

# STAYING SMALL SUCCESSFULLY VISIONING EXERCISE



**PREPARED BY:**



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**RESULTS & RECOMMENDATIONS  
FOR SOUTH PASADENA DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT  
JANUARY 2005**

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The following materials will be provided to the City of South Pasadena:	
○ Copies of All Staying Small Successfully Public Information Materials	
○ Copies of All Dialogue Group Sessions Sign-In Sheets	
○ Copies of All Submitted Questionnaires	

In February 2004, the Community Redevelopment Commission (CRC) for the City of South Pasadena presented a *Framework for Downtown Development*. One of the goals of the *Framework* document was to define the community's vision for downtown's future development and revitalization and to create a plan to implement that vision.

The redevelopment area under consideration is generally considered to be Mission Street, Fremont Avenue, Fair Oaks Avenue and Oxley Street. This area is currently dominated by surface parking lots and a substantial amount of under-utilized land, which the CRC believes could be used to a much greater advantage for the downtown business community and the city as a whole.

Based on comments received during the preparation of the *Framework for Downtown Development*, it became very clear that South Pasadena residents were interested in maintaining a "small town" feel in the downtown area. Creating a "sense of place" that allowed for a diverse and attractive city center, without allowing for a significant increase in density, became the stated goal.

The *Framework* document became the first stage of a work in progress. Once approved, the CRC identified outreach as an essential step in moving forward. The CRC is committed to creating opportunities for public information and involvement so that everyone who wants to be involved can be part of the redevelopment process.

Outreach serves the dual purpose of providing information and obtaining feedback so that the community is both informed and influential to the process. The CRC (whose job is to develop redevelopment plans, integrate public feedback, and to exercise all the powers of the CRA subject to appeal to them) has determined that there are three levels of community stakeholders:

- First ring: in the initial stage, outreach by the commission is focused on individual meetings and with the most immediate business and property owners
- Second ring: this stage of meetings is focused on business and property owners in the CRA area and greater downtown
- Third ring: the biggest and possibly the hardest to reach includes the community as a whole

Recognizing that outreach to the greater South Pasadena community was a challenge, the CRC hired Consensus Planning Group (CPG) to identify possible underserved publics and focus on identifying the key issues and concerns raised by the community to updating the downtown area.

By creating a "Staying Small Successfully" campaign which included a concentrated mailing effort, student backpack distribution, attendance at the local Farmers Market, communication through the city newsletter and small group dialogue sessions, CPG established a mechanism that allowed over 1,000 community members to share their vision for downtown South Pasadena.

The following report details the comments received from the South Pasadena community during a three month outreach period.

This document does not attempt to explain, justify or quantify issues specific to planning, zoning or public financing for the redevelopment. Rather, this document reflects a vision for downtown redevelopment by the South Pasadena residents who responded to the questionnaire and participated in our outreach efforts.

### **Project Vision**

Before determining the community vision for a new downtown, it was critical to determine if the community supported changes in the existing downtown. In conjunction with the CRC, Consensus Planning Group developed the “Staying Small Successfully” campaign. This campaign focused on building name identification for the project, encouraging residents to participate in outreach efforts, and developing a “buzz” in the community that ensured project visibility.

The first step in the “Staying Small Successfully” campaign required developing a theme that reflected what had been heard in the *Framework* document. While residents had indicated that they wanted to see downtown serve as a community amenity and draw local and neighboring residents to a unique commercial destination, there were three goals that were central to the revitalization effort:

- Build a Sense of Place
- Establish a Thriving Center for Local Residents and Businesses
- Build on the Unique Historic Fabric of South Pasadena

Based on the three goals stated above, the “Staying Small Successfully” campaign developed a postcard that was distributed at the local Farmer’s Market and through a backpack mailing at Arroyo Vista, Marengo, and Monterey Hills elementary schools. The cards were distributed to 1700 students. This distribution effort included an information card and a letter to the parent encouraging them to fill out the questionnaire.

After the distribution of the card at the Farmer’s Market, and based on the comments we had heard through this process, the “Staying Small Successfully” campaign prepared a questionnaire that was distributed to over 4,300 owner-occupied properties and businesses.

The residents of South Pasadena were very responsive to the mailing. Over 1,000 responses to the questionnaires were received. While there were residents who stated that they did not want to see any changes in the downtown area, they were in the minority.

Interestingly, of the questionnaires received, residents stated they would like to see South Pasadena remain small and unchanged. Many respondents also indicated that they would like to see new restaurants, an upgrading of the downtown core, and a return of shops that had existed in the past like Fosselman’s.

The balance of the respondents indicated that they supported updating and developing the downtown area, but they wanted to South Pasadena to maintain its “small town” village feel.

## QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

On November 8, 2004, questionnaires were sent out to over 4,300 South Pasadena owner-occupied residences and businesses in or around the downtown redevelopment area. In addition, the questionnaire was placed in the 2004 Winter Edition of the city newsletter *South Pasadena Neighbors*. As of January 7, 2005, the City of South Pasadena has received 1,031 questionnaires from residents.

For the most part, responses to the questionnaires were consistent. Through evaluation of the questionnaires, we noted that most comments fell into three categories. The first group, which included the majority of respondents, indicated support for some type of downtown redevelopment with minimal reservations. The second group of people would like to see redevelopment on a minimal scale – meaning renovating old buildings and beautifying the downtown area with landscaping, etc. The third group of people, who were a minority, liked the downtown area the way it is and are opposed to any change. They are also worried about developers taking advantage of and ruining their town.

The following is a summary evaluation by question. Although there were over 1,000 respondents, not every respondent answered every question on the questionnaire.

### SUMMARY EVALUATION BY QUESTION

<b>1. Would you like to be able to satisfy more of your shopping needs here in South Pasadena?</b>		
	# of respondents	%
<i>YES</i>	718	69.64%
<i>NO</i>	269	26.09%

Not surprisingly, most respondents to this question stated they would like to satisfy more of their shopping needs in South Pasadena. While most respondents acknowledged that there were places in South Pasadena to at least do their grocery shopping, many commented that they had to go to nearby Pasadena to shop for clothing or other similar items. Although many would like to meet all their shopping needs in South Pasadena, a large number of respondents stated that they did not want to see antique stores, nail salons, major chain stores or big box developments in town. Many respondents stated they would prefer upscale, independent retail stores in South Pasadena.

<b>2. How do you feel about your downtown?</b>		
	# of respondents	%
<i>Like it the way it is, don't want it to change</i>	252	24.44%
<i>Wish it were more of a center</i>	304	29.49%
<i>Would like to see it upgraded and revitalized</i>	560	54.32%
<i>Wish it were more connected to the Mission/Meridian stores</i>	388	37.63%
<i>Wish there were more stores and restaurants</i>	544	52.76%

## QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

A majority of respondents indicated that they would like to see new restaurants and shopping options for the downtown area. Most felt that downtown should be a destination that attracts local and non-local patrons, but remains low-density. Most respondents also indicated that they wanted to see connectivity between the shopping areas and would like to see South Pasadena maintain its small town character. Only a small percentage indicated they wanted to see no changes in the downtown area. While some respondents indicated they liked the area the way it is and did not want to see any changes, many wrote in that they would like to see more upscale restaurants, renovation of the Rialto, and more convenient shopping. Interestingly, responses from long-time residents were similar to newer residents with regard to downtown improvements.

**3. On a scale of 1-10 (1 is lowest, 10 is highest), please rate the following for downtown:**

	Average Rating
<i>Character and attractiveness</i>	6.36
<i>Parking availability</i>	6.23
<i>Shop and restaurant selection</i>	5.28
<i>Pedestrian experience</i>	6.10

While many respondents indicated room for improvement on all four of these areas, most liked the downtown area and thought it could use improvements that were consistent with South Pasadena’s more upscale reputation.

**4. Please mark the following you would like to see or not like to see:**

	Number		Percentage	
	YES	NO	YES	NO
<i>Outdoor gathering place/plaza</i>	630	323	61.11%	31.33%
<i>More parking</i>	506	408	49.08%	39.57%
<i>Restaurants/Outdoor dining</i>	821	177	79.63%	17.17%
<i>Mixed use</i>	523	399	50.73%	38.70%
<i>Arts and entertainment</i>	716	237	69.45%	22.99%
<i>Children and youth-oriented stores/activities</i>	515	369	49.95%	35.79%
<i>Sporting goods</i>	318	546	30.84%	52.96%
<i>Music</i>	542	349	52.57%	33.85%
<i>Home design and furnishings</i>	439	422	42.58%	40.93%
<i>Arts and antiques</i>	464	408	45.00%	39.57%
<i>Specialty clothing and gift stores</i>	573	316	55.58%	30.65%
<i>Residential</i>	351	504	34.04%	48.88%
<i>Office</i>	248	568	24.05%	55.09%
<i>Live/work</i>	364	415	35.31%	40.25%

As one will note from this table, a majority of respondents indicated that they would like to see a plaza, more restaurants, arts and entertainment options, a music store, and specialty clothing stores. Respondents also noted that they would like to see more parking, mixed use, and children

and youth-oriented stores/activities. A number of respondents also stated that they did not want to see a sporting goods store. It is also interesting to note they while many residents supported the mixed use concept, there were some who opposed residential, office, or live/work spaces in the downtown area.

For the outdoor gathering place/plaza, respondents remarked that they would like a central place in the downtown area where they can meet their friends. Respondents also remarked that they would like to see the outdoor plaza used for live entertainment or to show movies. Some also noted that it would be nice to have a water fountain in the plaza.

Overwhelmingly, local residents stated that they would like to see more restaurants in the downtown area. Many respondents disapproved of the current fast food chains such as KFC and McDonald's. Many respondents mentioned that they would like to see more diverse, contemporary, mid-range and upscale restaurant offerings. Many noted they wanted more upscale restaurants like Firefly Bistro or Shiro. Several respondents also noted that they would like to see an Italian restaurant, a Chinese restaurant, a sandwich shop, a pizza place, and more family-oriented restaurants. Many respondents also noted they would like to see outdoor dining and cafés.

A considerable number of respondents noted that they wanted to see more arts/entertainment options for the downtown area. Many commented that they went to Pasadena or other nearby cities for dining and entertainment and noted that they want those options in South Pasadena but on a much smaller scale. Many respondents stated that they would like to see the Rialto renovated and possibly be a center or anchor for restaurants and other entertainment. Several respondents also remarked that they would like to see after-hours/evening venues such as a jazz club, wine bar, or a place where "parents can have a romantic night out." Several respondents also said they would like to see a safe place where their children can safely meet their friends.

While respondents said that they would like to see added entertainment options grouped along with restaurants, they do not support the idea of having loud entertainment venues or a large movie multiplex.

Because Pasadena already has many retail chain stores as Gap or Crate and Barrel respondents feel that there is no need to bring them to South Pasadena. They want to see shops that are upscale, unique, and independent ("Mom and Pop type shops"). Many respondents indicated that they would like to see men's or women's clothing stores, a shoe store, a toy store, and a stationary store. Many respondents said they did not want to see any secondhand clothing or discount stores.

Responses to the home design and furnishings/antique options were almost equal, but many noted that there was already an overabundance of those types of shops in the area.

In addition to the above categories, respondents also had the chance to indicate what changes they would like to see. There were a considerable number of respondents who wrote that they would like to see a bookstore like Vroman's, a bakery, Fosselman's, a candy store, a small hardware store like the former Balk's, a shoe repair shop, independent coffee houses, and a

Whole Foods. Several respondents said that they would like to see the Trader’s Joe’s moved to the downtown area since it seems disconnected from the retail core.

<b>5. Do you support replacing parking areas with new buildings that are similar in scale, design and character to existing buildings and storefronts on Mission Street and Fair Oaks? If you checked NO, please explain why.</b>		
	# of respondents	%
<i>YES</i>	521	50.53%
<i>NO</i>	367	35.60%

Although a majority of respondents stated they supported a more efficient use of the surface parking areas, they stated that it was acceptable as long as the number of parking spaces would be replaced. If there is to be additional parking, most would prefer to see subterranean parking. Several respondents also mentioned that they would support a parking structure as long as it did not look like parking structure.

Of the respondents who checked no, many felt parking was already at a premium and they did not want to see a loss in parking availability.

In addition, many respondents noted they did not like the current street parking time restrictions. Respondents said they wanted to see free parking, close to the downtown area.

<b>6. What is your favorite building in South Pasadena?</b>		
	# of respondents	%
<i>Rialto</i>	189	18.33%
<i>Library</i>	186	18.04%
<i>Fair Oaks Pharmacy</i>	73	7.08%
<i>Buster's</i>	58	5.63%
<i>Other</i>	266	25.80%

This question was asked in order to get a sense of the preferred architectural theme for South Pasadena residents. Many respondents chose the library as their favorite building in South Pasadena because of its architecture and green space. Respondents also liked the Rialto, but repeatedly stated that it needed to be remodeled or improved in some way. Other favorite buildings included:

- Baranger Studios
- the middle and high schools
- St. James and Holy Family churches
- School administration building
- Fremont theatre
- Kaldi’s coffee house

<b>7a. Do you support housing as a part of mixed use development? If you checked NO, please explain why?</b>		
	# of respondents	%
<i>YES</i>	560	54.32%
<i>NO</i>	376	36.47%

Many of those who responded negatively to this question explained that South Pasadena was already too crowded and that any additional housing was unacceptable. They remarked that they did not want to see increased density and population growth in South Pasadena. Additional reasons for opposing mixed use development included:

- Keeping the single family character of South Pasadena
- Perceived increased traffic and congestion
- Lowered property values
- Impact on the local school district
- Concern that they would turn into slums

Respondents also stated that mixed-use housing is more urban and is not compatible with the small town character of South Pasadena.

<b>7b. If you checked YES, please explain what kind of housing you would like to see.</b>		
	# of respondents	%
<i>Single-family</i>	69	6.69%
<i>Senior</i>	30	2.91%
<i>Townhouses/Condominiums</i>	204	19.79%
<i>Apartments</i>	128	12.42%
<i>Lofts</i>	147	14.26%
<i>Affordable</i>	64	6.21%

The majority of respondents who supported mixed-use housing said they would like to see townhouses/condos. Many also favored having retail shops on the ground floor with housing and service operations such as dental or insurance offices on the upper floors.

While many people supported the idea of increased housing, support was tempered by density limits. Respondents also noted that they wanted buildings no taller than two or three stories. Several respondents said they liked Mission Meridian Village, but perceived it too dense.

There was great deal of support for some type of affordable housing as long as it did not bring more children into a school district that is already perceived as being overcrowded. Respondents noted that they would like to see mixed-use housing geared towards young professionals. Respondents said they did not support rental housing but were comfortable with for-sale housing. These respondents want to attract those who invest in the community and plan to stay in South Pasadena permanently.

## QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

In terms of style, respondents mentioned that they would like to see a Craftsman, Spanish, bungalow, or cottage style housing and no stucco.

### 8. Example of a downtown or neighborhood district that you like:

	# of respondents	%
<i>Pasadena</i>	166	16.10%
<i>Montrose</i>	84	8.15%
<i>Monrovia</i>	133	12.90%
<i>Other</i>	331	32.10%

Once the need to upgrade downtown was determined, it was important that residents determined what that downtown would look like. Of the downtown areas that were selected, Pasadena was named as a prime example of what residents would like South Pasadena to resemble. Many residents enjoyed the shopping diversity, but did not like the chain stores, parking issues, and congestion. Respondents remarked that they liked the Old Town, Paseo Colorado, and Lake Ave areas, but wanted something on a much smaller scale for downtown South Pasadena. Residents support the idea of creating a “destination” as long as it is smaller and more manageable than Pasadena. Respondents also suggested Monrovia and Montrose as examples of what they would like to see in the redevelopment area. These two areas have interesting shops on one main street, attractive landscaping and provide free parking. These areas also do not have strip malls in the main downtown area. Other local downtown areas that were also mentioned included:

- San Marino
- Sierra Madre
- Claremont
- Santa Barbara
- Santa Monica
- Glendale
- Larchmont Village

Many residents also noted that they wanted the charm and feel of a small European town.

Residents also indicated that they are comfortable with the idea of a theme as long as the theme provides design consistency. Residents would like to see a mission or brick motif that is consistent with South Pasadena’s current architecture. Residents would not support the “Disneyfication” or “Carusoization” of their downtown.

### Other Comments

	# of respondents	%
<i>Request for low-density</i>	49	4.75%
<i>No parking meters</i>	36	3.49%
<i>Provide subterranean parking</i>	14	1.36%
<i>No chain stores or franchises</i>	85	8.24%
<i>Landscaping</i>	65	6.30%

### **Other Comments**

Many residents included their own comments in the survey. The comments we received in this category broke down into four major themes. These themes included the creation of a fixed route shuttle, the current traffic problems, and aesthetic improvements including landscaping and architecture.

### **Creation of a Fixed Route Shuttle System**

Many residents remarked that they would like to see a shuttle that connected the various shopping areas with the residential areas and Gold Line stop. Respondents stated that they want a more pedestrian-friendly downtown that would provide connectivity and reduce the dependence of cars in the immediate downtown area.

### **Current Traffic Problems**

As important as it is to local residents to redevelop the downtown area, most felt that the existing traffic conditions, particularly on Fair Oaks Avenue, needed to be addressed immediately. Many felt that a new downtown would not work if local and neighboring residents could not easily access the downtown area. Residents were also concerned with existing traffic and what impacts development would have on existing traffic.

### **Aesthetic Improvements**

Many residents indicated that while South Pasadena had a number of beautiful and historic buildings, the Rite Aid shopping center, Big Lots, Granite State Bank, Vons, the El Pollo Loco strip mall and the furniture store at northeast corner of Mission Street and Fair Oaks Avenue were eyesores and should be razed or at least renovated to fit with existing downtown character. Several respondents did not like the vacant lots on Mission Street. Most residents asserted that they did not want to see any strip malls. Many felt that the current signage was ugly and some storefronts were industrial-looking. A good number of respondents stated they would like to see nice landscaping that incorporates all of the commercial and downtown area with trees, wooden benches, and more lighting with vintage lamp posts.

CPG staff coordinated and facilitated three dialogue group sessions to gain insight from residents and business owners in South Pasadena on the key issues regarding downtown redevelopment. The dialogue group sessions were conducted to refine what CPG heard from the questionnaire. CPG held three dialogue group sessions at various times throughout the day to allow residents with varying schedules an opportunity to attend.

The first session took place on Tuesday, December 7, 2004, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the South Pasadena Library community room. 12 people attended this session.

The second session took place on Tuesday, December 7, 2004, from 6 to 8 pm at the South Pasadena Senior Center. 17 people attended this session.

The third session took place on Wednesday, December 8, 2004 from 2 to 4 pm at the South Pasadena Library conference room. 1 person attended this session.

### **SUMMARY EVALUATION BY CATEGORY**

Questions asked and responses given during both dialogue group sessions focused on parking, housing, design and aesthetics, and other issues. As one will note, many of responses and concerns gathered at the dialogue group sessions were similar to those in the questionnaire. The following is a summary of the feedback received from all the dialogue group sessions:

#### ***Restaurants and Businesses***

- Participants said that they would like to see the Rialto become the focal point for the downtown area. They see it as an anchor for a pedestrian-friendly, entertainment zone.
- Residents want to see inviting retail and restaurants.
- Residents do not want to see fast food/chain restaurants.
- Participants said they would like to see more diverse retail. They do not want more coffee house chains, nail salons or Japanese restaurants.

#### ***Parking***

- Participants noted that they prefer subterranean parking.
- Participants do not oppose parking structures as long as are placed on side streets off the main downtown area or if they do not look like parking structures.

#### ***Mixed-Use***

- In terms of mixed-use development, participants noted that they would like to see retail businesses on the ground floor, housing or professional offices on the upper floors, and underground parking in the same structure.
- With regard to mixed use, participants would like to see more housing options for young professionals, young couples, and seniors.
- Residents said they would like for-sale, not rental mixed-use housing.
- Residents would like to see different types of mixed-use housing – lofts, townhouses, and senior housing.

- Participants were concerned about the influx of families with young children in mixed-use housing option.

### ***Design Elements and Landscaping***

- Residents stated they would like to see a combination of contemporary and classic styles for the downtown area.
- Instead of new development, some residents noted that they would like to see better landscaping, more trees, street furniture, and improved infrastructure.
- Residents want to keep within the South Pasadena character – not like The Grove.
- Residents like the New England village look that is quaint, has ambience, and a small town atmosphere.
- Participants want developers to respect original buildings.
- Participants would like to see connectivity on both sides of Mission Street.
- Residents want to see a downtown with a cohesive design/style that reflects the community.
- Residents said they like brick, Craftsman, and Spanish styles that keeps with the historic character and does not look artificial.

### ***General Comments***

- Residents are very concerned about the traffic and are worried about the impact from redevelopment.
- Residents would like to see a central plaza where you can hear music or see an outdoor performance.
- Residents would like to development to happen on under-utilized spaces such as the one behind Bank of America.
- Residents would like to get rid of the Rite Aid.
- Participants said they would like the City to take over the Rialto and restore it to its original condition like they did in Fillmore after the Northridge earthquake.
- Residents would like to see places where their children can safely meet, but absolutely no malls.
- Many residents felt that the City should do more to control what types of businesses are allowed.
- Participants said they would like to see bike lanes and a shuttle that took people around the main points in town.

The key finding is that the majority of participants to the questionnaire and dialogue group sessions are in favor of redevelopment for the downtown area. The following are key conclusions from both the questionnaire and dialogue group sessions:

1. No high density development
2. No restaurant/retail chains
3. Develop a community “center”
4. City should screen incoming businesses
5. Mixed-use development is an acceptable option
6. Need for more upscale, retail stores and restaurants
7. Address current traffic problems
8. Create a destination so that South Pasadena is pedestrian-friendly

In summary, residents would like to see a downtown district with more restaurants, a movie theater (preferably a renovated Rialto), upscale shopping, and parking. Furthermore, residents stated that they are not looking for an Old Town Pasadena, but redevelopment on a much smaller scale.