



Community  
Environmental  
Council

**Bold Climate Action**  
**Acción Climática Audaz**



COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENTAL COUNCIL

# An Ecological Framework for Revitalizing the Santa Barbara City Core

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NOVEMBER 15, 2023

## Preamble

The Santa Barbara community has long nurtured an environmental ethic. Previous generations, community leaders, politicians, civic organizations, and citizens have sought to preserve and protect its natural environment as well as its historic beauty.

Today, as the community strives to conceive and implement a vision for its future it must consider environmental factors to a degree that it has never contended with. Threats from fire, heat, drought, flood, and sea level rise are here and growing. How to anticipate and respond to them is a central question that should inform how we plan for Santa Barbara's future.

The Community Environmental Council has prepared a guidance framework for the community's consideration as it works to address one of its most significant current challenges, the revitalization of the city's downtown core. We firmly believe that the broad principles we propose are achievable within the existing skill sets of our architects, landscape architects, and builders. They are also forward-thinking investments in the lives and well-being of our citizens and in the future of our children and grandchildren.







## Vision

The Community Environmental Council believes that the re-envisioning of the core of our city provides an unprecedented opportunity to establish far-reaching environmental measures to guide future development. Plans for the revitalization of State Street should be steered by the interrelated goals of ensuring the well-being of both people and our environment. This is of particular importance in the face of the emerging climate crisis with its ever-increasing challenges and its many unknowns as the crisis continues to unfold. Revitalizing steps need to build resilience to climate change while fostering a vibrant city that provides for the economic livelihood, health, personal fulfillment, and happiness of its citizens.



# Planning Guidelines

## THE 15-MINUTE CITY

Downtown needs to evolve into a 15-minute city where all essential needs of its members can be met within a 15-minute walk, bicycle trip, or public transportation ride.

- Plans, policies, regulations, and incentives need to embrace and serve people first. Santa Barbara relies on tourism, but the focus needs to be on the local community. A thriving downtown, as well as a thriving city overall, will automatically appeal to visitors.
- The plan should seek and encourage a diverse and intentional mix of businesses, organizations, and resources.

- The plan should offer a variety of mobility options, especially encouraging healthy and sustainable modes.
- Special attention should be paid to the way food brings people together.
- Designate ample spaces for public gatherings, festivals, parades, and celebrations.







## **HOUSING SERVING A HEALTHY AND RESILIENT COMMUNITY**

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A revitalized downtown needs to include a large increase of housing, with diverse options to meet community needs that will help solve the current housing crisis, reduce commute times, and relieve traffic congestion. New development must prioritize workforce and low-income housing. Greater density needs to be achieved with attractive design and to offer a range of styles and sizes.

- Adaptive reuse and retention of as many components of existing buildings as possible will conserve planetary resources. More flexibility may be required in maintaining our architectural heritage and adapting it to new uses.
- Housing, plazas, and green spaces should be created rather than street-level parking lots.
- Create a model set of green building specifications for all new and remodel projects to help guide architects, designers, developers, property owners, and the permitting processes.

- Incentivize developers and property owners to use the model specifications and to contribute community lifestyle dividends (day-care centers, pocket parks, public art, etc.) by allowing extra units, greater building heights in selected spots, and an expedited permitting process.
- Decouple parking from living units to make rents and real estate more affordable.

## INFRASTRUCTURE AND ENERGY FOR A RAPIDLY CHANGING CLIMATE

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Re-think our infrastructure to overhaul antiquated and inadequate systems, and improve our resilience to extreme heat, drought, fire, and floods. Embrace the clean energy revolution with its flexibility and responsiveness to weather extremes.

- Build district systems that can help manage the twin challenges of storms and droughts, which will become more extreme in the future.

- Provide for effective systems for trash collection and recycling.

- Mandate new housing to be all electric and tied into a minigrid.

- The abundance of flat roofs downtown, existing and to be built, needs to be covered with solar panels as much as possible.

- Make State Street one level with gentle slopes for drainage. This improves flexibility, easier movement for the mobility impaired, and cost saving for adding district systems.

- Develop a downtown cooling system by harnessing and pre-cooling breezes.

- Street lighting needs to be adequate but designed to lessen light pollution. Public safety needs to be paramount.



## NATURE

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The downtown community will thrive if its habitat includes an abundant and rich mix of nature. This will lessen the effect of the urban heat island, provide visual attraction and enjoyment, and have beneficial effects on the physical and psychological health of citizens.

- Turn State Street and some cross streets into semi-parks. Parks help promote equity, increase community engagement, help provide clean air, and can be part of a natural cooling system, as per above. A mosaic of green spaces through the area will attract birds, insects, and maybe even some wildlife.

- Wherever possible, use buildings as an opportunity to host vegetation, with a preference to native plants.

## CONNECTIVITY AND INCLUSIVITY

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A revitalized downtown needs to foster a community that is diverse, inclusive (age, gender, race, and religion), and promote social equity and justice. Programs and activities should encourage a rich web of social interactions. The downtown center should not be an island but needs to be well connected to other neighborhoods in our city. Making downtown a desirable place to visit will not only help sustain the city's core but also improve the social fabric of Santa Barbara as a whole.

- The configuration of bus routes and bicycle lanes should ensure that people from all neighborhoods have easy access to downtown.
- Downtown amenities such as children's playgrounds and other social and cultural features should serve the needs and interests of residents of all neighborhoods, all abilities, all backgrounds, and all ages.



## Foundational Values

To achieve long-term sustainability, changes to our downtown will need to be anchored by a few foundational values:

### THE BUSINESS OF LESS

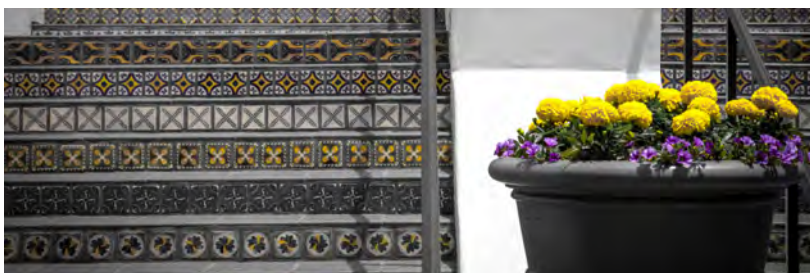
Use fewer material resources and less energy.

### FLEXIBILITY

Flexibility that encourages innovation is key for successfully responding to the many unforeseen situations that lie ahead.

### PARTNERSHIPS

Redeveloping downtown according to the principles laid out here will require substantial financial resources. To help find best solutions and generate the resources to implement these ideas, the city should encourage partnerships between the public, private, and nonprofit sectors.



There are many ways to take action  
Hay muchas formas de actuar

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