

Central San Pedro Neighborhood Council
Downtown Walking Tour Summary
July 30, 2008

On July 30th, 2008 the Central San Pedro Neighborhood Council Planning & Land Use Committee carried out a "Downtown Walking Tour" as an opportunity for community members to make constructive input towards improvements needed in our downtown, with particular emphasis on ideas that would attract tourists into the downtown area. Over 40 community members attended, many of whom have not attended a neighborhood council function before.

Although the walk started at the Warner Grand on Sixth Street, our perspective was that of a first-time visitor standing at the intersection of Harbor Blvd and Swinford, considering an exploration of San Pedro. Everyone was in agreement that the Promenade needs to be an attractive and lively place to entice tourists to walk south along it. Ideas discussed include:

- Distinctive signage stationed along the promenade could provide information and directions to local points of interest.
- Interpretive plaques telling San Pedro history stationed along the promenade could more provide interest along the walk, especially along the sections that front upon a fenced-off parking lot.
- The replacement of the Port's razor wire-topped chain link fencing would greatly improve the appearance of the promenade.
- More shady areas would make for a more comfortable walk, with several gazebo-like structures providing shade in sitting areas until such time as the Port-planted trees mature and develop a generous canopy.
- Vendor carts selling gelato, etc. would serve both tourists and residents, and provide more "life on the street."
- Temporary active uses such as basketball courts in the little-used west parking lot area now fenced off would provide an attraction for residents, thus making the promenade a more lively and interesting walk for everyone.

It was suggested that bike rentals at the north end would provide an interesting way for tourists to explore downtown and points further south. Another idea put forward was to serve wine and beer in a small garden-style enclosure next to the fountain during the fountain water show hours to activate the fountain plaza.

In order to link the promenade to downtown, it was suggested that the Port's signage (or a complimentary design) should continue west up Sixth Street from its intersection with Harbor Boulevard. A tourist information station at this intersection (near the Maritime Museum and Red Car station) could provide additional information and incentives to visit places of interest downtown. This key intersection deserves a great deal of design attention, and elements visible from the cruise terminal fountain would draw eyes southerly.

Arriving at the foot of Sixth Street, what does the adventurous tourist see to encourage an exploration of our downtown? There are few pedestrian-orientated land uses in the lower blocks west of Harbor Boulevard, and this discourages tourists from exploring further. Adding insult to injury the sidewalks are in dangerously poor condition. Eventual site redevelopment should correct these deficiencies, adding ground floor retail or other active uses, as well as reconstruction of the sidewalks. However, repair of the seriously defective pavement should not wait, and temporary active uses in the small outdoor plaza along the sidewalk would be beneficial in the meantime.

Beyond the obvious priority of regular sidewalk repair, many observed that the streetscape from Harbor to Pacific Avenue is not reaching its potential. Our new historic-style street lighting is a good start, but installing more appealing street furniture such as benches, planters, and trash receptacles is needed. The plaza at Sixth and Mesa is a real asset, but many observed that the plaza's empty kiosk needs cleaning up and repurposing. Many agreed that the sidewalk west of Center Street should be widened, and it was recognized that limiting parking to one side of the street might be required to do this. Replacing two-sided parallel parking with one-sided diagonal parking would add parking capacity. It was suggested that the new ACE District team might take the lead in developing a good streetscape improvement plan and design theme.

By 6:30 in the evening, many of the storefronts are closed off with folding metal security gates (aka concertina fencing). These eyesores are prohibited under our new Community Design Overlay, but only new businesses are required to comply with the guidelines. What can the community do to incentivize (or force) property owners to remove these? Could the CRA façade improvement program be used to replace the metal with electronic security systems?

Several attendees talked about how they missed the old Port trolley with its downtown circuit, making the approximately one-mile route from the cruise terminal to Pacific Avenue more accessible to everyone. Perhaps a Red Car extension might serve this purpose someday, but the old rubber-wheeled trolley could serve almost immediately. And, on First Thursdays and other special events, the trolley's route could be extended to galleries and hot spots along Pacific Avenue and other downtown locations.

Finally, it was suggested that the community, perhaps acting through the Chamber of Commerce, obtain more information about when cruise tourists are likely to be here with time to spare, pre-departure, and schedule activities downtown for these days and hours. Suggestions included sidewalk art shows situated in one or more of the small private plazas lining Sixth Street and live music acts in the plaza at Mesa and Sixth. ***It is hoped that these and other ideas will become action items initiated by the neighborhood council and other organizations vital to the development of San Pedro.***

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Sue Castillo, Committee Chair