

CITY COUNCIL
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SUBCOMMITTEE
MARCH 29, 2012 – 2:00 P.M.
MARTINEZ, CA

CALL TO ORDER; WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Councilmember DeLaney called the meeting to order at 2:00 P.M. She introduced herself and Councilmember Kennedy. Councilmember Kennedy explained the goals and subject of the meeting.

City Manager Philip Vince made introductions of staff.

Present: Lara DeLaney, Janet Kennedy; Councilmembers
Staff Present: Philip Vince, City Manager; Dave Scola, Public Works Director; Tim Tucker, City Engineer; Don Salts, Deputy Public Works Director; Bob Cellini, Public Works Superintendent; Corey Simon, Senior Planner; and Susan Moeller, City Consultant.

DOWNTOWN MATTERS: MAKING IT REAL

City Consultant Susan Moeller spoke about the revitalization of downtown and the City's goal of finding concrete action steps that could be taken immediately. She reviewed the process of Downtown Matters and the feedback that had been received through that process, including new insights on the needs of downtown, priorities, strategies and possibilities. She described the aspects of downtown organization that the discussion and planning would focus on, and summarized some of the comments on the current state and user-friendliness of downtown. She also discussed some of the successful ways other cities were addressing these needs and issues, and explained the concept of flex space.

OUTDOOR DINING IN DOWNTOWN

- * Problems
- * Proposal
- * Policies
- * Funding Options

Public Works Director Dave Scola gave a brief history of how the concept had been suggested and developed in the City. He addressed some details of how this would work in Martinez. Senior Planner Corey Simon went over proposed policy requirements of size, permitting processes, signage, insurance, and other categories, and reviewed acceptable uses of the spaces. Susan Moeller reinforced some concepts that were significant to the process, such as public space.

Councilmember DeLaney asked why staff was proposing such a uniform approach, while other cities had allowed businesses to pursue a more unique look. Ms. Moeller stated that the consistency gave a foundation that could be used throughout downtown, and helped to address health, safety and maintenance issues. She added that there would be ways to individualize the space. Mr. Scola agreed and described some of the flexible aspects of the design. Mr. Simon listed some of the functional limitations of Martinez's downtown.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

* Discussion and Feedback

Councilmember DeLaney opened up the discussion for public comment.

Mike, Pacifica Pizza, asked how the four panels would be divided among the six restaurants on the 500-block, and who would have first choice. Mr. Simon stated that there was the possibility of flexibility and that there would probably be a type of variance process built in to accommodate restaurants that wanted to add a fifth panel. The intent was to provide balance to the space, but staff did not want to be rigid.

Ernie Guerrero, La Tapatia, expressed appreciation to Mr. Scola and staff for their detailed explanation of the process. He expressed concern about restaurants losing money when the spaces were taken away due to weather, and stated that he liked the flexibility and ability to expand and change, or opt in and out. He also noted that this would add to the parking issues. He asked if the charge to add outdoor dining could be reduced as recognition of the increased sales tax the restaurants would be paying, even though the City would lose some parking meter revenue. He added that he did not believe the two-way street would present a problem. He also asked why there would need to be landlord approval, since it would be using City property, and asked if the patios could have lighting for evening dining.

Pat English, Haute Stuff, stated that she had enjoyed and appreciated the pockets up to now. She expressed concern about the appearance of the platforms and that aluminum would be too hot and reflective to sit on; and about the labor and storage needed to break down and put away the patio furniture. She also expressed concern about the added costs to business owners, since it was already difficult to have a lucrative business in Martinez. She added that she thought the seasons in California were mild enough that the dining could remain for nine months or even the full year and that people would continue to use it. She asked if the recent gas tax could go toward the construction and implementation of these spaces. She also asked why the 500-block was chosen for this experiment when it was successful already. Councilmember DeLaney thanked Ms. English for her comments, and added that a final decision had not been made at the Subcommittee or the Council level. She also stated that the City was not trying to fix the 500-block but was pursuing new possibilities for revitalizing the downtown.

Ann Mobley, 500-block of Main St, business owner, noted that even if the project was not intended to "fix" the 500-block, it would affect the businesses there. She stated that the 500-block had been successful so far and that she preferred to keep the organic look and the one-way street. She noted that she had 800 signatures on a petition to keep the one-way street for safety and visibility reasons. She expressed concerns about diagonal vs. vertical parking, the narrowness of the streets, and drainage problems with pipes filling with leaves. She suggested it would be better to get a grant to extend the outdoor dining down the rest of Main St., leaving the 500-block the way it is, and not restrict the number of businesses who could offer it. She asked about storage of the platforms and railings, and suggested that because of the good weather it would not be a problem to have it all year round. She stated that it would be good for each restaurant to have its own style and look, and agreed that the outdoor dining should not be subject to landlord approval.

Carol, Main Street Sweets, agreed with Ms. English and Ms. Mobley. She expressed concern about applying one cost to everyone because her business did not pull in as much revenue as the restaurants. She agreed that the 500-block was currently very charming, that the spaces for each business should be unique, and that the outdoor dining should stay out year round.

Councilmember DeLaney thanked Carol for her comments and stated that the City had not determined what the cost would be yet.

Al Turnbaugh thanked staff and business owners for their hard work in participating with this process. He stated that revitalization of the downtown would benefit everyone. He stated that he would prefer it if landlords and property owners had input, since they would have to pay for some of the changes. He noted that the City staff, business owners, and property owners were all in this together and needed to work together to make things happen. He added that the pockets were originally intended to be temporary and a stepping stone to something bigger and better. He stated that he believed this was a fantastic idea and suggested there were a lot of ways to individualize the spaces. He suggested that the decision to take them down in the winter should be taken on a year-by-year basis, and that the cost be balanced among the City and the business and property owners because of the tax revenue that would be created. He stated he was looking forward to seeing the results of all the hard work.

The proprietor of Copper Skillet Courtyard stated that he was excited about the possibility of having outdoor dining. He asked if restaurants would be allowed to use other vendors if they found someone who offered the same thing for cheaper.

Jonathan Stone, Pacifica Pizza, asked who would be responsible for the maintenance, upkeep and insurance of the platforms.

Sally Sweetsner, Martinez resident, stated that she liked the outdoor dining on the 500-block and wanted it to be extended down the rest of Main St. She suggested the idea of staggering one lane down the street. She wondered about the idea of having small park spaces or plazas in the pockets, offering more opportunities for people to sit down in downtown.

Kelly, Studio Treskelon, stated that she benefited from the increased business on the 500-block even though she did not own a restaurant, and that her customers liked to be in the 500-block. She stated that she did not like the proposed new look because it was too urban and compact and was not consistent with the historic pedestrian look that the business owners were trying to create. She stated that she had invested her family's life in the downtown community and wanted to make sure her child would be safe walking down the street. She expressed concern about the possibility of theft if the platforms were too portable, and she suggested that the outdoor dining as well as the historic, pedestrian-friendly aesthetic should be continued for the entire block. She added that the community should be given more opportunity to participate and that the cost should be kept low in consideration of the economy.

Beckey, Lemongrass Bistro, expressed concern that all of the restaurants would be able to offer outdoor dining, and suggested that the City make sure the cost was not prohibitive. She stated that she loved Martinez and wanted to continue to be part of the community.

Rachael Ford, Main Street Martinez, read a letter on behalf of the organization which expressed support for the proposal, since it would upgrade and expand the outdoor dining and capitalize on the success that the restaurants were experiencing. This proposal would support the goal of revitalization, and Main Street Martinez looked forward to assisting with the implementation of the proposal.

Phillip Ciaramitaro, Community Initiatives of Martinez, suggested that the Marina area should be rebuilt and made more accessible, so that it could contribute to the revitalization of the rest of downtown by creating more attractions. Councilmember DeLaney thanked Mr. Ciaramitaro for his comments and agreed that the Marina was important to the City.

Donna Allan, resident, thanked Ms. Moeller for keeping business owners excited about the prospect of revitalization. She stated that the question of the shape of the parking and whether the streets would be one-way or two way would be important to the design of the spaces. She asked if it would be possible to see the flex spaces in use in a different community. Mr. Scola stated that he did not know if this exact model was being used anywhere, and that the City had worked with the manufacturer on the design. It might be possible to purchase one as a sample to display in City Hall. Ms. Allan stated that she and others wanted to know what the feel would be, to decide whether it would fit in downtown or not.

Mike of Pacifica Pizza suggested the possibility of building a parking structure in a vacant lot on Main Street, and using all the spaces on the street for outdoor dining, park areas, benches, and other community space. Councilmember Kennedy stated that the City was looking into other parking options, but multi-level parking structures are very costly. Councilmember DeLaney also noted that not all of the vacant lots in downtown are owned by the City.

Kelly of Studio Treskelon asked about the possibility of cleaning up the unused buildings and properties in downtown, and the possibility of putting a public restroom in downtown.

Earl Dunivan, downtown property owner, stated that putting parking meters in all the spaces in downtown could help pay for a parking structure. He suggested that the cost of the flex spaces not be more than the revenue generated by a metered space. He stated that it was important for everyone in downtown to pay into the parking district, although the fee needed to be reasonable. He added that the property owners had been promised that the original pockets would not be permanent and that it was time for them to be upgraded and made more consistent.

Rachael Ford, resident, stated that consumers also had an important investment in downtown. She stated that the parking revenue issue was complicated by the fact that customers would park further up and walk since the street is one-way. She agreed that the fee for the flex-spaces should not go higher than the lost parking revenue, but noted that Martinez does not get all of the sales tax. She stated that just because the spaces are modular and metal, does not mean they have to be unattractive. She thanked staff for their work on the proposal.

Roxann Collier, Rox on the Main, stated that she was looking forward to getting pockets on the 600-block. She noted that the ability to individualize the platforms was very important, and expressed concern with the labor needed in taking them down and putting them up.

Dick Vanderkous, property owner, stated that he was still of the opinion that the pocket spaces and the single direction of the street were a detriment to the street and caused problems with traffic. He stated that he did not think the 500-block was currently attractive and that it should be made uniform.

Mike Alford, resident, stated that it was difficult to move forward and work as a community when parts of the downtown were in conflict with each other. He also expressed concern with circulation of traffic and with lost parking revenue.

Marty Ochoa, resident, stated that he was interested in building a restaurant in downtown. He stated his opinion that the pockets are a good idea and that the uniform look was better.

Councilmember Kennedy thanked everyone for their input and noted that the design was not set in stone and they would not make a decision immediately.

Councilmember DeLaney invited everyone to return for the second workshop and stated that a lot of the details would be addressed in another meeting. She requested that everyone continue to participate in the process.

ADJOURNMENT

Adjourned at 4:00 p.m. to another workshop at 6:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers.