

"What We Heard" at the 1st Community Workshop

The City of Bakersfield is tapping into the community's imagination to guide the overall planning efforts of Downtown for the next 30 years. The feedback given in 11 Vision Workshops, numerous stakeholders meetings (one-on-one and online) together with the insights discovered through our existing conditions report, market analysis, and case studies was translated into several development scenarios highlighting various opportunities. To further advance these visions in an inclusive way, the City held its first Community Workshop, bringing together over 125 residents, business owners and stakeholders. Together, the people of Bakersfield discussed and collaboratively designed their own preferred alternatives.



THE PROCESS

The 1st of two Community Workshops was held on August 23rd, 2016, at the Rabobank Convention Center in Downtown Bakersfield. The format of the meeting provided participants time to review the information boards with project representatives and discuss about national and international case studies of Downtown revitalization and High-Speed Rail development (HSR). The participants were encouraged to join project representatives as part of the open house format and engage with a creative, interactive site model of Downtown Bakersfield.

After an introduction from the Mayor and City Council, attendees were presented a synopsis of the planning process to date, to acquaint them with the purpose, methodology and other findings thus far of the project.

The purpose of the 1st Community Workshop was to solicit public input on the project as a means of furthering the overall planning efforts. To obtain clear input, participants formed diverse break-out groups for a collaborative experience to develop a preferred vision of Downtown Bakersfield. A multiplicity of diverse alternatives were conceived and presented by the various groups, and the following summarizes "What We Heard".

COMMUNITY CONCEPTS

- Two possibilities should be considered for the station area location: next to the Golden State Ave and F street/Chester Ave intersection and also next to the Truxtun Ave and Union Ave intersection, close to the Amtrak station
- In either locations there are opportunities for mixed-use and dense development
- Access to the HSR station should inform its implementation
- A great share of Downtown's amenities and attractions are closer to the southern portion, near to Truxtun Ave, which indicates strong arguments for strengthening development between the many Downtown Districts
- The focus of future Downtown development should be close to the station
- A "people-mover" system should be created to facilitate the connection between Amtrak, the Downtown Transit Center, the proposed HSR station and other destinations in Downtown
- Chester Ave should be reinforced as the "spine" of development
- Development should be condensed and integrated in the Downtown core, not its outskirts
- Preservation areas should be defined, to be enhanced by future redevelopment in Downtown but should not lose their identity and unique character
- Vacant and underutilized land should be leveraged for infill development
- Pedestrian and bike circulation should be prioritized and improved, prioritizing the safety and the comfort of the user
- Wall St development should be designed for an active day/night use along a new pedestrian corridor to Mill Creek
- The bike network should be better developed and integrated with the destinations and activity centers, such as parks, schools and public transportation
- Mill Creek Linear Park should connect to Downtown and the Kern River Trail



CONCLUSION

The community showed excitement about the prospect of a future High-Speed Rail station, knowing that it offers a unique opportunity to revitalize Downtown Bakersfield and reintroduce Bakersfield to California as a destination. Nevertheless, much of the discussion hinged on the merits of the proposed F Street location versus the proposed Truxtun Ave location.

Connectivity was an important aspect of the discussions held with participants. Many expressed the importance of efficient travel both statewide as well as locally. Ideas for improving connectivity included incorporating transit, pedestrian linkages and bike infrastructure. A common underlying theme throughout the meeting was a desire to maintain the character of Bakersfield. While many acknowledged that the economic benefits and a HSR station would bring, there was a sense of cautious optimism.