

DOWNTOWN SANTA CRUZ | ROUNDTABLE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

The Downtown Association of Santa Cruz (DTA) in partnership with the Downtown Management Corporation (DMC) and the City of Santa Cruz Economic Development Office have launched a strategic planning process to identify priorities and improvements for Downtown Santa Cruz over the next five to seven years. The consulting firm Progressive Urban Management Associates (P.U.M.A.), was contracted to assist with the strategic planning process.

An important element of the process is getting input from the Downtown Santa Cruz community. During a site visit September 16th to 19th, 2019, P.U.M.A. held a series of roundtable discussions to gather information on the strengths, challenges, and opportunities for improvement in Downtown Santa Cruz. Widespread outreach was done to encourage participation in the discussions. Each roundtable ended up having 11 to 15 participants (approximately 100 participants total) representing a variety of interests in Downtown including: property owners, businesses, non-profit and arts organizations, major employers, residents, and employees.

Below is a summary of common themes and priorities from the roundtable discussions. Additionally, an online survey will be broadly distributed to receive additional input on improvements and priorities for Downtown.

Downtown Strengths

Common strengths for Downtown based on roundtable discussions, include the following (listed alphabetically):

- **Abbott Square** - Abbott Square was identified many times as a great addition to Downtown, serving as a de-facto town square.
- **Compact** - Downtown has a pedestrian-friendly scale that is easy to navigate.
- **Destination** - Downtown is a draw for visitors from the wider region and provides good visibility for local businesses.
- **Local Businesses** - Downtown has an abundance of unique, independent businesses that are a point of pride for the community and differentiate downtown Santa Cruz from other places.
- **Natural landscape** - Santa Cruz has a great climate with access to nature. The beach, redwoods, and San Lorenzo River are all within proximity to Downtown.
- **Neighborhood** - Downtown continues to evolve as a neighborhood with a growing number of residents. Downtown offers convenient access to everyday amenities, such as groceries and medical services.
- **Vibrant**. Santa Cruz has an active downtown with offerings for various interests including arts, sports, special events, and many local restaurants and retailers.

Downtown Challenges

Common challenges for Downtown based on roundtable discussions, include the following (listed alphabetically):

- **Homelessness, Mental Health Behaviors, and Drug Addiction Behaviors** . The homelessness crisis is impacting downtowns across the country, including Santa Cruz. There is concern the issue is growing worse. There is also a seemingly growing population of people Downtown exhibiting disruptive behaviors related to mental health and alcohol/drug addiction issues.
- **One Street Downtown**. Pacific Ave. receives a lot of attention and there is a desire to spread the vibrancy to adjacent streets, particularly Cedar and Front streets.

- **Parking.** Parking is seen as a challenge for both employees and customers, with people citing not enough supply and an aversion to parking in the garages. The need for more bike parking was also mentioned.
- **Perception.** Those who are regularly involved in Downtown see the many positives but there is a widely held perception, exacerbated by negative press, that Downtown is unsafe. There is concern that Downtown will continue to lose the local market if this perception does not change.
- **Safety.** There are real and perceived issues of safety Downtown, particularly expressed by employees and employers on behalf of their employees. Late evening and early morning were the times of most concern.

Downtown Improvements

After brainstorming a list of improvements, participants were asked to vote on their top priorities. The table below shows the top 3 to 5 priorities for each roundtable group. While priorities differ among groups, they can largely be grouped into the following three categories:

- **Clean and Safe.** Participants want to see improvements in these Downtown fundamentals, particularly on the safety side. A component of this is increasing services for the population that is experiencing homeless, and the subset of this population with mental health issues.
- **Marketing and Image.** There is a strong desire to change the negative outside perception of Downtown and pro-actively disseminate a positive narrative.
- **Economic Vitality.** This includes a number of concepts, including: the need for more housing across all price points, support for small, independent businesses, extending the vibrancy beyond Pacific Ave., and improving mobility through parking management and alternative mode enhancements.

Roundtable Priorities							
	Property Owners	Non-Profits / Arts	Residents	Major Employers	Businesses 1	Businesses 2	Employees
1	Update the vision for Downtown	More housing (affordable)	Noise enforcement	More housing (all types)	Services/ support for mental health	Marketing campaign for Downtown	Increase foot patrols for police and Rangers
2	More parking supply	Renovate/ enhance the Civic	Pacific Ave -pedestrian only	Clean/safe; reduce homelessness	Connect Downtown to the beach	Business support – affordable	Vibrancy beyond Pacific Ave.
3	Redevelop the bus station	Support independent businesses	Update benches; remove backs	Supportive policy body – “can do” attitude	Increase cleanliness – esp. off Pacific Ave.	More community gathering places	Address employee parking
4	More housing	Broaden concept of Downtown		More parking supply (inc. for bikes)		More kid-friendly	Share positive Downtown news
5	Family-friendly places			Improve mobility alternatives		Improve safety; police presence	Art/creative enhancements