

**State of Texas County
of Bexar City of San
Antonio**



**Meeting Minutes City
Council B Session**

Council Briefing Room
City Hall
100 Military Plaza San
Antonio, Texas 78205

2023 – 2025 Council Members

Mayor Ron Nirenberg
Dr. Sukh Kaur, Dist. 1 | Jalen McKee-Rodriguez, Dist. 2
Phyllis Viagran, Dist. 3 | Dr. Adriana Rocha Garcia, Dist. 4 Teri
Castillo, Dist. 5 | Melissa Cabello Havrda, Dist. 6 Marina
Alderete Gavito, Dist. 7 | Manny Pelaez, Dist. 8 John
Courage, Dist. 9 | Marc Whyte, Dist. 10

Wednesday, March 6, 2024

2:00 PM

Council Briefing Room

The City Council convened a B Session meeting in the Council Briefing Room beginning at 2:06 PM. City Clerk Debbie Racca-Sittre took the Roll Call noting a quorum with the following Council Members present:

PRESENT: 11 – Nirenberg, Kaur, McKee-Rodriguez, Viagran, Rocha Garcia, Castillo, Cabello
Havrda, Alderete Gavito, Pelaez, Courage, Whyte

ABSENT: None

ITEMS

1. Briefing on implementation of the SA Tomorrow Comprehensive Plan [Roderick Sanchez, Assistant City Manager; Bridgett White, Director, Planning]

City Manager Erik Walsh introduced the Item and Rudy Niño, Interim Director of the Planning Department, who presented a briefing on the SA Tomorrow Comprehensive Plan which was adopted on August 11, 2016 and included the Comprehensive Plan, Sustainability Plan, and Multimodal Transportation Plans.

Niño reported that the Comprehensive Planning Program defined 13 Regional Centers, 17 Community Areas, 12 Priority Corridors, and Comprehensive Rezoning. Niño outlined the Northeast Corridor Revitalization Sub-Area Plan which was adopted in 2014 and included façade enhancements. He noted that Phase 1 of the Bandera Road Corridor Sub-Area Plan was adopted in December 2022 and included the area of SH-16 between Loop 410 and Loop 1604; and Phase 2 would include Loop 410 to Culebra Road.

Niño reported on two rezoning efforts to align the zoning with newly adopted plans which included the approval of the Bandera Road Corridor Plan in December 2023 and the Goliad Road Revitalization Plan which began in April 2023. He noted that mixed-use zoning districts was a new policy recommended in several Sub-Area Plans including the Bandera Road Corridor Plan with the Verde Hills Neighborhood that was approved in May 2023. He noted that the Sub Area Plans focused on neighborhood stabilization, the Medical Center Area Regional Center Plan which included Medical Center facilities with a focus on corrective zoning for non-conforming medical facilities and neighborhood stabilization with a City Council hearing expected in May 2024, Denman Neighborhood focused on neighborhood stabilization expected in Fall 2024, and Northeast Area Residential & Commercial with a City Council hearing expected in October 2024.

According to Niño, a stakeholder meeting was planned in April 2024 with a City Council hearing in June 2024 for the Texas A&M-San Antonio Area Regional Center Plan Overlay District. He added that the UTSA, Downtown, and Midtown Area Regional Center Plans were currently under analysis for land use and zoning.

Niño outlined the proposed Mixed-Use Zoning Districts which included an implementation tool for the Comprehensive Plan, Sub-Area Plans, and adopted Future Land Use Maps, and directly corresponded to the Mixed-Use land use categories adopted in 2018. He noted that it was being used in all Sub Area Plans intended to be broadly applicable across the City and modeled after conventional zoning districts rather than form based for ease of use and community familiarity. He noted that the implementation tool included elements related to housing types and affordability, multimodal connectivity, and parking reduction. Niño added that the Planning Department was working to create a technical review and community engagement program that mirrored and was coordinated with Transportation and Housing amendments.

The Transit Oriented Development Plan (TOD) had begun as a result of a Council Consideration Request (CCR) and was intended to create growth along transportation corridors including VIA Metropolitan Transit (VIA) Advanced Rapid Transit (ART) corridors, according to Niño. The 2016 SA Tomorrow Growth Policy and Extraterritorial Jurisdiction (ETJ) which updated the City's annexation policy would create guidelines to articulate sustainable development patterns, he stated.

Niño described the community engagement activities of the department in support of the plans. He added that all outreach was provided in English and Spanish and placed on various media platforms.

DISCUSSION:

Mayor Nirenberg commented that the growth plan needed to be a comprehensive policy to be equitable as well as prosperous. He stated that The SA Tomorrow effort was a vision to put in a plan of action for growth, sustainability and multi-modal transportation in which we were currently completing

phase 3 and moving into phase 4 of the Plan. Mayor Nirenberg noted that it took a decade to get to this point through extensive public outreach and input.

Mayor Nirenberg noted that downtown was a major economic and employment zone and, with the decade of downtown, housing became a priority. However, Mayor Nirenberg recognized that there were 12 other Regional Centers that needed the same focus as downtown.

Mayor Nirenberg asked the City Manager to provide an update on TODs. Catherine Hernandez, Director of the Transportation Department, stated that the TOD Task Force and Technical Working Group kicked off last week and were reviewing the Unified Development Code (UDC) to develop amendments that could remove barriers to TOD and better align housing and transit. Hernandez forecasted that more community engagement would be hosted this summer with recommendations being brought back in August 2024. She noted that this could include market rate analysis and identification of properties that would be land banking opportunities. City Manager Walsh stated that they would be brought before the Planning & Community Development Committee (PCDC) for feedback along the way. Mayor Nirenberg cautioned that TOD should not be taken out of the context of SA Tomorrow and separated to the point at which it went in a different direction than the SA Tomorrow Plan.

Councilmember Viagran requested more information on the Mixed-Zoning Program noting that it included light industrial. She stressed that the Transportation Plan needed to include the Southern Sector to be able to connect Brooks, St. Philips College Southwest Campus, Palo Alto Collect, Port San Antonio, and others. Niño stated that the development of the Sub-Area Plans included collaboration with these partners was well as the Transportation Department and VIA.

Councilmember Viagran commented that large participation was needed to obtain feedback on the proposed UDC changes and offered to help communicate with residents and Neighborhood Associations.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia, Chair of the PCDC, supported bringing the Plans back to the Committee and recommended that Councilmember Castillo serve on the TOD Task Force to represent the San Antonio Housing Trust (SAHT). Councilmember Rocha Garcia suggested redevelopment of the Southwest Military Drive Corridor and asked for successes and challenges in the Northeast Corridor. Niño stated that there was a Northeast Corridor TIRZ that came from the Northeast Corridor Plan which allowed for the creation of the façade grants. However, a challenge was that businesses were asking for more than facades, such as signage and parking lot improvements, which were included in updates to the pilot program, according to Niño who recommended expansion of the Program moving forward.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia suggested that there needed to be a buffer between industrial districts and residential areas and supported Councilmember Castillo's CCR to update codes related to recycling plants. Councilmember Rocha Garcia requested an update on the Sustainability Plan for development to the Planning & Community Development Committee (PCDC).

Councilmember Castillo recommended coordination with Bexar County for pedestrian friendly infrastructure. She supported planning for the future we wanted to live in as well as the present which needed to take parking into consideration and suggested that streets could be wider. Niño reminded City Council that mixed-use zoning was only one development tool. Councilmember Castillo recommended that TOD have a more equitable approach so people without vehicles could still live near the transit

centers to be able to take the bus to work.

Councilmember Cabello Havrda spoke to the need for analysis of transportation of goods from the border through the area and how that would impact the local Transportation Plan. Niño stated that the Plan would consider all modes of travel and transportation needs. Hernandez stated that discussions with the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) would also take place to gain input. Councilmember Cabello Havrda requested that actual VIA riders and other organizations be included in data gathered for the SA Tomorrow Regional Transportation Plan. Hernandez recommended coordination with the MPO. Councilmember Cabello Havrda supported simultaneous conversations about transportation, TOD, and other development.

Councilmember Whyte agreed with the Mayor that the City needed to collect more data and supported more local business participation in the programs. Councilmember Whyte supported looping Bexar County into the discussion on TOD and other issues. He suggested that TOD include a balance of housing along VIA's new Advanced Rapid Transit (ART) line to include market rate.

Councilmember Whyte asked how businesses could get information on the planning efforts and recommended a unified liaison. City Manager Walsh commented that there was a Construction Mitigation Outreach Team within the Economic Development Department that could help with communication to local businesses. Councilmember Whyte noted that plans were put into place and sometimes the implementation did not go through as originally envisioned. City Manager Walsh noted that the Northeast Sub-Area Plan had been implemented in an inconsistent manner and should have been simpler and more focused on direct outcomes.

Councilmember Kaur noted that her residents were interested in participating in upcoming Sub-Area Plans and asked why the department was not using form based code for the Mixed-Use Zoning Districts. Niño stated that community and small businesses preferred more conventional planning and the zoning process. Councilmember Kaur agreed that form based code was a different methodology but suggested a pilot program as it allowed more visioning including potentially using virtual reality. Niño stated that the department would review that as it could be costly.

Councilmember Kaur supported TOD that focused on new development but wanted to ensure that current residents near those transit corridors would be positively impacted and supported.

Councilmember Courage commented that the SA Tomorrow Plan had been underway for many years and was developed over eight years ago noting changes such as UTSA moving its campus downtown, business closures, high interest rates, closure of office buildings because of the COVID-19 Pandemic, 5,000 new Short Term Rentals (STRs), increased construction costs, and the Broadway Plan. He suggested that the Plans needed to be accelerated before they were revisited, noting that they were frustrating to the community since many times the Plans were amended when a developer came in with a different idea.

Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez commented that 60% Area Median Income (AMI) Housing was not being developed so he recommended that the limited funding for housing should only incentivize affordable housing. He hoped that the Plans guided the City's blueprint for revitalization and development, noting that residents had been engaged previously in planning efforts, only for those Plans to not come to fruition by the development community so they were often disappointed.

Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez requested that staff provide the number of Plan Amendments that were brought before the City Council each year and the number that were approved versus rejected, noting that City Council could be undermining the planning process by approving so many requests for amendments from developers. Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez suggested that the SA Tomorrow Plan be leveraged for grant funds. Mayor Nirenberg mentioned that the internal scoring tool included those plans and should do so moving forward.

Mayor Nirenberg closed the discussion by noting that he was a Co-Chair of SA Tomorrow when he was the Council District 8 Councilmember. Mayor Nirenberg was grateful that the SA Tomorrow Plan was being utilized, even if inconsistent and was a living breathing document. Mayor Nirenberg stated that the goal to have a resilient, thriving, equitable community had not changed even as the landscape and community had changed.

Mayor Nirenberg emphasized that it was necessary to check ourselves against our plans so we could stay on track. City Manager Walsh agreed and stated that staff could provide a briefing every spring and fall.

City Manager Walsh thanked Niño for his interim leadership and welcomed Bridget White, Director of Planning, back from her loaned executive stint at San Antonio for Growth on the Eastside (SAGE).

2. Briefing on the Downtown Strategic Plan [Lori Houston, Assistant City Manager; John Jacks, Director, Center City Development and Operations]

City Manager Erik Walsh introduced Assistant City Manager Lori Houston who provided an overview of the Downtown Strategic Plan which began 14 years ago with SA2020 which designated Downtown as a priority which culminated in former Mayor Julian Castro's "Decade of Downtown" a Strategic Framework (December 2011), and Center City Implementation Plan (March 2012) as well as an economic impact for downtown.

Assistant City Manager Houston highlighted six successes which included \$270 million in 2012 and 2017 General Obligation Bond Funds, adoption of the Center City Housing Initiative Policy (CCHIP) which resulted in 9,094 new housing units being added to downtown, place based approach for Zona Cultural/San Pedro Creek and Hemisfair/Alamo (these two areas represented a combined total \$2.2 billion investment), design guidelines for downtown, leveraged public assets (Hemisfair, Alamo, UTSA downtown expansion, Continental Hotel and others), and realignment of the Center City and Downtown Operations Department (CCDO) to include both development and operations to ensure coordination.

Assistant City Manager Houston reported that since the decade of downtown ended, policy priorities shifted, the COVID-19 Pandemic occurred, and a downtown regional center all supported updating the Strategic and Implementation Plan. Assistant City Manager Houston reported that Visit San Antonio (VSA), Centro San Antonio (Centro), and the City had unified their leadership to update the Plan and would split the costs with \$45,000 from the City of San Antonio, \$255,000 from Centro, and \$255,000 from VSA.

President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Visit San Antonio (VSA), Marc Anderson, spoke regarding successful projects such as the International Pow Wow (IPW) San Antonio Conference in 2023, Holidays on Houston Street this past December, and he announced that in June 2024, Event Connect would be held in San Antonio and would include over 3,000 attendees that would normally be hosted in Las Vegas, Nevada.

President and CEO of Centro San Antonio, Trish DeBerry, expressed excitement for the Plan and introduced the strategic planning consulting team HR&A Advisors, Inc. (HR&A), a globally respected urban planning firm. DeBerry reported that downtown was an employment hub providing jobs for 78,000 and generating \$4.9 billion in wages for a total economic impact of \$22.7 billion.

DeBerry noted that a Downtown Circulator Pilot Program would be created in partnership with UTSA deploying electric cab vehicles within the downtown area. She stated that the pilot program would be for six months and would have four total permitted vehicles operating through the Downtown Public Improvement District (PID) and UTSA downtown campuses. She mentioned that the Program would roll out in March 2024 with input from UTSA, VIA, and downtown stakeholders.

DeBerry stated that the unified vision was to determine how the City wanted downtown to grow with regard to housing, jobs, catalytic projects, planning, and public investments. She stated that the partners needed to develop new policies, finance/incentives, and bond programs.

DISCUSSION:

Mayor Nirenberg noted that two of the circulator vehicles would be dedicated to UTSA and the other two would roam within the PID boundaries until 7:00 p.m. He asked about getting data beyond the PID boundaries. DeBerry stated that Southtown and the Pearl were very interested in participating in the pilot program, however, data was needed to determine financial feasibility and potential usage. Mayor Nirenberg noted that we had half full VIA busses running down City streets and suggested partnering with VIA to explore these smaller circulator vehicles which could even be expanded to the Medical Center, Brooks, and other Regional Centers.

Councilmember Viagran recommended that the Downtown Plan look critically at affordable housing for those working downtown, particularly in the leisure industry.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia recommended continuing the Housing First Strategy downtown and noted that while the decade of downtown was over, the decade of the neighborhood had begun and she regarded downtown as a neighborhood. Councilmember Rocha Garcia supported additional investments downtown including with General Obligation Bond Programs, but noted that downtown projects were often considered citywide and downtown housing focused on more expensive housing options, but noted that affordable housing was needed. Assistant City Manager Houston clarified that luxury housing was needed downtown but it did not need to be incentivized. Mayor Nirenberg agreed that they did not need to be subsidized because the market would bear it.

Councilmember Castillo recommended more development of affordable housing downtown. Assistant City Manager Houston clarified that a focus on market rate housing could be necessary to ensure affordable housing was not drowned out by the luxury and market rate housing. Councilmember Castillo supported the Housing First Strategy noting that the Haven for Hope homeless shelter was usually full and also encouraged including labor unions in downtown planning so that hospitality workers would be ensured a place to live as well as work. Councilmember Castillo noted that the people who worked in the Alamodome who had been laid off were also the backbone of the economy.

Councilmember Cabello Havrda supported the work of Centro and DeBerry as the new leader. She commented that Council District 6 was a commuter district where her residents lived but commuted

downtown, to the Medical Center or Port San Antonio for work, however, those who took the bus to work experienced challenges and suggested that more information be provided to workers regarding availability of public transportation and she supported a downtown circulator. She asked whether downtown sports would be included in the Plan. DeBerry stated that price of the planning process would increase significantly, if it were included but since those discussions were still in infancy, it was not included.

Councilmember Alderete Gavito expressed support for the Downtown Circulator Pilot Program and noted that the City was planning to contribute \$100,000 to the effort, however, a local small business was passed over for the opportunity and Centro opted to pilot with an Austin firm. DeBerry stated that the local firms were not experienced in collecting utilization, demographics, attitude, and perception data, which was needed for the pilot program; noting that after the data was collected and the program was expanded, the local firms could participate. Councilmember Alderete Gavito suggested that Centro should have built the capacity of our local firms to collect the data as those participating in the pilot program would have a competitive advantage. Assistant City Manager Houston stated that staff would make a recommendation to participate and contribute the \$100,000 at the March 21, 2024 City Council A Session.

Councilmember Alderete Gavito asked DeBerry if there was a plan for helping our residents get over the hurdle of expensive parking. DeBerry suggested that the micro-mobility options would help drive down the cost of parking and added that Centro needed to do more outreach throughout the city's neighborhoods. Assistant City Manager Houston stated that a parking plan could come out as a need in the Strategic Plan, noting that more engagement and parking would have been helpful to the Holidays on Houston Program.

Councilmember Whyte asked if there was any objective included in the previous downtown plan that did not get implemented and why. Assistant City Manager Houston stated that a lack of funding was a limitation but she was optimistic that having a unified plan could help get the top priorities implemented through the partnership.

Councilmember Pelaez commented that downtown was an asset that belonged to the entire City and supported the development of a unified strategic plan. Councilmember Pelaez asked whether there was a clear understanding of the people downtown, for example where do visitors go after finishing their barge ride or attending a convention. He suggested that data could help us understand how people could be encouraged to visit the rest of the Missions, go to Southtown, or other parts of the City. Councilmember Pelaez suggested that the data could be used to improve line management/queueing, predict crowd density and behavior, deploy law enforcement, and promote visitors to return not just downtown but citywide. He recommended partnering with UTSA's School of Data Analytics to collect the data and wanted to see a report back to the Economic and Workforce Development Committee (EWDC) which he chaired and encouraged that all data be made public.

Councilmember Pelaez noted that there were multiple strategic plans that all needed to be tracked and noted his CCR to develop an SA2050 Plan which would incorporate all City strategic plans into one large comprehensive document.

Councilmember Kaur suggested that the community engagement effort surrounding Hemisfair Park could be replicated and encouraged the consultants to look at efforts that were inclusive of our residents and not just visitors. Councilmember Kaur supported the completion of downtown projects like the Alamo and

Zona Cultural, but also supported a Housing First Strategy. Councilmember Kaur suggested that Centro use the Small Business Economic Development Advocacy Program (SBEDA) model to help encourage local small businesses or include a mentorship program for large or out of town firms.

Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez commented that many Council District 2 residents were impacted by downtown and recommended including accessibility to residents in the Plan as well as potential discounts for residents by downtown businesses. DeBerry stated that Centro staff had been exploring a Downtown District Program that might make downtown more accessible and general accessibility would be a part of the Plan. Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez recommended using the Downtown Plan to build on Black history in San Antonio and make San Antonio a safe and attractive destination for Black visitors. Anderson stated that Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) was a basic tenet of the outreach being conducted by VSA including working with Black organizations.

Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez suggested more inclusion of local small businesses and echoed Councilmember Alderete Gavito's recommendation to bring more local businesses into contracting opportunities through Centro.

Councilmember Courage asked how you would hail an e-ride on the downtown circulator. DeBerry stated that you could simply wave your hand when you saw them or summon them using a Smartphone App. Councilmember Courage suggested that private companies could share their data to get a wider look at the transportation need downtown.

Councilmember Courage recommended more incentives for affordable housing since there were 100,000 people waiting for public housing vouchers and many property owners did not want to wait for their money so they did not like to accept vouchers. He noted that other cities had introduced an up-front city voucher program that could be reimbursed by Opportunity Home when they received the HUD Funding. He added that TOD needed to include partnerships for affordable units in those areas.

Councilmember Courage requested that Centro weigh in on the use of horse drawn carriages through with the micro-mobility option. He asked about lighting downtown. DeBerry stated that more lighting helped improve safety and their pilot to light up Peacock Alley and bringing the riverwalk holiday lights to street level had been successful. Councilmember Courage suggested connecting downtown to Brackenridge Park.

Mayor Nirenberg closed the discussion noting that useful data could help inform and shape the Plan.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Executive Session was not held.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:35 p.m.

Approved

Ron Nirenberg Mayor

**Debbie Racca-Sittre City
Clerk**

DRAFT