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INTRODUCTION

Santa Rosa serves as San Francisco’s North Bay urban core and economic center. Downtown Santa Rosa is centrally located in the City and laid out on a walkable street grid. Downtown encompasses several distinct residential neighborhoods and provides a strong concentration of jobs and a wide array of stores, services, and restaurants. The reunification of Courthouse Square, completed in 2017, provides an important community space in the heart of the city, while Downtown Station in Historic Railroad Square provides access to passenger rail service on the Sonoma-Marin Area Rail Transit (SMART) corridor, and the regional transit mall near Courthouse Square links the Downtown area to a network of North Bay communities.

The Santa Rosa Downtown Station Area Specific Plan (DSASP) seeks to capitalize on these assets and guide the intensification of an energetic commercial enterprise and innovative cultural center with a strong sense of place, enhanced connectivity, and increased residential and social options. The DSASP envisions a vibrant urban core centered around Courthouse Square and a network of pedestrian-friendly mixed-use village centers, each with its own character. To make this vision a reality, the DSASP offers strategies designed to remove barriers to development, meet the community’s housing and job needs, foster vibrant civic spaces, and enhance local quality of life.
A culturally rich, self-contained urban center situated within predominantly agricultural surroundings, the City of Santa Rosa is located in central Sonoma County, approximately 55 miles north of San Francisco. Like each of the other eight incorporated cities in Sonoma county, Santa Rosa is defined by an urban growth boundary that ensures a regional commitment to open space and a uniquely picturesque location. It is the fifth largest city in the San Francisco Bay Area, the 26th largest city in the state, and it's ranked in the top ten greatest Metropolitan Service Area GDPs in California. Santa Rosa consistently ranks highly in the nation's top places to live and work. Within its city limits, Santa Rosa has a diversity of neighborhoods and historic districts that house one-third of the county's workforce and over a third of the county's businesses.

The Downtown Station Area covers approximately 720 acres surrounding the Downtown Station SMART site in the heart of the city. As shown on Map INTRO-1, the Downtown Station Area is bounded by College Avenue to the north, Brookwood Avenue to the east, Sebastopol Road and State Route (SR) 12 to the south, and Dutton Avenue and Imwalle Gardens to the west. The Downtown Station Area encompasses Courthouse Square, the city's central business district and an important regional jobs center, Santa Rosa Plaza, Sonoma County's largest retail shopping destination, as well as other established neighborhoods, including Railroad Square, Maxwell Court, the Santa Rosa Arts District (SOFA), and several residential neighborhoods, including many that are designated preservation districts.

Originally inhabited by the Southern Pomo Tribe, the future city of Santa Rosa was settled by the Carrillo family in the 1830s. Downtown was laid out with a rectangular street grid around the town plaza, now known as Courthouse Square. In the later nineteenth century, the town flourished as an agricultural trading center, and the advent of rail service established Railroad Square as another commercial center. The two cores were bordered by several residential districts that now constitute Downtown Santa Rosa's historic preservation districts. The structure of Downtown Santa Rosa was shaped significantly by the earthquakes in 1906 and 1969, the decentralization of commercial services due to auto-oriented development, construction of Highway 101, and development of the Santa Rosa Plaza mall during urban renewal. In addition to changing the character and connectivity of Downtown neighborhoods, these events often resulted in the elimination of potential historic structures. Recent civic achievements that...
Map INTRO-1: Planning Area

Source: City of Santa Rosa, 2019; Dyett & Bhatia, 2020
have helped to enliven the Downtown landscape include establishment of the Downtown SMART Station, completion of the Prince Memorial Greenway, and reunification of the public plaza at Old Courthouse Square. Despite the negative public perceptions of the now dated structural changes resulting from the 1969 earthquake, and construction of the mall and highway, there has also been recognition of the inadvertent benefit of encouraging the Downtown Station Area neighborhoods to develop with unique character.

The Downtown Station Area is made up of a mix of residential, commercial, office, retail, industrial, and entertainment uses. Based on data from the US Census and the Sonoma County Assessor, there were 2,445 housing units in the Downtown Station Area and 8,432 jobs in 2018. Approximately 65 percent of the existing homes are multi-family housing units, predominantly duplexes, triplexes, and fourplexes integrated into the fabric of established residential neighborhoods. As shown in Chart INTRO-1, on average, residents of the Downtown Station Area generally tend to be younger, with 40 percent of Downtown residents between the ages 25 and 44 years old, compared to 28 percent citywide. They are more likely to live alone or with roommate, whereas a larger share of the citywide population is married with a family, as shown in Chart INTRO-2. While the Downtown Station Area has 11 percent of the jobs in Santa Rosa, less than three percent of people who work in Downtown Santa Rosa also live there, and about 62 percent of workers in the Downtown Station Area commute from outside the city.

Given its proximity to major healthcare and technology employers as well as Santa Rosa Junior College and Sonoma State University, there is significant opportunity to create an atmosphere that is attractive and supportive to recent graduates and young professionals, address the imbalance between jobs and residents living in the Downtown Station Area, and provide housing options for a variety of family types, income levels, and ages.

The Downtown Station Area is designated as a Priority Development Area (PDA) in Santa Rosa, established by the Metropolitan Transportation Commission/Association of Bay Area Governments (MTC/ABAG) to provide opportunities for compact, infill development in proximity to transit, jobs, schools, shopping and services (see Figure INTRO-2). PDAs are an integral part of Plan Bay Area 2040, the regional sustainable growth strategy that coordinates housing plans, open space conservation efforts, economic development strategies, and transportation investments. With the collaboration of local governments throughout the Bay Area, MTC/ABAG estimates that about 80 percent of the region’s future housing needs can be met within PDAs. By promoting dense, mixed-use residential and commercial neighborhoods in areas well-served by transit in this way, Plan Bay Area 2040, and the update of the DSASP which is underway, seeks to reduce traffic congestion and air pollution and further statewide goals for climate action.
Background

Downtown Santa Rosa has been the focus of planning efforts in the past. Anticipating the inauguration of SMART service, the City adopted the original DSASP in 2007 (2007 DSASP) with the goal of increasing the number of residents and employees within walking distance of the Downtown Station. While this plan enabled more housing density, it did not address some of the other policy elements needed to accommodate the type of infill development desired. Soon thereafter the housing bubble burst, triggering a global financial crisis, The Great Recession, and a dramatic drop in nationwide housing production. While the Bay Area region saw an economic recovery in 2012, housing production in Napa and Sonoma Counties did not rebound as quickly, and development in Downtown Santa Rosa has been limited since adoption of the 2007 DSASP.

In light of Downtown’s central location, proximity to transit, concentration of jobs, and urban growth boundaries that disincentivize sprawl, Santa Rosa City Council has prioritized density infill development policies promoting new multi-family housing and mixed/shared use development in the area. The need for housing became increasingly urgent in the wake of the devastating loss of homes in the North Bay Fires of 2017 and 2019 and rising housing costs throughout the Bay Area. To address this, the City undertook a series of initiatives, including preparation of a Housing Action Plan in conjunction with a process improvement action plan, adoption of Resilient City Development Measures as a short-term strategy to fast-track housing development in the burn areas as well as throughout most of the Downtown Station Area, and implementation of an Expedited Permitting Program, which dramatically reduces time for planning, engineering and building review. The City also created the Downtown High-Density Residential Incentive Program, an aggressive fee reduction program that reduces impact fees and defers water and wastewater fees for higher density projects that break ground Downtown before August 2023.

In this context, the City secured a grant from MTC/ABAG and initiated an update to the 2007 DSASP with the objectives of:

- Revisiting the 2007 DSASP land use plan and policy framework to accommodate increased housing density in the Downtown Station Area along with other transit-supportive uses and improvements;
- Improving motorized, non-motorized, and transit connectivity between the SMART station site, the Downtown Transit Mall, regional alternative transportation pathways, including the SMART pathway, Joe Rodota Trail, and Santa Rosa Creek Greenway Trail, and existing and future adjacent commercial, residential, educational, and governmental areas;
- Developing and implementing urban design standards which promote walkable and livable environments within the Downtown Station Area;
- Actively involving the public in updating the Plan through a comprehensive community involvement strategy.
Planning Process and Community Engagement

Community engagement was integral to the development of the DSASP. More than simply hosting or attending a meeting, the process involved proactively initiating conversations, maintaining ongoing dialogue, collaboration, and the creation of new relationships with community members with the goal of reaching a place where decision-making and processes are shared by staff and community stakeholders. A multifaceted community engagement strategy sought participation and input from a broad cross-section of the community’s population and interests, and a Community Advisory Committee (CAC) was formed to act as “ambassadors” to further engage community members in the process. The CAC was instrumental in building connections to historically unengaged (e.g., youth and students), underrepresented, or hard to reach groups, establishing forums for dialogue with their networks and the general public, and helping to develop and refine outreach methods. Additionally, a designated website, available in both Spanish and English, was maintained to provide the community with updates, resources, and information. The website also served as a platform for administering surveys and other data-gathering tools. At each phase of the work, a variety of different methods was used to provide opportunities for discussion and meaningful input and build community ownership of the DSASP:

- **Phase 1. Issues and Opportunities (Winter-Spring 2019):** The purpose of this phase was to conduct an intensive “deep-dive” early in the process to identify and understand stakeholder priorities and concerns, and to establish a coordinated and realistic direction for the future of the plan founded on community vision. Community engagement methods included a series of stakeholder interviews with the representatives from the developer, nonprofit, business communities; two community workshops with over 90 participants; small group meetings and citywide outreach events; and an online issues and opportunities survey, with close to 400 respondents.

- **Phase 2. Alternatives Exploration (Summer-Fall 2019):** Based on community vision and input, this phase saw development of distinct land use alternatives, each of which highlighted opportunities and tradeoffs. Over 120 community members participated in a charrette-based alternatives workshop, and 90 people responded to an online alternative concepts survey. Additionally, neighborhood meetings in Maxwell Court, Santa Rosa Avenue, Roseland, and other areas within Santa Rosa were held to provide more targeted input on relevant areas of the DSASP.

- **Phase 3. Draft Plan Preparation (Winter 2019-Summer 2020):** A draft plan was prepared based on the preferred plan concept that emerged from Phase 2. About 300 people provided their input on preferred architectural design, ground floor requirements, and civic spaces in a visual preferences survey disseminated online, which informed development requirements and design guidelines in Chapter 3 of the DSASP.

- **Phase 4. Plan Finalization (Summer-Fall 2020):** The final plan was presented for adoption to the Planning Commission and City Council. Outreach activities included an open house and pop-up engagement to raise awareness about the DSASP.

Vision

Reflective of its size, Santa Rosa has a diverse economy and population. Santa Rosa welcomes people of all ages, income levels, and backgrounds, and this diversity is linked to its vitality. To grow in a manner that continues to meet the needs of its current and future residents, retain and expand its business base, and attract new businesses, Downtown Santa Rosa is envisioned to feature a vibrant urban core centered around Courthouse Square, with a network of pedestrian-friendly mixed-use village centers, each with their own character. City-owned parking lots and garages will be redeveloped to accommodate housing, commercial space, and replacement parking without requiring additional parking spaces. Higher density work and housing options in Downtown will support by quality of life amenities such as grocery stores, healthcare, childcare, pharmacies within the Downtown Station Area, and infrastructure accommodating multi-modal and public transportation options will be abundant, reducing the need for cars. It is also envisioned that whether on public or private property, there will be ample community space to socialize and allow for a variety of programming and activation opportunities. It is recognized that what is built now needs to be flexible enough to change with time.

Vision Statement

Downtown Santa Rosa is a vibrant, sustainable, and important community gathering place where we celebrate our diversity, our heritage, and our local culture; we live, work, and share with one another; and everyone plays a part in shaping Downtown’s future.
**GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR OUR DOWNTOWN AREA**

Our Downtown is a community-centered place where we can all live, work, shop, and play in a thriving urban space.

- Downtown is safe and friendly for people of all ages, income levels, and cultures.
- Downtown’s streetscape is active and comfortable day and night, with pedestrian-scale lighting, street trees, landscaping, seating, and other coordinated amenities that establish a distinct identity.
- A successful Downtown is a driver of Santa Rosa’s economic health and quality of life.

We value our heritage - from Courthouse Square to our historic buildings and throughout our network of unique pedestrian-friendly, mixed-use village centers – and acknowledge those people and places who have contributed to our success.

- Downtown values its historic buildings and encourages compatible, high-quality new construction.
- A diverse array of distinct neighborhoods with vital business activity, housing options, and multimodal connections to each other and the greater region is essential to Downtown Santa Rosa’s success.
- Meaningful and visible communication about Downtown Santa Rosa’s heritage can link past, present, and future, and it can contribute to Downtown’s evolution.

We move about assured that our sidewalks and trails, our bicycle facilities, our public transit, and our streets take us to where we want to go, however we want to travel.

- Downtown will safely accommodate many modes of travel – pedestrians, bicycles, rideshare, and transit – with the easiest choice being forgoing a personal car entirely.

- Downtown’s network of public parks, plazas, trails and recreational spaces is enhanced and interconnected.
- Increasing active lifestyles is Santa Rosa’s greatest opportunity to improve the health of its residents.

We create higher density living and employment options that enhance our quality of life by supporting a diverse array of retail goods and services, arts and culture activities, and outdoor recreation opportunities.

- Downtown continues to serve as an economic engine for the City and region, promoting a diverse economic environment that supports both local entrepreneurial ventures, as well as larger businesses.
- Downtown provides economic opportunity for all residents.
- Downtown is comprised of successful, desirable, and complete neighborhoods with a variety of housing choices and mix of uses.

We experience one another, and our local arts and culture together, in public and private civic spaces that encourage us to connect with each other.

- Downtown has a thriving cultural and arts community and its lively public spaces are local and regional destinations.
- Downtown’s network of public parks, plazas, trails and open space is enhanced and interconnected.
- Santa Rosa’s arts and cultural scene offers opportunities than can enrich everyone’s lives.
- Active celebration of Santa Rosa’s diversity will help ensure economic and social success.

We celebrate Downtown Santa Rosa together as we value our past and look forward to our future success.

- Downtown protects and restores natural resources and incorporates environmentally friendly elements into new projects.
LEGAL CONTEXT AND RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PLANS

California Government Code (Section 65450) states that planning agencies may prepare specific plans for the systematic implementation of the general plan for all or part of the area covered by the general plan. "A specific plan shall include a text and a diagram or diagrams which specify all of the following in detail:

- The distribution, location, and extent of the uses of land, including open space, within the area covered by the plan. This requirement is addressed in Chapter 2, Land Use.

- The proposed distribution, location, and extent and intensity of major components of public and private transportation, sewage, water, drainage, solid waste disposal, energy, and other essential facilities proposed to be located within the area covered by the plan and needed to support the land uses described in the plan. This requirement is addressed in Chapter 3, Mobility; and Chapter 5, Public Services and Sustainability.

- Standards and criteria by which development will proceed, and standards for the conservation, development, and utilization of natural resources, where applicable. This requirement is addressed in Chapter 4, Design and Development Standards; and Chapter 5, Public Services and Sustainability.

- A program of implementation measures including regulations, programs, public works projects, and financing measures necessary to carry out paragraphs (1), (2), and (3). This requirement is addressed in Chapter 6, Financing and Implementation.

In addition, "the specific plan shall include a statement of the relationship of the specific plan to the general plan." Refer to Chapter 6 for a summary of the relationship between the DSASP and goals, policies, and actions in Santa Rosa’s General Plan.

Relationship to General Plan

Although amendments to the City’s General Plan will be necessary to allow its implementation, the recommendations and objectives of the DSASP are consistent with the broad goals of the Santa Rosa 2035 General Plan. The General Plan describes a vision for Downtown as the heart of the community with expanded residential, commercial, and civic uses that will provide a high level of urban activity and a strong identity. In general, the policies of the General Plan support Downtown Santa Rosa as a mixed-use hub that serves as the major regional office, financial, civic, and cultural center in the North Bay, and a vital mixed-use center. In addition, new and existing housing development should be well connected to transit centers and the core of Downtown for pedestrians and bicyclists. The recommendations contained in the DSASP are consistent with and further these goals.

Zoning Code

The Santa Rosa Zoning Code provides standards for development, including height restrictions, setbacks, parking regulations, allowed uses, and signage requirements, among others. These standards set the pattern and character of development in the city. The DSASP proposes new land use designations and streamlines the number of existing land use designations within the Downtown Station Area. The Zoning Code will be amended to reflect these new designations to ensure consistency and facilitate implementation.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan (2019)

This Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan Update 2018 establishes a long-term vision for improving walking and bicycling in Santa Rosa by updating the previous plan adopted by the City Council in 2010. The Plan Update 2018 provides a strategy to develop a comprehensive bicycling and walking network to provide access to transit, schools, and Downtown Santa Rosa attractions alongside support facilities like bicycle parking and pedestrian amenities. The DSASP incorporates all Master Plan recommendations for the Downtown Station Area and makes some additional bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure improvements outlined in Chapter 3. The Master Plan will be updated for consistency with DSASP recommendations and will remain the guiding document for bicycle and pedestrian network improvements.

Santa Rosa Avenue Corridor Plan (2011)

Approved in 2011, the Santa Rosa Avenue Corridor Plan provided a comprehensive, long-term vision for this corridor and surrounding area, including recommendations for capital improvements and design guidelines. The DSASP incorporates the Corridor Plan’s vision for roadway reallocation, bicycle lanes, and pedestrian improvements along Santa Rosa Avenue. The Santa Rosa Avenue Corridor Plan will be amended to allow the DSASP to control where there is overlap in the Plan boundaries.
**Environmental Impact Report**

The Final Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the 2007 DSASP was certified in October 2007. The updated DSASP makes certain changes to the land use designations, development regulations, and infrastructure improvements envisioned in the 2007 Plan that could potentially result in new or substantially more severe impacts as compared to those analyzed and mitigated in the 2007 EIR. Additionally, since certification of the 2007 EIR, the California Natural Resources Agency has adopted updates to the CEQA Guidelines that represent a substantial change to the circumstances under which the Proposed Plan would be implemented. Pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15063, the City prepared an Initial Study in December 2019 to determine which of the proposed Plan's effects were adequately examined by the 2007 EIR and which effects to analyze further in a Subsequent EIR (SEIR). The SEIR was prepared concurrently with the Draft DSASP and policies in the DSASP were developed to respond to the findings of the environmental analysis for the SEIR to minimize or reduce significant environmental impacts to the extent feasible; in this way the DSASP is "self-mitigating." The SEIR provides a basis for evaluating the potential environmental impacts of subsequent development projects and for granting project approvals.

**Roseland Area/ Sebastopol Road Specific Plan (2016)**

The purpose of Roseland Area/Sebastopol Road Specific Plan is to support a unified, vital, healthy, and livable Roseland community. The area's designation as a Priority Development Area supports walkable, bikeable, and transit-rich neighborhoods by increasing the number and proximity of residents to amenities, schools, parks, and jobs. The plan aims to do this by improving connectivity, concentrating areas of activity, and enhancing the physical environment. The Plan area was previously bounded by State Route (SR) 12 to the north, Bellevue Avenue to the south, US Highway 101 to the east, and Stony Point Road to the west. The Roseland Area/Sebastopol Road Specific Plan will be amended to remove the area bounded by Highway 12, Sebastopol Road, and Dutton Avenue to be consistent with the DSASP boundary and Downtown PDA boundary.
PLAN ORGANIZATION

The following chapters of this document present guiding goals and accompanying policies; design standards and guidelines; and recommendations for implementation:

**Chapter 1: Introduction.** Provides background and context, DSASP objectives, and the contents of the DSASP document.

**Chapter 2: Land Use.** Presents key features of the Downtown Station Area, including existing land use, development potential and opportunity sites where significant change may be expected to occur, the land use framework, vision, and designations, development form and intensity standards, and affordable housing strategies.

**Chapter 3: Mobility.** Addresses the Downtown Station Area’s roadway network and circulation, pedestrian and bicycle connectivity, transit and transportation demand management measures, and parking management strategies.

**Chapter 4: Urban Design and Civic Spaces.** Provides guidance for the development of the built environment in the Downtown Station Area, including streetscape improvements and the public realm, civic spaces, detailed development standards and design guidelines, and preservation and compatibility of new development with historic resources.

**Chapter 5: Public Services and Sustainability.** Addresses public services and infrastructure needed to ensure public health and safety in the Downtown Station Area. Also identifies and addresses key environmental issues that will potentially have an impact on the design and location of new development, including noise and hazardous materials, air and water quality, flooding, geology and seismicity, and biological resources. Emergency response strategies are also described.

**Chapter 6: Financing and Implementation.** Outlines measures for consistency with the General Plan and Municipal Code and provides an infrastructure cost assessment, preliminary financing strategies for infrastructure and public improvements, and a phased implementation program.