



FOR OUR COMMUNITY...

A New Vision for Downtown Santa Cruz

Downtown Commons Advocates

DECISIONS ABOUT DOWNTOWN IN THE MAKING

Crucial decisions about the future of Downtown Santa Cruz are upon us. We have a choice. Instead of piecemeal decisions around land use, we need an environmentally sustainable and socially equitable approach of stewardship — for public space, the Downtown Library, parking, and housing so that people who work here can afford to live here. The social attractiveness and economic vitality of our community are at stake.

Downtown Commons Advocates want the City to:

- Provide a permanent home for the Farmers' Market at its existing location on Lot 4 as part of a new public space – a Downtown Commons.
- Develop 100% permanently affordable housing on Lot 7, behind Pizza My Heart, instead of on Lot 4.
- Renovate the Downtown Library at its existing location as part of the Civic Center.
- Provide parking for residents, workers and visitors without building an expensive multi-level parking structure.

This is stewardship – for our citizens, our community and the environment.

For downloadable English and Spanish versions of this brochure:

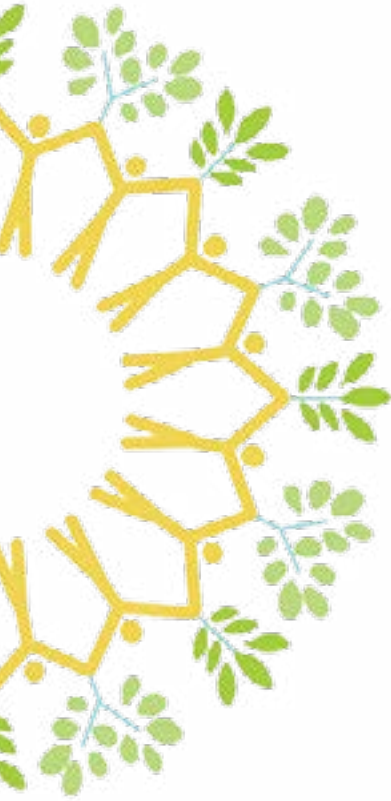
<https://downtowncommonsadvocates.weebly.com/dca-brochure.html>

OR <http://www.ourdowntownourfuture.org>

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Help create a new Downtown

Go to: downtowncommonsadvocates.weebly.com/join-with-us.html



From here to a green downtown

DOWNTOWN SANTA CRUZ can become a better, economically and socially thriving place. It can include more affordable housing, a public green space with a permanent Farmers' Market, a thoroughly renovated Downtown Library at its present location, and a 21st-century transportation plan that accommodates pedestrians and bicyclists, and provides better public transit and more effectively managed parking for cars. This is a great vision for Downtown Santa Cruz. We can't get there overnight, but we can take bold steps to achieve it.

Why we need an alternative

Cities throughout the world have central plazas, parks and town squares. Not Santa Cruz. It lacks any substantial downtown public space. The largest city-owned parcel downtown, Lot 4 on



Artists came to Lot 4 for an Earth Day celebration. Could we have a commons and keep our beautiful trees next year?

Cedar Street with its 10 Heritage trees, is paved in asphalt and used for parking most of the time. Once a week, the lot blossoms into the Farmers' Market. But now, that community space is in jeopardy, the City is planning to build a 60- to 70-foot high "mixed-use" project entirely covering Lot 4.

The City would move the existing Downtown Library from its current location to the ground floor of the proposed Lot 4 project. There would be around 100 units of affordable housing and an unneeded 400-space parking structure either above the Library or directly adjacent. The Farmers' Market would be moved to a less desirable location, either Lot 7 on Front Street or, ironically, in space created by demolishing the present Downtown Library.

The City should not be cutting down Heritage trees to build a 6 to 7-story mixed-use structure that will cost more than \$90 million when there is a superior way to achieve the same goals, creating

Following the long tradition of engaged Santa Cruz politics, people are joining together to oppose this project.



Many have expressed **their wish** to keep the Farmers' Market on Lot 4

a public space in the bargain. The far more environmentally responsible course is to leave the Downtown Library and the Farmers' Market *where they work already*. The City needs to follow basic urban planning principles: observe how people are using spaces already and collaborate to support and build on those uses.

What kind of downtown?

We all want an attractive, livable Downtown. The challenge is how to move forward with actual policies and projects. The City's own 2020 Downtown Plan warns against "the creation of monolithic 'projects' that destroy the human scale and pedestrian quality of the downtown." The 6 or 7-story behemoth proposed to cover Lot 4 would do just that, forever depriving the community of its best opportunity to create a central park or commons. This is not the way to honor the City's 2020 Downtown Plan to "preserve and enhance the informal 'village' qualities of the Cedar Street Corridor."

The approach proposed here can accomplish everything promised in the Lot 4 project and more, but with real concern for environmental sustainability and the wellbeing of our people, our community, and our Downtown.

- **A Major Public Space Downtown:** A Downtown Commons can become a major public space where people gather everyday. It can include facilities for a permanent Farmers' Market and fairs, a play area for children, green space, and a stage for concerts and other events. On page 7,

we propose unpaving an asphalt parking lot to create a Downtown Commons for ourselves and future generations.

- **The Downtown Library:** Santa Cruz’s Downtown Library has been at its present site since 1904. In 1968, a new library building replaced the original Carnegie library. Then, in 2019, City consultants Jayson Architecture showed how that library structure can be thoroughly renovated to create a 21st-century library. Learn more on page 13 about how the renovation can provide a first-class library for the community.

- **Parking to Meet Demand:** On page 19, we examine Downtown Santa Cruz’s current public parking use and projected needs. Even at periods of peak demand, nearly 30% of parking spaces are vacant. A City-sponsored parking study concludes that proper parking management can ensure adequate supply without building an unnecessary and expensive parking structure. This is the environmentally sound approach.

- **Affordable Housing:** On page 25, we propose developing 120 to 144 units of 100% low and very-low income housing on Front Street’s city-owned Lot 7, near public transportation. This approach to our housing crisis creates *more* housing than the City’s Lot 4 project, thus better helping meet the needs of the people who live and work here. It also reduces commuting, traffic congestion and environmentally harmful greenhouse gases.

We can create a better Downtown Santa Cruz! 🌿

What would a public space downtown look like? More about that on page 7

Our library, where it is now but fully renovated. Find it on Page 13

No parking garage on the Farmers’ Market present site. See page 19

Lot 7 for affordable housing? See page 25



Farmers' Market days transform this parking lot, giving us a glimpse of a potential Downtown Commons that we could all enjoy every day.

The Downtown Commons and Farmers' Market on Lot 4

STRENGTHENING DOWNTOWN as the center of our community can start with the creation of a public space, a Downtown Commons – including permanent year-round facilities for the Farmers' Market. The Commons would be located on Parking Lot 4, bounded by Cathcart, Cedar and Lincoln Streets.

[The City of Santa Cruz Downtown Plan 2020](#) lists as a first principle the need for “A strong network of public and private open spaces (streets, sidewalks, public parks, plazas, passageways and courtyards) that creates a socially active and pedestrian-oriented downtown.” Urban planning



What I'd like to see in our Downtown Commons
 Strong Towns



What I'd like to see in our Downtown Commons
 Strong Towns



What I'd like to see in our Downtown Commons
 Strong Towns



What I'd like to see in our Downtown Commons
 Strong Towns

Community members drew what they would like to see in our Downtown Commons

groups such as [Strong Towns](#) emphasize that public space fosters community and builds equity and mutual respect among diverse people. According to the Bay area civic-planning organization [SPUR](#), public space also drives business, tourism, jobs, and ultimately tax revenues. And gathering together is central to democratic society.

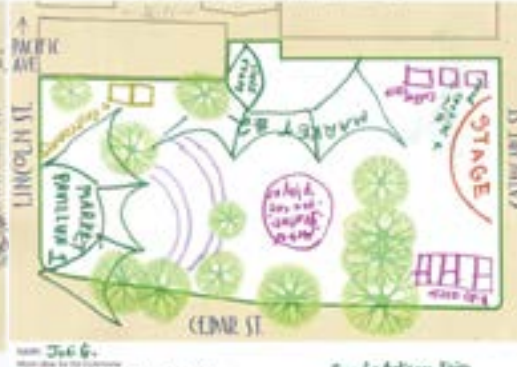
Creating a Downtown Commons is critically important for the health and wellbeing of our community. As a matter of social equity, people living in multi-story apartments need public

FARMERS' MARKET AND COMMONS

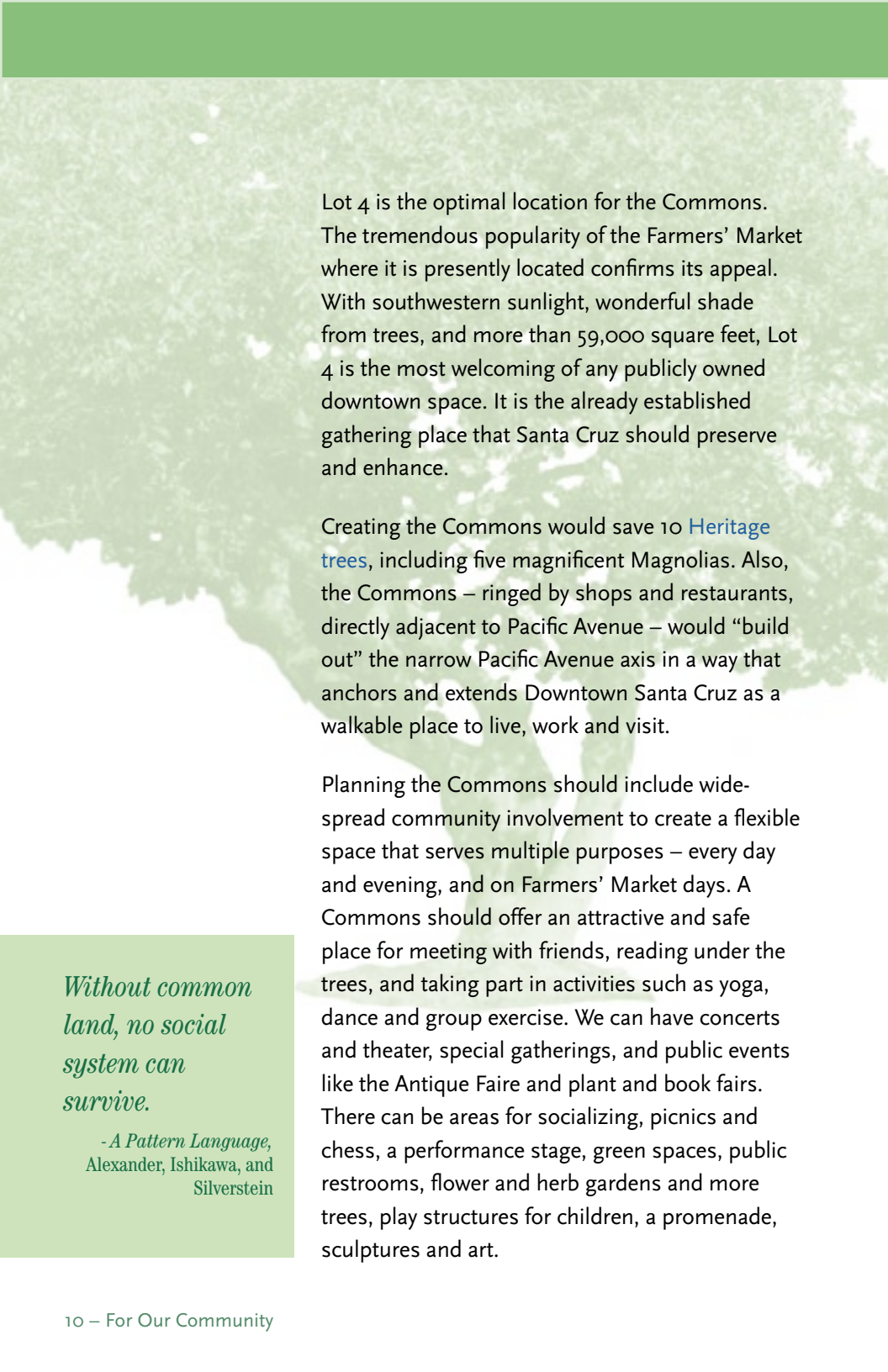
What I'd like to see in our Downtown Commons



What I'd like to see in our Downtown Commons



space. This need is now increasing due to new development of large-scale housing downtown. The question should be not whether, but where to locate a commons. Depot Park and the London Nelson park – both good public spaces – are adjacent to neighborhoods, not in the urban center. Abbott Square is a pocket private space, not a public space. Lot 7 on Front Street lies in afternoon shadows, a much smaller location for the Farmers' Market than Lot 4. And to site a public space across from City Hall would require the destruction of the Downtown Library rather than the renovation promoted during the Measure S campaign for library bond funding.



Lot 4 is the optimal location for the Commons. The tremendous popularity of the Farmers' Market where it is presently located confirms its appeal. With southwestern sunlight, wonderful shade from trees, and more than 59,000 square feet, Lot 4 is the most welcoming of any publicly owned downtown space. It is the already established gathering place that Santa Cruz should preserve and enhance.

Creating the Commons would save 10 [Heritage trees](#), including five magnificent Magnolias. Also, the Commons – ringed by shops and restaurants, directly adjacent to Pacific Avenue – would “build out” the narrow Pacific Avenue axis in a way that anchors and extends Downtown Santa Cruz as a walkable place to live, work and visit.

Planning the Commons should include wide-spread community involvement to create a flexible space that serves multiple purposes – every day and evening, and on Farmers' Market days. A Commons should offer an attractive and safe place for meeting with friends, reading under the trees, and taking part in activities such as yoga, dance and group exercise. We can have concerts and theater, special gatherings, and public events like the Antique Faire and plant and book fairs. There can be areas for socializing, picnics and chess, a performance stage, green spaces, public restrooms, flower and herb gardens and more trees, play structures for children, a promenade, sculptures and art.

*Without common
land, no social
system can
survive.*

*- A Pattern Language,
Alexander, Ishikawa, and
Silverstein*



The Farmers' Market is especially important. It has been held on Lot 4 since the 1990s. Every Wednesday, hundreds of shoppers and tourists visit Downtown for the market. Its success is a testament to the Santa Cruz commitment to organic agriculture, good food, and our support of farmers and other vendors. An adaptable Commons design can include a permanent pavilion for key market operations and food programming, as well as adjustable fabric tensile structures for winter weather. Truck parking for market vendors can be organized so it no longer visually dominates the space and to maximize regular parking on non-market days.

In an era of climate change, creating a public space on Lot 4 will be a major improvement to the public life of our Downtown in its own right. It also offers a foundation for sustainable solutions to other needs: a renovated and modernized Downtown Library at the Civic Center; affordable low and very-low income housing; and parking to meet community, residential and business needs. 🌿





Jayson Architecture can transform the existing facility into this state-of-the-art library”

We all want an excellent downtown library

THE CITY COUNCIL has made initial decisions to replace the present library at the Civic Center with a library in a 6 to 7-story mixed-use development covering all of Lot 4. But, because of the proposed project’s complexity, construction would likely not start for years. The proposed project is *not* a “done deal.”

A better approach is to follow the general principle set forth by former Mayor David Terrazas in 2017: “We should show our respect for the past by ... doing a better job of taking care of what we have. We don’t just start over from scratch ... throwing away everything from our past. Instead, we renew.

We revitalize. We transform.” In this spirit, we can follow [Jayson Architecture](#)’s plan to renovate the existing library – rather than demolishing it.



The original Carnegie Library opened downtown in 1904 with about 9,000 square feet of space on two floors. The Library served a city with a population of 10,000. By the 1950s the building was considered too small. The City could have retained this architecturally significant library by adding a new wing. Instead, the building was bulldozed in 1966.



The present two-story Downtown Library building was completed on the same site in March 1968. Over the years, the Library has undergone a number of renovations, including floor plan changes and several asbestos abate-

ment projects. In October 1989, it withstood the 6.9 magnitude Loma Prieta earthquake without any structural damage.

Fast forward to 2016. Deferred maintenance had long been the norm at all 10 Santa Cruz County Library system branches. Measure S proposed using bond funds to address deferred maintenance, upgrade facilities to current building standards, and replace two branches – Felton and Capitola – with entirely new buildings. In June, voters in the County library financing district overwhelmingly

approved taxing property owners for 30 years to carry out the plans and repay the bonds.

What happened next?

In December 2016, city staff presented the City Council with a radically different proposal it had developed behind closed doors – not to renovate the Downtown Library, but to build an entirely new library on the bottom floor of a parking garage. This “bait and switch” from the Measure S campaign provoked justifiable outrage among Santa Cruz voters.

City staff initially claimed that sharing construction costs with a parking garage would make Library bond money go further. However, architects later informed the City that a thoroughly renovated and modernized Downtown Library at its present location would cost slightly *less* per square foot than building a new library in the proposed Lot 4 project. Both libraries were reasonably sized at 30,000 square feet. Both alternatives now need at least \$5 million in additional funding to add to the less than \$25 million that still remains available from Measure S. A library in the Lot 4 project would cost millions of dollars more if it were to be significantly larger.

City planners are struggling to find money for the Lot 4 project. Meanwhile, taxpayers are being robbed of the value of our tax payments because post-pandemic inflation in building materials and construction costs decrease the purchasing power of library bond funds over time.



On February 11, 2016, the SCPL Facilities Financing Authority placed a \$67 million bond measure (later designated Measure S) on the June, 2016 ballot. With 70% approval, voters agreed to fund Measure S.

Natalie Dean designed this inviting landscaping for the Downtown Library showcasing our region’s spectacular native plants and helping to create a garden “corridor” and a strong sense of place.



“Never demolish, never remove – always add, transform and reuse.”

- Anne Lacaton and Jean-Phillipe Vassal, 2021 Pritzker Architecture Prize winners

By contrast, the he Jayson architectural proposal for renovating the existing Downtown Library is ready. Instead of waiting to insert the Library into a 6 to 7-story project, we can begin now to create a first-class 21st-century library for a digital age.

What would a newly renovated library at its present site be like? [Jayson Architecture](#)’s proposal is both cost-effective and inspiring. It includes new plumbing, electrical, HVAC, shelving, carpeting, lighting, and elevators in an efficient and attractively designed building that shifts the main entrance to face the courtyard of City Hall. Handicapped and other parking would increase, and be directly accessible adjacent to the Library, not in a multi-story



parking garage. The Jayson proposal includes study rooms, a teen space, a greatly increased children's area with its own outdoor patio and a large community room available for meetings after hours, also with an outdoor patio. The renovated library thus would make possible programs and activities unavailable in a Lot 4 project library that lacks outdoor spaces.

Creating a state-of-the-art Downtown Library at its present site builds on the 117-year tradition of having the Library at the city's Civic Center. Renovation is forward thinking. As the 2021 winners of the prestigious Pritzker Architecture Prize assert: "Never demolish, never remove – always add, transform and reuse." A renovated stand-alone library will not only serve our needs well, it also will represent the value of knowledge that is at the heart of our democratic society. The Library is a civic institution, already an integral, historic part of the Civic Center. It should remain so. 🌿





We do not need to build a parking garage downtown!

Oversupplying parking in a space-constrained area like a downtown can fragment the built environment, creating a less desirable place to work, live, visit, and walk around.

- The Economics of Parking: Santa Cruz Strategic Parking Plan, by Nelson\Nygaard

BASED ON PARKING supply/demand projections and financial considerations, professional parking consultants have advised the City that it should implement parking management strategies, and only build a new parking structure if and when other alternatives have been exhausted.

To follow the City's commitment to [Health in All Policies \(HIAP\)](#), addressing parking must take into account the health impacts of expanding auto infrastructure as well as effects of greenhouse gases. The very building of parking structures requires using large amounts of concrete in a process that intensively adds CO₂ to the atmosphere, with a negative impact on addressing climate change.

HIAP also values social equity rather than discrimination. Transportation is the second highest expenditure for the average household. Failure to provide practical commuting alternatives forces households to own and operate extra vehicles. By perpetuating auto dependency, the Lot 4 project reduces social equity.



“No agency will make enough on user fees to pay for that new parking space.”
- Parking Consultant Janis Rhodes, JR Parking Associates

We can meet projected parking demand without a parking garage

Pre-pandemic, Downtown had a large surplus of parking. The City-commissioned study, *The Economics of Parking: Santa Cruz Strategic Parking Plan (2019)*, by Nelson\Nygaard, analyzes City parking survey data. It reports, “Almost 30% of off-street parking in the Downtown remains empty even at the peak of the peak times.” In fact, the number of vacant parking spaces at the peak demand hour *increased* by more than 700 from 2008 to 2018.

City staff still claim that a new parking structure is needed. In their assessment, residents and customers of new buildings Downtown will create more future parking demand. It is true that some City parking spaces in surface parking lots will be lost as those developments are built. However, a number of the developments will offset loss of surface parking by including new public parking spaces. For example, the Laurel and Pacific project eliminates 23 surface parking spaces but provides 43 new spaces available to the public.

The Nelson\Nygaard answer to whether Down-



town can meet future parking needs is a basic policy strategy: “The most fiscally prudent approach to accommodating additional demand: Modernize parking management and better align parking prices to the cost of building and maintaining the system.” The model of future demand by Patrick Siegman, who worked on the Nelson\Nygaard report, shows that even with the loss of surface spaces and new development, there will be a surplus of Downtown parking well into the future. He explains, “What we see from the model is ... the City Council-approved price increases will reduce demand enough, so that even with new development and the loss of some surface parking spaces, you’ll still have a surplus.”

The City’s consultants recommend management strategies that include:

- Pricing parking for availability. (Higher parking fees at prime curb locations will encourage their more efficient use. According to UCLA parking expert Donald Shoup, achieving a 15% vacancy rate at the curb results in visitors readily finding parking.)



- Offering benefits to working commuters to reduce single-occupancy vehicle commuting. (Boulder is a model of commuter benefits, getting the drive-alone rate to work downtown reduced to 43%, compared to 58% in Santa Cruz.)
- Charging parking permit holders by the day rather than by the month to encourage alternatives to driving.
- Using smart parking software to show visitors the locations of available parking.

The Nelson\Nygaard report also points out the negative consequences of too much parking: “Oversupplying parking in a space-constrained area like a downtown can fragment the built environment, creating a less desirable place to work, live, visit, and walk around. City code provisions that require more parking to be built than the market demands increase the cost of development and relegate land that could support jobs, housing, and tax-generating uses to the storage of vehicles.”



Building a parking garage would have unnecessary financial risks

Each parking space in any new parking structure would potentially cost \$60,000. A 400-space structure thus could cost \$24 million upfront, and around \$60 million in bond payments over 30 years. Consultants have indicated that this cost cannot be met simply with parking income. Janis Rhodes of JR Parking Consultants told the City’s Planning Commission and Downtown Commission: “No agency will make enough on user fees

to pay for that new parking space. All three of us professionals and all my peers in the industry have become very conservative ... maximizing existing inventories before we step out into that arena of financing new resources.”

Another consultant, Economic and Planning Systems, reviewed the City’s parking financing model in 2018. They found, “With market cycles all but inevitable, it will be important for the City to have a plan to manage Parking District finances during an economic downturn.... It should be noted, however, that the model does not evaluate a worst-case scenario (for parking revenues) where a major recession occurs or a technological change (and pricing) substantially reduces parking demand.”

In the absence of a plan to pay the 30-year parking structure debt during economic downturns, the burden could fall on businesses Downtown in the form of higher parking rates and/or parking fees on each business (similar to the fees that are currently being phased out). Ultimately the burden to pay bond debt on the parking structure would fall on taxpayers.

Ultimately, the burden to pay bond debt on the parking structure would fall on taxpayers

The City can provide for future parking needs without building an extremely costly parking structure. Downtown businesses and the public will be better served by avoiding the financial risks inherent in a project for which there is no clear and pressing need. By not building an expensive and unneeded parking structure and by renovating the existing library, we can have a Commons on Lot 4 anchor a more vibrant Downtown and we can build even more affordable housing on Lot 7. 🌿



Preliminary proposal demonstrating how affordable housing could be built on Lot 7. Design by architecture student Bao Hoa Pham under the direction of University of San Francisco Professor Jeff Oberdorfer.



Maximizing affordable housing: Lot 7 instead of lot 4

FOR THE FUTURE (FTF) AND EDEN HOUSING, chosen to provide the affordable-housing component of the proposed Lot 4 mixed-use project, identified two alternatives: develop 94 units of low and very-low income rental housing in a 6-story structure with a separate 5-story parking garage or create 107 units in a 7-story structure, either way, including 400 stalls of parking. With promised solar panels, rooftop vegetable gardens, a child-care center, space for agency services for residents, responsiveness to the City's commitment to Health in All Policies, and bike storage, either of these two schemes might seem like an attractive way to help address the very real affordable housing crisis in Santa Cruz.

There are 5 problems.

- The Lot 4 project is based on the environmentally deficient approach of demolishing the present library.
- It includes an unnecessary parking facility, wasting space instead of using city-owned land for housing.



- It displaces the Farmers' Market from its present highly successful location.
- It requires cutting down 10 [Heritage trees](#).
- It fails to maximize development of affordable housing Downtown.

There is a clear alternative that creates *more* housing using the *same* city-owned spaces:

- Renovate the Library where it stands at the Civic Center.
- Keep the Farmers' Market where it is on Lot 4, as part of a Downtown Commons.
- Build affordable housing on Lot 7.

Lot 7 is on the east side of Front Street, bounded to the south by Cathcart Street and on the north by the New Leaf parking lot. For years, the City offered



Lot 7 as the place to relocate the Farmers' Market so as to build on Lot 4. But Lot 7 is inferior to Lot 4 as a location for the Market: it misses the sunshine of Lot 4 because it is mostly shaded by adjacent buildings in the afternoon, and at just over 39,000 square feet, it is some 34% smaller than Lot 4. Building 100% low and very-low income housing on Lot 7 makes much more sense. The lot is city-owned and in the heart of Downtown, right next to public transportation, and large enough to have housing on upper floors with commercial/community space and parking on the ground level.

To get an initial idea of how building housing on Lot 7 could work, we consulted with University of San Francisco faculty member and architect [Jeff Oberdorfer](#). His architecture seminar participants produced attractive proposals for low-income housing, with studios, 1-bedroom and some 2-bedroom units in 5 stories above the ground level.

The net gain in affordable housing compared to the FTF/Eden Lot 4 proposal is quite substantial.




This preliminary design, by Kelli Rodriguez of the University of San Francisco, provides 120 one- and two-bedroom units of affordable housing.

On Lot 7, a minimum of 120 units can be built in a 6-story structure, or 144 units if their development were expanded to 7 stories. By comparison with Lot 4, the Lot 7 preliminary design yields 27% more units of low-income housing than the 6-story FTF/Eden proposal and it would yield 34% more than their 7-story proposal. Either of these Lot 7 solutions yields more than the *total* number of low-income units completed in the city since 2010.

Either of the Lot 7 solutions yields more than the total number of low-income units completed in the city since 2010.

The FTF/Eden proposal for Lot 4, with all its attractive features, should be adapted and applied to Lot 7 – minus the Library and the parking structure. The development would qualify for tax credits and other governmental sources of low-income housing funding, and FTF has demonstrated strong expertise in putting together financing packages. If all Lot 7 units went to low and very-low income households, the apartments would be rented to households with \$66,000 annual income or less.

Using Lot 7 for low-income housing gives the City its best opportunity to maximize production of affordable housing in relation to three major City-owned spaces – the Civic Center, Lot 4, and Lot 7. It is a far stronger approach to the housing crisis than the City's approach.

With Lot 7 dedicated to addressing housing needs of the community, the City can renovate the Library where it is and create a permanent Farmers' Market and Commons on Lot 4 to satisfy the community and downtown residents' need for a shared public space at the center of Santa Cruz. We can make a better Downtown. 

Credits

With heartfelt thanks to Jeff Oberdorfer, Keili Gonzalez, and Bao Hoa Pham for their Architectural demonstration project.

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Further resources about the New Wave in City Planning

Websites

Communitecture, <https://www.communitecture.net/>

Congress for the New Urbanism, <https://www.cnu.org/>

PlacemakingX, <https://www.placemakingx.org/>

Project for Public Space, <https://www.pps.org/>

SPUR, <https://www.spur.org/>

Strong Towns, <https://www.strongtowns.org/>

The City Repair Project, <https://cityrepair.org/>

Books

Christopher Alexander et al., *A Pattern Language: Towns, Buildings, Construction*

Jane Jacobs, *The Life and Death of Great American Cities*

Jane Holtz Kay, *Asphalt Nation: How the Automobile Took Over America and How We Can Take It Back*

Kevin Lynch, *Good City Form*

For a longer list of books, see <https://www.cnu.org/resources/new-urbanist-books>



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Build affordable housing
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