstrating a preference for “experiential retail” that offers more than just goods for sale.

Santa Rosa Plaza has a regional retail draw with national and international chains in a traditional mall format, while the Railroad Square commercial district offers a unique blend of local retailers in an historic setting. These areas offer differentiated retail experiences, and as such they represent the best potential for successful retail in the future, although they would continue to compete with other amenity rich retail destinations in the county that offer free parking and easy access. A focus on creating a differentiated retail experience that provides local residents and visitors with a unique sense of place will be critical to economic vitality.
LAND USE VISION AND FRAMEWORK

Based on the development potential for the Downtown Station Area, the DSASP articulates a vision for future land use involving the following key elements:

The area surrounding Courthouse Square is the heart of the City where tall buildings accommodate residents and employees to strengthen Santa Rosa’s role as the cultural and business hub of the wider region. In turn, new rooftops and new jobs support both the vitality of existing businesses and the establishment of new amenities. Residents and visitors will enjoy shopping at unique and eclectic stores, dine at restaurants or meet coworkers for after-work drinks, attend a show at new entertainment venues or civic spaces, enjoy family fun the sunshine at Courthouse Square, and take advantage of other recreational amenities.

A key gateway into the Courthouse Square area, Santa Rosa Avenue is envisioned to transform into a multi-modal, tree-lined gateway with higher density housing and commercial spaces. Uses and design techniques have been incorporated to activate the ground floors of buildings at the corners of Mills and Maple streets.

Railroad Square and vacant sites west of the railroad tracks make up a distinct district with a transit and visitor orientation. The larger western parcels will support higher-density housing, oriented to provide easy pedestrian access to SMART’s Downtown Station and Railroad Square via the at-grade rail crossing to the east. Residents of new housing on the SMART site join with visitors in shopping, dining, and enjoying leisure time in Railroad Square. The vitality of this charming commercial district is further enhanced with the redesign of Depot Park, which creates a public plaza that puts the “square in Railroad Square,” and design standards call for active ground floors to foster walkability around the plaza and on Fourth Street.

A similar visitor orientation is envisioned in the Roberts Avenue area south of SR 12 between Sebastopol Road and Dutton Avenue. An anchor use such as a sports facility, civic center, performing arts center, or a major shopping, dining, or recreation destination will give this area a distinct identity and will attract both area residents and visitors.
Industrial areas in Maxwell Court and Roberts Avenue areas will be home to a mix of maker-oriented businesses, live/work shops, and housing that co-exist with and complements existing businesses in a village-like atmosphere. In Maxwell Court, new mixed use development will be centered on a new public plaza, creating a distinctive neighborhood feel in concert with light industrial uses. In portions of the Roberts Avenue area allowed uses include live/work spaces, and creative, maker-oriented uses such as artisan shops and studios, media and print production outlets, tech startups, limited light industrial businesses and other supportive uses add character and vitality to the village center.

Pockets of neighborhood-scaled multi-family development together with shops and services catering to the daily needs of local residents would be fostered in the Imwalle, North Railroad Square, SOFA, East Side, and College areas. Elsewhere in the Downtown Station Area, the unique character of existing neighborhoods will be retained and enhanced.

**LAND USE DESIGNATIONS**

The DSASP introduces a distinctive set of land use designations to advance the vision for the Downtown Station Area by guiding new development on vacant and underutilized clusters of land within Opportunity Areas. No change is envisioned in established neighborhoods outside these areas. Shown on Map LU-3 and described below, the DSASP land use designations are intended to recognize, enhance, and foster the character of various distinct Downtown Station Area districts.

**MIXED USE DESIGNATIONS**

**Core Mixed Use** - The Core Mixed Use (CMU) designation is intended to foster a vital mix of residential, retail, office, governmental, entertainment, cultural, educational, and hotel uses to activate the greater Courthouse Square area and key transit corridors. The principal objectives of the CMU designation are to strengthen the role of this area as a business, governmental, retail, and entertainment hub for the region, and accommodate significant new residential development that will extend the hours of activity and create a built-in market for retail, service, and entertainment uses. High-rise development in all-residential or mixed-use buildings is envisioned in a walkable, bikeable environment with public gathering places such as plazas, courtyards, or parks and easy access to public transit.
Medium-Low Density Residential - Housing at densities from 8.0 to 13.0 units per gross acre. This classification is intended for attached single family residential development, but single family detached housing and multifamily development may be permitted. Development at the mid-point of the density range is desirable but not required.

Medium Density Residential - Housing densities from 8.0 to 18.0 units per gross acre. This designation permits a range of housing types, including single family attached and multifamily developments, and is intended for specific areas where higher density is appropriate. New single-family detached housing is not permitted except in historic preservation districts and historic neighborhoods where single family detached units are allowed.

Public/Quasi-Public Designations

Civic Spaces - The Civic Spaces (CS) designation provides for publicly accessible spaces programmed or improved with recreational amenities. The intent of the CS designation is to foster opportunities for interaction between residents, workers, artists, and visitors and to celebrate local culture and history. Lands designated CS may be publicly or privately owned and maintained. Amenities may include green spaces, play structures, seating, picnic tables, fountains, public art, special landscape features, walkways, and trails that are part of larger circulation networks. The CS designation is a floating designation and the precise boundaries are not defined; however, the general location and distribution of Civic Spaces is shown with a symbol on Map LU-3. Until such time that these properties are purchased by the City or privately developed as a publicly accessible urban park or plaza space, development consistent with the underlying land use designation shown on Map LU-3 is allowed. Additional policies and standards related to Civic Spaces are included in Chapter 4, Urban Design and Civic Spaces.

Public/Institutional - An area or cluster of governmental or semi-public facilities, such as hospitals, utility facilities and government office centers, etc. New facilities may be appropriate in any land use category based on need and subject to environmental review.
Active Ground Floor Overlay - This overlay requires that new development activate the ground floor of buildings with uses and/or design techniques that engage the street and enhance the pedestrian environment. Active ground floor uses include retail and service establishments, restaurants, cafes, bars and brew pubs, co-working spaces, art and craft studios, and other substantially similar uses. Building design that optimizes pedestrian access; facade length and articulation; and window coverage will be required. The overlay applies at locations within mixed use areas where retail currently exists and where enhanced walkability and vitality is desired. (See Map LU-4, Policy LU 1-4, and Standard DS-1 in Chapter 4, Urban Design and Civic Spaces).
Map LU-3: Downtown Land Use

Source: City of Santa Rosa, 2018; Dyett & Bhatia, 2020
GOALS AND POLICIES

GOAL LU-1: Downtown Santa Rosa will be an energetic regional commercial and cultural center with a range of housing, employment, retail, entertainment, and restaurant options in a safe, vibrant, walkable environment.

POLICIES

LU-1.1 Provide a Downtown Station Area land use and development framework that establishes a vibrant big city urban core centered around Courthouse Square, and a network of mixed-use village centers that offer an array of housing options for people at all income levels and stages of life, mixed with retail and services catering to residents’ daily needs.

LU-1.2 Foster a rich mix of uses in the Core, Station, Maker and Neighborhood Mixed Use areas, while allowing differences in emphasis on uses to distinguish between them.

LU-1.3 Actively facilitate and promote redevelopment in the Core Mixed Use area to create a compact hub of high-intensity structures providing a vibrant mix of housing, employment, and visitor-oriented uses. The objective is new non-residential development with a strong government, financial, commercial, and visitor-serving orientation and significant new residential development to provide workforce housing and vitality during non-work hours.

LU-1.4 Require that development in areas shown on Map LU-4 provide uses or building design features that activate the ground floor. To comply with this requirement, one or more of the following active ground floor uses may be provided: retail and service establishments; restaurants; cafes; bars and brew pubs; co-working spaces; art and craft studios; other substantially similar uses. Alternatively, building design features that optimize the pedestrian experience and access may be provided as detailed in Standard DS-1 in Chapter 4, Urban Design and Civic Spaces.

LU-1.5 Focus new residential and employment-generating land uses along key transit corridors, including Mendocino Avenue, Santa Rosa Avenue and Third Street in order to support higher-frequency transit service.

LU-1.6 Prohibit drive-through establishments and other new development whose design prioritizes automobile access in the Core and Station Mixed Use areas in order to establish a strong pedestrian and transit orientation.

LU-1.6 Locate buildings that specifically serve individuals with disabilities or seniors near accessible pathways to transit and public services.
DEVELOPMENT FORM AND INTENSITY

As a way of providing more flexibility to help developers to design and build financially feasible projects, the DSASP establishes a system that regulates Floor Area Ratio (FAR) in Opportunity Areas, replacing height and density regulations. Traditional height and density regulations regulate areas outside the Opportunity Areas.

FAR is a planning tool widely used throughout California and the US. It is the ratio of total building space in relation to lot size. It can be calculated quickly based on information that is readily available to planners, architects, and developers - simply by taking the total building square footage and dividing it by the area of the lot. Figure LU-1 shows different building forms on the same lot at 1.0 and 3.0 FAR. FAR does not directly limit the height or number of stories of a building; it simply controls the amount of building space allowed on a given lot.

FAR will be calculated as the total area of all floors in a building as measured to the outside surfaces of exterior walls or to the center line of common walls. FAR calculations exclude crawl spaces, structured parking, carports, breezeways, attics without floors, porches, balconies, terraces, below grade structures, and outdoor recreational space (common, public, or private). Additionally, for ceilings over 20 feet above floor height, the gross floor area of these areas would be doubled for the purpose of calculating floor area ratio, but not for the purpose of determining actual floor area. This is to ensure that double-height lobbies, ballrooms, and similar spaces are adequately accounted for in the FAR calculation.

FAR is particularly useful in central business districts and in other areas of high-intensity land use with a mix of office buildings, restaurants, shops, hotels, and tall apartment buildings. Some of the advantages it offers are that:

- it provides flexibility for developers to meet community and market needs;
- it permits a variety of unit types and sizes which allows “affordability by design” (i.e. smaller units with lower rents or sale prices);
- it makes the utilization of new construction methods more feasible than under traditional controls
- it removes the inducement to squeeze extra stories into the permitted volume of a building.

Map LU-5 shows the maximum base FAR allowed in Opportunity Areas prior to application of any FAR bonuses.

DSASP standards exclude parking areas, outdoor recreational spaces, and the area of any historic structure to be preserved on-site from the FAR calculations so as to maximize the building square footage that can be devoted to housing, employment, cultural, and entertainment uses. The flexibility and incentives provided through this approach are complement other incentives available to downtown housing development. Residential and mixed use developments that offer housing affordable to low and very low households are also eligible for additional “bonus” FAR under State density bonus law and the City’s Density Bonus ordinance. Additionally, the Santa Rosa Resilient Cities Development Measures allow most residential uses by-right, and the City has also set up an Expedited Permitting Program to further fast-track housing development.

Figure LU-1: Examples of FAR

**FAR = 1.0**

1 story

2 stories

**FAR = 3.0**

3 stories

6 stories

Floor Area Ratio does not directly limit the height or number of stories of a building.
VISUALIZING FAR

The FAR-based system regulates the amount of development that can occur on a site, but leaves open a greater range of design options than would be possible under existing regulations.

The examples at right illustrate some possibilities for each of the FAR tiers that apply downtown. The renderings at right are massing studies intended to illustrate height and form, but do not represent completed architectural designs. They were modeled in SketchUp by an architect and geolocated into the site using Google Earth. The surrounding buildings in the aerials views are actual building found in Santa Rosa. The colors of the model represent different land uses: red is commercial, yellow is residential, and parking is gray.

Note that development standards and design guidelines included in Chapter 3 Urban Design and Civic Spaces also apply in order to ensure that the look and feel of new development is consistent with community standards.

Figure LU-2: Visualizing FAR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATA</th>
<th>AERIAL</th>
<th>STREETVIEW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>FAR: 2.0</strong></td>
<td>410 B St, Santa Rosa</td>
<td>View looking east towards Courthouse Square.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buildings wrap around a shared parking structure. 2.1 FAR.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Street view looking west at Mendocino Ave &amp; 5th St.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total building area: 278,393 sf</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stories: 5</td>
<td>View looking east towards Courthouse Square.</td>
<td>Street view looking west at Mendocino Ave &amp; 5th St.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Height: 55'</td>
<td>Street view looking west at Mendocino Ave &amp; 5th St.</td>
<td>Street view looking west at Mendocino Ave &amp; 5th St.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential Units: 211 units</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FAR: 4.0</strong></td>
<td>Buildings wrap around a shared parking structure. 4.2 FAR.</td>
<td>View looking east towards Courthouse Square.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total building area: 546,523 sf</td>
<td></td>
<td>Street view looking west at Mendocino Ave &amp; 5th St.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stories: 10, 8</td>
<td>View looking east towards Courthouse Square.</td>
<td>Street view looking west at Mendocino Ave &amp; 5th St.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Height: 105', 85'</td>
<td>Street view looking west at Mendocino Ave &amp; 5th St.</td>
<td>Street view looking west at Mendocino Ave &amp; 5th St.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential Units: 446 units</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FAR: 4.0-6.0</strong></td>
<td>Above-grade podium parking with towers. 5.9 FAR.</td>
<td>View looking east towards Courthouse Square.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total building area: 771,577 sf</td>
<td></td>
<td>Street view looking west at Mendocino Ave &amp; 5th St.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stories: 8, 18</td>
<td>View looking east towards Courthouse Square.</td>
<td>Street view looking west at Mendocino Ave &amp; 5th St.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Height: 85', 180'</td>
<td>Street view looking west at Mendocino Ave &amp; 5th St.</td>
<td>Street view looking west at Mendocino Ave &amp; 5th St.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential Units: 543 units</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FAR: 8.0-9.0</strong></td>
<td>Above-grade podium parking with towers. 8.1 FAR.</td>
<td>View looking east towards Courthouse Square.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total building area: 1,063,177 sf</td>
<td></td>
<td>Street view looking west at Mendocino Ave &amp; 5th St.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stories: 8, 27</td>
<td>View looking east towards Courthouse Square.</td>
<td>Street view looking west at Mendocino Ave &amp; 5th St.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Height: 85', 270'</td>
<td>Street view looking west at Mendocino Ave &amp; 5th St.</td>
<td>Street view looking west at Mendocino Ave &amp; 5th St.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Residential Units: 788 units</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Map LU-5: Maximum Base FAR

- 8.0 FAR
- 6.0 FAR
- 4.0 FAR
- 3.0 FAR
- 2.0 FAR
- Park

Legend:

- Undercrossing
- SMART Rail

* Minimum FAR of half the max required for catalyst unless it can be demonstrated that special circumstances exist on the site preventing development of that intensity.

Note: Supplemental FAR is available for undersized parcels and bonus FAR is available for projects that provide community benefits.

Source: City of Santa Rosa, 2018; Dyett & Bhatia, 2020
GOALS AND POLICIES

GOAL LU-2: Significant new development is focused in Opportunity Areas and on catalyst sites.

POLICIES

LU-2.1 Regulate building intensity and form based on floor area ratio (FAR). Maximum allowable base FAR prior to application of any bonus shall be as shown on Map LU-5. The following shall be excluded from FAR calculations:

- All areas of a building devoted to parking;
- Crawl spaces, breezeways, attics without floors, below-grade structures;
- All open space (common, public, or private), including porches, balconies, terraces;
- Active ground floor uses in areas where active ground floor requirements apply as shown on Map LU-6; and
- The area of any designated historic structure to be preserved on a specific site, so long as the historic and/or architectural character of the structure is rehabilitated and not adversely affected.

LU-2.2 Pursue public-private partnerships for the redevelopment of City-owned catalyst sites with high-density multi-family housing and other community-serving uses, such as affordable housing, workforce housing, childcare, community/cultural spaces, and publicly accessible outdoor recreational space. Require a minimum FAR equivalent to at least half of the maximum base FAR with redevelopment of these sites.

LU-2.3 For smaller parcels along Fourth and Fifth Streets in the Core Mixed Use district where it may not be possible to achieve the maximum base FAR, consider incentives to encourage lot consolidation and optimize development potential.

LU-2.4 Explore opportunities to consolidate City and County facilities in a new civic center complex Downtown and pursue redevelopment of surplus properties that result from consolidation.

LU-2.5 Monitor market conditions and assess opportunities to provide additional incentives for developments that include significant community benefits such as affordable housing, 3-bedroom units, childcare, grocery stores, publicly accessible urban open space, on-site performance space, public art, and green building features. Incentives may include bonus FAR, expedited permitting, fee reductions, and other items.

LU-2.6 Require commercial uses that exceed 10,000 square feet to have a multi-storied format, rather than be spread out horizontally, and integrate other uses. Allow single-story development only if it can be shown to be complimentary and compatible with the vision and desired character for the area where it is proposed.
ECONOMIC VITALITY

Since its earliest days, Downtown Santa Rosa has been an economic hub for Sonoma County and the North Bay, and economic vitality is integral to its success in the future. The DSASP envisions a critical mass of diverse businesses that create economic opportunity and draw people for work, play, and living. Today, Courthouse Square is home to an important concentration of professional, government, and financial service sector jobs, and the adjacent Santa Rosa Plaza Mall is the premier shopping destination in Sonoma County. Railroad Square features a number of small-scale, locally owned shops and restaurants and is welcoming new hotels as well. The DSASP seeks to build on the existing employment base and attract new employers to the Downtown Station Area in order to enhance daytime vitality and support existing businesses. A focus on creating and attracting jobs in higher average wage industries will also help stimulate demand for market rate housing in Downtown Santa Rosa, address the deficit in achievable rents as compared to other Bay Area communities, and attract more interest from the real estate development community. Equally important is an emphasis on home-based businesses, startups, creatives, maker-oriented businesses, and jobs in retail and hospitality.

Sense of place is a powerful attractor and a high-quality urban environment will draw new businesses and visitors to the Downtown Station Area. Public and private investment in attractive streetscapes, buildings, park and public plazas will help cultivate a distinctive Downtown character. The DSASP emphasizes a people-scaled approach to development which will translate into a walkable, friendly, safe, and appealing pedestrian realm. As people spend a day or evening Downtown, they'll observe and experience well-designed and inviting ground floor uses, public programming both celebratory and routine, and urban parks and interesting public spaces interspersed through their urban environment.

Art and culture have an important role to play as well. From the Arlene Francis Center, The Lost Church and Sixth Street Playhouse; to the Sonoma County Museum and Downtown Library; to the SOFA arts district; to beautiful downtown murals and lovable Peanuts sculptures, Downtown Santa Rosa continues to nurture and expand its artistic spirit. The arts not only have a positive impact on Downtown’s quality of life and cultural evolution, but also on the entire social and business environment. The arts support additional investment, beautify and activate spaces, showcase neighborhood history and pride, and draw tourists. As Downtown grows, opportunities to support and infuse culture, arts, and recreation into the fabric of Downtown will ensure that this home to artists and innovators continues to cultivate creativity and support its uniqueness.
GOALS AND POLICIES

GOAL LU-3: The Downtown Station Area will be economically viable and resilient over the long-term.

POLICIES

LU-3.1 Expand and diversify the Downtown employment base by attracting new employers, including firms active in technology, medical/bio, additive manufacturing, engineering, and media that provide well-paying jobs with potential for career advancement; and by nurturing and retaining small businesses and start-up firms. Ensure that buildings are designed to accommodate these uses.

LU-3.2 Ensure that development is designed to accommodate flexible uses that can accommodate a pivot in business type to residential as economies evolve.

(See also the development standards and design guidelines for building design included in Chapter 4, Urban Design and Civic Spaces.)

LU-3.3 In collaboration with the Metro Chamber of Commerce, Downtown businesses, and other business advocacy groups, maintain a Downtown business attraction program to assist with site identification, incentive programs, permitting assistance, and other aspects related to establishing or relocating a business.

LU-3.4 Preserve some sites in the Courthouse Square area for employment-oriented development to ensure that its role as a regional employment hub is maintained.

LU-3.5 Encourage the integration of commercial tenant spaces designed to accommodate small businesses within new development.

LU-3.6 Encourage the creation of visually appealing, comfortable, and memorable places with a variety of amenities and facilities throughout the Downtown area to meet the needs of residents, employees, and visitors. This may include “pop-up” businesses, cultural or artistic exhibitions, public and private events, or other temporary uses for vacant storefronts and parcels in the Downtown Station Area.

LU-3.7 Establish a Downtown Facade Improvement Basics (D-FIB) program that supports efforts to create attractive facades on existing buildings.

(See also policies, standards, and guidelines in Chapter 4, Urban Design and Civic Spaces.)

LU-3.8 Partner with the Metro Chamber of Commerce, the Museum of Sonoma County, Sonoma County Library, Downtown businesses, cultural organizations, and arts groups to develop and expand the program of activities and events that activate public spaces Downtown and attract residents and visitors alike. Explore public/private partnerships that could support additional programming. Encourage evening and weekend activities that residents of Santa Rosa and the wider region, including families, students, and seniors, as well as lunchtime events for Downtown Station Area employees and visitors.

LU-3.9 Support and partner with local businesses on efforts to attract residents and visitors through marketing campaigns that highlight events, programming, and destinations and promote use of transit to access to Downtown Santa Rosa. In particular, events should showcase Downtown merchants, music, and food.

LU-3.10 Ensure that Downtown zoning allows for home-based businesses in all areas.

LU-3.11 Expand the availability of infrastructure and services needed to support employment growth, including high-speed broadband communications, fiber and wireless infrastructure, enhanced transit opportunities, and supportive services.

(See also Chapter 5, Public Services and Sustainability Goal PSS-3 and associated policies regarding utility and telecommunications infrastructure in the Downtown Station Area).
Housing for All

Housing Production

One of the DSASP’s principal objectives is to facilitate housing development, a critical factor in addressing the ongoing housing crisis in Santa Rosa made worse by the devastating Tubbs and Nuns Fires, which resulted in the loss of approximately five percent of the Santa Rosa’s housing stock. In 2019, the Downtown Station Area had approximately 2,445 homes, 65 percent of which are multi-family units. In general, these multifamily units tend to be duplexes, triplexes, or fourplexes, rather than large complexes of five or more units: of the approximately 300 multi-family structures in the Downtown Station Area, 47 percent are two-unit structures, and approximately a third are three or four-unit structures. Construction of new, larger multifamily developments has been limited, which can be largely attributed to market uncertainty, a lack of demonstrated project viability and financing, a perceived lack of policy and process commitment to support development, and high construction costs. Because the Downtown Station Area is capable of accommodating more housing opportunities, the City has taken significant action to address these concerns and promote housing development. This includes development and implementation policies and programs that streamline processes and incentivize higher-density housing in the Downtown Station Area with fee reductions and bonuses.

Building on these efforts, the DSASP seeks to remove regulatory hurdles and support the feasibility of higher-density housing by eliminating residential density limits for key change areas Downtown, establishing instead a map-based system of maximum base Floor Area Ratios (FARs). This approach provides flexibility for developers to build in line with market demand and can potentially also incentivize the construction of smaller, more naturally affordable units. The DSASP also eliminates parking minimums, leaving the number of spaces to be governed by market demand and the requirements of financial lenders. This represents a significant potential cost saving for developers and for tenants and homeowners, as parking costs are usually factored into sales prices or rents. In addition to these strategies, the DSASP supports partnerships with affordable housing developers, major employers, and public agencies to facilitate the development of a variety of housing types.

Affordability and Anti-Displacement

Downtown vitality is inextricably linked to its ability to support diversity. The most vibrant places have a mix of housing and employment types, as well as residents from a variety of demographic, socioeconomic, and cultural backgrounds. Diverse environments promote social and economic inclusion at the neighborhood level and help overcome the kind of mismatch in location of jobs and housing that requires people to commute long distances to work.

Approximately 75 percent of the planning area’s housing units are renter-occupied, a greater share than in the city (53 percent). Housing markets, especially rental housing, are heavily influenced by household incomes, particularly the wages and salaries of the working population. In 2017, the median income of Downtown Station Area residents was approximately six percent lower than the City as a whole. Fifteen percent of Downtown Station Area households had incomes below the poverty line, compared with 12 percent of households citywide. Approximately 33 percent of owners and 44 percent of renters in the Downtown Station Area spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing costs, generally regarded as the benchmark for overburdensome housing costs.
While rent increases in the city and Downtown Station Area have been comparable, home ownership has declined in the planning area by nine percent from 2000 to 2017, despite rising homeownership in the city. To support the current and future residents' housing needs, the DSASP promotes creation of a mix of housing unit types, sizes, and price points, such as smaller units that are affordable by design, live/work units for creatives and home-based business operators, and larger units for families.

As with any plan, new development without protections and proactive strategies can have direct and indirect consequences, such as gentrification and displacement. The Downtown Station Area's lower median incomes make it difficult for developers to charge rents or sales prices that people can afford while simultaneously recouping their costs. In creating an environment that is attractive to higher-wage industries and employees to stimulate housing production, there is potential for lower-income residents to be displaced as higher-income residents move in. Long-time residents who are able to stay in newly gentrified areas may feel a reduced sense of belonging or loss of culture as existing neighborhood amenities and services are replaced to serve higher-income demographics. To ensure everyone can enjoy the new amenities that will be created Downtown, enhance quality of life for all, and preserve local culture, the DSASP includes policies to increase availability of affordable housing, monitor indicators that may signal displacement is occurring, and work directly with affected communities to identify gentrification and displacement issues and strategies to address them.

To address the needs of Santa Rosa's unhoused residents, the DSASP envisions collaboration between the City and County to prioritize development of permanent supportive housing and coordination with a range of local stakeholders to identify and address housing issues on an ongoing basis.

GENTRIFICATION AND DISPLACEMENT

Gentrification is the process of neighborhood economic and demographic change in an existing area, which often results from real estate investment and increased demand from higher-income residents.

While increased investment in an area can be positive, gentrification is often associated with displacement, which means that long-term residents are not able to stay to benefit from new investments in housing, transit infrastructure, and other quality of life improvements.

Many neighborhoods vulnerable to the negative effects of gentrification are influenced by past policy and investment patterns that benefited some racial groups and classes over others, such as redlining, urban renewal, and subprime lending.

Other populations at risk of gentrification and displacement’s negative effects include households with low incomes; renters, especially those paying 30 percent or more of their income; elderly households; people with language barriers; residents of affordable housing developments at risk of deed-restriction expiration; people with low levels of formal education; and undocumented people.
GOALS AND POLICIES

GOAL LU-4: A diverse range of housing opportunities suitable for people of all incomes, abilities, and stages of life.

POLICIES

LU-4.1 Increase the supply of residential units Downtown and expand the range of housing opportunities available.

LU-4.2 Partner with major employers and facilitate the development of employee and/or workforce housing in the Downtown Station Area.

LU-4.3 Encourage a mix of for sale and rental housing units in all Downtown areas.

LU-4.4 Promote the use of innovative building methods and materials and the development of alternative housing types, including co-housing, accessory dwelling units, tiny homes, single-room occupancy units, and smaller/micro units that are affordable by design.

LU-4.5 Facilitate construction of larger units (with two or more bedrooms) suitable for families with children.

LU-4.6 Continue to partner with Sonoma County and other public agencies to attract developers, blend private financing and public funds, and leverage State and federal grants to facilitate the creation of housing.

LU-4.7 Encourage multi-family developments and live-work units in Maker Mixed Use areas to provide housing options that are affordable for artists, creative entrepreneurs, emerging industries, and home-based business operators.

LU-4.8 Preserve and expand affordable housing Downtown with the following actions:

- Provide funds to renovate older buildings in exchange for rent restrictions; and
- Encourage the integration of deed-restricted affordable units within housing developments; and
- Discourage the conversion of older rental apartments to condominiums.

LU-4.9 Monitor indicators such as change in share of low-income households, average rent and sales price, supply of affordable units, and evictions and foreclosures within the Downtown Station Area. Use this data to identify at risk neighborhoods and target programs and resources.

LU-4.10 Consider creation of a forum for ongoing dialogue on local housing issues and strategies to address them. Include representatives of public agencies, affordable and for profit housing developers, housing advocacy groups, and other community organizations.

LU-4.11 Continue to engage the community in developing new and refining existing affordable housing and anti-displacement strategies.

LU-4.12 Facilitate opportunities to incorporate innovative design and program features into affordable housing developments, such as on-site health and human services, community gardens, car-sharing, and bike facilities. Support the development of projects that serve homeless and special needs populations.

LU-4.13 Continue to partner with County agencies, social service providers community organizations, and others to maintain existing emergency shelters and provide additional shelter capacity both in the Downtown Station Area and Citywide.