

CLOCKTOWER CENTER

Santa Cruz, California 95060

Community Meeting #1
June 5, 2024



workbench



Q+A Responses

QUESTIONS/ COMMENTS

Zoning / Planning

What does "infill housing" mean?

Infill housing means housing that is built on sites where some other urban use was previously developed. It is a contrast to "greenfield development" which is developing on previously-undeveloped land. We like infill development because it preserves wild and open spaces for nature.

Higher housing density can be tenable with 1) robust mass transit, 2) services within walking distance of the housing (including groceries).

Thanks for that comment. And we have that here in downtown S.C.!

I know mixed use is popular but at this point we need housing far more than commercial space. This could change I suppose in future but I'd rather see more housing.

What is FAR?

FAR is the floor area ratio. It means how much floor area of building you can have relative to the total square footage of the site.

Will this be for UCSC students?

This housing will be available to all renters.

We have a lot of commercial space, and also housing, in downtown Santa Cruz that sits empty because it is too expensive. Would you be able to make this all affordable if you truly cared about Santa Cruz for its residents?

So, first we really do care about Santa Cruz and its residents, and we believe building more housing, both market rate and affordable, is good for Santa Cruz. But no, it is not possible to make this project or any other substantial housing development 100% affordable without really large government subsidies.

Why not consider upper mission/ swift street area? What other areas in Santa Cruz were considered?

Workbench and other developers are constantly looking for other places to build housing in Santa Cruz and the surrounding county and Cities. We develop on sites where the laws allow us to build and where it's economically feasible.

How can residents of Santa Cruz help get this project approved as fast as possible?

In general, the developer and city will work through the usual process, which does take a fair amount of time. I think that one of the big variables in Santa Cruz is how many appeals happen to the project IF it is approved by staff and, for example, the planning commission. So talking to people to provide support and avoid opposition to the project that eventually gets proposed is helpful to that.

What is your time line for a huge project like this??

Many years, likely 3 - 6 years from purchasing the property to occupancy.

QUESTIONS/ COMMENTS

Building Design / Aesthetics

I'd like to see 5-8 stories. I also wish the design could improve aesthetically perhaps reflect historical design in a modern way. I'd like to see 5 stories but realize that likely isn't realistic.

The idea of creating a restaurant on the top floor should be considered, imagine the views of Santa Cruz!

I really like the idea of a dense mixed-use building here. Even if it can't reach 16 stories, it'll be a great start on the kind of buildings that our downtown should have. I'd be happy to live here.

Given the central importance of the town clock to community life in Santa Cruz, what can and will you do to make sure the project is a fitting architectural contribution to forging community?

We absolutely want a project to work here well with the community use of the Clocktower park and area

I am concerned about the design of the building. How much input are you willing to take from the public. Ultra modern isn't appreciated by many of us.

Architectural style and aesthetics are definitely subjective, so developers listen to design input but have the right to propose their own vision. Santa Cruz has buildings of lots of different styles. New buildings can either mimic old styles or be of their time. It is because cities develop over many years, and architects are creative, that cities are eclectic.

I like the design of the building it's beautiful and UNIQUE, please keep it how it is or similar.

Is there any oversight by any City department/agency regarding building design? Specifically are there design guidelines in place so that new developments support the character of Santa Cruz and are similar to other (already built) buildings?

Yes, the City of Santa Cruz has passed Objective Design Standards, as well as other ordinances, that all new projects must comply with.

I think the design could incorporate more historical components of the facade to match some of the buildings downtown.

I live near the clocktower and am looking forward to this project moving forward!

Are you taking into consideration windows that are created to minimize/eliminate bird strikes?

The City has a bird safe glass ordinance that the design will need to follow.

This project seems well thought out and the team seems committed to bettering a place that is their home too. Thanks for sharing the design ideas, great part of the presentation. When would this project get started?

We are open to design ideas, please let us know your thoughts.

QUESTIONS/ COMMENTS

Building Height

I love the height! I would like to see more “modulation” of the building to be less blocky. But keep the height.

The architecture is currently evolving, as shown in the design this evening. It will continue to be refined prior to the formal submittal.

Mission Hill is iconic and will that be blocked by this project for everyone to see? Isn't the Mission Hill a historic district and is it not protected as a viewshed also?

The Downtown Plan requires that impacts of projects to views to Mission Hill be evaluated. This will be a necessary step following submittal of a formal application.

What is the current building height limit for the site according to Santa Cruz zoning, not including any density bonuses?

In this area, the standard maximum height is 35 feet, which may be increased to 45 feet with City Council approval as described in the City's Downtown Plan.

How did Workbench get to 16-story's? Why not 15-story's or 17-story's?

For this specific proposal, the building's height is a function of the number of units we are trying to achieve and the vision for the massing / design. As we refine the project and study the constructability, financial viability, etc the building could be a different height.

The tall project is just too tall! We are not a large city! 8 stories would fit in with our town, not 16.

What is the highest building in Santa Cruz? Why do you want to change this amount to 18 stories which is not consistent with Santa Cruz county.

The tallest building in downtown Santa Cruz is the Palomar, built 95 years ago this year. We believe that the environmentally more responsible way to create housing is infill density, not sprawl - which is in keeping with city and county plans and new state laws. Similarly, rather than put tons of 5 story buildings all across Santa Cruz, having taller buildings downtown is a better plan in our view.

Really glad you are giving this context. We definitely need to go tall on some of these buildings to get to 3700 homes!

We need housing but it should expand beyond downtown. Buildings over 10 stories are out of place in current Santa Cruz.

8 stories is enough! This project Won't help the housing crisis if low income people cannot afford it! How does this project address the housing needs of our service workers and teachers?

Thanks for your input, this project proposes more than the required amount of affordable units (in both the 174 and 260 unit scheme). Those who qualify for affordable housing in Santa Cruz will be able to rent these units at the rates defined by the state.

I like the infill, more housing, car free approach. I worry about the 16 story height and the modern look not blending at all with current, existing buildings.

QUESTIONS/ COMMENTS

Parking

What is the plan for parking?

We don't have that determined yet - it is still very early on in determining what this project will be - the presentation will have more. Per State Law AB2097, this project is only required to provide EV and Accessible parking spaces, and that can be reduced further under density bonus law. We CAN add more parking than that, however. We are proposing 86 parking spaces and 225 units.

I like the balance of parking you've created. The building is so close to downtown, adding more parking which adds more vehicles in the city would be a negative.

Both Knight St and Bulkhead are small streets. As is, parking for people living at 2030 N Pacific for vendors is challenging. What are your plans to increase street parking so people living in the area can still have lives.

The project is not required to provide on-street parking, but staff will consider options as suggested in a larger context through consultation with the City's Public Works Department.

I used public transportation throughout my childhood on the east coast. This was possible for my single mother with 4 children because there was public transportation not reliant on the flow of automobile traffic. I think you need to consider residents who need cars to reach county destinations ...

Would love a parking garage to be included in the bottom for safe parking.

Where did you get statistics on people "wanting to live without a car"?

I don't have those on hand but I have seen stats from the city and from Bike Santa Cruz County about this, as well as surveys of people in broader regions, other places like Santa Cruz, etc. The UC has also shared info at some points about % of students that have vehicles. We'll be doing more research on this for sure.

Need for a car not always a choice but an unfortunate necessity in much of California. I think there is room for some locations without cars but not in all these large projects.

I understand that legally this apartment may be above board. However, as a city, the lack of parking and rapid growth downtown are questionable. Can we wait to see if the apartments already going up get filled? Who will handle security around this building?

...we waited decades in this town without building much housing, which got us into this mess along with so much of CA. hence the city's planning and state laws that are meant to help us catch up in amount of housing that would have been much better to build gradually over many years. This won't get funded if there isn't extremely high confidence that it will get filled. Property management will have a security service/infrastructure, but what that will be on this project is several years in the future at least..

QUESTIONS/ COMMENTS

Traffic

Are you not required to submit any kind of analysis of how this proposed structure will impact traffic?

Not at this stage. The plans we provided under "SB 35" are very preliminary. The City will determine whether any traffic study is required after we make a full formal submittal for a specific project with proposed number of units, commercial space, etc.

Please address how this building addresses the transportation needs of elderly people and differently abled people.

Elderly and differently abled people often use public transportation and they benefit from our American's with Disabilities Act (ADA) that requires developers to build homes that are adaptable for differently abled folks. Newer projects meet all those ADA requirements and make ADA improvements to surrounding sidewalks, etc. if necessary.

Really worried about the congestion and traffic. It's not realistic to think that someone is not going to have a car and need a parking space just because they live downtown.

We hear you and we feel strongly that a major part of the solution to CA's housing supply crisis and climate action goals is to add much more density in downtowns designed to support living without cars. The other goal is to reduce the region's traffic by having more people live near where they work.

What will be the impact on traffic in the surrounding area? We have experienced a significant increase in traffic in the past 2-3 years as the roads currently do not support cross city flow.

I can't answer that question precisely right now, but the impact on traffic from building this project with limited parking, and a tall building that meets a lot of housing needs in a small footprint, and all of the residents are walking distance from everything that the downtown has to offer, is way less than the traffic that will be created by an equivalent number of new homes built across Santa Cruz, in places too far to walk to all the everyday conveniences.

It is impossible to get around town already

Respectfully, no, it certainly isn't impossible. Santa Cruz has a great public transit system that is getting better all the time, great bike routes, public bike rentals, a walkable downtown and trails all along the river.

A robust public transportation system doesn't exist in Santa Cruz. Building high density housing without an improvement in public transportation will have the predictable effect of increasing traffic.

QUESTIONS/ COMMENTS

Safety / Emergency Response

Downtown Santa Cruz is in a flood plain, as clearly demonstrated during the 89 earthquake. The large skyscraper in San Francisco (I forget the name) is leaning. Are you confident that the engineering of your design will not have inherent structural issues. Alternatively, given location and soil types, how can you be certain this building will be able to withstand a major quake?

Earthquake resilience is super important. We have already brought a structural engineering firm onto our team for this project even though we have not yet decided on the building type, etc. In addition we already have a geotechnical engineer providing their expertise on how to safely work with the soil conditions at this site.

I think safety should be a part of these surveys. That area of Pacific is not an area I would take my child. It doesn't matter how affordable it is if it isn't safe.

Circulation and traffic safety are reviewed as part of any proposed development project. City staff will review these aspects of the proposal.

Public accessibility only invites theft.

This is a good point we will be considering as we continue to progress the design. Our goal is to provide an inviting space but still be realistic about security.

We are in a floodplain. what kind of risk assessments have been done to measure the environmental risks?

The downtown area is protected by a levee, and the City is in the process of certifying that levee with FEMA. We consulted with a hydrologist that is also providing services to the City, and they provided a letter. The bottom line of their response was "The City has submitted a full map revision to FEMA, and the best available information at present indicates that the SFHA in the immediate vicinity of the Project will be revised to Zone X." Zone X is the designation for least risk flood area.

QUESTIONS/ COMMENTS

Natural Resources

There has been several new tall mix use buildings like this already planned and/or built, yet I haven't heard anything about how much water will be needed for all this housing and how the City plans to provide it?

Yes, any housing project on this site would remove the large trees. Trees that size have large root structures that extend over much of the site, so it isn't feasible to build a project that uses all or most of the site and save those trees. But consider this: if we built the same number of homes further from the City center we'd need to build a building with a larger footprint, so that would use up more open space. Santa Cruz made the smart decision to not expand into the natural open spaces around us, preserving that land for nature and recreation. We love trees, and will be planting more trees than we remove, so they provide more shade of our streets and sidewalks..

The development plans to kill two heritage redwood trees that are part of our urban forest and a focal point of this lot. Why can't you develop a building to let them live?

If you can't build around healthy heritage trees, don't buy the lot.

New construction is extremely expensive, so most of the units will be the current market rate in Santa Cruz, although also there will be a significant number of lower income affordable housing units. Unit size will be figured out in a later design phase as a part of figuring out the size of the project, what commercial spaces there will be, what parking there will be, etc

QUESTIONS/ COMMENTS

State and Local Law / Policy

Questions on height waiver.

What State law basically says is that the City can't restrict the height of a building in such a way that the project can't fit all of the units allowed by local and state law. So the height limit is set by the number of units allowed on the site. State law allows for a "waiver" of height limits that prevent the project from including all the units allowed.

Has SC not met its regional housing needs?

Santa Cruz is doing great, and needs to keep up the good work in order to maintain its Pro Housing designation and be eligible for additional transit, housing and climate funding.

Is this project going to have union labor?

Unknown at the moment.

I get the impression that this project will be built even if the people of Santa Cruz does not want it built. Is that true? Is there anyway we can stop it from being built.

New construction is extremely expensive, so most of the units will be the current market rate in Santa Cruz, although also there will be a significant number of lower income affordable housing units. Unit size will be figured out in a later design phase as a part of figuring out the size of the project, what commercial spaces there will be, what parking there will be, etc

The SB330 preliminary application process IS deemed complete when...

The SB330 Pre Application has been deemed complete, because, per State law, all required submittal items have been provided.

Why wouldn't Measure M have applied to this project?

The short answer is no. We think Measure M would have reduced future housing development, if it had been passed and implemented.

Is there anyway to assure that all the housing that has been started and planned to be built will NOT be for second homes especially for people outside of SCCC or become vacation rentals.

We can't speak to "all the housing." In general, it is illegal to discriminate against an applicant that qualifies to rent a unit, so you can't keep someone from renting a "second home." With respect to vacation rentals, known as "short-term-rentals" they'd have to follow the local laws.

How are you going to incorporate public feedback into your plan? If the community opposes the 18 story building yet it's legal to build, will you move forward with that plan?

We have already received both objections to the idea of an 18 story building and a lot of enthusiastic support for it from Santa Cruz residents. That is a difficult thing to balance. Note that a very wide range of project sizes has been submitted in the two pre-proposals. We are gathering all feedback and will figure out what project can satisfy as much as possible of what we receive and be financially possible to make happen and be something we believe is in keeping of the city's and state's stated goals.

QUESTIONS/ COMMENTS

Other

8 stories is enough!
This project Won't help the housing crisis if low income people cannot afford it! How does this project address the housing needs of our service workers and teachers?

Thanks for your input, this project proposes more than the required amount of affordable units (in both the 174 and 260 unit scheme). Those who qualify for affordable housing in Santa Cruz will be able to rent these units at the rates defined by the state.

Without rental policies, these housing units may be stand-in for UCSC dormitories.

There needs to be actual affordable housing for those who are being paid minimum wage, such as service workers. It would also be helpful to have a lease to own plan.

So not an opportunity for locals to buy, rent only. What is the estimated rent price points and what size are the units?

New construction is extremely expensive, so most of the units will be the current market rate in Santa Cruz, although also there will be a significant number of lower income affordable housing units.

Do you know how many homeless people will be provided an apartment at this project?

We can't know that at this point. The affordable homes in the project will be filled according to fair housing laws and the County housing authority. Keep in mind that nearly 10,000 families are on the wait list for Housing Choice Vouchers (Section 8) in SC County, and that wait list has been closed since 2018!

I think Santa Cruz residents need housing. Locals should be prioritized. How will you project provide housing for our children and we who struggle to live here?

Thanks for supporting more housing! We hear your concern that people who already live here struggle to find affordable housing, and many are homeless. We also acknowledge that new housing can be occupied by people new to the community, and that Santa Cruz is a welcoming place to new neighbors.

In Santa Cruz I've read private equity money and UCSC growth have been main drivers of increased rentals and housing prices. What is your answer?

It's supply and demand. No supply and and a steady increase of demand over the last 40 years has led to high housing costs.

Changing the landscape of downtown by a project of this size could impact the economic viability of Downtown....That is a high risk but you have no accountability to that impact. What are your thoughts on that issue?

The general response from business groups has been very supportive due to the expectation that this would help the economic viability of Downtown.

How many units will be for sale/ vs rented?

It's currently being planned as a rental project.

Who is financing this project?

So far small investors, many of who are Santa Cruz locals.