

SAN RAFAEL TRANSIT CENTER COMMUNITY DESIGN ADVISORY GROUP

MEETING #1
WHAT WE HEARD REPORT

JUNE 2023



Prepared by
DIALOG

Introduction and Purpose of CDAG

The Community Design Advisory Group (CDAG) is a collaborative group of selected stakeholders with a mandate to provide input into the architecture, design, and amenities of the new transit center. As an advisory group, CDAG contributes valuable expertise and perspectives, but is not a decision making body. The group is consensus-based, with a facilitator providing support to the process, and seeks to bring diverse and broad input to the design.

CDAG will meet four times over a six month period during concept design. The first meeting was held in June 2023, and was a opportunity to orient members to the project and process, and to curate a shared understanding of the existing site conditions and context.

Meeting #1

CDAG Meeting #1 was held June 20, 2023 at the Jackson Cafe. Participants met the design and facilitation team in person, and were given a short introduction to the project, the process, and the role of CDAG.

Following the introduction, the team and CDAG members participated in an interactive design 'workshop' where they walked the site area together, exploring the current context and site conditions to establish a shared understanding of the site. Each CDAG member was given a key chain workbook outlining the initial urban design moves envisioned to guide the project. Throughout the workshop, participants reflected on their experiences of the public realm and made comments and suggestions related to their overall impressions, as well as specific to the four categories of urban design moves.

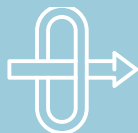
Project Vision and Big Moves



**Consolidate
Transit Center
Improve bike &
pedestrian safety**



**Create gateway
to downtown
San Rafael**



**Retain sense
of historic rail
building**



**Sustainability and
Resilience**



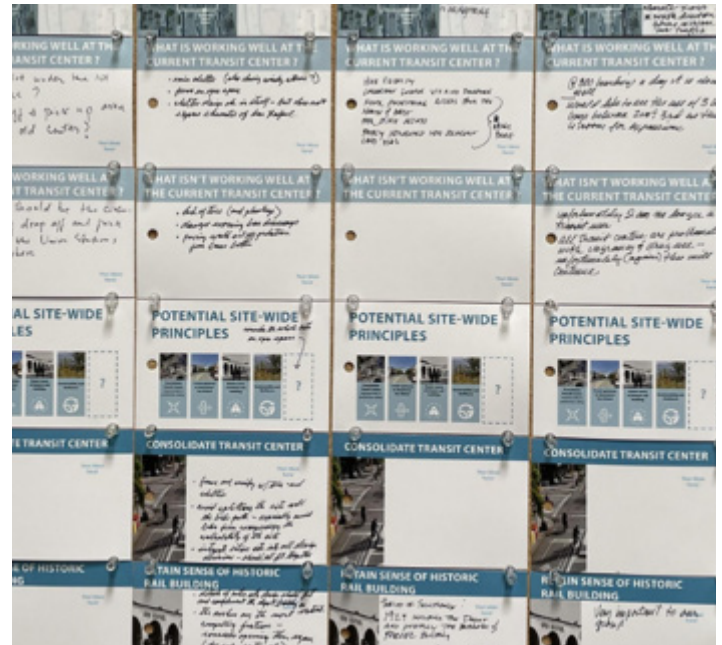
Created by Lemon Liu



The outcomes from the walkshop, in terms of the content collected on the keychains and other information shared was collected, summarized, and analyzed to distill key themes, big ideas, and directed input that will be used to refine the design vision and big moves, prior to the second CDAG meeting, Canal Alliance Facebook Live Event, and Open House, in July/August 2023.

The following content reflects comments made during the CDAG meeting and/or collected in written form on the keychains. Comments are presented without edits except where useful for clarity or context.





Existing Site Observations

- *Very loud*
- *Busy*
- *Ugly*
- *Old*
- *Too much concrete*
- *No greenery*
- *Poor lighting*
- *Unsafe - too much crossing of streets, open and exposed*

What is working well at the current transit center? What do you like about it?

- *Bus efficiency*
- *Seems to provide weather protection*
- *Distinctive design of shelters (though not great fit for character of San Rafael)*
- *Signage is ok*
- *Plenty of places to sit*
- *High visibility*
- *Convenient location with respect to downtown*

What isn't working well at the current transit center? What don't you like?

- *No maps, guides, wayfinding*
- *No businesses such as nice café or bookstore, gift store*
- *No clear bike access - bike racks hard to find (or none)*
- *Narrow sidewalks*
- *Lacks distinctive paving to offset pedestrian zones from bus driveways (e.g. at sidewalks)*
- *Lack of trees and plantings*
- *Poorly integrated into the adjacent land uses*
- *Concern about vagrancy and drug use*
- *Not reflective of the City of San Rafael -- Who are we? What are our city values?*
- *Not enough ticket machines*
- *Difficult access for wheelchair users*

Potential site-wide principles

- *Economic vitality matches design of City.*
- *Create opportunities for future development.*
- *Consider the whole site an open space.*
- *Consolidate transit center and improve bike/pedestrian safety*
- *Paving patterns to indicate priority to pedestrians*
- *Clear wayfinding signage and features within the station to orient passengers to connecting buses & trains*
- *Safe and easy pedestrian access from all directions. The station is primarily a pedestrian environment.*
- *Slow bicycles to accommodate pedestrian safety and comfort. "Walk bikes through transit center" signs at all crosswalks to the transit center. Bike path should be multi-use, not a bike-only throughway.*
- *Connect N-S Greenway by providing a dedicated bike lane on the north side of 4th (replacing parking).*
- *Clear signage/barriers to keep people and bikes off the train tracks (when intent to catch a bus or train).*
- *Locate bike storage within the building (replacing & expanding the storage currently on Tamalpais).*
- *Frame and unify with trees and shelter.*
- *Integrate entire site into all design decisions - should all fit together .*

Retain aspects of historic rail building

- *Give primary attention to revealing original station features 1929 (not parts of the building added later). Period of Significance: 1929 including The Depot and possibly the baggage & parcel building.*
- *The arches are the main features; consider open porticos for seating, cafes, retail.*
- *Activate ground floor with transit services, cafes, other retail. (Upstairs for transit &/or other offices?)*
- *Maximize size of 4th Street plaza and activate it with cafe uses spilling out of the building. Make plaza more than a circulation shortcut, while recognizing it is the main pedestrian 'gateway' from 4th.*
- *Echo building's arch theme in design of bus shelters, unifying site without mimicking historic features.*
- *Some of the building can be saved for a reasonable cost, moved slightly, that can fit, satisfaction is worth something.*
- *Keep drop-off passengers from overwhelming the plaza.*
- *Secretary of Interior Standards encourage new construction to not be imitative. It may not be appropriate to try to completely restore the 1929 building if we aren't able to determine what it was.*



Create a gateway to downtown San Rafael

- *Treat the entire transit center as an open space welcoming people downtown.*
- *Lots of comfortable seating, interesting paving demarking use areas, pedestrian amenities, artwork, use for “events/music”*
- *Big trees, especially along the street edges creating and inviting corridor through the Transit Center. Large London Planes like those thriving on 5th and Tamalpais could be a thematic tree for the whole transit district, welcoming people to a city that values nature.*
- *Maintain the 10’ sidewalk width along Hetherton, accommodating large trees, to help buffer freeway noise.*
- *Establish a strong frame for transit center with large trees east of Hetherton (to help buffer freeway noise), south of 3rd, and north of 4th.*
- *Soften site with hanging flower baskets, vertical gardens, vines covering walls, bus shelters as trellises.*
- *The primary audience are passengers, but also consider views from sidewalks, cars and surrounding buildings.*
- *Good lighting*
- *Recycling and trash receptacles*
- *Include trees. Avoid concrete. Be colorful.*
- *Narrow the lanes on 4th St. Current pedestrian crossing is 20’ per lane. Slow down westbound traffic as they head into downtown across Tamalpais.*
- *Add more signs to give info on downtown San Rafael*

Sustainability and Resilience

- *Plan for likelihood of periodic flooding from sea level rise.*
- *Use and showcase sustainable materials.*
- *Authentic durable materials locally sourced: urban trees (eucalyptus) for benches; recycling granite curbing from San Francisco for bollards; fired clay pavers from McNear in San Rafael.*
- *Reuse clay tile from the Bank or Depot roof*
- *Achieve net zero GHG emissions in design and operation of the transit center.*
- *Add recycle bins & signs of recyclables.*
- *Create an inviting space for new people, tourists, visitors, relatives, etc.*

What site features resonate with you?

- *Interpretive signage and displays X3 – bilingual signage*
- *Outdoor seating X3*
- *Places to relax, rest and socialize X2*
- *Entry plaza with shade X3*
- *Wayfinding signage X3*
- *Native Landscaping X2*
- *Rainwater management X3*
- *Bike amenities – bike secure storage X2*

What are we missing?

- *Retail / restaurant that would activate the space*
- *Parking?*
- *Local art about San Rafael*
- *Local materials*
- *Local monuments St Raphael SRHS Mission bell / building*
- *Acknowledgement of land; Miwoks ?*
- *Celebration of cultures in San Rafael through murals, tiles.*
- *Need to be cognizant of impact of homeless in the design.*
- *Integrate the transit center into downtown*
- *Noise shielding.*
- *Prioritize shading.*
- *Restore Depot Exterior to 1929. Recreate interior waiting room space to period if information can be found.*

Final thoughts

- *An attractive, clean, lit, safe, colorful, fun, comfortable space (I want people to travel here to just see the space not just transit users).*
- *Prioritize the transit riders.*
- *Gateway and edges are critical.*
- *Expand pedestrian pavement treatment from the plaza at the Depot down 4th to Hetherton and to bus platforms.*
- *4th St is a complete street across the Transit Center - bikes, peds, buses, cars.*
- *Fit the transit center into the surrounding context. (Consult Downtown Plan and Station Area Plan for specific ideas.)*
- *Solve safe pedestrian use of the Hetherton/Third intersection, especially the right turn onto Third.*
- *Plant large trees along both sides of Hetherton, a simple way to block freeway noise and visibility.*
- *Create safe and pleasant pedestrian connections under freeway (and integrate creek as 'gateway') feature.**
- *Lease (don't sell) existing site & bond against lease revenue for additional construction costs of project.**
- *Limit height & setback development on existing site to keep adequate sun on new transit center.**
- *Consider additional car drop-off zones north and south along Tamalpais.**
- *See further comments on Transit Center at SSR website 'zero-emission mobility' page.*



*These items are not within the scope of the transit center design, but are noted for documentation purposes.



Additional Questions Asked

- *How many CDAG members use public transportation?*
- *Are business compensated for being moved?*

Summary of Project-Wide Ideas

Overarching ideas

- *Treat the entire transit center as an open space welcoming people downtown.*
- *Interesting paving demarking use areas, pedestrian amenities, artwork*
- *Soften site with hanging flower baskets, vertical gardens, vines covering walls, bus shelters as trellises.*
- *Create an inviting space for new people, tourists, visitors, relatives, etc.*
- *Use trees as a gateway to welcome visitors*
- *Avoid concrete; be colorful.*

Amenities

- *Good lighting.*
- *Comfortable seating*
- *Recycle and trash bins with signage.*
- *Bike amenities, including bike secure storage.*

Signage

- *Wayfinding signage*
- *Interpretive signage and displays*
- *Bilingual/ multilingual signage*
- *Signage that provides info on downtown San Rafael*

Sustainability and Resilience

- *Plan for likelihood of periodic flooding from sea level rise.*
- *Use and showcase sustainable materials.*
- *Authentic, durable materials locally sourced: urban trees (eucalyptus) for benches; recycling granite curbing from San Francisco for bollards; fired clay pavers from McNear in San Rafael.*
- *Native Landscaping.*
- *Rainwater management*

Summary of Building and Plaza Ideas

Building Relocation/Reuse

- Give primary attention to revealing original station features from 1929 (not parts of the building added later). Period of Significance: 1929 including The Depot and possibly the baggage & parcel building.
- The building was updated multiple times by the railroad, during the time considered to be of historic significance. This makes it more challenging to isolate clear features or elements to retain.
- The arches are the main features; consider open porticos for seating, cafes, retail.
- Some of the building can be saved for a reasonable cost, moved slightly, that can fit, satisfaction is worth something.

Building Relocation/Reuse (continued)

- Secretary of Interior Standards encourage new construction to not be imitative. It may not be appropriate to try to completely restore the 1929 building if we aren't able to determine what it was.
- Reuse clay tile from the Bank or Depot roof.

Building and Plaza Use

- Activate ground floor with transit services, cafes, other retail. (Upstairs for transit &/or other offices?)
- Maximize size of 4th Street Plaza and activate it with cafe uses spilling out of the building. Make plaza more than a circulation shortcut, while recognizing it is the main pedestrian 'gateway' from 4th.
- Use for events and music.
- Keep drop-off passengers from overwhelming the plaza.

Plaza Amenities

- Outdoor seating.
- Places to relax, rest and socialize.
- Entry plaza with shade

Summary of Bus Shelter and Streetscape Ideas

Bus Shelter Design

- Echo building's arch theme in design of bus shelters, unifying site without mimicking historic features.

Streetscape

- Big trees, especially along the street edges creating and inviting corridor through the Transit Center. Large London Planes like those thriving on 5th and Tamalpais could be a thematic tree for the whole transit district, welcoming people to a city that values nature.

Streetscape (continued)

- Establish a strong frame for transit center with large trees east of Hetherton (to help buffer freeway noise), south of 3rd, and north of 4th.
- Maintain the 10' sidewalk width along Hetherton, accommodating large trees, to help buffer freeway noise.
- The primary audience are passengers, but also consider views from sidewalks, cars and surrounding buildings.
- Narrow the lanes on 4th St. Current pedestrian crossing is 20' per lane. Slow down westbound traffic as they head into downtown across Tamalpais.

Summary of What We Heard

The current transit center has several shortcomings, including its outdated appearance, lack of greenery, poor lighting, and pedestrian/bicycle safety concerns. It is important to address these issues by designing a safe transit center by prioritizing pedestrians, implementing clear wayfinding signage, and ensuring safe and easy bike and pedestrian access from all directions.

Integrate the transit center into the surrounding area by incorporating trees, distinctive paving, and shelter design. Consider the city's identity and values representation, and create a gateway to downtown with amenities such as bike access, comfortable seating and artwork.

Retain and emphasize the original features of the Whistlestop Building from 1929, noting that the building was frequently updated throughout the period of historic significance. Activate the ground floor with transit services, cafes, and retail, and maximize the size of the plaza to create a vibrant space.

Incorporate sustainability as a core principle in the transit center redesign. The transit center should not only be functional but also create an inviting and eco-friendly space that benefits both residents and visitors.

Include amenities such as maps, guides, retail, and bike storage facilities. Prioritize accessibility by ensuring wheelchair-friendly access, sufficient ticket machines, and proper integration with public transportation.

Collaboration with stakeholders, including businesses, the community, and transportation authorities, is crucial for the success of the transit center redesign. This will ensure that the final design meets the needs and expectations of all stakeholders involved.



