

4 OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS

This chapter describes the most significant opportunities for Santa Cruz as the community develops land use goals and policies for the next 20 years. It also describes some of the key constraints that may limit what policies and land use changes are appropriate. The ideas in this chapter are drawn from recommendations provided by community members at the September 2006 Community Design Workshop, as well as discussions with key stakeholders in the General Plan 2025 process.

Many of the recommendations in the Community Design Background Report for General Plan 2025 are directly related to land use issues in the city. Some of those recommendations are re-emphasized and expanded upon in the sections that follow.

A. *Economy*

Land use policies can help Santa Cruz to maintain a healthy economy. By taking advantage of opportunities for new and more intensive land uses, the community can accommodate economic growth within its existing borders.

- ◆ **Allow New Uses in Industrial Areas.** The Harvey West and Westside Industrial districts have a great deal of vacant and underutilized land, and most of this land is unlikely to be developed with traditional industrial uses, such as manufacturing. The community could choose to allow commercial and residential uses in conjunction with a compatible industrial use; for example, mixed-use buildings could provide ground-floor space for light industrial uses or live-work units, and offices or dwelling units could be located on upper floors. Another option that may be appropriate for Harvey West is to allow large retail uses, such as the existing Costco, that could take advantage of large underutilized parcels.
- ◆ **Promote Use of Small Parcels in Harvey West as Incubator Spaces.** While most parcels in the city's industrial areas are fairly large, Harvey West also has a number of small, vacant parcels in its nonconforming residential areas. These parcels, which are typically no larger than 5,000 square feet, could be developed with buildings that serve as incubator

spaces for new high-technology businesses. Many of these businesses would be compatible with surrounding residential uses, but potential conflicts would have to be carefully considered and avoided. Some of these small parcels could also be appropriate locations for other types of small offices.

- ◆ **Preserve Existing Industrial Businesses.** Many of Santa Cruz's remaining industrial businesses provide goods and services that the city needs. They are also a source of relatively high-paying jobs that do not require college degrees. As the community decides whether to allow new land uses within the city's industrial areas, it should consider whether those new uses would create land use incompatibilities that would displace existing businesses. It should also consider whether there are opportunities for existing industrial businesses to expand, or to attract new industrial businesses.
- ◆ **Create Destinations for Visitors and Residents.** Many of Santa Cruz's visitor attractions are also valued by residents; for example, both visitors and residents enjoy strolling through Downtown Santa Cruz and visiting the city's beaches. There may be opportunities to draw residents into tourist-oriented parts of the city, such as the Beach and Boardwalk area, by creating new tourist destinations that residents would also enjoy. The proposed Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary Visitor Center, which will be built near the Santa Cruz Wharf, could become one such destination. Another possibility is to create new cultural venues, such as museums, galleries and performance studios, that have a variety of different events and rotating exhibits.
- ◆ **Encourage University-Related Businesses.** Researchers at UCSC have developed many new technologies and scientific advances that could become commercially useful. As researchers start new businesses to bring their ideas to market, the city could encourage them to start these businesses in central locations, such as Downtown and on major corridors, to draw the University into the life of the city. The Harvey West and Westside Industrial districts could also be appropriate locations for these businesses, especially if they require large floorplates or heavy equipment.

- ◆ **Create a Conference Center.** In the past, many community members have not supported proposals for a new conference center in Santa Cruz. However, there may still be opportunities in the future to develop a conference center that would gain more public support. A proposed conference center would be more likely to gain support if it includes high-quality architecture and provides benefits for the city's residents as well as its visitors. One way to accomplish this goal would be to combine a conference center with a cultural facility, such as an art museum.

B. Community Character

Santa Cruz values the character of its existing built form. However, there are also opportunities to choose new land use policies that will enhance the city's character as new development occurs.

- ◆ **Manage Densities in Residential Neighborhoods.** In some residential neighborhoods, especially Seabright, recent development has included medium-density buildings that are taller and larger than existing buildings. It may be appropriate in some cases to reduce the maximum density that is allowed in these neighborhoods. However, it may also be possible to add policies and programs in General Plan 2025 that would fit higher-density buildings into these areas more gracefully. For example, General Plan 2025 could include programs to reduce maximum building heights and create detailed design guidelines for multi-family residential buildings, so their scale more closely resembles a single-family home.
- ◆ **Intensify Development on Corridors.** Santa Cruz's commercial corridors have many vacant and underutilized parcels, as well as buildings that lack historic character and are nearing the end of their useful lives. These corridors may be appropriate locations for more intensive development, such as multi-story, mixed-use buildings that combine ground-floor retail shops with office or residential uses on the upper stories. This change would make it more feasible to reduce maximum densities in smaller-scale residential neighborhoods, while maintaining goals for providing affordable housing.

- ◆ **Promote a “Riverwalk” District.** The San Lorenzo River’s levees often divide the river from its surroundings. New development along the San Lorenzo River could overcome this problem by creating a “Riverwalk” district adjacent to Downtown, with shops and restaurants facing the river on their upper floors.
- ◆ **Intensify Development on Front Street.** Front Street has a large number of surface parking lots and underutilized parcels, even on sites that do not face the San Lorenzo River. More intensive development on Front Street could draw from Pacific Avenue’s existing character, or it could define an architectural style and a sense of place that is unique to Front Street.
- ◆ **Connect Downtown with the Coast.** Although Downtown Santa Cruz is within walking distance of the coast and the Santa Cruz Beach and Boardwalk, it is difficult for visitors to understand how they can get from one place to the other. New development on Lower Pacific Avenue could enhance this connection by extending the character of Downtown towards the coast and creating a transition to Beach Street. Development could include a few especially tall “signature buildings” that create visual interest and encourage people to explore Lower Pacific Avenue.
- ◆ **Create Opportunities for Active Recreation.** Santa Cruz has a wealth of natural open space. However, many neighborhoods have little space for active recreational uses, such as softball, basketball and skateboarding. As the city’s population grows, the community should find suitable places to build facilities for these uses, especially where higher-density residential development is likely to attract new residents.

C. Housing and Transportation

Land use policies have a strong influence on the city’s employment and housing opportunities. Also, they should reflect the availability of transportation services, so that people and goods can move around the city efficiently.

- ◆ **Provide Incentives for Affordable Housing.** Santa Cruz already has a variety of policies and programs to encourage the production of affordable housing. A continued focus on this area will be essential over the next 20 years, so that the city can continue to provide homes for workers in low-wage employment sectors.
- ◆ **Locate Jobs and Housing Near Each Other.** One way to reduce the number and length of vehicle trips is to make it easier for people to live near their workplace. Santa Cruz already has policies that encourage housing construction near Downtown, a major employment center. However, the community could also focus on providing more jobs along major corridors, near the city's existing residential neighborhoods.
- ◆ **Encourage Mixed-Use Development.** By making it easier for people to live near the places where they work, shop and spend their free time, mixed-use development can reduce the effects of growth on a city's transportation system. Santa Cruz already encourages mixed-use development in many locations, but the community may be able to create new policies or incentives that would result in additional mixed-use development.
- ◆ **Encourage Development Near Transit Routes.** When people's homes, workplaces and shopping destinations are connected to one another by transit routes, it is easier for them to ride transit instead of driving. The community could decide to provide incentives that encourage development in places with high-quality transit service, such as Santa Cruz's commercial corridors. It could also decide to allow higher-density development around new bus rapid transit (BRT) lines.
- ◆ **Share Parking Facilities.** Some of the City's area plans include policies that reduce parking requirements in dense areas near transit. These policies encourage residents and visitors to use transit, and they allow land that would normally be required for parking to be used for dwelling units or open space. General Plan 2025 could expand on these policies by encouraging the sharing of parking facilities. For example, in a mixed-use area, a residential use might share parking with a day-time use, such as a shopping center or office building.

- ◆ **Encourage Innovative Housing Types.** Santa Cruz’s residents have a wide variety of ages, income levels and housing preferences. The community could encourage developers to accommodate this variety by providing a variety of innovative housing types, including all of the following:
 - Small dwelling units in single-room occupancy (SRO) and small ownership unit (SOU) developments.
 - Cohousing projects.
 - Family-oriented housing with on-site play areas and daycare facilities.
 - Accessory dwelling units (ADUs).
- ◆ **Consider Downtown for Student Housing.** Downtown Santa Cruz has especially strong transit connections to the UCSC campus, and many students are frequent visitors to the Downtown’s grocery stores, retail shops, restaurants and bars. Because of these connections, Downtown Santa Cruz may be an appropriate place for private developers to build small residential units that are suitable for UCSC students.

D. Sustainability

Santa Cruz has several opportunities to adopt land use policies that would make the city more sustainable and help people use their existing infrastructure and resources more efficiently.

- ◆ **Develop Measurement Tools for Sustainability.** Santa Cruz residents want the city’s land use decisions to be sustainable, so those decisions do not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. However, the community does not have a way to measure whether the existing land uses in Santa Cruz are sustainable, or whether a proposed change would be sustainable. As an alternative to the idea of “carrying capacity” that is in its current General Plan, the community could use other indicators to measure its sustainability. For example, Redefining Progress, a policy institute that focuses on sustainability, has

developed a tool called Scenarios for Sustainability (S2); this tool is designed to analyze and compare the sustainability of different land use patterns.¹ In addition, the U.S. Green Building Council is creating standards called Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) for Neighborhood Development, or LEED-ND; these standards measure the features of a neighborhood that contribute to sustainability, such as proximity to transit and pedestrian-friendly design.² Santa Cruz could focus on using these indicators to evaluate the sustainability of new development proposals. It could also evaluate existing neighborhoods, or the city as a whole, and look for opportunities to make them more sustainable.

- ◆ **Create Self-Sufficient Neighborhoods.** One way to make a neighborhood more sustainable is by making it more self-sufficient, so that it can take care of many of its own basic needs. The city could make Santa Cruz's neighborhoods more self-sufficient by finding new locations for community gardens, so that residents can grow some of their own food, and by finding additional locations for corner stores in residential areas. There may also be opportunities to provide new recreational spaces near people's homes—for example, by giving the public more access to the active play areas on school campuses.
- ◆ **Develop Infrastructure as an Amenity.** Infrastructure systems can be designed so that they also provide ecological, recreational and educational amenities. For example, in addition to facilitating the transport of people and goods, streets can provide pleasant open spaces, and they can include vegetation or permeable paving to help manage stormwater runoff. Some cities have also used major investments in their infrastructure to create new recreational spaces. In Arcata, for example, marsh lands that

¹ Redefining Progress, undated, "Scenarios for Sustainability," http://www.redefiningprogress.org/newprograms/sustIndi/rsi/S2_Flyer.pdf, accessed on December 1, 2006.

² U.S. Green Building Council, 2006, "LEED for Neighborhood Development," <http://www.usgbc.org/DisplayPage.aspx?CMSPageID=148>, accessed on December 1, 2006.

serve as open space and natural habitat are also used to treat the city's wastewater; portions of the site are open to the public. In Sacramento, a new water intake facility in the Sacramento River was designed to allow limited public access, so that people can view the pumps that supply their drinking water; the facility also includes a public plaza and observation decks for viewing the river. Santa Cruz could explore similar opportunities as it builds and upgrades its infrastructure over the next 20 years.