



Staff Report

File #: 22-0730

REQUEST FOR CITY COUNCIL ACTION

DATE: 09/21/2022

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council Members

FROM: Economic Development Department

SUBJECT:

Adoption of the City of Corona Downtown Revitalization Plan and Design Guidelines: A Guide to Placemaking in Downtown Corona.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This staff report asks the City Council to adopt the City of Corona Downtown Revitalization Plan and Design Guidelines: A Guide to Placemaking in Downtown Corona. The Downtown Revitalization Plan and Design Guidelines were developed following extensive community engagement and market analysis. They contain strategic recommendations, design recommendations for the area's placemaking efforts, and an action plan that will guide the City's Downtown revitalization efforts over the next 10 years.

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

That the City Council adopt the City of Corona Downtown Revitalization Plan and Design Guidelines: A Guide to Placemaking in Downtown Corona.

BACKGROUND & HISTORY:

In the late 1990s, the City developed a Downtown Revitalization Specific Plan (Specific Plan) to address the needs of Downtown Corona. The Specific Plan offered an in-depth study of the existing area and provided recommendations and requirements for land-use and development and design standards. The Specific Plan currently serves as the formal guide for development within the Downtown. Since then, the City determined that while the Specific Plan would continue to serve as the regulatory document, it was imperative to create a detailed, strategic action plan that could be implemented to attract investment in order to transform and revitalize Downtown Corona into a thriving, vibrant destination.

In April 2021, the City of Corona entered into a Professional Services Agreement with Kosmont Companies (Kosmont) and subconsultant Storyland Studios, to develop a Downtown Revitalization

Plan (DRP) that includes a strategic action plan and a set of Design Guidelines focused on design elements to encourage placemaking and community. In order to promote a community-informed process, Kosmont and Storyland Studios have supported the City with a series of community outreach and engagement efforts resulting in the following:

- More than 2,400 surveys completed
- More than 450 participants across six community meetings (residents, businesses, investors, etc.). Community meetings were held in English, Spanish, in-person, and virtually.
- 14 key stakeholder groups
- One-on-one meetings with City Council
- Department meetings
- More than 45,000 interactions on the project website (thecoronacircle.com, coronacirculo.com)

Utilizing this information, draft DRP and Design Guidelines were created and provided to the public and City Council for comment on August 4, 2022. The final document presented here for adoption incorporates direct feedback from both the public and Council.

ANALYSIS:

The DRP and Design Guidelines are two distinct, but complementary, documents that will serve as guides for the revitalization of Downtown Corona. The DRP is intended to serve as a roadmap for the City's downtown revitalization efforts, focusing on five goals and recommending short-, medium-, and long-term actions and initiatives. The DRP is divided into sections that address Outreach and Engagement, Land Use Changes, Current Conditions, Concepts and Lessons Learned, Assets and Opportunities, Goals and Strategies, Strategic Recommendations and Action Plan, and Tools and Approaches.

Goals and Strategies

After careful review of Downtown Corona's history, community feedback, market trends, case studies, and existing conditions, the DRP identifies five primary goals and strategies.

1. Enhanced safety: Utilize Homeless Solutions programs, continue the Police Department's Business District Enhancement Team, and develop technological infrastructure.
2. Catalyst projects: Advance coordination of major projects including the revitalization of the Corona Mall and City Park.
3. Public infrastructure improvements: Improve the City's aging infrastructure and enhance infrastructure for sidewalks, landscaping, lighting, parking, etc.
4. Creating a sense of place: Develop a unique identity for Downtown Corona through branding, signage, public art, etc.
5. Community events and programming: Make Corona a destination and gathering place through outdoor festivals, athletic events, night markets, etc.

Strategic Recommendations and Action Plan

The DRP recommends specific actions that are categorized by short- (1-2 years), medium- (3-4

years), long-term (5 or more years), and ongoing efforts. Table 1 below provides a highlight of some of the recommended activities to implement the DRP. identified in the Strategic Recommendations and Action Plan section of the DRP. The complete set of Strategic Recommendations and Action Plans are detailed within the DRP, which is attached for reference (Exhibit 1).

Table 1: Strategic Recommendations and Action Plan

Category	Tasks	Timeframe
General Implementation	Create interdepartmental team to implement goals	Short-term
	Codify Design Guidelines and amend Downtown Specific Plan	Short-term
Catalyst Projects	Identify Downtown infrastructure needs and support catalyst projects that advance vision and goals for the Downtown, including: Corona Mall, Sixth and Main Streets, Medical Center, City Park, and Historic Civic Center	Short-term
	Support and guide catalyst projects through evaluation of feasibility of financing tools/mechanisms (EIFD, BID, CFD, Grants, Others) that can fund public infrastructure	Medium-term
Enhanced Safety	Promote and utilize the City's Business Liaison Program	Ongoing
	Identify public infrastructure improvements to address safety concerns	Short-medium-term
Sense of Place	Develop a brand identity for the Downtown and create a brand leadership team	Short-Medium-term
	Identify and implement comprehensive and cohesive enhancements that reinforce brand identity	Medium-Long-term
Public Infrastructure	Explore/evaluate local, state, or federal programs to assist existing and future Downtown businesses (e.g., business grants, commercial façade improvement programs, etc.)	Ongoing
	Consider strategic partnerships with RCTC, CalTrans, SCAG or others to improve transportation-related infrastructure	Short-medium-term
Community Events and Programming	Support investment to facilitate entertainment uses within catalytic projects and determine appropriate financing mechanisms.	Medium-long-term
	Invest in public amenities (programmed public open space/gathering areas) as anchors to drive economic activity.	Ongoing

Design Guidelines

The new Design Guidelines offer guidance for placemaking in the Downtown and address the community's desire to have Downtown transformed into an inviting gathering place. The Design

Guidelines primary focus is on the 64 acres of Downtown designated as “Downtown” and “Gateway Business” districts in the Specific Plan. The goal of the Design Guidelines is to create an improved blend of land uses, establish greater connectivity within the Downtown, and identify opportunities to promote design improvements. Ultimately, the desire is to bring back what made Corona unique and reestablish the downtown feel of the past and pay homage to Corona’s history.

The existing Design Guidelines within the Specific Plan cover a broad set of design and development standards for Downtown Corona. The Specific Plan will continue to serve as the regulatory document and will incorporate updated elements as recommended in the attached Design Guidelines. These updated Design Guidelines complement the Specific Plan and focus on providing direction for placemaking in the Downtown. Subject to Council adoption, recommendations from the Design Guidelines will be codified into the existing Specific Plan. Per State law, changes to regulatory documents must go through a discretionary review process that requires objective language. Consequently, staff would work with a third-party consultant to amend the Specific Plan. Economic Development will work with Planning and Development and a planning consultant to identify pertinent sections of the regulatory document that need to be updated based on the recommended changes resulting from the DRP Design Guidelines. Staff anticipates that a General Plan Amendment will be needed to address updates to circulation elements. The process of amending the Specific Plan and General Plan will take approximately six to nine months and will include updates to both the Planning Commission and City Council for final adoption and codification of the proposed changes.

The Design Guidelines are divided into three main categories: Built Environment, Public Space, and Circulation. Each section contains recommendations on ways the City can achieve the community’s expressed desire to reestablish Downtown Corona as the center of the city’s commercial, civic, and social life.

Built Environment

Built Environment focuses on the relationship between buildings, their surroundings, and the impact on how individuals interact with the area. Some aspects include building typologies, building placement, scale, uses, architecture, entrances and fenestrations, and exterior building lighting. Thoughtful placement of buildings, selective architectural types, such as Spanish Revival, Classical, and Commercial Block, and emphasis on aesthetics are key to how the built environment would support placemaking in the Downtown.

Public Space

Public Space is where individuals engage with the area and form impressions. Creation of outdoor rooms, enhanced sidewalks that are widened and encourage pedestrian activity, and easier and safer transportation accessibility are some of the ways in which public spaces should be addressed. Beyond enhancing the experience, emphasis on the creation of public spaces is imperative to creating the sense of place desired by the community. This can be achieved through environmental art, graphics, and signage that are both visually appealing and pay homage to Corona’s history and culture.

Circulation

Circulation evaluates Downtown Corona's street network and offers ways to enhance the area, while accommodating multiple modes of transportation for pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicles. Recommendations to enhance circulation include: reducing travel lanes for increased pedestrian connectivity creating a more walkable Downtown, improving public transportation connectivity, revising current site-specific parking requirements, or the development of a parking structure to serve the greater Downtown area. Any reduction in travel lanes or parking requirements will require a Downtown-specific traffic study and parking study that supports these recommendations. Enhancements to transit could include a partnership with RCTC to develop micro-transit within the Downtown or a redesign of Corona Cruiser routes that provide more direct service within the Downtown. The Design Guidelines are attached to the staff report as Exhibit 2.

Staff will report DRP progress on a regular basis, in conjunction with the Citywide Strategic Plan. Staff will also integrate strategic actions into future budget cycles and the Department's overall workplan to ensure progress is made on each identified recommendation. Staff will provide Council with regular updates on the DRP's execution including milestones achieved and potential solutions to any unforeseen challenges.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

There are no direct or immediate fiscal implications associated with the adoption of the Downtown Revitalization Plan and Design Guidelines. Potential additional costs associated with the strategic recommendations and action plan detailed in the Downtown Revitalization Plan and Design Guidelines will be incorporated into future budget actions or presented to the City Council as needed.

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

The action before Council is exempt from California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Section 15061(b)(3) of the Guidelines for CEQA, which states that a project is exempt from CEQA if the activity is covered by the general rule that CEQA applies only to projects that have the potential for causing a significant effect on the environment. Where it can be seen with certainty that there is no possibility that the activity in question may have a significant effect on the environment, the activity is not subject to CEQA. The actions are simply the adoption of the City of Corona Downtown Revitalization Plan and Design Guidelines. While there are strategic recommendations and action plan that would need to be reviewed for environmental analysis, these items will be evaluated independently at the time they are brought forward for implementation. Sincere there is no possibility that adopting this action will have a significant effect on the environment, no further environmental analysis is required.

PREPARED BY: ASHLEY ZARAGOZA, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATOR

REVIEWED BY: JESSICA M. GONZALES, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR

Attachments:

1. City of Corona Downtown Revitalization Plan.

2. Design Guidelines: A Guide to Placemaking in Downtown Corona.