



COMMUNITY DIRECTIONS AGENDA

City Council Workshop Meeting
Thursday, December 13, 2012, 1:00 p.m.
Sierra Nevada Auditorium
Caltrans District Office Building
703 B Street
Marysville, CA 95901

COMMUNITY DIRECTIONS AGENDA

This community has a long and rich history, rooted in the boom of California's Gold Rush in the mid-1800s. As the farthest northerly point that river ferries could navigate up the Feather River, bringing miners and mining supplies from Sacramento and San Francisco, destined for the gold fields, Marysville soon became the hub of commerce in the region. To one degree or another, it kept that position until the 1970s, when commerce began to increase on the Sutter County side of the Feather River, and the growth of suburbs began to expand Yuba City's influence. Marysville's location on the banks of the Feather River—its economic lifeline for so long—was becoming its greatest constraint to economic progress. Encircled by rivers and levee systems, the community could not match the unimpeded growth available to Yuba City, and Marysville businesses soon began to pull up stakes and relocate across the river, starting a slow, steady decline in the commercial fortunes of the community.

In the upcoming year, when the two remaining new car dealerships relocate across the river, Marysville will be without a new car dealership for the first time in more than 80 years. That is a troubling metaphor. By itself, the loss of those businesses will not cause the demise of the city, just as their being here did not ensure its economic success. But it represents yet another, and particularly undeniable, reminder that the prosperity the community enjoyed for so long continues to slip away from us.

Today, the community stands at a crossroads. A new path to future prosperity is needed, and it is urgent that the community agree on the way forward. Indecision now is the same as indifference. It is my judgment that small mid-course corrections will not be enough; nothing short of a transformation and rebirth can get the job done.

In the time that I have been your city manager, I have met and spoken with hundreds of people in the community: business people, opinion leaders of all sorts, successful entrepreneurs, professionals, and just plain residents. They expressed themselves in a variety of ways, describing various gauges of future success most familiar to their lives. But in every case, it added up to the fact that the community has big needs and high expectations of its city officials to demonstrate the leadership to get that transformation moving. What I heard from them was that we cannot continue doing what we have been doing and expect that the outcome will somehow be better. So this afternoon, I want to lay out for the Council the broad outline of a plan for the path to rejuvenation, our "Bounce Back" strategy.

We know about the community's geographic and topographic constraints. The rivers—and levee system that protects us from those rivers—also mean that Marysville will not likely be able to follow the conventional path taken by cities everywhere that have grown their way to prosperity. Even so, I don't dismiss that possibility, and part of my suggested plan will make provisions for just that, should annexations in the future permit it. More about that in a subsequent, companion report.

So, with growth of the City unlikely, a different path to prosperity must be found, one that capitalizes on the community's indigenous assets—its history, culture and local arts. One that revels in being a small town, not regrets that it has missed out on malls and



mega chain stores. One that evokes strong feelings of community and contentment. In short, one that celebrates its status as “Main Street, America.”

But just how will this put us on the road to renewed prosperity? Under prevailing conditions locally, 12,000 residents is not a large enough market to serve as the engine of prosperity. The good news is that, within a 50-mile radius, a population of 2.4 million people offers more than enough purchasing power, provided we give them a reason to come to Marysville. It comes down to answering this question, “What will bring people to Marysville to shop and make investments, thereby creating economic activity for business owners and employment for residents of this community?” I want to propose the following plan to answer that question.

To my mind, there are five distinct areas of the community that I would regard as particularly significant targets of opportunity to focus our attention because of their potential for economic growth. As a convenient shorthand, I refer to these as:

(1) The Lake District, including all the area along the shore of Ellis Lake, from Ninth Street on the south to 14th Street on the north, and B and D Streets for that entire distance. Ellis Lake is the signature amenity of the city and, as such, should be regarded as prime commercial and residential lands.

(2) The River District, the entire riverfront area including the levee and beyond, into the inundation areas along the Feather River. Unquestionably difficult to develop, but undeniably underutilized as an economic contributor to the community.

(3) The Medical Arts District surrounding the Fremont Rideout Hospital by one or more blocks in each direction.

(4) The Highway 70/E Street Corridor, stretching from the bridge at the city limits on the south to Tenth Street on the north.

(5) The Historic Downtown District, encompassing B, C and D Streets and all cross streets from First Street to Eighth Street.

HISTORIC DOWNTOWN DISTRICT

Economic development in smaller communities is almost always driven by small businesses, so the focus quite naturally is often on the central business district. In Marysville, that fact has already been recognized somewhat by the efforts made to-date to brand the Historic Downtown District and to invest in upgrading the public infrastructure along D Street. Creation of the Marysville Downtown Business Improvement District was another step in that direction. The historic downtown is a prime target of opportunity for additional branding, infrastructure improvements (including parking facilities), targeted business recruitments and commerce-generating activities, events and attractions. This district represents the most recognizable example of the notion of promoting our indigenous assets—in this case, its heritage.

The future vitality of the Historic Downtown District depends on two related, but somewhat different, developments. On one hand, business prospects in the district will be improved by increasing the overall average retail sales per square foot of store space. On the other hand, an increased volume of shoppers will have the same effect. And when



both of those things happen together, the economic impact becomes especially robust. This is where the shopping power of 2.4 million people living within 50-miles of Marysville comes into play. The Historic District is in a particularly good position to serve as the attraction that can bring in shoppers from outside the immediate area.¹ What's needed is not so much a re-think of its current image, as a more intensive, broadly-applied, coordinated and sustained emphasis on building a future around a strong arts, cultural and historic image. Capitalizing on the tag line "Main Street, America", staging more events and attractions of regional significance would play a vital role in drawing in people from outside the immediate trade area and beginning to establish Marysville as a worthwhile day-trip destination. Specialty boutique and lifestyle retailers who themselves enjoy an image synonymous with arts and crafts, culture and a classic heritage should be sought out for opening stores in the district. Similarly, diverse dining choices in the district will be important. In time, the district's reputation would develop as a unique, easy afternoon outing destination for both recreation and distinctive retail shopping experiences.

Historic downtowns, as compared to newer marketplaces (malls, in particular), are unique because of their human scale. They evoke a sense of intimacy not possible in malls and impersonal mega-stores. For that reason, streets, sidewalks and public spaces play a key role in a downtown's success. This is so because shopping is inherently a pedestrian experience. The goal must be to turn motorists into pedestrians who will stroll and, in so doing, exhibit a greater likelihood of making purchases, including impulse buying. The degree to which pedestrian-friendly amenities—shade trees, storefront awnings, restrooms, benches, drinking fountains, green space, art in public places—have been well thought out and carefully positioned, will directly determine how much time visitors are willing to spend (and shop) in the district, and whether the overall experience will be considered positive enough to be shared by word-of-mouth and to lead to return visits. This is especially important where on-street parking may be limited, and shoppers are required to begin the pedestrian experience away from the main shopping areas, as can be the case in our Historic District. Shoppers whose comfort and senses are catered to respond by spending money.

HIGHWAY 70/E STREET CORRIDOR

Many of the points discussed above for the Historic District apply equally to the other "Main Street" in Marysville, Highway 70. But there are also major differences between these two retail districts. High daily traffic counts provide a significant pool of shoppers, but these are apt to be transient shoppers who will stop only out of necessity—fuel, food, overnight lodging. Their retail demands are much more limited than is true of shoppers in the Historic District. These are shoppers who are not so much coming to Marysville, as passing through Marysville. For that reason, easy vehicular access is necessary for these shoppers, and that creates a fundamental conflict with the pedestrian experience. The prevailing patterns of development over the past 50 years or so have

¹ According to the 2010 ESRI *Retail Marketplace Profile*, downtown Marysville, including the Historic District, already generates a surplus of \$61.7 million in retail sales over predicted demand, indicating that retailers are attracting shoppers that reside outside the trade area.



markedly favored the automobile. The result has been the widening of roads, the elimination of barriers to traffic flow and, in general, an increase in the land area dedicated to vehicle use. In many cases, this has been to the detriment of pedestrians, as their once-connected streetscape became fragmented by the needs of motorists. Presently, some of the retail trade along the E Street corridor is well-suited to high vehicular traffic and easy vehicular access. Gas stations and drive-through fast food establishments are notable examples. However, much of it remains as retail business that is better suited to more pedestrian-friendly areas, no doubt a hold-over from earlier times when E Street was not also a major state highway.

This conflict in retail uses poses a challenge as we plan for the future of this district. It will require imagination and a community consensus concerning the type of “Main Street” we want E Street to be and, not least, the likely fate of the State Theater and the Marysville Hotel buildings. Nevertheless, it remains a prime commercial district in search of a clear identity before large-scale outside investment can be expected.

MEDICAL ARTS DISTRICT

Even before its current expansion, the Rideout Regional Medical Center was likely the single largest investment in Marysville. It certainly will be the largest when the current expansion project is completed in late-2014. Both its growing size and its stature as a preeminent healthcare center suggest that it should be able to draw allied businesses to the area, and that justifies treating this as a target of opportunity for future economic activity. Medical offices and support services should favor the proximity to the hospital, and all-new segments of the healthcare industry could be attracted to the district. Things like respite care and spas, as well as geriatric services like assisted living and retirement homes would be sensible. Similarly, medical research and pharmacology might be possibilities. Additional restaurants could certainly benefit from the large and concentrated workforce, and short-term lodging within walking distance is needed for families who come to Marysville to spend time with hospitalized loved ones. New, upscale housing, too, would be needed to meet the demands of doctors and other healthcare professionals drawn by the hospital. That could have beneficial implications for East Marysville residential neighborhoods, and possibly for the restoration and preservation of downtown Victorian homes. One can even imagine new higher-end residential construction taking place within the district itself.

LAKE DISTRICT

Like the Highway 70/E Street corridor, the Lake District enjoys high traffic counts, but none of the conflicts with pedestrians. The presence alone of Ellis Lake in the heart of this district means that this would normally be considered prime development land for high-end dining, retail or residential uses, or recreation facilities. In contrast, the prevailing land use typology is older, down-market service businesses like tire and muffler shops, inexpensive variety stores and vintage motor courts—land uses that we would not typically recommend for prime commercial areas of the community. This disparity between what is and what could be cries out for imaginative, pragmatic planning and a vision that elevates Ellis Lake to its proper place as the signature amenity



it is in the community. The challenge here will be to factor in the presence of the railroad tracks that mark the eastern boundary of the district.

RIVER DISTRICT

Marysville, it can truly be said, is a product of its rivers. And yet, today, the rivers play no discernable role in the economic life of the community, and otherwise only as threats to be protected against. The relatively wide inundation areas along the banks of the rivers limit its present usage. Its future as a contributor of economic activity to the community likely depends on improvements that will be costly to construct. Regulatory approvals, too, will challenge our imaginations. Nevertheless, our rivers are the biggest underutilized asset of the city, and that alone warrants our attention as a legitimate target of opportunity.

THE NEXT STEPS—A STRATEGY FOR GETTING IT DONE

What's needed now is for the economic potential associated with these five target areas to be developed to its fullest through meticulous, imaginative and pragmatic planning by top tier professionals in the field of sustainable community and economic development, working under the guidance of serious-minded, successful civic and community leaders from business, education, healthcare and the arts. I have begun to recruit just such people, all of whom share a love of the city, a passionate commitment to its future, recognized stature in the community, and who have been successful in their chosen fields. Some of those people are able to be with us today, and are here in the audience.

There are several key elements to the strategy being proposed here which deserve to be emphasized. Principal among these is the requirement for the community at-large to be involved in the transformation effort. The very notion of defining "districts" is, in part, an effort to engage each of these neighborhoods and encourage the businesses and residents located there to take an active role in finding and promoting their common interests. At present, most of the organized activity in the city revolves around the historic D Street district. But each of the other neighborhoods must become equally important centers of activity and commerce, and that will require those with the most immediate interest to take leading roles in making it happen.

Secondly, it will be important that as many community-based groups as have an interest in civic improvement be enlisted to make the transformation effort a sustained part of their civic missions. This not only spreads ownership of the outcome, but provides us with important perspectives and resources, and promotes support for the effort throughout the community.

Thirdly, there will be a need for an effective, ongoing marketing mechanism to plan, organize, and stage larger, community-wide events and attractions, and to serve as an information and referral facilitator for smaller, neighborhood-organized events.

Finally, there is an urgent need for full-time business development capabilities within the City government. So much of the Bounce Back Initiative and the community's future is tied to reversing the decades-long trend of business flight from Marysville, and



yet the City has no resources dedicated exclusively to that purpose. This is a serious deficiency that we must correct at our earliest opportunity. I intend to make provision for that capability in the City Manager's Proposed Budget for FY 2013/14.

Much of this presentation so far has focused on the need to develop an imaginative vision for our community's future. But there is another, equally important side to the "Bounce Back" strategy—one that is more immediate and pragmatic. Community and economic development is all about investments. Nothing happens unless landowners are motivated to make investments. The starting point in developing a vision for the community must be to focus on the landowners in each of the five target districts. Constructing an inventory of land ownerships tells us whether there are significant landowners who are—or could be—major players. Are they active developers, or are they satisfied just collecting rent? If they are developers, why aren't they developing in Marysville? What's keeping them from it? Is it small parcel sizes and an inability to assemble the land around them into developable sites? Is it state highway traffic congestion, or is it too little traffic? Are land use and regulatory impediments keeping them from making a commitment? Are there difficulties securing local financing? Or perhaps the landowners are simply not interested in development.

To be serious about developing a sustainable community future, we have to be willing to begin by identifying obstacles to development, and build our vision on that sort of a pragmatic foundation. That will be the role of the professional planners, working under the guidance of the community-based leadership group.

This will be a highly significant undertaking, one that not only can lay the groundwork for the renewal of the community and its return to prosperity, but which will provide the direction we need to update the city's General Plan and Zoning Code at long last. The chart on the following page shows a preliminary timeline for completing this phase of work. Updating the General Plan is always expensive, but by acting decisively in the way that I have described, we can reassure the community that we have the vision, the foresight and the will to do what's necessary to return Marysville to prosperity.



	2012	2013												2014						
	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul
Council Workshop	◆																			
Council approves project and project budget		◆																		
Council appoints project steering group			◆																	
Steering group prepares RFP/RFQ for planning consultant			■																	
Council approves RFP/RFQ					◆															
RFP/RFQ circulated to planning consultants					■															
Steering group reviews proposals; interviews selected consultants						■														
Council awards planning contract								◆												
Community kick-off meeting with planners								◆												
Planners prepare existing ownership inventory and profile of 5 target districts									■											
Steering group meets with planners to review profiles												◆								
Planners hold community meeting to present profiles												◆								
Planners develop practical options and designs													■							
Steering group reviews tentative options and designs with planners															◆					
Planners make modifications as necessary																■				
Steering group reviews revised options and designs with planners, as necessary																		◆		
Community presentations of proposed plan																		◆	◆	
Planners prepare final plan documents																			■	
Steering group and planners present final plan to Council for adoption																				◆

Legend:

- ◆ Council action
- ◆ Steering group action
- ◆ Planner action
- Steering group process
- Planner process