

A new San Pedro means new rules

Ideas are sought to ensure a revived downtown and the waterfront will connect.

By Donna Littlejohn
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With new development springing up in downtown San Pedro, city and community leaders have banded together to produce design guidelines to regulate things such as awnings, signs and building facades.

An open house to give residents an opportunity to review the new draft guidelines begins at 5 p.m. Thursday, with a public hearing at 7 p.m. at the Croatian Cultural Center.

"We want to make sure we strike a balance between providing guidelines that are helpful but not overly restrictive," said Conni Pallini-Tipton of the Los Angeles Planning Department.

The boundaries generally take in an area that has drawn the most interest of developers - Harbor Boulevard on the east, Pacific Avenue on the west, Eighth Street on the south and Swinford Street on the north.

One focus is providing a visual connection between the waterfront and downtown. Historic buildings also will be protected under the guidelines.

"Sixth and Seventh streets, in particular, have historic or possibly culturally significant buildings, so we identified those as well in this document," Pallini-Tipton said.

Among them are the John T. Gaffey Building at 333 W. Sixth St., the two-story building at 455 W. Sixth St., the Warner Grand Theatre at 450-478 W. Sixth St., the Brown Bros. Building at 455 W. Sixth St., the Croatian Cultural Center at 510 W. Seventh St., the First Baptist Church of San Pedro at 543-555 W. Seventh St., the Harbor Health Center at 122 W. Eighth St., and the Art Deco building at 630 S. Pacific Ave.

Many of the buildings were constructed in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s.

Another city process now under way - remaking the area's five-year community plan - will explore more substantial issues such as building heights, undergrounding utilities and improving streets and crosswalks in the area.

"Downtown San Pedro is poised to welcome significant new development in the future as residents and visitors rediscover the charm and attraction of its waterfront and small town commercial and cultural center," states the introduction to the 36-page draft document.

"These guidelines reflect community goals for a lively, attractive, pedestrian-oriented downtown that serves residents and welcomes visitors. These guidelines will also support community aspirations for a true cultural hub, with theaters, dining, shopping and inviting public spaces."

The goals are to create a "recognizable, vibrant and attractive" downtown, to contribute to the area's unique "sense of place," to establish Sixth and Seventh streets as primary pedestrian zones that link to the waterfront and to improve the aesthetic appeal of Pacific Avenue.

The draft design recommends using California native plants to landscape the area; encouraging sidewalk dining; using awning, window, pedestrian - or blade - signs; reducing "sign clutter;" building architecturally pleasing parking structures; preserving view corridors to the waterfront, Vincent Thomas Bridge and cruise ships; and requiring setbacks for mid- and high-rise buildings.

A final document is expected to be ready after the first of the year. It will go to the Planning Commission for approval.

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