

City of Vacaville TAP

December 6, 2024



The Panel

- **Kelly Kline**, Associate Vice President of Local Government Affairs, Stanford University (TAP Co-chair)
- **Ryan Call, AIA**, Partner, Urban Field Studio (TAP Co-chair)
- **Erin Morris**, Community Development Director, City of Vacaville
- **Mariana Ricker**, Associate Principal, SWA Group
- **Don Capobres**, Principal, Harmonie Park Development
- **Tracey Flaningam**, Partner, Community Strong Strategies, LLC
- **Danielle Surdin-O’Leary**, Director of Entitlements + Local Partnerships, Prologis
- **Mayor John Carli**, City of Vacaville
- **H. Ruth Todd, FAIA, AICP**, Principal and Board Chair, Page & Turnbull
- **Alison Ecker**, Associate Principal, SWA Group (TAP Report Writer)

Agenda

- Overview of ULI Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) Program
- City of Vacaville Context
- Panel Framing + SWOT Analysis
- Housing
- Historic Buildings + URM Approach
- Main Street Placemaking
- Marketing + Vibrancy
- Recommendations + Next Steps
- Q+A

About the Urban Land Institute (ULI)

- ULI's mission is to shape the future of the built environment for transformative impact in communities worldwide. ULI is committed to:
 - CONNECT active, passionate, diverse members through the foremost global network of interdisciplinary professionals
 - INSPIRE best practices for equitable and sustainable land use through content, education, convening, mentoring, and knowledge sharing
 - LEAD in solving community and real estate challenges through applied collective global experience and philanthropic engagement
- Established in 1936, ULI is a nonprofit education and research institute with over **40,000 members across the globe—2,200 here in the San Francisco Bay Area**



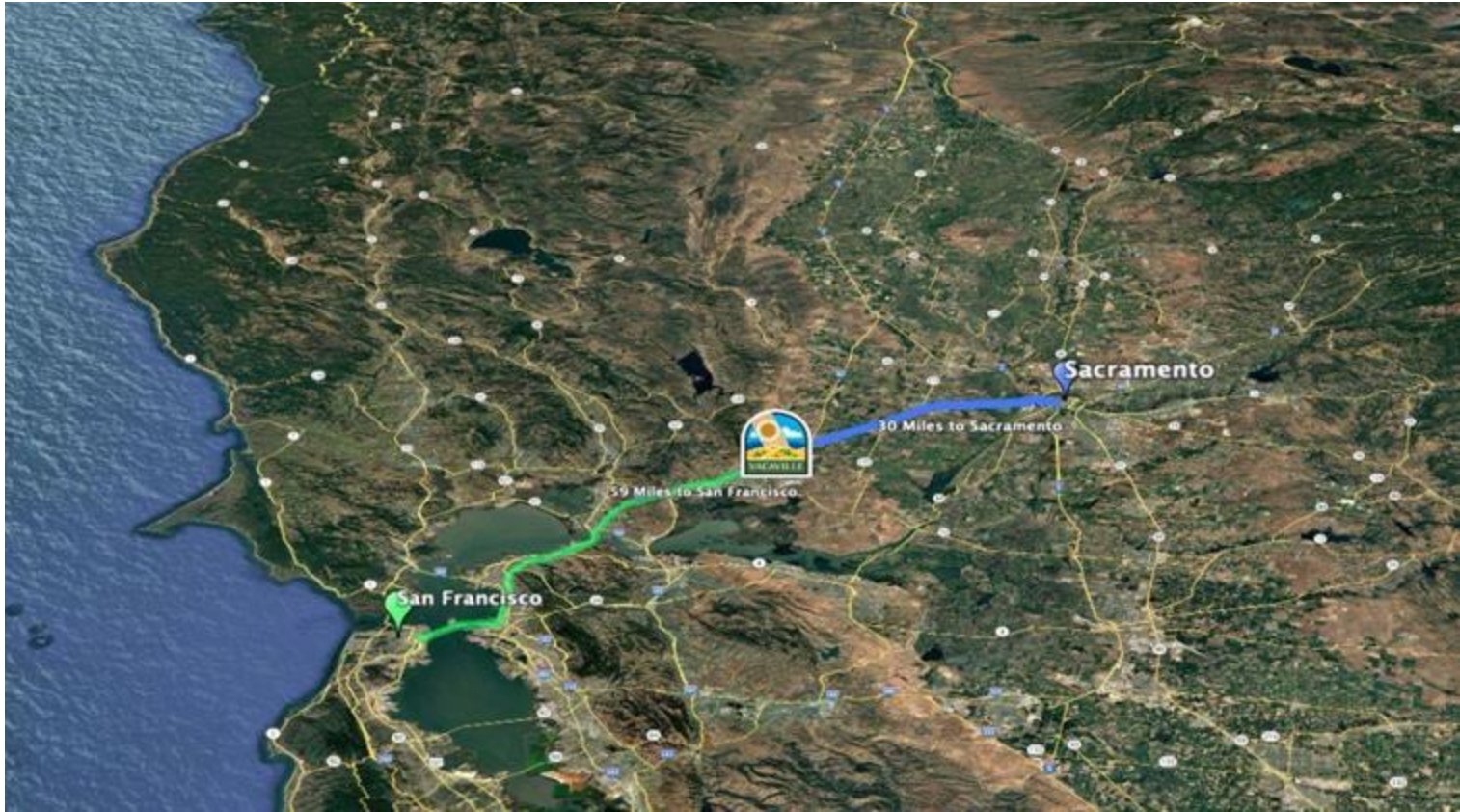
Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) Program

- Provides independent, objective candid advice on important land use and real estate issues
- Process
 - Define TAP scope and questions
 - Review background materials
 - Receive client sponsor presentation and tour
 - Conduct stakeholder interviews
 - Review data, address issues and solutions, and write recommendations
 - Present findings and recommendations
 - Produce a final report
- 37 Bay Area TAPs conducted since 2006



City of Vacaville Context

Vacaville - Regional Context



Panel Assignment Questions

1. What will it take to spur existing property owners to upgrade their existing buildings to bring in more active uses including infill residential? What can the City do to support this? What can other key partners do to support private property improvement efforts?
2. What are the most cost-effective approaches to seismically strengthening buildings Downtown that are considered Unreinforced Masonry Buildings (URMs)? If there are multiple URMs adjacent to each other, are there design approaches that would tackle the seismic work in a more collective and cost-effective fashion?
3. For non-URMs that would require significant modifications to facilitate introduction of new uses (such as food and beverage uses on the ground floor, residential uses on upper floors), what are the most cost-effective strategies to make these projects feasible?

What We Saw: Site Tour



Thank you to Peyman Behvand, Barbara Carr, Aleris Dunn, Erin Morris, and Leslie Silver for serving as our tour guides.

Who We Heard From: Stakeholder Interviews

- Blake Borchers
- Don Burrus, City of Vacaville
- John Carli, Mayor
- Crystal Carlyn
- Kevin Chavez-Derreza
- Samantha Clevenger
- Louie DeBartolo
- Elissa DeCaro
- Debbie Egidio
- Rafael Espinoza
- Christine Firstenberg
- John Goodwin
- David Knecht
- Shea McGuire
- Erin Morris, City of Vacaville
- Miguel Moya
- Mike Paris
- Traci Perry
- Tom Phillippi
- Tina Pittman
- Kathleen Ramos
- Tom Rapisarda
- Barry Rico
- Greg Ritchie, City Councilmember (District 2)
- Doug Rodgers
- Mary Ann Rollison
- Frank Schembri
- Mary Schembri
- Marianna Schiavone
- Michael Silva, City Councilmember (District 3)
- Leslie Silver
- Morne Van Stade

Panel Framing + SWOT Analysis

Framing — Bringing the Downtown Vision to Life

- In answering these questions, the TAP aimed to provide a larger framework for bringing the Downtown Specific Plan to life
- Economic context
 - The cost of upgrades may exceed the overall value of property – for now
 - But there is a lot the City can do to move the needle to strengthen and improve Downtown Vacaville
- What steps can the City take to attract investment to the Downtown?

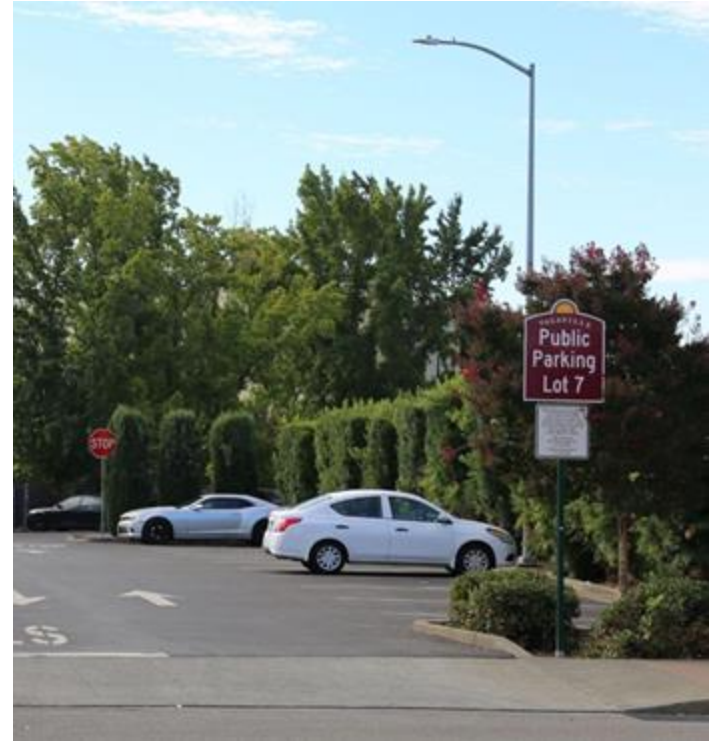
Strengths

- **Historic character** + hometown atmosphere creates authenticity
- **Vibrant event scene**
- **Town Square** serves as a central focal point
- **Stakeholders** want Downtown to grow/succeed
- **Walkability**
- **City investment** in Downtown planning and infrastructure improvements provide solid base



Weaknesses

- Downtown feels **disconnected** (I-80) and lacks visibility
- Downtown is struggling to find the “**right mix**” of tenants; little appeal for families and young people
- Uncertain and time-consuming **code compliance** and entitlement environment is affecting investment
- Perception of a **lack of parking**
- Lack of a **destination tenant** affects Downtown’s “draw”
- Residential **rental rates** are low



Opportunities

- Surrounding **demographics** are improving
- **Unique** experience for visitors contrasts with other shopping areas - including the historic context
- Many ideas for outside **activation** (patios, sidewalks, town square)
- “**Ambassador**” approach in Planning and Building departments can bring trust and partnership
- New **incentives** coming (i.e., Storefront Grant Pilot)
- Increased **wayfinding and access** for visitors including bike infrastructure



Threats

- Larger **economic trends** making new development difficult
 - Risk + Time + Cost >> An equation that doesn't work
- There is a feeling of being “**stuck**” and risk-averse
- Staff **empowerment** to make decisions
- **Competition** from nearby cities are growing and competing for tenants
- **Residential** easier to implement outside of Downtown (see Housing Element sites)
- **Leasing impediments** include impact fees, tenant improvement (TI) costs, and infrastructure deficits (i.e., electrical amperage)



Image credit: visitfairfield.com

Housing

Housing as a Driver of Activity

- Rooftops drive retail
 - Vacaville's population is greater than 100K and growing
 - State-certified Housing Element features 2,595 new homes in the next eight years
- What about Downtown?
 - 700 Parc moving forward in form that adds value to Downtown and is an example of economically feasible market rate housing
 - Good mix of affordability in variety of forms from bungalows to Victorians - this is an asset

Housing as a Driver of Activity

- Economic context
 - Best opportunity is on larger parcels outside of Downtown
 - Construction type - wood construction/self parked
 - Scale of sites is bigger
 - In Downtown and in many other places, higher density, vertical mixed-use type of residential is not feasible
 - Cost of construction, largely parking
 - Rent needs to be approaching \$5 per square foot

Housing as a Driver of Activity

- Vertical mixed-use development
 - Cost to construct per square foot = **\$645**
 - Expected local value per square foot = **\$390**

- Town homes
 - Cost to construct per square foot = **\$320**
 - Expected local sales prices per square foot = **\$400**

*Figures for illustrative purposes only



Historic Buildings + URM Approach

Historic Downtown

- **Existing Preservation Overlay District has tangible benefits** for “contributing” buildings
- Unreinforced masonry buildings subset
 - ‘New’ URM ordinance
 - Life safety issue
 - Unknown costs



Map of the historic buildings within the DHPD Overlay

Image credits: Vacaville Downtown Specific Plan (2022) and Vacaville TAP Briefing Book (2024)

Incentivize Historic Preservation

- Prioritize URM life safety improvements
 - Engineering assessments
 - FEMA grants
 - Mills Act Program
- Historical building code – use and enforce it!
- Permitting assistance and code relief
- Tax credits for historic rehabilitation



*Main Street, Downtown Vacaville, ca. 1930
(Source: Vacaville Heritage Council)*

Main Street Placemaking

Focus Placemaking Investments on the Historic Core

- Main Street is 1,000 feet long - the perfect length! Concentrate activity here!!
- Focus investment on “next level” customer experience - give people a reason to linger
- Prioritize placemaking investment where it supports existing historic core tenants





Main Street is the Focus



- EXISTING MERCHANT
- EXISTING F+B
- F+B OPPORTUNITY

Dynamic Downtown Experience

The Street: Weave into Existing Fabric

- Great bones for a Main Street
 - Enhance what you have!
- Improve streetscape and paseo comfort + safety
- Centralize pedestrian and bike furnishing



The Paseo: Dining District by Design

- Reclaim former street
- Activate with destination dining (Heritage House, Triangle Building)
- Intimate community hub, framed by historic buildings
- Vibrant gateway to Main Street



Image credit: SWA Group

The Square: Community Center

- Unleash Parks + Rec in interim!
- Flexible + functional community gathering space
- Activate with diversity of tenant types to increase draw
- Focus the energy on Main Street + engage with the Paseo



Image credit: Photos by Kim E

Marketing + Vibrancy

Drive Foot Traffic Downtown

- Wayfinding graphics + branding
 - Solicit more community engagement in marketing and branding the Downtown
 - Wayfinding can be fun and memorable
 - Encourages visitors to explore
 - Boosts visibility to businesses

- Arts and culture programming
 - Expand support for public art program
 - Continue music, festivals, and events throughout the year
 - Unique events that celebrate community culture and history



Image credits: SWA Group

Business Improvement District (BID)

- Bolster funding to provide additional support for existing programming
- Better coordination between marketing entities such as Visit Vacaville, Vacaville Chamber of Commerce, Downtown BID, and the City
- Use grassroots marketing tactics to increase awareness and activation
- Coordination and communication are key elements to develop trust and connectivity



Recommendations + Next Steps

Short Term: Launch in the Next Year

- **Historic:** Designate a Development Facilitator at the City
- **Historic:** Explore + educate on Historic Building Code benefits
- **Placemaking:** Pop ups in the Town Square
- **Marketing + Vibrancy:** Local artisan awareness/ familiarization (FAM) tours
- **Marketing + Vibrancy:** Identify increased funding for BID
- **Housing:** Fanfare around 700 Parc groundbreaking



Mid to Long Term

- **Historic:** URM upgrades and economic development based on historic preservation
- **Placemaking:** Strengthen dining district with Merchant Street Paseo and update Town Square
- **Placemaking:** Boutique hotel on Davis Street
- **Marketing + Vibrancy:** Experiential wayfinding + historic core branding
- **Marketing + Vibrancy:** Reconsider PBID formation and continue expansion of BID “best practice” programming
- **Housing:** Market robust incentive package for developers and seek opportunities to assemble larger sites as vibrancy increases Downtown

Reflections from the City

Reflections on TAP impact and work in progress

- Overall experience
- Initial outcomes
- Downtown Vacaville's future

Final Report



Report url: <https://sf.uli.org/uli-resources/vacaville-tap-2024/>

Thank you + Q/A

