CHAPTER 5

STIMULATING DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY
5.1 Introduction

Private sector investment is a critical component in achieving a vibrant downtown. Public investments in mobility infrastructure, parking and public spaces all help to create an environment that will stimulate activity and investments in downtown development. With relatively low interest rates, now is the time to attract development partners to revitalize downtown.

Through public and stakeholder input, the following strategies have been suggested for stimulating economic development:

- Create development catalyst sites
- Create a strong job base around Government Center
- Add additional residential and mixed-used residential development
- Streamline the development approval process
- Increase the profitability and sustainability of retail businesses

The City’s Economic Development Element (EDE) recognizes the importance of downtown to the economic vitality of the City. Action LU 3.2.3 from the plan states:

“Support key catalyst development projects in the downtown area, such as Taylor Farms Corporate Headquarters and other development projects that bring more people into and help revitalize the downtown. With the implementation of the Downtown Vibrancy Plan and the completion of catalyst projects, the City should also consider the following action steps for the downtown:

- Identify potential opportunities to expand the National Steinbeck Center footprint (e.g. conference room/gallery addition on open corner of Market and Salinas Street);
- Prepare and implement a Government Center Plan which consolidates Federal, State, County and City assets with connections to Main Street. Work with the County of Monterey to implement the Government Center Plan;
- Encourage development and parking structures on City-owned surface parking lots where surface parking can be replaced by structured parking.”

The current “zoning by right” exists for those parcels zoned appropriately for development; however, since the re-zoning of public land is recommended in this document, special attention is needed for the environmental impacts associated with more intensified uses. This plan recommends that as much environmental work be done as possible in conjunction with the EDE based on programmatic recommendations contained for each catalyst site.

Priority Development Projects

The City of Salinas has demonstrated that it can partner with businesses desiring to locate downtown. In order to attract the right development and to provide assistance, it is important that priority developments be identified.

Through input received in developing the Vibrancy Plan, the following types of development should be aggressively targeted and given special considerations in processing for City approvals:

- Office buildings that accommodate professionals
- Residential development (market rate or upscale)
- Urban grocery store or other targeted retail use
- Projects that fill vacant space on or near Main Street

This chapter summarizes the efforts of the public and stakeholders in developing concepts for catalyst sites for redevelopment; the following five areas were examined:

- Monterey Street
- Government Center
- Intermodal Transportation Center
- Historic Main Street
- Salinas and Gabilan Streets

Each of these catalyst sites has the potential to bring priority development projects to downtown and breathe fresh life into old and underutilized properties.

This chapter also discusses how to attract additional residential and mixed-use residential developments, identifies recommendations for streamlining the government approvals process, and summarizes ideas to improve the sustainability of downtown businesses.

Taylor Farms Headquarters - Case Study

The Taylor Farms corporate headquarters building being constructed on the 100 block of Main Street represents a significant investment in downtown Salinas. Once complete, over 350 employees will work in the building, representing a new client base to downtown restaurants and shops. The headquarters will also bring out-of-town visitors who travel for corporate meetings. Parking and retail uses are also included with the project. This development represents the type of project that the Vibrancy Plan hopes to attract to downtown.

The process in gaining City approvals can proceed quickly, but not always smoothly nor with universal support. Some lessons learned through the development process of Taylor Farms that should be included or approved upon when dealing with priority development projects include:

Positive Experiences

- Built on a former surface parking lot.
- Project was properly characterized as priority project.
- Political will to make the project happen (Mayor/City Manager).
- Development was administratively approved.
- Designed to reflect historic character of Main Street.
- Accommodated half of the parking demand in the Monterey Street Garage.

Lessons Learned

- Localized parking shortages are anticipated to occur in the future if a new parking structure is not provided (No long term parking plan was presented particularly during construction).
- The loss of convenient surface parking was not supported by existing merchants.
- Surface parking lot conversion to development and replacement parking structures should be integrated.
- Local business didn’t perceive an opportunity to provide meaningful input.
- An aggressive schedule for project approvals should be developed that keeps the public informed.
5.2 CREATING CATALYST SITES

Figure 5-1 Catalyst Sites

Investment in new development can occur on sites that are occupied with underutilized uses or on newly created sites that are made available to potential developers. The former occurs within the private sector with little or no involvement by the government. As discussed in the parking section, the City of Salinas and Monterey County own properties currently used for parking that can be made available to developers, provided that the existing parking is replaced on-site or in a nearby parking structure. These sites, which are depicted on the adjacent figure, represent potential catalyst sites that could be made available for priority development projects.

These sites should be made available using the following process:

1. Identify a site for structured parking.
2. Designate nearby surface parking lots for redevelopment.
3. Change the base zoning of redevelopment lots from Public/Semi-public to Mixed-Use or Mixed Arterial Frontage zones that are prevalent in the downtown.
4. Market redevelopment sites for priority development. Priority development should include developments that add base employment, housing and/or an urban grocery use downtown.
5. Expedite processing of the development.
6. Construct structured parking when needed.

It is recommended to combine the work required under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for the implementation of the Environmental Development Element (EDE) and that required for the implementation of the vibrancy plan under one study. Because the Vibrancy Plan is a subsection of the EDE, the two should be able to achieve a high level of efficiency by completing the same CEQA study. This will minimize the needs for a private developer to undergo, large costly, time consuming environmental studies in order to build their project.

Utilizing the “Repurposing Parking lots” idea discussed in Chapter 3, the Downtown Stakeholder Team developed concepts for redeveloping a number of surface parking lots and other underutilized properties. These areas are depicted on Figure 5-1. The next several pages depict the concepts and recommendations for the five catalyst sites that were examined.

The numbered and lettered lots designate government parking currently used for specific government uses (typically employee parking), public parking or leased to the public as permit parking. More information on the existing public and government owned parking sites is included in Chapter 3 (see Figure 3-1 & 3-3).
5.2.1 Monterey Street

The Monterey Street corridor encompasses Monterey Street from Gabilan Street to John Street and includes Parking Lots 3 and 5. As part of the plan discussed in detail in the “Destination Downtown” chapter, it is recommended to return Monterey Street to two-way traffic and add Class II bike lanes (see Figure 2-8, 2-9, 2-10). Five opportunity areas within the Monterey Street corridor are discussed below:

- City Lot 3, City Lot 5, private lots on the north side of Alisal Street, and private vacant sites on John Street, and bank properties just west of Monterey Street. The recommendations shown in Figure 5-2 represent an opportunity for one hundred thousand square feet of development, improved streetscape and traffic flow in the heart of the downtown area.

The preferred method of reconnecting Monterey Street to Main Street is through the use of public art, public amenities like fountains and benches, and good lighting along pedestrian connections. In Lot 3 for example, opening the building design to face the pedestrian walkway to Main Street provides room for a plaza and various amenities and public art displays. The existing cork trees in Lot 3 can be replanted to create a “Courtyard” that joins the surface parking lot with the redevelopment site and extends the pedestrian access from Main Street to Monterey Street. Alternatively in Lot 5, the pedestrian access is limited because of the building at mid 500 block. Because of limited access to the redeveloped site, the building access can be centered toward Monterey Street, with an indoor connection through the building.

The corner of Monterey Street and Alisal Street (depicted to the right) is another significant opportunity to catalyze positive change. With a successful public/private partnership with 249 and 235 Monterey Street and 295 Main Street property owners, this whole intersection can come to life. Architect Sal Munoz lead the ODT in a discussion regarding this corner. In the discussion, Sal suggested to re-orient 235 Monterey Street to face south and Alisal Street. These units can also increase value with the addition of glazing to the Monterey Street/Alisal Street Lodge Lane access points. These changes will begin to activate the alley at Lodge Lane. Pending the improvements recommended at Parking Lot 5, the allowance of parking reductions based upon the future expansion of public parking across the street, allows for more room for public art, historic statuary or fountains at the corners. Additionally, the old planter in the parking lot of 295 Main Street that still has the remnants of a Great Western Bank sign on it could be replaced with a coffee cart or floral kiosk. Either option would be a great addition that would win the business of passing traffic.

The area north of John Street between Monterey Street and Pajaro Street (depicted to the right) is quickly becoming a key component in the development of Downtown. At the April community meeting, an important link was brought to the attention of the ODT at the intersection of Monterey Street and John Street. The vacant hotel, vacant lot that faces Pajaro Street, and the Veblen Gas Station has tremendous development potential. Developing this area can help to begin a link between Pajaro Street and Monterey Street, and initiate the growth and redevelopment of John Street. In addition, if the current bank properties to the west of Monterey Street are redeveloped, this link could easily extend to Main Street.

Key recommendations for the Monterey Street Site include:

- Rezone Parking Lots 3 and 5 to mixed-use.
- Replace 220 parking spaces between the two Lots.
- Consider housing and parking at Lot 5—open up in-door connection to Main Street.
- Consider 10,000 square feet of office space, 50 residential multi-family, and mixed-use units at Lot 3.
- Consider 80 units of housing, 150 parking spaces, 10,000 square feet of second floor open space at Lot 5.
- Design each of the two developments in a horse-shoe or circular design with open space on the ground-level, to provide room for fountains and public art.
- Encourage banks to redevelop their sites with a mix of other uses such as retail, office, or residential.
5.2.2 Government Center

The Government Center contains City Hall, the County offices, the Post Office, federal offices, and the court system—a center that mostly draws daytime workers and visitors to downtown Salinas. The area has a deficit of available office space, which is witnessed by the District Attorney and Public Defender offices being housed in temporary, modular buildings. Parking shortages are also prevalent, creating spillover into adjoining residential neighborhoods. Due to spatial challenges and limited store hours, Government Center employees don’t visit Main Street commercial establishments to a great extent after work. As of August 2014, the County purchased office buildings at Schilling Place and will be relocating nearly 150 persons of its downtown workforce. The loss of downtown workers will impact retail business, but will also create some momentum for change in the Government Center.

Within its boundary, the City owns Parking Lots 8, 12, 17, the Salinas Street parking garage, the parking lot on Alisal Street that is currently occupied by modular offices, the parking lot at the corner of Capital Street and Alisal Street, and other surface parking and open space within the current campus. City Hall, the Police Station and Armory also fall within the current campus. The campus represents approximately 30-acres of space and opportunity for the four government agencies to work together to come up with viable solutions.

The City and County have an existing 2012 Memorandum of the Understanding that expires in 2014. It is a commitment of each agency to work together to build a government campus that connects to the downtown. The Government Center area has been studied by others over the past decade, including the County, Renaissance Partners, and SPARC. Additional planning was accomplished during the Vibrancy Plan planning process by the Downtown Stakeholder Team and by the public during a Community Workshop that was specifically focused on the Government Center (pictured below).

**Figure 5-3 Catalyst Improvements Government Center**

- **Build Structured Parking**
  - Remove modular buildings and construct a structured parking lot suitable for both use by County and City Hall workers and visitors.

- **Create a Plaza**
  - Build a plaza or urban park at the existing police station site for daytime workers and evening and weekend events.

- **Redevelop City Property**
  - Redevelop City property Lot 10 with an urban grocery store.

- **Pedestrian Crossing**
  - Extend pedestrian crossing from County property through City Hall and Lot 8 to Salinas Street.

- **Pedestrian Connection**
  - Create a safe and pleasant pedestrian connection between Government Center and Main Street.

- **Other Recommendations**
  - Project and plan for office space needs of all government entities.
  - Re-zone all City and County surface parking lots for mixed use.
5.2.3 Intermodal Transportation Center

The Intermodal Transportation Center (ITC) has been studied for more than a decade as just a transportation center. This site, however, has a huge potential for transit oriented development and new connections with the rest of the City. Spanning 24 acres from Hopkins to Pajaro Street along Market Street, developing this site will open up downtown and Bataan Park and new connections to Chinatown and north Salinas.

Currently, the ITC, Bataan Park, and Chinatown are three separate areas, like islands, with no clear connection to Downtown (the mainland). A key component of making downtown vibrant is unifying these three spaces within the urban heart of the City of Salinas so they function together as one site.

The first step in generating the reconnecting energy is to build upon the 2010 Chinatown Rebound Plan. Specifically, to look at how it reconnects Chinatown to downtown at Pajaro Street and East Market Street via an at grade pedestrian and bicycle crossing. At present, Chinatown is not a safe or desirable destination for visitors due to homelessness and substance abuse. This area needs attention so that it’s rich history and unique architecture can become an asset to the area. Bataan Park, described in detail in Chapter 4 (see Figure 4-1), is an ambitious plan to activate the park and provide seamless connections between Historic Main Street, the ITC and Chinatown.

Transit Oriented Development

The ITC will serve as a hub for intercity bus and rail (commuter rail to the Bay area and local buses). Much of the land area will be used to provide parking needed for the commuter rail passengers (a total of 780 parking spaces). However, this site also provides opportunities for mixed-use, residential or hotel development that is extremely close to transit (shown in Figure 5-4). The parking lots located between Market Street, Lincoln Avenue, North Main Street and the rail tracks also provide potential opportunities for mixed-use development.

Key recommendations for the ITC development site include:

- Build structured parking to accommodate new uses and to ensure that adequate parking is available for the ITC uses and the museum uses (First Mayor’s House and Train Museum)
- Construct Transit Oriented Development with residential, hotel and/or mixed-use development
- Provide stronger vehicular and bicycle connections to Main Street, the Monterey-Salinas Transit center, Chinatown, and Government Center
- Create safe pedestrian and bicycle connection from Chinatown through Bataan Park, and to the ITC
- Construct ground floor retail (ideally an urban grocery)
- Integrate development with Bataan Park improvements
- Provide pathway through Bataan Park that connects the ITC and downtown
- Develop at least 40 units of market rate housing