



STAFF REPORT

To the Honorable Mayor and City Council
From the City Manager

DATE: January 27, 2020

SUBJECT

Discuss next steps for a City-led Central Redwood City Plan including the Transit District, Sequoia Station General Plan Initiation, Community Visioning and Gatekeeper Process

RECOMMENDATION

1. Authorize City Manager to develop an MOU with partner transit agencies for completion of technical studies and planning work, supporting the creation of the Transit District; and
2. Provide direction on a community visioning process for Central Redwood City and direct staff to issue a Request for Proposals for consultant assistance with this effort.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

Transportation and Community of All Ages

BACKGROUND

On November 4, 2019, the City Council considered a series of planning actions to shape future development and transit service in Downtown Redwood City. The boundaries of the area to be studied are expected to be El Camino Real, Whipple Avenue, Veterans Boulevard and Woodside Road. This new planning area will be referred to as Central Redwood City.

The need to revisit transit and land use planning in Central Redwood City is driven by several factors:

- Adoption of the Caltrain Business Plan with up to [12 trains per peak hour](#) per direction by 2040, including high speed rail which would not stop in Redwood City
- Continued work on the Dumbarton Rail Corridor with the potential for new transit service across the Bay and ending in Redwood City
- Potential grade separations of the railroad and surface streets to increase safety, preserve traffic flow, and accommodate a 4-track station

- Receipt of a mixed-Use redevelopment proposal for Sequoia Station, creating a unique and important window of opportunity to support City-desired land use and transportation improvements at and adjacent to this potential development site
- Numerous development projects requesting to exceed the downtown development caps; and
- The ongoing need to plan for additional housing, particularly affordable housing, as directed by State and regional bodies.

At the November 4, 2019 meeting, the City Council requested staff to return with additional information on the creation of a Transit District, a resource and funding plan to support the community visioning process, and a “gatekeeper process” using the City Council’s Strategic Plan and statements on community benefits to consider project proposals that would require a General Plan Amendment.

Strategic Plan - At its January 13, 2020 meeting, the City Council adopted an updated Strategic Plan. The proposed work described in this report aligns with and will facilitate implementation of all three of the Council’s strategic priorities of Housing, Transportation, and Children and Youth and the following adopted goals:

- Produce housing to meet Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA) goals for moderate, low and very low-income residents
- Ensure Redwood City is considered in all strategic regional transportation initiatives
- Create policies and infrastructure to support zero emission trips
- Increase opportunities for family entertainment, family-friendly businesses and youth activities
- Increase opportunities for youth to provide meaningful input
- Make key public meetings more accessible to families with children

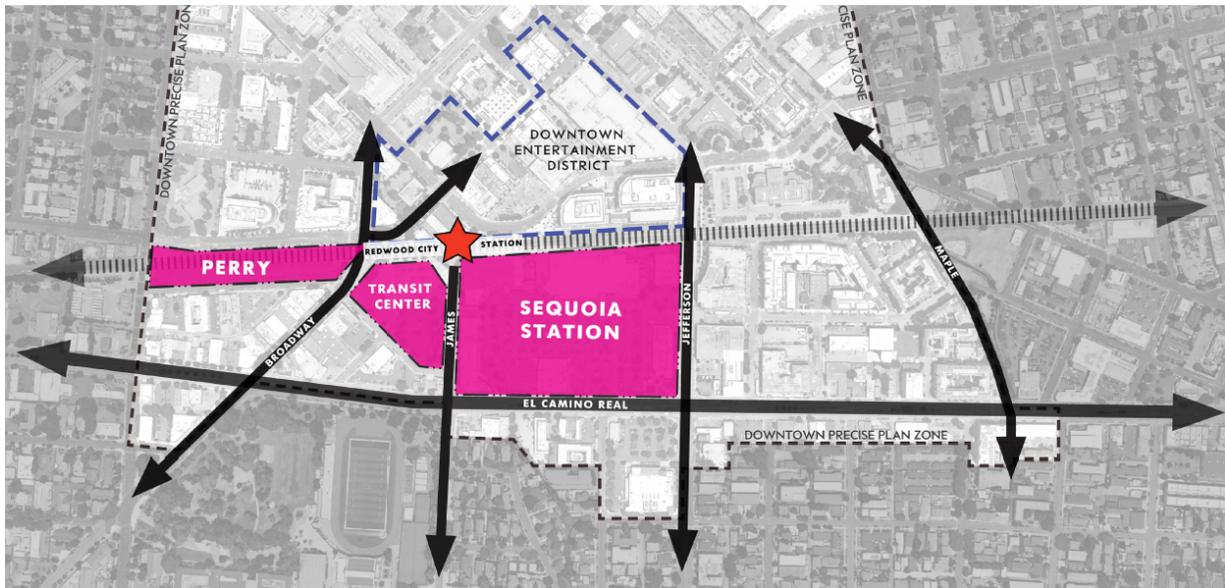
ANALYSIS

Transit District – To consider increased transportation services in the downtown, staff has identified a potential sub-district of the Downtown Precise Plan, generally bounded by the railroad, Jefferson Avenue, El Camino Real, James Avenue, Perry Street, and Brewster Avenue. This area, referred to as the Transit District, will consider potential additional railroad tracks, a new bus depot, and a signature transit station that would integrate these services in an intuitive and appealing way, accommodating future increases in transit service and improved linkages to downtown. Supportive land uses will also be considered, including office, retail, and residential, including affordable housing. The new Transit District will be an amendment to the Downtown Precise Plan; however it will also inform the Central Redwood City Plan.

The City Council-adopted Strategic Plan established Transportation as one of the Council’s top three Strategic Priorities. This Strategic Priority is defined as *Create and maintain a multimodal, safe and accessible transportation network* and the City Council approved three goals for advancing this priority:

- Ensure Redwood City is considered in all strategic regional transportation initiatives
- Create an action plan to implement Vision Zero strategies (zero fatalities or serious injuries involving road traffic)
- Create policies and infrastructure to support zero emission trips

The development of a Transit District addresses each of these goals.



Additionally, the City has recently completed a variety of planning studies that create a strong foundation for this planning effort. These studies include:

- Citywide Transportation Plan ([RWC Moves](#)) - Adopted by Council on [July 23, 2018](#), *RWCmoves* presents the City’s vision and goals for transportation and identified and prioritized over 100 projects to implement the vision. Projects include improved, multimodal access to Central Redwood City and improvements to the Transit Center itself.
- [Transit Center](#) and [Broadway Streetcar Study](#) - A multi-year study for short-and long term improvements to the Transit Center, as well as a feasibility study for a potential streetcar or urban circulator (shuttle). These studies were presented to Council at their [January 13, 2020 meeting](#).
- [El Camino Real Corridor Plan](#) - Adopted by Council on [December 4, 2017](#), the plan recommends future land use and transportation improvements along the corridor, including an enhanced “activity node” at the Sequoia Station location and access improvements to the Transit Center.

Creation of the Transit District advances these policy goals, requiring more complex technical studies and decisions on rights-of-way needs, types of transit service, a train station location, and how they can be integrated with future potential grade separations. Implementing a Transit District will require amendments of the Downtown Precise Plan, including potential land use and circulation changes.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) will be developed with the Peninsula Corridor Joint Powers Board (Caltrain) and the San Mateo County Transit District (SamTrans) to provide a framework for advancing the transportation and land use planning work of the Transit District. The MOU is expected to be modeled on agreements for station area planning work in San Francisco and San Jose with transit hubs and Caltrain service. Staff expects that key components of the MOU will include:

- Goals for transportation, land use and funding, including increasing transit ridership, improving local mobility, and creating a transit-oriented destination. This MOU will not commit any specific City funding. SamTrans and Caltrain will be responsible for completing the technical transportation studies, while the City will be the lead on the Transit District/Sequoia Station review process, and local access and mobility.
- Descriptions of the identified activities, which include the completion of technical studies for train and bus service improvements, the Transit District Plan and Sequoia Station development.

- Corresponding roles and responsibilities, including a staff group, deputy (management) group, and executive group with identified individuals. The MOU will also have a matrix specifying parties responsible for each identified activity, and whether consultation or concurrence is required.

The City will lead the community engagement portion of the project, as well as planning for transportation activities outside of the public transit services, such as street, bicycle and pedestrian connections, planning for private shuttles, design and integration of the station with the downtown, and traffic operations in the project area. Caltrain and SamTrans will lead their respective technical studies to support transit expansion, including right-of-way needs, station locations, service scenarios, and high-level design for the station.

While not parties to the agreement, the MOU will identify important partners such as Lowe (Sequoia Station developer), and the Cross Bay Transit Partners who are leading the Dumbarton Rail Corridor planning. Staff recommends that Council authorize the City Manager to develop this MOU. Work has begun on drafting the document which focuses on coordinating efforts and responsibilities amongst the partner transit agencies. Financial commitments will not be included in the MOU. Staff expects to have the draft MOU completed and presented to the City Council for execution by the end of March

Sequoia Station - Complementing the City-led process to develop a Transit District, development representatives for Sequoia Station are [requesting a General Plan Amendment Initiation \(GPI\)](#) to consider redevelopment of the shopping center into a retail, housing, and office development. This initiation process allows the City to provide feedback on the developer's initial submittal, including how to shape the development plans to meet community needs and advance policy goals. This redevelopment proposal creates a unique opportunity to coordinate transit planning, as the station is currently constrained by the close proximity of the shopping center (Safeway and CVS buildings) to the railroad tracks.

Future redevelopment could accommodate transit needs, as further defined by the technical studies and service decisions. It could also advance other City Council priorities such as providing housing for people of all income levels as well as support Guiding Principles adopted by the City Council including Aesthetics, Healthy Community for all Ages, Communication and Community Building, Economic Vitality, Public Safety, and Sustainability. This GPI is tentatively scheduled for City Council consideration on February 24, 2020. If the GPI is approved, an extensive community outreach and study period would begin, which would be coordinated with the Transit District outreach and studies, including environmental review. The Sequoia Station developer, Lowe, would be responsible for funding staff and consultant resources to support this effort.

Community Visioning - The 2011 Downtown Precise Plan was a forward-thinking plan intended to leverage private investment to meet City policy goals including to revive the downtown area, promote housing which is affordable to a variety of income groups, preserve historic resources, create a network of great public open spaces which prioritizes pedestrians and integrates transit and bicycle uses, and create a strong employment district and entertainment center with "just enough" parking.

Implementation of the Plan coincided with an unanticipated and sustained economic boom in the Bay Area, and land use development and caps that were expected to last for twenty years were largely exhausted in five years. The City Council, staff, and the community were surprised by the speed at which new development occurred. Almost 2,000 housing units were built, creating a new neighborhood district of residents in the downtown, and 495,508 sq. ft. of net new office development was approved, creating

many new offices and businesses in the Downtown. The table below provides the status of the Plan’s development caps:

Land Use	Total Cap	Remaining in Cap	Notes
Residential Market Units	2,125 units	302 units	The total residential cap is 2,500. In 2016, the Council amended this total, setting aside 15% (375 units) for affordable housing.
Residential Affordable Units	375 units	199 units	
Office	500,000 sq. ft.	4,492 sq. ft.	Of this, 1,970 sq. ft. is set aside for ‘small office’ cap.
Hotel	200 guest rooms	200 guest rooms	
Retail	100,000 sq. ft.	100,000 sq. ft.	While new retail has been created, it has not resulted in a net increase.

As confirmed at the November 4, 2019 Council meeting, it is now appropriate to receive community input on land uses in the Central Redwood City area and for the City Council to consider how future land use will fulfill community needs and City policy goals.

This process would be informed by numerous factors, including:

- Reviews of future land use to meet current and projected community needs,
- Climate adaptation planning,
- Consideration of commercial and residential densities,
- Council-adopted policies and initiatives as described above,
- Economic drivers and impacts (both on the community and on the City) associated with development,
- Place making,
- Social equity, and
- Utility and infrastructure needs.

Many of the new Downtown buildings have completed construction and, through *RWC Moves*, staff have collected data on how new employees and residents are getting around and how public parking is being utilized. This is important data for future planning. The community has gained a sense of the scale and size of development and improvements to sidewalks, plazas, and outdoor seating areas. With this information, a visioning process would engage residents, business and property owners, and other stakeholders in discussing successes and challenges, and creating a new plan for the future. During this visioning process, the area will continue to be governed by the Downtown Precise Plan, including signage, requirements for active ground floor uses on key streets, and new uses where cap space remains (e.g., hotel, residential and retail uses).

To support this visioning process, staff recommends that a Request for Proposals be issued to seek consultant assistance in implementing a highly inclusive public outreach process. This process, which could use methods used in the successful *Home for All* housing discussions, would emphasize innovative approaches to meet residents and stakeholders where they are, and not just host public meetings. While

the ultimate approach will be considered by the City Council once a consultant is selected, outreach efforts could have the following goals and methods:

1. *Inform* - Many land use and development challenges are grounded in balancing community members' hopes and aspirations, policy objectives, and technical and financial feasibility. To make the best possible choices for the long term benefit of the community, it's important for community members, policy makers and development stakeholders to understand these considerations. A speaker series or other types of open house events can be an effective way to provide data and discuss how to balance multiple objectives.
2. *Identify Challenges and Opportunities* - What was successful about the previous plan? What was less successful? Group discussions and online polls can be an effective way to identify and explore these questions. For this particular step, a variety of viewpoints are crucial to understanding community opinion. This presents challenges, as the typical night-meeting format often doesn't capture the opinions of younger residents, renters, or other hard to reach populations. To understand diverse community viewpoints, efforts will be taken to meet residents where they are: at Neighborhood Association meetings, community groups, shopping at their local market and at City special events and festivals.
3. *Envision the Next Phase* - This step moves into the next plan's vision, with ideas about placemaking, land use, and transportation. Key elements from the original [Downtown Vision](#) in the DTPP will create a starting point for discussion and direction.

Gatekeeper Process - Lastly, the City has been approached by a number of property owners and developers about additional development projects in Central Redwood City. While there is some complexity in allowing individual projects to proceed during a substantial community visioning process, the Council may determine that certain projects meet City goals and are consistent with the Council Strategic Priorities and community benefit objectives, and that allowing these particular projects to proceed could benefit the City.

The November 4, 2019 City Council report listed 14 potential development projects (housing, office and mixed-use) that could request consideration to proceed with City discretionary planning and environmental review during the visioning process. Staff recommends an initial streamlined and efficient approach to reviewing these proposals, requiring the development teams to submit high-level information for a consistency evaluation with City Council policy objectives such as the Strategic Priorities for Housing, Transportation, and Children and Youth and to the extent to which it provides community benefits beyond required mitigations, including:

- Affordable housing targeted to community needs (e.g., families with children, locally employed workers, work force housing)
- Community facilities
- Family entertainment uses
- Improvements to circulation and bike/pedestrian facilities
- Job training and local hiring programs
- On-site childcare
- Open space and recreation—additional contributions to City projects and publicly accessible private open space
- Rehabilitation and restoration of historic properties

- Retail and active ground floor uses
- Shared public parking
- Other programs as identified by the community or City Council

Staff would provide a summary of how each proposal addresses the City's adopted Strategic Plan and otherwise provides community benefits. At the Gatekeeper meeting, the City Council could decide whether to allow particular projects to proceed to a full project submittal with the corresponding CEQA analysis. Where possible, staff would consolidate CEQA reviews rather than doing an individual review for each project. Development project sponsors would be responsible for funding staff and consultant resources to support this effort. Staff will recommend that only a limited number of projects move forward for further review in order to avoid overwhelming the City's resources, City staff time to coordinate multiple project reviews, and to allow for participation in the community visioning initiative.

FISCAL IMPACT AND RESOURCES

The Planning Division currently has a significant workload, with multiple long-range and current planning efforts already underway (see Land Use Studies and Timeline, [Attachment A](#)). To provide adequate resources for these multiple overlapping efforts, staff has developed the following resource plan:

1. Additional Staff Positions - On [December 16, 2019](#), the City Council approved two additional full-time planning staff positions. These positions will provide experienced staff to help process complex applications. Staff is in the process of filling those positions.
2. On-call services - At the same meeting, City Council also approved contracts with three professional planning firms, in addition to regular staff, to provide on-call assistance for potentially both the Sequoia Station project and review of projects for the Gatekeeper process.
3. Grants - On [November 25, 2019](#), City Council approved a resolution for a non-competitive grant (SB2 funds) totaling \$320,000 in financial assistance for the visioning process, with one of the stated goals being to plan for additional housing and accelerate the production of housing. Staff will also be submitting for the REAP/LEAP (Regional/Local Early Action Planning) Grants that could approximate an additional \$300,000.
4. Budget Amendments - The upcoming FY 20/21 budget will include amendments to the professional service budget to fund additional work. Staff expects Caltrain and SamTrans to fund the technical, transit-related work. We will collaborate to identify funding for station area design work included in the Transit District.

NEXT STEPS

1. **February 2020** - Bring the Sequoia Station General Plan Amendment Initiation to the City Council, tentatively scheduled for February 24, 2020.

2. **March 2020**

- Complete the MOU with Caltrain and SamTrans to partner on technical studies for the Transit Plan and continue with studies/activities to support the establishment of a Transit District within the existing DTPP.
- Release the RFP for consultant assistance on the community visioning process.

3. **April 2020**

- City Council Gatekeeper meeting to consider whether to initiate particular development projects consistent with Council Strategic Priorities, tentatively scheduled for April 13, 2020.
- Review initial grade separation alternatives with the community, this will inform community discussions about station design and location.

4. **Summer 2020** - Select a consultant for the Community Visioning process and develop a detailed outreach plan for City Council consideration.

5. **Fall 2020**

- Begin the Central RWC Visioning Process.
- Refine preferred alternative(s) for grade separations to inform the station design and location with feedback from the community, the City Council Transportation and Mobility Sub-Committee and the City Council.

See Attachment A, Land Use Studies and Timelines, for further information on tentative timelines for these items.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

This activity is not a project under California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) as defined in CEQA Guidelines, section 15378, because it has no potential for resulting in either a direct or reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment. The Transit District Plan and Central Redwood City Plan will undergo individual CEQA review.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public notification was achieved by posting the agenda, with the agenda items being listed, at least 72 hours prior to the meeting. Additionally, the public notice was sent via email to interested parties

ALTERNATIVES

1. Direct staff not to proceed with one or more of the following initiatives:
 - City-led Transit District development,
 - Community Visioning and
 - Gatekeeper Process

2. Direct staff to extend the timeline for one or more of the following initiatives:
 - City-led Transit District development,
 - Sequoia Station General Plan Amendment Initiation process,
 - Community Visioning and
 - Gatekeeper Process

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A - Land Use Studies and Timelines

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