

Envision Downtown Hayward: Senior Undergraduate Community Planning Lab 2011-2012

Jenna Hahn
Senior, BCRP

Zeljka Howard
MCRP, AICP; Lecturer, CRP.

Hayward, with a population of approximately 145,000, is the sixth largest city located in San Francisco's East Bay. A plan to revitalize its struggling Downtown was developed by a two-quarter senior studio, which included several public workshops and outreach efforts. The authors, one of the students and the instructor write about the plan and their proposals to transform the Downtown based on smart-growth and sustainable principles.

Envision Downtown Hayward was prepared as a class project by the fourth year Community Planning Lab led by Zeljka Howard. The purpose of the project was to engage the community in proactively planning for the future of the City's Downtown, to develop a shared vision about future development of Downtown Hayward, and provide recommendations based on that vision.

The results of this planning effort are summarized in Envision Downtown Hayward which contains recommendations for future development of the overall Downtown area as well as specific proposals and guidelines for selected opportunity areas that have potential to serve as catalysts for future development in the Downtown. These proposals are based on the comments and suggestions received from the community.

This planning project entailed the preparation of three inter-related documents: the Synoptic Survey records the existing characteristics of the Downtown area, the Public Outreach Report summarizes the extensive community engagement process and public input, and the Envision Downtown Hayward document. The Envision Downtown Hayward document provides a summary of the planning recommendations that were born out of the suggestions and ideas offered by the community during public workshops, stakeholder interviews and community opinion surveys.

City goals and priorities, extensive research, community outreach, and business owners' concerns helped to identify opportunities and challenges for Downtown that were later embraced by the project's vision statement and overall planning goals that guided formulation of concept plans. A description of the proposals for land use and open space, circulation, opportunity areas, key features of urban design, policy recommendations, and how these elements addressed the vision and overall goals were also included.

The partnership between the City of Hayward and the City and Regional Planning Department proved to be mutually beneficial and a positive educational experience to all.

Project Location

Downtown Hayward is located in the northern portion of the City, encompassing 320 acres with a core area of approximately 102 acres. Once the economic, commercial, and cultural center, the Downtown lost much of its businesses and has struggled to maintain economic vitality ever since the introduction of shopping malls in the 1960's and 1970's, but residents are proud of the rich history the area holds to the community. Throughout the last several years, there has been an influx of eateries into the area that have proven to be popular and resilient, despite economic downturn. The consensus is that the Downtown is in need of revitalization to make it a stronger destination spot and economic core.

Some positive opportunities identified include the iconic historic structures in Downtown, a central location in the Bay Area with a BART station in Downtown, a diverse population, recent streetscape upgrades, and vacant buildings with potential for new uses. Some of the challenges identified include the Hayward Fault running directly through Downtown, perception of safety, lack of entertainment for all ages, and calming and capturing more visitors from the busy traffic cutting through Downtown. Besides the General Plan and Zoning Ordinance, there are five different plans that guide development in Downtown Hayward. Many of these plans have overlapping boundaries and inconsistent standards or are simply outdated for addressing current issues and community needs. The final document from this planning effort will be used by the City for development of a Downtown Specific Plan that will provide a comprehensive guide for growth in Downtown and replace the outdated plans that currently guide the area's development.

The Planning Process

Background Research

The first phase of the planning process involved gathering background information about the existing characteristics of Downtown Hayward as well as conducting public outreach activities



Figure 1: The old Hayward City Hall building, to be enhanced by the proposed plan.

in order to understand the community’s vision and create suggestions for development of the Downtown. The Project Team conducted field surveys and reviewed City documents including the General Plan, zoning regulations, specific plans, design guidelines, neighborhood plans and redevelopment activities.

Further research was conducted to obtain information about the many historic resources and structures, circulation and transportation, environmental resources, hazards (such as the Hayward Fault which passes directly through Downtown), community services, population, and housing. The City promotes Smart Growth and sustainability principles and policies (as seen in their modern City Hall above), integration of their rich historic structures, and crime prevention through environmental design.

Public Outreach

Extensive public outreach efforts were a keystone throughout every phase of the planning process. With the help of the City staff, the Project Team held several public outreach events. A public workshop at the onset of the project was attended by 60 community members who identified assets and concerns and gave the Project Team a better understanding of visual preferences for the development of Downtown.

Later, a focus group meeting was held to better identify opportunity areas and possibilities. Students also met with representatives of the CSU East Bay student body and faculty to gather ideas of how to better connect the campus with Downtown, had conversations with Farmers’ Market, BART Station and Lucky’s Grocery patrons, held stakeholder interviews, and created a blog and community opinion surveys (in person and available online).

A second public workshop reviewed and clarified the Project Team’s recommendations before the final proposals were developed. These interactions were vital in order to gain insight into the community’s perceptions of the Downtown and are described in detail in the Public Outreach Report for Envision Downtown Hayward.

Envision Downtown Hayward

Based on the information obtained from the background research, comments received from the community, and the City’s guiding principles of sustainability and smart growth, the Project Team formulated an overall Downtown concept plan and alternative plans for three key Opportunity Areas that were identified at the community meetings: The City Center Area, the Main Street/B Street/ Library Area and the BART Station Area.

These proposals were presented and discussed at a second public workshop where participants provided feedback on key features of the alternative proposals. Project Team members synthesized the comments from the community workshop and developed a vision concept plan for development in the Downtown, a circulation plan, and specific proposals for the



Figures 2 & 3: A working groups during a public workshop (top) and the students holding a posters depicting two land use alternatives for Downtown.



Figure 4: Concept for mixed-use buildings and streetscaping.



three identified Opportunity Areas and were presented to the City at a public meeting in March 2012.

The overall Envision Downtown Hayward Concept proposes a broad range of residential uses; mixed-use commercial-office and commercial-residential spaces; the enhancement of Downtown’s Main Street and B Streets as the commercial core by providing entertainment, cultural and recreational uses for all ages; and the preservation of historic resources along both corridors. The concepts include circulation enhancements, a shuttle service, improved recreational and open space, increased signage and gateways within the Downtown area, improved streetscaping and lighting, and Complete Streets.

Opportunity Areas

In addition to the topics addressed regarding development of the Downtown as a whole, Envision Downtown Hayward addresses the key Opportunity Areas, including the City Center Complex area, Main Street/B Street/Library area, and the BART station and its surrounding area. The Project Team suggests the following strategies for developing and revitalizing these sites

The City Center Complex is envisioned as a major node of activity with a large hotel, Youth Sports Center, and high density residential facilities. The Plan outlines these developments with the goal of creating an area with a balanced mix-of-uses and multitude of recreational activities. The building infrastructure is proposed to compliment a restored Creek-walk along the San Lorenzo Creek, a new open space area, and enhanced connections to other attractions such as the Japanese Gardens.

The Main Street/B Street/Library area, already a place of great importance to the Downtown, has the potential to become a more vibrant economic center. The Project Team proposes enhancements to increase activity and mobility. Mixed-use office retail commercial space should be developed and streetscape



Figure 5: Site concept for one of the Opportunity Areas

improvements should be made to achieve Complete Street design goals. The redevelopment will maximize the aesthetic value of historic buildings like the Old Post Office and City Hall, while adding new features including a new Library, and outdoor amphitheater.

Land adjacent to the BART Station currently suffers from inefficient land use and vacant parcels. The area has potential for development that not only improves the area’s image and safety, but also establishes the station as an activity hub and gateway for the Downtown. The Project Team suggests the development of new Transit Oriented residential development on the site as well as a new performing arts center and plaza. The site’s image can be further enhanced through updates to the BART Station facade and additional bus and pedestrian access points.

Figure 6: The reports produced by the class: area assessment, public outreach, final plan.

