

TAKE PART



**MIDTOWN
BY
DESIGN**

MIDTOWN VENTURA
COMMUNITY COUNCIL
2001

FINAL REPORT

TAKE PART



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MIDTOWN — BY — DESIGN

*Midtown
Community
Planning
Workshops*

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Sponsored By:
Midtown Ventura
Community Council
&
City of Ventura

In compliance with the
Americans with Disabilities Act,
if you need special assistance
to attend these workshops call
805 654 7891 or contact the
California Relay Service

Higher Density?

Trees?

Mixed-Use
Development?

Come Share Your Ideas for Midtown's Future

Pedestrian
Friendly Streets?

Parks?

Bike Paths?

*If you live, work or care
about Midtown Ventura,
join us at the Midtown
Community Planning
Workshops to help
plan our future.*

- Should there be angled parking and slower traffic?
- How do we support a healthy, vital Midtown economy?
- What streetscape improvements would you like to see?
- How do we keep our unique quality of life?

Workshop 1: Saturday, May 5

Sign-In - 8 30 am

Workshop starting promptly at 9 00 am - 3 00 pm

Workshop 2: Saturday, June 2

9 00 am - 3 00 pm

Workshop 3: Saturday, June 23

9 00 am - 1 00 pm

All three workshops will be held at Will Rogers School Cafeteria located at Thompson Blvd and Howard Street. All workshops will include a lunch.

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OVERVIEW

This report describes the three Midtown By Design TAKE PART participatory workshops which took place May 5, June 2, and June 23, 2001. These workshops, sponsored by the Midtown Community Council and funded by the City of Buena Ventura, were attended by a diverse group of 140 concerned citizens, including 5 city councilmembers and 3 planning commissioners.

As a follow up to the 1998 Midtown Vision process and the 1999-2000 Ventura Seize the Future process, Midtown By Design was focused on developing a current citizen based insightful vision of the Midtown community's aspirations for its future. The intention of this workshop series was to enable Midtowners to establish their planning goals, objectives, and implementation strategies to guide the future of Midtown.

The TAKE PART workshop process involves its participants in open dialogue, focusing on development of consensus on the issues of importance to their community. It allows all points of view to be expressed, discussed, and then addressed.

The three workshops were sequential. Workshop 1 "Our Overall Vision: Who and What Do We Want To Be" established a strong foundation. Workshop 2 "What Should Be Done: Definition of Key Elements, Development of Key Proposals" took this foundation and expanded it into a detailed set of proposals dealing with community planning elements of Circulation, Land Use, Housing, Open Space, Public Facilities, Urban Design, and Community Activities. Workshop 3 "Where Do We Go From Here: Implementation Strategies and Priorities" focused on making the strategic choices of priorities and requisite physical, social, economic, and political strategies to support the Consensus program developed by the participants for the future of Midtown.

The workshop Consensus, as delineated in this Final Report and presented to the Ventura City Council, is intended to serve as a guideline for future policy and budget decisions by the City that will affect Midtown. It will also serve as input to the ongoing Ventura Comprehensive Plan Update process as a statement of what the Comprehensive Plan should contain relating to Midtown and its future. This Consensus blueprint for the future provides a solid first step in an ongoing process, outlined in this report's Implementation program, to bring this future into reality.

The Midtown by Design TAKE PART workshops demonstrated that the citizens of Midtown can work productively to produce a strong collective vision for their future. They indicated that participants could deal with the complexities of making choices and setting priorities that were based on community needs.

The results of the Midtown By Design TAKE PART Workshops clearly reflect the community's desires.

"This is truly ours. We own it!"



CONTEXT

Midtown Ventura is a mixed residential and commercial community of about 25,000 persons located in the geographical center of the city. Its boundaries are Sanjon Road and Crimea Street on the west, the ridgeline on the north, Mills on the east, and the 101 freeway on the south. Midtown is bisected by the major east/west arterial streets Main and Thompson which are the site of major commercial development. At the east edge sits the recently renovated Buena Ventura Mall. Seaward Avenue, a major north/south collector street, connects to the adjoining beach community. Midtown contains a number of different residential neighborhoods, each with their own identity. It also is the home to a full range of schools, and two major hospitals.

The Midtown Ventura Community Council (MVCC) was formed in 1998 to preserve, enhance, and revitalize Midtown. Its commitment to engage the City in the attainment of this goal led to the City's securing of funding through community block grants money for the Midtown Ventura Community Council's Midtown By Design TAKE PART workshops.

This participatory process was to provide the community's input to both the recently underway Ventura Comprehensive Plan Update and to the Ventura City Council ongoing deliberations on city policy and budget as they affect Midtown.

Previous involvement by the MVCC and workshop participants in the 1998 Midtown Vision Plan and the 1999-2000 Ventura Seize The Future visioning process were recognized but not taken as the starting point. Midtown By Design was programmed to allow participants to take a fresh look at their community now, and envision and plan for its future as they believe it should and could be.

"I love Midtown. It has a lot of potential."

WORKSHOP 1

"Our Overall Vision"

Who and What Do We Want To Be

On a sunny Saturday morning, May 5, 84 participants gathered at Will Rogers School for the first TAKE PART workshop.



As an initial activity participants were given three small red and three black stick-on dots and were asked to individually place them on a large map of Midtown lying on the floor of the meeting space. The placement of these dots provided a clear illustration of the favorite (red) and least favorite (black) places of each individual. The fervor of participants during this activity served as a good introduction to the 2 mile awareness walk that all took for the next 1 1/2 hours around the heart of Midtown.

The awareness walk had been developed by the workshop team so that all participants, walking in small groups, would be exposed to representative aspects of Midtown. Most of the "favorite" and "least favorite" places turned out to be encountered during the walk. Participants were asked to pause at 9 designated locations during the walk and to record in a handbook a prescribed activity (write a postcard, answer a question, etc) to heighten their awareness of what they were seeing. At the conclusion of the walk, participants recorded their response to "What I Feel" on a large scroll posted at the meeting place. Their comments clearly indicated that they had slowed down and truly observed Midtown, its problems and opportunities, and were now ready to engage in fruitful, open discussion about its future.



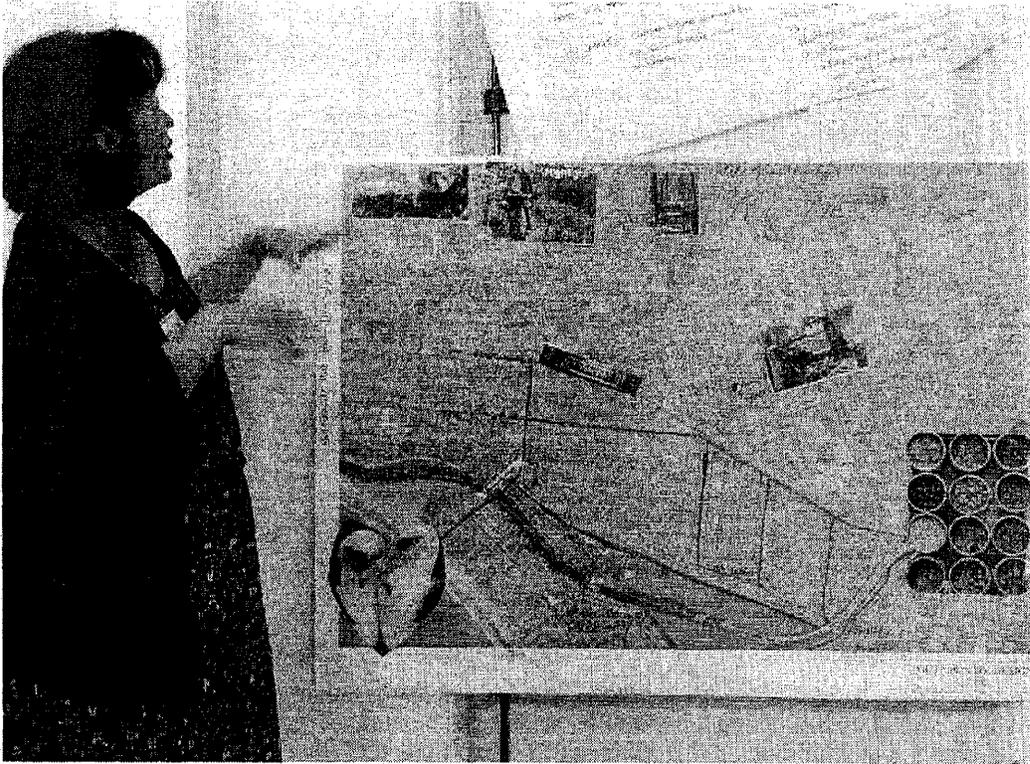
The workshop participants were next randomly placed in one of seven groups. Each group developed a statement of "Problems/Opportunities/Issues" for Midtown, with a part of this process being to answer the question "Who and What Are We?" These statements were created as large scrolls combining words and supporting images. Each group then made a presentation to the full assembly so that the conclusions of each were shared by all. It became clear that there were many shared appreciations and concerns.

A stellar lunch of burritos followed during which much sharing of the morning's experience between participants occurred. During this time participants also indicated on a map of Midtown their prime "Sacred Places", a sacred place, be it icon or back yard, being defined as a place that they personally treasured in some way. This material along with everything else generated by the participants in the morning served as valuable resource material for the afternoon session.



After lunch each group then reassembled to develop "Our Vision for Midtown: 2005 and 2025". Each group engaged in active discussion and creative plan making. At the conclusion of this activity each group posted their very graphic scrolls on the wall and presented their work to all the participants. After a brief summary by workshop conductor Barry Wasserman of the day's conclusions the workshop was adjourned.





"We have a great community!"

"I feel enthusiastic!"

"There's a lot we can take advantage of."

CONCLUSIONS 1

The first workshop revealed that the participants shared agreement on what Midtown should be. They had listened to each other, discussed the options that were put forth, and focused on the essence of what constituted the public good for their community. Their vision for Midtown was that it should be

A People Place with residential and commercial uses related

A Place with its own intimate scale

A Sustainable / Healthy Place

A Green Place lots of trees with some tree plantings in particular used to give order and definition to the distinct areas of Midtown

A Place with a new parks and a community center

Better public transportation and a bike path system

A pedestrian oriented environment

A Place truly connected to the beach

An "outdoor city"

Development to focus on strongly identifying nodes of activity

Thompson as a denser, finer grain, infilled street with continuous trees

A Place that provides housing opportunity for all

A Place with its own set of regular "urban events"

A Place that serves the people who live there

A Place where the "public realm" creates a true sense of place

A Place with a visible backdrop of the preserved hillsides

A "REAL" PLACE

The participants had determined the essential framework. They were now ready to deal with looking in a much more detailed way at the specific ingredients necessary to create a program that could lead to the accomplishment of their vision.

WORKSHOP 2

"What Should Be Done"

Definition of Key Elements

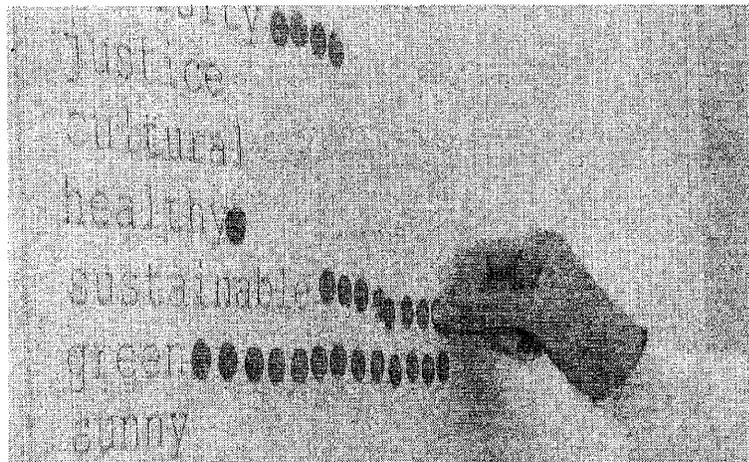
On an overcast Saturday morning, June 2, 74 participants gathered at Will Rogers School for the second TAKE PART workshop.

Barry Wasserman presented the workshop team's outline of the Consensus conclusions of the first workshop. He indicated that this was a strong framework that would form the basis of Workshop 2. This workshop would take a look at discrete planning elements similar to those constituting the Ventura Comprehensive Plan and determine the specific acts within them that would support the broad consensus vision established in Workshop 1. A list titled "What Wasn't Decided", categorized by planning element, had been prepared by the workshop team and was presented to the assembled participants. It indicated some of the detailed questions generated by their consensus that now they needed to answer to fully describe and support their consensus vision.

As a lead in to the ensuing group exercise each participant was directed to a large poster on the wall of the meeting space.

This poster, "My Midtown / My Priorities" contained a list of 33 single words, each of which dealt with characteristics of Midtown that had surfaced during the first workshop.

Participants were directed to take the three stick-on dots they had been given and place them next to their three highest priority words supporting their Midtown vision. Words receiving many stickers included green, sustainable, charming, walkable and community. The fervor generated by this activity again brought the participants together and served as an energizer for the ensuing exercise.



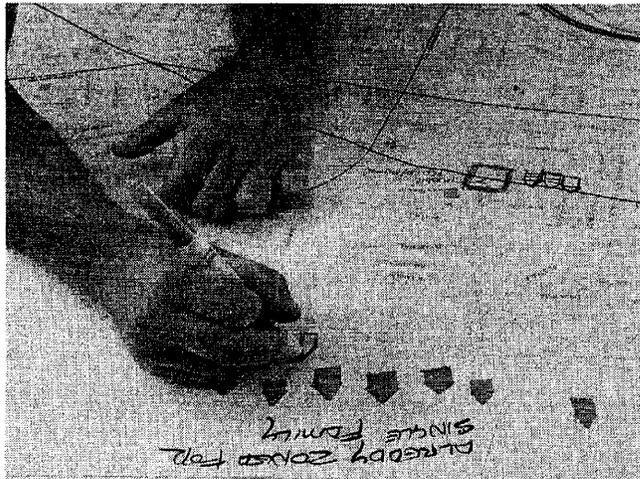
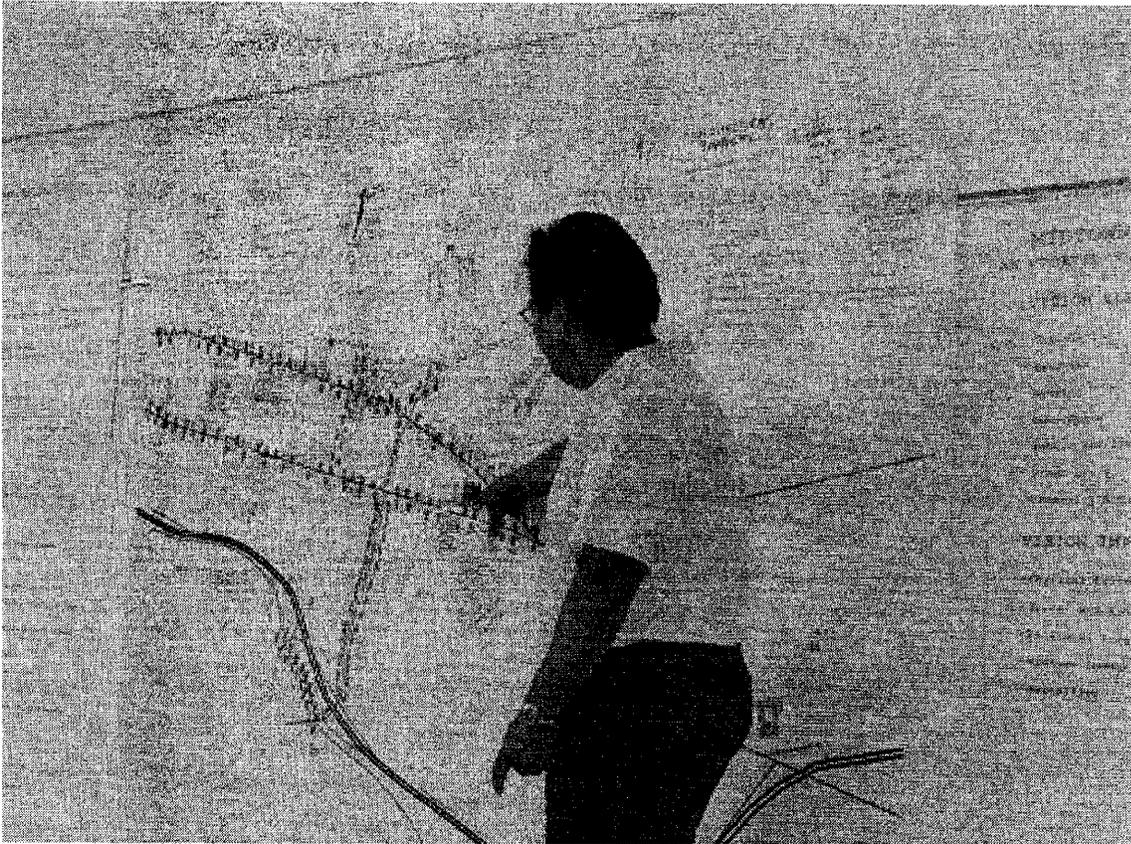
"The vitality here is wonderful!"

The participants then randomly assembled themselves into seven groups to each develop "Our Specific Plan". This Specific Plan, an expanded version of the consensus vision framework from Workshop 1, was to be described in terms of the following planning elements: Circulation, Land Use, Housing, Open Space, Public Facilities, Urban Design, and Community Activities. Each group was directed to first divide into smaller sub-groups to deal with the one or more of the planning elements. Each group then took this material, discussed it, and integrated it into a comprehensive plan. This process required trade-offs, compromises, prioritization, fairness, and judgment on the part of the team members. After much spirited effort the teams finished their plans and a pizza lunch was then served to all.



After lunch, each of the seven groups made a spirited presentation of their detailed plan to the assembled participants. Questions were asked by those assembled and answered directly by each group in explanation of the rationale for and detail of their plans. Barry Wasserman then provided feedback to the assembled group of the workshop team's initial perception of the commonalities that were apparent in the seven presented plans. It was clear that a detailed Consensus Vision was emerging and the workshop team stated they would bring it back to the participants at the time of Workshop 3. After some concluding remarks about the day's apparent accomplishments the workshop adjourned.

As participants left the workshop they were asked to record on a Midtown map, mounted on the meeting hall wall, their personal route to the beach. A series of options had emerged during the presentations and there was much curiosity as to what people really did. The resulting documentation was the subject of some comradely dialogue by the participants as they departed.



"Midtown is the heart of our community and connects the two ends of our city, east and west. Improvements to Midtown will benefit the entire city."

"Midtown has great assets."

CONCLUSIONS 2

The second workshop saw the participants reach broad consensus on a detailed vision plan for Midtown encompassing the elements of Circulation, Land Use, Housing, Open Space, Public Facilities, Urban Design, and Community Activities.

An overview of this consensus indicates the following:

Circulation: The impact of traffic on Main, Thompson, and Seaward should be mitigated to allow for safer and easier pedestrian use along and across these streets. A traffic calming program should be instituted to protect all residential areas. Midtown's 101 freeway interchange areas should be improved. A bicycle path system and a local public transit system should be developed. Better beach access for pedestrians and bicycles should be provided.

Land Use: Mixed use development should take place along Thompson and Main. Neighborhood commercial should be encouraged. Off street parking zones should be provided.

Housing: Higher density housing should be provided as part of a mixed use development along parts of Thompson and Main. New housing should accommodate a broad range of age and income needs.

Open Space: A community park system should be developed utilizing school facilities, existing parks and open space, and new mini parks. Main should be redesigned and developed as an urban linear open space.

Public Facilities: A Midtown Community Center should be developed.

Urban Design: Midtown's gateways should be visually identified. The character of the residential neighborhoods should be maintained and enhanced. The major commercial streets should be redesigned to provide pedestrian friendly environments. All of Midtown should be enhanced by a major tree planting program. The scale of all new development should be compatible with the existing small scale neighborhoods. Views to the hills and ocean should be preserved.

Community Activities: Programs and locations for a diversity of community activities for all ages shall be provided.

The detail of this Consensus, as verified during Workshop 3, are illustrated on the pages 20 through 23 of this report.

WORKSHOP 3

"Where Do We Go From Here"

Definition of Key Elements
Implementation Strategies/Priorities

On a pleasant Saturday morning, June 23, 70 participants gathered at Will Rogers School for the third and last TAKE PART workshop.

The activities started with workshop conductor Barry Wasserman making a detailed presentation of the Consensus Vision that had been developed by the participants in the second workshop. The workshop team had reviewed the Workshop 2 participants' written and verbal presentation materials to put together this synthesis map and vision elements description.



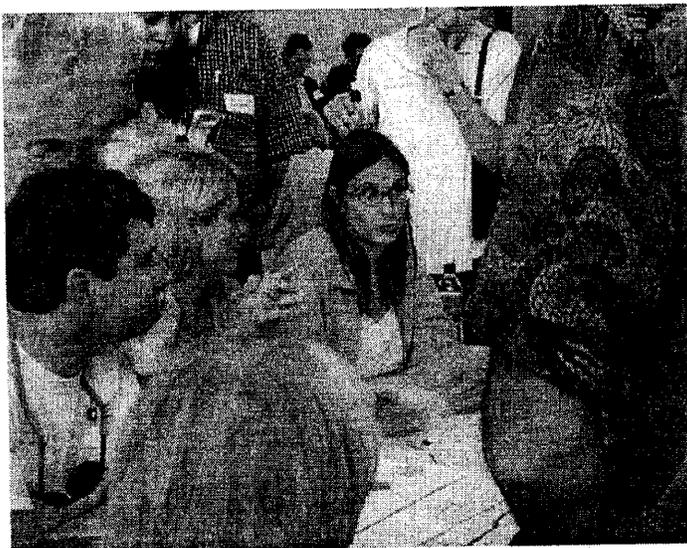
The presentation was followed by a lengthy open and spirited discussion involving the full assembly on the described Consensus. It was concurred by the assembled participants that, with some minor amendments and clarifications, the presented material did reflect the Consensus Vision for Midtown. That Consensus Vision in its adjusted final form is illustrated on pages 20 through 23 of this report.

The participants then randomly assembled themselves into six groups to each develop "Design Programs/Criteria" for their choice of one of the major projects/project areas in Midtown. The six that were selected by the participants were the Community Center project, Ventura High School area, Five Points Area, Main Street, Thompson Boulevard, and the Beach Access areas. The design programs/criteria were all developed in the context of the previously agreed to Consensus Vision. Each group presented its conclusions to the whole assembly. In developing this material the participants began to deal with the complexities of implementation which provided a good lead into the next



event Any of the presented material that amplified or clarified the Consensus Vision was subsequently integrated into it by the workshop team.

The participants then reassembled into six groups to develop "Implementation Strategies" for the Consensus Vision. Each group was directed by the workshop team to delineate the physical, social, economic, and political implementation activities that would be required. The activities were to deal with the "what, who, when, how, and where". Each of the groups then presented their conclusions to the full assembly. A brief summary of the commonalities that were apparent was made to all by Barry Wasserman.

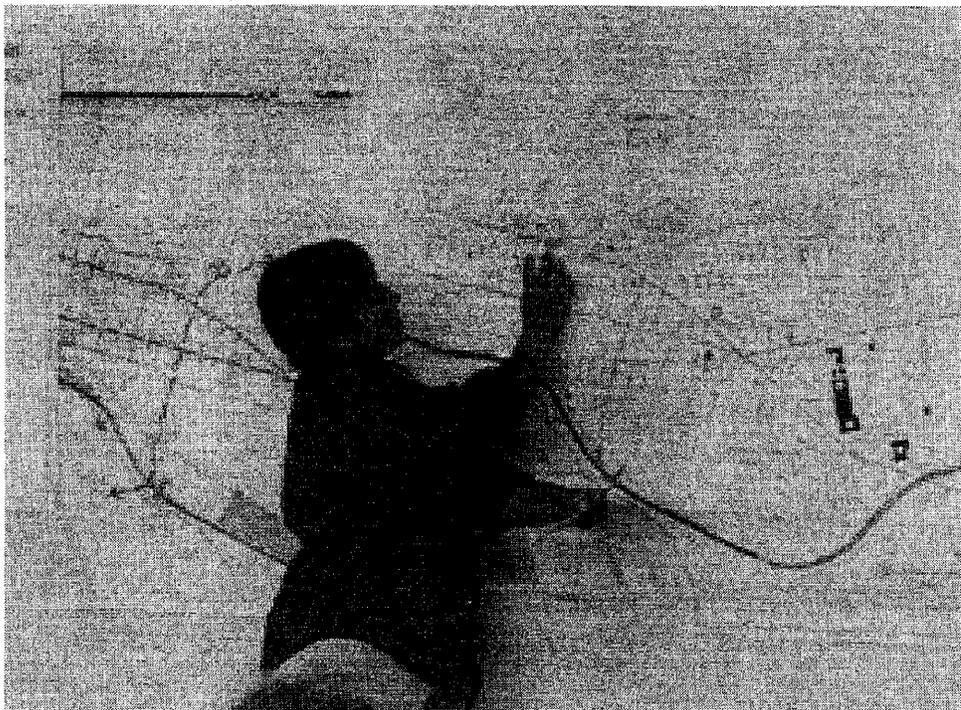


The workshop then adjourned to enjoy a festive barbecue lunch with Mayor Sandy Smith and Deputy Mayor Donna DePaula as grill masters. As the workshop participants left Will Rogers School many recorded on a large mounted scroll their answer to "Why Us!" to be transmitted to the City Council with their Midtown By Design vision.



'Midtown has committed residents!'

"We care!"



"Let's make it all we can with investment, planning, and promotion."

CONCLUSIONS 3

The third workshop introduced participants to the difficult task of setting priorities and responsibilities necessary to provide for implementation of the Consensus Vision. Participants were asked to focus on process. They deliberated on what it took to make decisions happen in the physical, social, economic, and political arenas.

Of these four implementation aspects, participants provided the most detail about the physical improvements they wanted to see happen. There appeared to be consensus that the highest priority was in dealing with traffic/circulation issues. Further, it was clear from the presentations that developing an urban design plan/guidelines that supported the Consensus Vision was a step that should be started as soon as possible. Beyond that there was strong sentiment that efforts should and could start immediately on all those actions listed under the physical heading on the Implementation list found on page 24.

It was apparent from the implementation measures listed under the social, economic, and political headings that there was understanding that implementation will require the full participation of many constituencies. Particular emphasis was placed on the various aspects of the City's involvement, both by its elected officials and various City departments. But equally, there was recognition that Midtowners must be a part of the process, particularly in an advocacy role. There clearly was a need demonstrated for the workshop groups to have more time to generate a comprehensive time line for implementation and to delve further into the financing mechanisms and options that would be available to support it. However, the Consensus Implementation program—as it appears on page 24—that was developed for the Consensus Vision is a solid first step.

The Consultant team adds the following observations:

A continuation of a process that truly engages Midtowners as their vision for the future moves toward realization is absolutely needed. These workshops showed that Midtowners could work together and reach common agreement on key issues. However, as the implementation process moves forward questions will inevitably arise over interpretation of the Consensus. It is essential that the positive approach to problem resolution that occurred at these workshops be continued. The TAKE PART process enabled each participant to develop confidence that all were working toward a common goal, that of the promoting a future that will be in the total community's best interests. The "public good" was the winner here and should continue to be as time goes on.

The Midtown Ventura Community Council must make continued efforts to engage and represent the fullest spectrum and number of Midtowners through every means possible. Membership should be increased. The success of efforts to bring the Midtown By Design vision to fruition will be greatly enhanced by the Ventura community's knowledge that this vision represents the will of midtown residents and their constituencies.

A major effort must be made by the City to embark on at least one of the physical implementation recommendations so that visible results of this Midtown By Design process are apparent as soon as possible. There is no better way to assure Midtowners that their voices have been heard.

CONSENSUS VISION

Overview

- Midtown shall be:
- A Sustainable/Healthy Place
- A Green Place
- A Walkable Place
- A Place that primarily serves the people who live there
- A Place with commercial areas of vitality
- A Place that provides housing opportunity for all
- A Place that has preserved its innate physical character
- A Place truly connected to the beach
- A "REAL" PLACE

Urban Design

- Views of the hills and toward the sea should be protected as a public resource
- Midtown should be identified at its major entry points: Main and Mills; Seaward and 101; San Jon Road and 101; San Jon Road and Thompson; Main and Memorial Park; Mills at Telegraph and Loma Vista.
- Main/Mills/101/126 area should be redesigned to reflect its role as a visual gateway to Midtown.
- The Five Points area should be treated as a major use and identification node
- Main shall have wider sidewalks, canopy trees, decorative lighting, and street furniture in conjunction with redesigned parking to facilitate shopping, outdoor dining, temporary exhibits and events and create a pedestrian friendly zone
- Remodeling of buildings along Main should reflect the smaller scale and grain of the adjoining neighborhoods
- Commercial buildings with parking at their rear shall develop pedestrian friendly entryways from these areas.
- Thompson shall have continuous canopy trees. Existing parking lots shall have low scaled greening to support the image of Thompson as a green boulevard
- Parking lots for new activities along both Main and Thompson shall not be given street frontage
- Major vehicular intersections along Main, Thompson, and Seaward shall be redesigned to be pedestrian friendly
- A public Art program shall be developed and public art works placed in significant Midtown locations
- Historic areas, such as Hobson Heights, and historic buildings should be inventoried and preserved
- New massive and/or bulky structures in Midtown should be discouraged
- New higher density housing developments should be no more than three floors, should be broken in horizontal mass to preserve sense of views to hills and sea, should have a vertical mass compatible with scale and privacy of adjoining residential uses.
- New development or remodeling in residential areas shall be compatible with the existing character of Midtown's residential districts
- Street trees shall be added throughout all residential neighborhoods
- Utilities shall be placed underground

Community Activities

- Provide locations/program space for recreation needs of Midtown users of all ages
- Provide public toilets in public parks
- Provide opportunities for community celebrations, festivals, and the like
- Provide for a farmers market

IMPLEMENTATION

Physical

CIRCULATION/TRAFFIC: Have the City immediately start a Midtown traffic/circulation study. It should give priority to a program of traffic calming measures on local neighborhood streets and speed enforcement measures for Main, Thompson, and Seaward. It should also focus on facilitating pedestrian use at major traffic intersections and at other street crossings on major streets, development of an integrated bicycle path network, and measures to optimize public transit use

URBAN DESIGN: Work with the City to identify a section on Main to implement as a test the suggested design revisions of wider sidewalks, street trees, new street furniture, parking modifications, etc. As a first step seek City funding for an urban design plan for this area.

HOUSING: Have the City start a focused housing study of Midtown to facilitate early start of Consensus housing recommendations.

COMMUNITY CENTER: Work with the appropriate City departments to develop a firm Midtown Community Center location and project proposal.

TREE PLANTING - RESIDENTIAL: Work with the City on a neighborhood outreach program to facilitate the rapid implementation of a major street tree planting program in the Midtown residential areas.

TREE PLANTING - COMMERCIAL: Have the City embark on a program of street tree improvement and additions for Main and Thompson from Five Points west in the context of the Consensus urban design strategies.

OPEN SPACE: Have city parks department program and develop small mini-parks in Midtown neighborhoods

BEACH ACCESS: Work with the city to place a high priority on design and implementation of improved pedestrian and bicycle access to the beach area for Midtown residents.

FIVE POINTS URBAN DESIGN: Work with the city and property owners in the Five Points area to develop an mixed use strategy for realizing the Consensus goals for this area. As a first step make some changes in the existing parking areas including the municipal lot on South Katherine that promote community use as park/events space.

PUBLIC ART: Work with the appropriate city commission on a Midtown a public art program.

POLI CIRCULATION: Work with the city, school district, and adjoining neighbors to develop a strategy assuring that the use of Poli is programmed to truly meet community needs in the context of the Consensus.

24 UNDERGROUND UTILITIES: Work with the city on a strategy to place utilities underground.

Social

Continue to utilize an inclusive community participation process in Midtown to support the implementation of the Consensus

Develop an ongoing program of Midtown activities, such as a farmers' market, art festival, food festival, historic tours, etc.

Secure affordable housing for all social strata as part of new mixed use housing development

Develop a Community Center program that meets the needs of all residents of Midtown

Economic

Develop joint strategies, both short and long term, with Midtown business and real estate interests to facilitate development, design, zoning, and activity recommendations in this Final Report.

Work with the City Community Development Department to develop strategies to secure economic development and revitalization funds from federal, state, and local governmental sources and non-profit and private sources to carry out the Consensus actions.

Work with the City to determine the City's position on the best use for the vacant Montgomery Ward site compatible with Midtown's future as described in the Consensus.

Implement a program of local fundraising events to support the implementation of Consensus actions.

Political

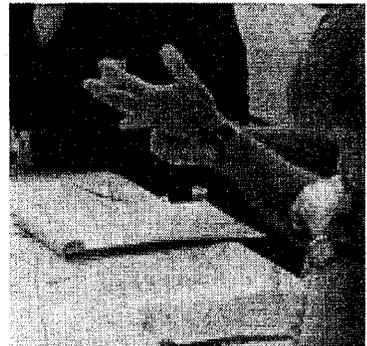
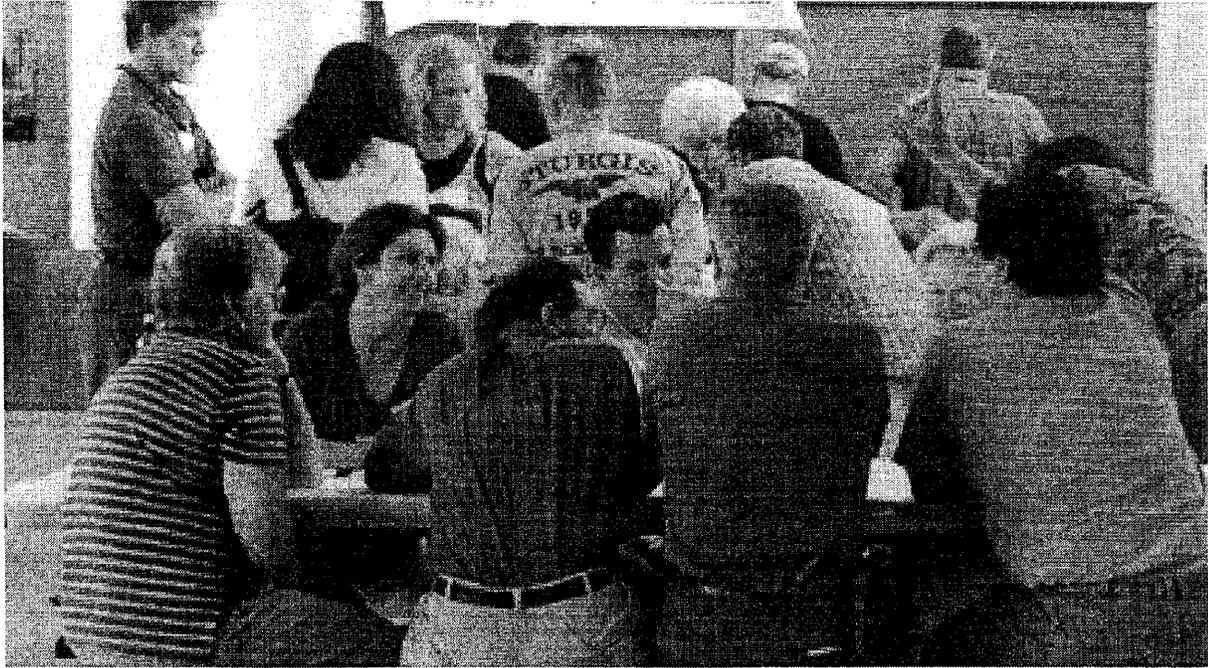
Secure adoption of the Midtown By Design Final Report as the city's policy framework for planning, budgeting, and funding decisions affecting Midtown.

Make immediate request to City Council for funds to implement necessary planning, design, and economic studies that will serve as the first steps in the process of realizing the actions described in the Midtown By Design Consensus.

Support the establishment of a Design Review Board and requisite enforcement ordinances to oversee the Consensus design proposals

Facilitate development of a joint action plan involving the City and the School District to develop community use of school grounds

Have Midtown members of the Comprehensive Plan Update Advisory Committee advocate the inclusion of any necessary actions in the Update to facilitate the Midtown By Design Consensus.



Participants

Wendy Abbruscato	Scott Engblom	Kathy Kolima	Patty Pimentel
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SPECIAL THANKS TO

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Affinity Bank

American Commercial Bank

Midstate Bank

