

Santa Cruz News
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A Downtown Mixed-Use Project Built by this Generation for the Next Generation

In June 2016, with voter approval of a countywide Library bond Measure S, this started the wave of positive interest that our future county library system would be modernized. Over the past two years the Santa Cruz County Chamber, other business and community



organizations have worked diligently to support a mixed-use downtown library project that includes, much needed affordable housing, as well as adequate parking for residents, employees and visitors to our downtown. We believe that building a 21st century library in a mixed-use project is the most economic and environmentally sound decision for our city council to make.

A year ago, on May 14, 2019, the Santa Cruz City Council voted to put a hold on the decision regarding how to proceed with a Downtown Library Mixed-Use Project, and instead approved formation of a Council Subcommittee to investigate library project alternatives, in collaboration with Library staff and the interested community. The subcommittee included Mayor Justin Cummings, Vice Mayor Donna Meyers and Councilmember Sandy Brown. You can review the subcommittee activity during the past

year: cityofsantacruz.com/government/subcommittees/downtown-library-3994

Last week, the subcommittee unanimously recommended a mixed-use project on the city owned parking Lot 4, instead of remodeling a 1966 old and out of code library building. I applaud the subcommittee members for listening to the majority of the community who took the time to follow the subcommittee's actions by attending meetings, submitting letters demonstrating the variety of reasons why this project is the best solution. As one community member I attended, listened, spoke out to offer constructive input throughout out the process. The subcommittee's decision is the right thing for our community. Now, four years after passing Measure S, it is time for the full city council to approve the subcommittee's recommendation.

The opposition argues that a mixed-use project is not environmentally sound. This argument falls flat, as it doesn't even meet the national Sierra Club's own environmental standards for in-fill

development. <https://www.sierraclub.org/redwood/blog/2019/09/sierra-club-updates->

urban-infill-policy

Fundamental to all good urban planning is designing 21st century communities. The Sierra Club's national policy underscores the value of the mixed-use project and refutes the local environmental group's arguments, who stridently oppose change for the better in our downtown.

The national Sierra Club policy says: It is important that neighborhoods be close to safe paths for bicycles and good-quality public transportation." The policy further states: "In order to realize these goals, the land use policy calls for transformative strategies that build communities with:

- Affordable housing that is accessible to all;

- Transit, bike and pedestrian-first approaches to transportation;

- Expanded opportunities for all residents to participate in the local economy and civic decisions;

- Living-wage jobs;

- A balance between employment opportunities and housing;

- Access to education, services, amenities, and recreation that improves overall quality of life;

- Measures and policies that increase climate resilience.

The policy statement acknowledges that traditional zoning practices in the United States have led to social inequities, economic insecurity and increased greenhouse gas emissions. By calling for living wage jobs located close to affordable housing, plus advocating for mixed-use developments which support diverse food markets, cafes, and other businesses, the policy aims to bring more balance to communities while strengthening local economies.

The Downtown mixed-use Library project hits on all of the national Sierra Club's policy priorities, and especially places a stronger worded policy that address inequity in our society. Vivian Rogers' recent Opinion piece in the Sentinel (June 13th) is spot

on: <https://www.santacruzsentinel.com/2020/06/13/guest-commentary-new-library-brings-abundance-of-community-benefits/>. Vivian was the former Executive Director of the Friends of Santa Cruz Public Libraries, so she has a clear understanding of what it requires to have a functional library for our community.

On June 23, the Santa Cruz City Council has an opportunity — and I would say an obligation — to address the fundamental needs for our current and future residents with a new library, affordable housing and adequate parking space. I encourage you to reach out to our city

council members to register your support for a modern 21st Century Library built by this generation for future generations. The council needs to hear from you. Here are the councilmembers' email addresses.