

Final Civic Center Station Area Plan

Executive Summary

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The full report can be found at www.cityofsanrafael.org/stationareaplans.

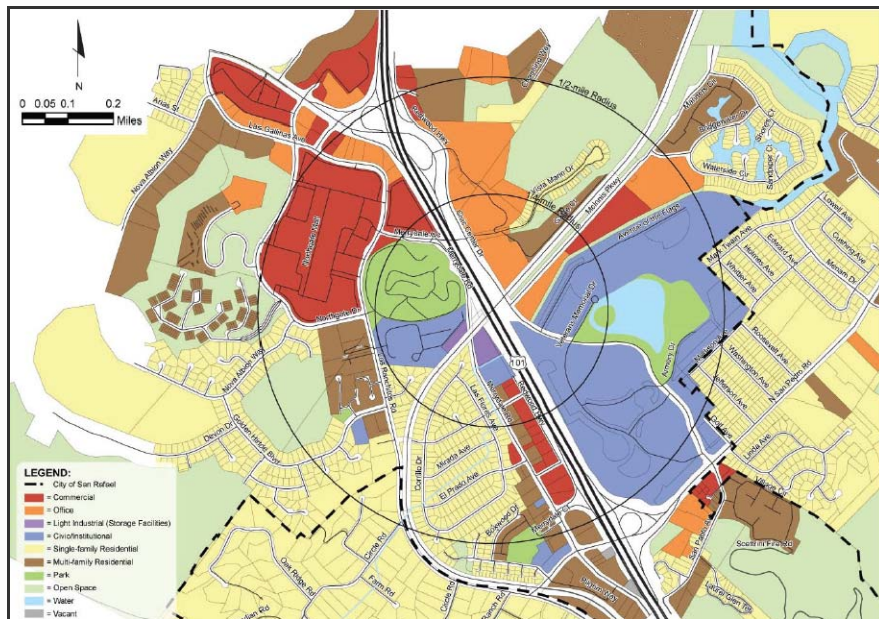
The San Rafael Civic Center Station Area Plan is the culmination of nearly two years of work by the City of San Rafael and a citizens committee to identify a community vision for the area around the future Civic Center SMART station in North San Rafael. The Plan builds on previous planning efforts, and sets out a conceptual framework for development and circulation improvements in the area. No environmental review has been done as part of this conceptual planning effort. Future, detailed plans will be needed to further develop and implement the concepts in the plan and conduct environmental analysis.

SMART

The SMART District is proposing implementation of passenger rail service along a 70-mile rail corridor extending from Cloverdale in Sonoma County to a station located near the Larkspur ferry terminal. Two stations would be constructed in San Rafael, one Downtown and the other in North San Rafael at what is called the Civic Center Station. The first phase of the SMART project will connect the Downtown San Rafael station to the North Santa Rosa station and will include the Civic Center station.

The Study Area and Citizens Advisory Committee

The Civic Center SMART station is located underneath US 101, just north of the Marin County Civic Center and adjacent to Civic Center Drive. The Study Area is the land within a one-half mile radius of the station, with particular emphasis given to that within a quarter mile.



1/2 mile and 1/4 mile radii around SMART station

A 14 member Advisory Committee appointed by the City Council to represent all aspects of the surrounding community developed this Plan through a community-based process over the course of 24 months. The Plan was developed by the Committee, with input from the public at regular monthly meetings as well as two public workshops and numerous public outreach meetings.

Goals of the Plan

The overarching goal of this Plan is to “set the stage for creating a vibrant, mixed-use, livable area supported by a mix of transit opportunities, including passenger rail service.” It focuses on key pedestrian, bicycle and transit connections, and identifies transit-oriented land use opportunities. Other goals include:

- Leverage investments to maximize riders
- Explore the opportunity for a bus hub
- Improve access for pedestrians and bicyclists
- Maximize opportunities for adjacent land uses
- Leverage the rail station for housing and economic development

Key Considerations

Through the course of developing this Plan, key considerations evolved. These considerations and how they were addressed are:

Take Advantage of Previous Extensive Planning Efforts. North San Rafael has been the subject of numerous visioning and planning efforts. Rather than revisit these issues, this Plan incorporates, and builds on those efforts. Specifically, this Plan incorporates elements of the North San Rafael Promenade, bicycle and pedestrian improvements listed in the Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan, roadway improvements described in General Plan 2020, affordable housing policies from the Housing Element, environmental resource protection policies in the Conservation Element, and references to the Climate Change Action Plan.

Focus on Station Access and Neighborhood Connectivity for Bicycles and Pedestrians. A common theme that emerged was a focus on improving bicycle and pedestrian connections between the neighborhoods and the station. New and/or improved sidewalks, new bicycle lanes, and adequate bicycle parking at the Station were identified that will make cycling or walking to the train a pleasant experience. Connections between the existing neighborhoods and the Station are improved by Plan provisions for the completion of the North San Rafael promenade, connections to the new multiuse pathway along the SMART right of way, the enhancement of the existing rail crossing and a proposal for a new crossing on the west side of the Civic Center Station.

Ensure that Station Parking Does Not Overwhelm Neighborhoods. Members of the public and the Committee expressed concern that the Station would be a park-and-ride destination, and the resulting parking intrude into existing neighborhoods. In addition, there was concern that the SMART’s leased parking at the County Government Center is on the east of the freeway and users on the west side of the freeway would find it more convenient to park in the residential areas on the west side. The Plan identifies new on-street spaces on Merrydale Road north of the tracks, includes new turnarounds on Merrydale Road both north and south of the tracks to facilitate drop-offs, and identifies programs, such as residential parking permits, that could be implemented to ensure that neighborhood parking is preserved for residents.

New Development Near Station Should Preserve Character of Area. One purpose of this Plan is to identify sites for new residential and commercial development that would encourage use of the train. The Committee endorsed this idea while stressing the importance of preserving the existing character of the area, including preserving views and protecting the creeks and wetlands in the area. The Plan recommends new development close to the station, within the traffic capacities identified in the General Plan, with design guidelines to ensure that the character of existing neighborhoods remains.

Summary of Recommendations

The Plan includes many recommendations and implementation actions. The following is a compilation of the recommendations included in each section of the Plan. More details and illustrations are provided in the plan and should be consulted in all implementation actions.

Access and Connectivity:

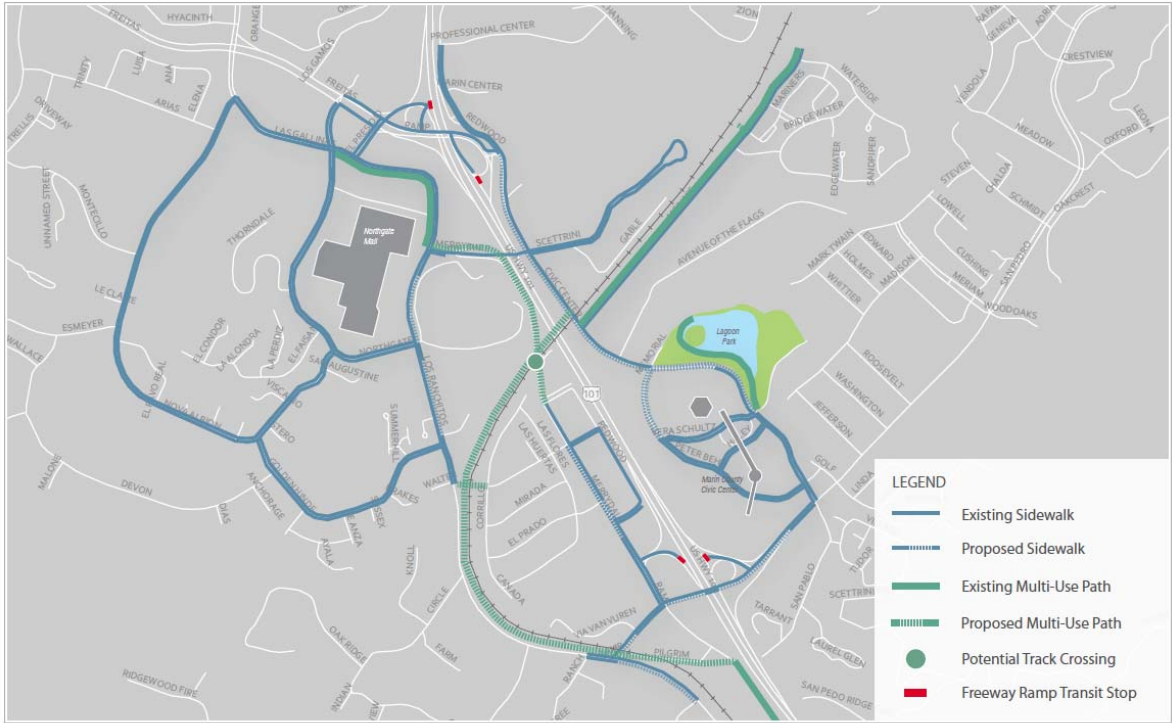
1. **Provide “Complete Streets” treatments**, such as wider sidewalks, improved bicycle facilities, calmed traffic, and improved streetscaping on all streets within the Study Area, but specifically on Merrydale Road (both north and south of the railroad tracks), the Merrydale Overcrossing, and McInnis Parkway. These treatments may be challenging to implement due to right-of-way, cost, or engineering constraints. However, the City should pursue improvements on these streets as opportunities become available.

2. **Complete the Promenade from Las Gallinas Avenue to North San Pedro Road**, along Merrydale Road, the SMART Multi-use Pathway and Civic Center Drive. As a longer-term recommendation, consider extension of the Promenade north from Merrydale Road, through the Northgate III parcel to the Las Gallinas Road/Northgate Drive intersection if the Northgate III parcel were to redevelop. As another longer-term recommendation, consider construction of a Class I shared bicycle/pedestrian path along Civic Center Drive instead of the Class II bicycle lanes proposed as part of the North San Rafael Vision.



Long-Range Vision Concept for Promenade

3. **Complete the sidewalk network**, including portions of Civic Center Drive, North San Pedro Road, and Los Ranchitos Road, such that all streets have adequate facilities on both sides of the street.



Note: If feasible, multi-use pathways are desired along Civic Center Drive from McInnis Parkway to North San Pedro Road and along North San Pedro Road from Civic Center Drive to Los Ranchitos Road.

AREAWIDE PEDESTRIAN IMPROVEMENTS

4. **Maintain and improve the Walter Place Crossing.** This important connection facilitates access between the residential neighborhood south and east of the railroad tracks and west of US 101 with the Northgate Shopping Center. In the future, when the SMART Multi-use Pathway is constructed, this at-grade connection will facilitate access to the regional pathway from neighborhoods on both sides of the tracks. Prior to initiating rail service, SMART proposes to upgrade this crossing to meet current safety and design standards. The crossing could be upgraded to meet minimum requirements for a Class I shared, two-way bicycle and pedestrian facility. Access to the crossing could be improved across Los Ranchitos Road. One option would be to install a new crosswalk across Los Ranchitos Road and ADA-compliant ramps at either end. However, this requires further study and potentially special crossing treatments to address safety concerns.
5. **Construct a new pedestrian crossing at the west end of the Civic Center Station (connecting Merrydale Road).** Providing a new pedestrian crossing at the west end of the Civic Center Station would facilitate easier access to the station from neighborhoods south of the railroad tracks and is strongly endorsed by the Plan.. It would also facilitate easier access between neighborhoods in the Study Area that are currently bisected by the railroad tracks. Implementing this improvement may be challenging due to the CPUC approval process, which typically does not favor new rail crossings, and due to the costs associated with safety amenities, such as gates and lights, that may be required.
6. **Complete the Citywide Bicycle Network, as identified in the San Rafael Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan.** A number of local improvements identified in the City's

Class I/II Bikeways:

- North San Pedro Road, from Los Ranchitos Road to Civic Center Drive (Class I/II) (If feasible, Class I facilities are desired on North San Pedro Road between Los Ranchitos Road and Civic Center Drive)
- Civic Center Drive, from North San Pedro Road to Merrydale Overcrossing (Class I/II) (If feasible, Class I facilities are desired on Civic Center Drive, from North San Pedro Road to McInnis Parkway)
- Merrydale Road, north of SMART tracks to Merrydale Road, south of SMART tracks, including new at-grade crossing on west side of SMART station (Class I)
- SMART Multi-use Pathway, from Northern City Limits to the Puerto Suello Hill Path at Los Ranchitos Road (Class I)
- Walter Place Pathway, from Las Gallinas Avenue to Los Ranchitos Road (Class I – although this pathway already exists, the Plan calls for upgrades to meet design standards for Class I facility.)

Class II/III Bikeways

- Los Ranchitos Road, from Northgate Drive to North San Pedro Road (Class II/III)
- Merrydale Road, from Las Gallinas Avenue to Puerto Suello Hill Path (Class II/III)
- North San Pedro Road, from Civic Center Drive to Golf Avenue (Class II) (If feasible, Class II facilities are proposed between Civic Center Drive and Golf Avenue and desired between Golf Avenue and Woodoaks Drive)

Class III Bikeways

- Las Gallinas Avenue, from the Walter Place crossing at the SMART MUP to Merrydale Avenue
- Merrydale Road, from the Merrydale Overcrossing to the SMART MUP (This improvement could be done as an interim step prior to completing this section of the Promenade, as recommended above.)
- Merrydale Road, from the Merrydale Bridge, just south of the SMART MUP to Las Gallinas Avenue.

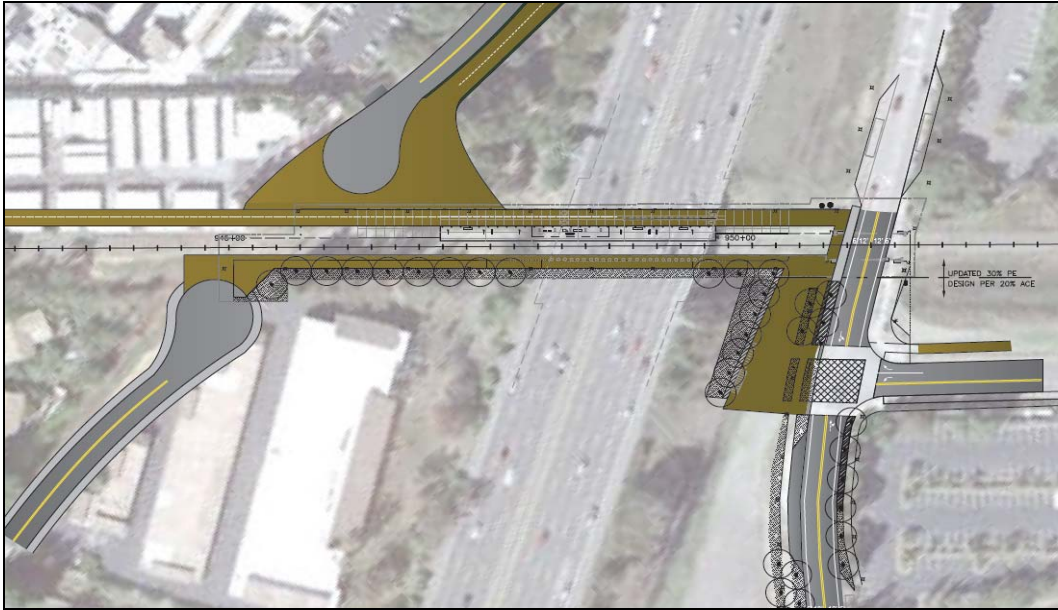


Note: If feasible, multi-use pathways are desired along Civic Center Drive from McInnis Parkway to North San Pedro Road and along North San Pedro Road from Civic Center Drive to Los Ranchitos Road.

PROPOSED BICYCLE CONNECTIONS

7. **Implement planned SMART-proposed shuttle service to major activity centers in the Study Area.** SMART has proposed two separate shuttle routes serving the Civic Center Station. One route would travel along Redwood Highway, north of the Study Area, serving Professional Center Parkway, the Regency Center, and the Marin Commons office complex. The other route would travel south and west of the station, and would connect to the Civic Center, Kaiser Medical Center, and the Northgate Mall. Service is dependent on funding availability, and final route details would be developed in consultation with the service provider. Employers should be encouraged to coordinate shuttle service to and from the station, and shuttles and transit service should complement each other.
8. **Construct a transfer point for bus and shuttle service connecting to the SMART station.** A transfer point should provide users with information on connecting transit service as well as weather protection and seating. These amenities should be constructed as part of the SMART station on the west side of Civic Center Drive, near the bus pull out/turnaround area as shown on Figure 2. In addition, the use of real-time bus arrival technology is encouraged for all transit vehicles at the mini-hub. A procedure for regular updates of information by all transit agencies should be established. Local transit service schedules should be coordinated with SMART train schedules to ensure convenient transfers.

9. **Construct vehicular turnaround areas at the ends of Merrydale Road north and south of the railroad tracks.** These improvements would allow residents on the west side of the tracks to drop off and pick up passengers without having to cross US 101. The turnaround at the end of Merrydale north of the railroad tracks could be constructed within existing right-of-way; the turnaround at the end of Merrydale south of the tracks would require some space from the existing mini-storage site, and would thus only be possible as part of potential redevelopment of that site.

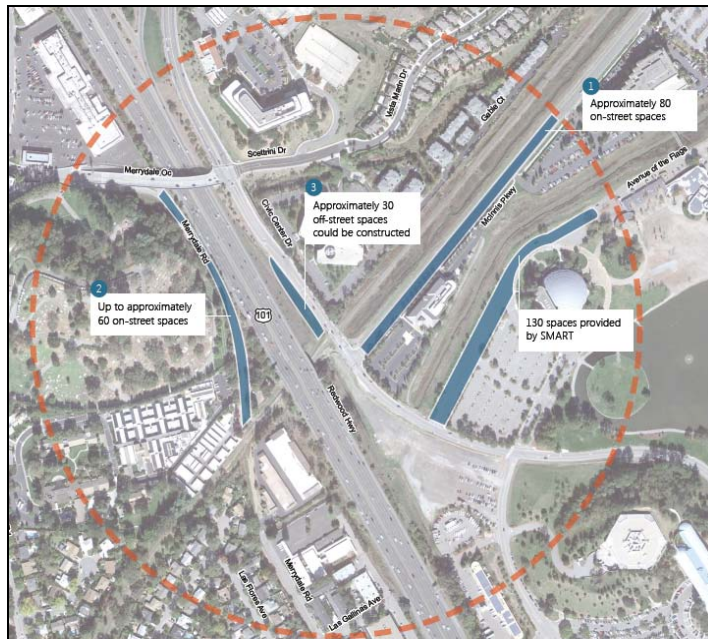


Vehicular turn-around and bus pull-out at station

10. **Construct improvements at Las Gallinas Avenue, from Merrydale Road to Del Presidio Boulevard:** Remove parking and widen the street to provide four travel lanes (one southbound, two northbound, and one two-way left turn).
11. **Construct Improvements at US 101 / Freitas Parkway Interchange as specified in the General Plan 2020 :**
- a. **Freitas Parkway and Del Presidio Boulevard:** Explore the feasibility of providing double turn lanes for northbound right turns from Del Presidio Boulevard to eastbound Freitas Parkway, as well as widening the on-ramp to southbound US 101 from eastbound Freitas Parkway. This improvement should be considered carefully, since double right-turn lanes can be difficult for pedestrians and cyclists.
 - b. **Freitas Parkway / Northbound US 101 Ramps / Civic Center Drive / Redwood Highway:** Widen ramps and signalize. (Note that this improvement requires acquisition of right-of-way.)
 - c. **Freitas Parkway / Northbound US 101 Ramps / Civic Center Drive / Redwood Highway:** Construct new flyover ramp from Civic Center Drive to Freitas Parkway.
12. **Signalize US 101 Southbound Ramps / Merrydale Road Intersection**
13. **Install directional signage for all modes directing people to and from key destinations in the area.** This information should be accessible to pedestrians, bicyclists and drivers, with a particular focus on pedestrians and cyclists.

Parking:

1. **Explore residential parking permits and time limits.** Residential parking permits coupled with 2 or 4-hour time limits can protect neighborhoods from long-term commuter parking spillover. Permit programs would be at the request of the impacted neighborhood in response to a documented problem.



Parking opportunities for SMART commuters

2. **Provide more commuter parking opportunities throughout the area.** Three additional parking opportunities have been identified for SMART commuter parking. This will be public parking and therefore they will be open to non-SMART users as well. They are:
 - a. **McInnis Parkway**, approximately 80 on-street parking spaces
 - b. **Merrydale North**, approximately 65 on-street spaces (depending on how the roadway is configured without compromising the planned promenade extension)
 - c. **Vacant parcel northeast of station**, approximately 32 spaces (can include some ADA parking for SMART and possibly more bike parking for station)
 - d. **If more parking is needed**, the City and County should pursue the use of public lots for SMART parking.
 - e. **Consider using new technology** as it develops to communicate real-time availability of parking to station users.
3. **Coordinate parking controls.** A successful parking strategy will require extensive on-going coordination and planning for increased parking demand between the County of Marin, SMART and the City of San Rafael. The City should survey the SMART related parking situation annually to identify problems and seek solutions. Coordination among the jurisdictions is essential to insure that SMART parking does not intrude into the residential neighborhoods such as Rafael Meadows. Every effort should be taken to prevent this from happening.

4. **Reduce parking requirements.** If coupled with other strategies that can demonstrably show a reduced demand for parking, such as transit incentive programs, carsharing, shuttles, unbundling parking, and shared parking, new development may need less parking than the current ordinance requires. Developments seeking to provide less parking may be subject to periodic review for efficiency.
5. **Provide bike parking.** Provide adequate bike parking at the station and in new development. The demand for bike parking at the station should be monitored over time and additional space provided if needed.

Land Use and Urban Design:

1. **Protect existing residential neighborhoods.** No changes are proposed for the existing single-family residential neighborhoods. These neighborhoods should be protected from adverse impacts of new development. New development should be both in scale with the existing neighborhoods and complementary in community character.
2. **Encourage residential uses within walking distance (generally a ¼-mile) of the station.** Inclusion of additional multi-family residential development near the station will help increase ridership for the transit station. Affordable units will be included in new housing throughout the Station Area through conformance with existing and future City housing policies.
3. **Allow limited retail in proximity to the station.** Current market demand does not appear to be strong enough to support significant additional retail in the area. However, some additional station-serving and neighborhood-serving retail should be allowed, though not required, in areas appropriate for mixed-use development.
4. **Develop design guidelines to ensure compatibility with the existing neighborhoods.** Higher densities demand greater attention to high quality design, and design guidelines can help ensure compatibility of new development with the existing neighborhood character. Design guidelines should reflect the unique character of each of the three planning areas, based on the guidelines in this plan.
 - East of US 101 Area Design Guidelines need to:
 - Preservation of views from the hillside residences
 - Establishment of view corridors along Avenue of the Flags to the hills, Mt. Tam and the Frank Lloyd Wright designed Civic Center
 - Height step-backs and buffers from single-family neighborhoods
 - Continue the City's creek and wetlands policies.
 - Redwood Highway Area Design Guidelines need to address building height transitions, building façade articulation and massing, and setbacks to ensure compatibility with the adjacent residential neighborhoods and prevent the appearance of a solid wall to the adjacent single-family neighborhood.
 - Northgate Area Design Guidelines need to buffer existing neighborhoods from the height increases of new development.
5. **Restore and enhance the natural resources in the station area.** The station area has an abundance of natural open space, hillsides, creeks, and wetlands. These resources should be restored and enhanced per the General Plan and zoning designations. They should also be celebrated by new development.

- New development should celebrate natural resources.
- Restore and enhance the natural environment by improving and protecting creeks, wetlands and hillsides as provided in the General Plan and zoning provisions.
- The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change estimates that mean sea level rise will rise between one and three feet by the end of this century. A three-foot rise would inundate much of eastern and central San Rafael, potentially impacting the study area. In accordance with the San Rafael Climate Change Action Plan, the City will monitor sea level rise and plan for shoreline defense; develop a program of levee analysis; participate in Marin County's regional vulnerability assessment, and prepare a local vulnerability assessment for San Rafael; and continue to provide emergency planning and community awareness.

6. Allow an increase in building height, allowable FAR and/or residential density in focused locations. In addition, amend the General Plan and zoning designations on Planned Development (PD) zoned parcels to allow for additional uses. The increases in density are contingent upon the identified limits of traffic capacity in the area. They reflect the development potential of each of the three planning areas.

East of US 101 Area

- In the current office and commercial areas, investigate and implement increases in retail and office FAR above 0.30 and increases in residential density above 44 units per acre within the identified limits of traffic capacity. Amend the General Plan and zoning designations on PD zoned lots to allow residential use.
- Density increases can be higher on the level lots (MCERA APN 180-410-06; Autodesk parking APN 180-124-06), than on the more distant flat lots or on the hillside lots.
- The Christmas tree lot is under County jurisdiction. If changes to the existing master plan are contemplated in the future, density and FAR increases to the same level as the (MCERA APN 180-410-06 and Autodesk parking APN 180-124-06), are appropriate.
- Include requirements for facilitating pedestrian access to the Station from the sites at higher elevations on the hillside.
- On development sites close to the station, amend the General Plan and zoning to increase height limits to 4 stories for residential and mixed-use development only, subject to design requirements. Allow an additional story (for a total of 5) for developments that propose a significant benefit or amenity in the planning area.

Redwood Highway Area

- On the properties closest to the station, specifically the Public Storage and Marin Ventures sites, investigate and implement increases in retail and office FAR above 0.30 and increases in residential density above 44 units per acre within the identified limits of traffic capacity. Amend the PD zoning to allow a mix of residential and retail.
- *Increase height limits on Redwood Highway to 4 stories where residential is constructed over ground floor retail.*

The Committee reached consensus on the Draft Plan to include the italicized text above. After hearing the public comments on the Draft, the Committee was not able to reach consensus on heights for the Redwood Highway frontage, the Marin Ventures site, or either storage lot parcel, and were evenly divided between a No Change Alternative and a Four-Story Alternative.

Northgate Area

- On the properties closest to the station, specifically the Northgate Storage site and Northgate III, investigate and implement increases in retail and office FAR above 0.30 and increases in residential density above 44 units per acre within the identified limits of traffic capacity.
- Amend the General Plan and zoning for Northgate III to increase densities to the levels assigned to the areas within walking distance of the station, and to allow 4 stories for residential over retail uses.
- Consider the extension of the Promenade through Northgate III in any major reconstruction of the site.
- Amend the General Plan and zoning to allow height increases to 5 stories for residential development at Northgate Mall.