

Downtown Digest

Downtown Efforts and New Webpage

Welcome to the first edition of the Downtown Digest, a monthly publication that will highlight all that is happening in Downtown Mountain View.

The City of Mountain continues its efforts to create a welcoming, vibrant, and active pedestrian mall on the 100, 200 and 300 blocks of Castro Street.

There are four focus areas for the work happening in the Downtown to create: 1) a thriving business environment, 2) a welcoming space, 3) opportunities for social engagement, and 4) an area where people feel safe. With that in mind, the City is hard at work on various projects and initiatives for Downtown, which can be found in the illustration on the right. As you can see, while a lot of work is underway, there is still much to be done.

We know the Downtown is a priority for the Mountain View community, which is why we want to make it as easy as possible to track projects, ask questions, and provide feedback.

Stay Informed with These New Resources

To help residents, business owners, and visitors stay informed about ongoing, current, and future Downtown initiatives and projects, the City is launching this new Downtown Digest and a redesigned Downtown website: MountainView.gov/Downtown.

These “one-stop-shop” sources will be regularly updated to ensure everyone has the most current Downtown information.

For questions or comments, email Downtown@mountainview.gov.

Downtown Projects and Initiatives

ONGOING (Happening Now)

- Downtown Maintenance & Improved Aesthetics
- Public Seating & Social Zones
- Outdoor Patio Areas
- Food Vendor Education & Enforcement
- Public Safety Strategies
- Homeless Mitigation Efforts
- Code Enforcement
- Employee Parking Permit Program
- Development Updates
- Business Support & Promotions
- Downtown Committee Meetings

SHORT TERM (Planned for 2024-2025)

- Spring/Summer Events
- Wayfinding Signage Program
- Decorative Street Treatments
- Removal of Bus Shelters
- Facade Improvement Grant Program
- Vacant Property Analysis & Strategies
- Economic Vitality Strategy
- Development Updates

LONGER TERM (Planned for 3+ years out)

- Private Development Projects
- Castro Street Grade Separation*
- Public Safety Building
- Lot 5 Parking Structure
- Permanent Farmers’ Market Location
- Downtown Precise Plan Update
- Interim Pedestrian Mall Intersection Improvements
- Permanent Pedestrian Mall*
- Transit Center Master Plan*

*Projects that are longer term (5-10 years)

DOWNTOWN FOCUS AREAS



Thriving Business Environment



Welcoming Space



Opportunities for Social Engagement



Public Safety

Outdoor Patio Areas

The Outdoor Patio Program, launched in fall 2023, allows businesses to extend operations into the public right of way (on Castro Street and/or sidewalks). The City has been working closely with Downtown businesses over the last couple of months to establish their outdoor patio areas. As of March 5, 27 businesses have outdoor dining, with more on the way.

Program Guidelines & Standards

The outdoor patio program guidelines and standards were developed to:

1. Create a welcoming and attractive atmosphere;
2. Preserve the central walkway for pedestrian and emergency vehicle access;
3. Safeguard ADA access and meet critical safety standards;
4. Provide equitable access and opportunity for all interested businesses; and
5. Formalize the program.



Patio areas do look different than they did during the early years of the COVID-19 pandemic when the businesses could not use indoor dining spaces. There is a limited amount of street frontage and often many businesses on a single block want outdoor patio space. Every business has been given the opportunity to operate in the area directly in front of their business, with expansion into neighboring storefronts with written permission from the neighboring business and property owner.

Recent Modifications

In late January 2024, modifications were made to the program based on valuable insights gained from a review of patio areas that were installed at that time. In response to feedback from businesses, the City extended the maximum patio area depth from 18 to 20 feet providing additional patio square footage and a greater sense of activity on the street. The City also made modifications to patio areas that included public seat walls in order to preserve access to these seating areas by the public and City maintenance teams. Per the Outdoor Patio Standards and Guidelines, the Castro Street seat walls were always intended to remain accessible to the public. The City will continue to take in feedback and make adjustments with the aim to be both responsive to business requests and also ensure the program aligns with the intended goals.

Here are the current Downtown businesses which have established outdoor patio areas through the City's Outdoor Patio Program:

- Vida (110 Castro)
- Ramen Izakaya Yu-gen (125 Castro)
- Oren's Hummus (128 Castro)
- Asian Box (142 Castro)
- Blue Line Pizza (146 Castro)
- Amarin Thai Cuisine #2 (147 Castro)
- Fu Lam Mum (153 Castro)
- Doppio Zero (160 Castro)
- Amarin Thai Cuisine #1 (174 Castro)
- Udon Mugizo (180 Castro)
- La Fontaine (186 Castro)
- Eureka (191 Castro)
- Redrock Cafe (201 Castro)
- Yifang Taiwan Fruit Tea (211 Castro)
- Pokeworks (211 Castro)
- Maison Alyzee (212 Castro)
- QBB (216 Castro)
- St. Stephen's Green (223 Castro)
- Ristorante Don Giovanni (235 Castro)
- Bonchon (260 Castro)
- Queen House (273 Castro)
- New Mongolian BBQ (304 Castro)
- Paris Baguette (315 Castro)
- Rootstock Wine Bar (331 Castro)
- Ava's Downtown Market (340 Castro)
- Cafe Baklava (341 Castro)
- Limon (800 California Street)

Program Fees

The City has also received questions and feedback on the program fees and costs to businesses. In developing the program, the City conducted thorough research and analysis of fees charged by other regional and neighboring cities for their outdoor dining areas. Mountain View's fees are designed to be comparable and are significantly below the market rate cost per square foot for indoor dining space. Regular communication with participating businesses has indicated that the additional revenue generated from outdoor seating exceeds the fees imposed by the City.

Downtown Vacancies

Downtown Mountain View is experiencing elevated ground-floor vacancy, which occurs for a multitude of reasons. This section of the Digest outlines some of the reasons, and describes the vacancies and some of the actions the City is taking to address this issue.

The reasons for vacancies in Downtown include:

- Demand for physical store space is declining in key retail sectors across the region.
- Downtown Mountain View does not currently have a critical mass of retail stores, nor does it have the level of activity required to meet the typical retail location criteria for expanding retailers.
- Aging and outdated commercial spaces in the Downtown are difficult to fill because of the high costs to potential tenants.
- Retail rents are not typically able to cover retail development costs.

Along Castro Street, between Evelyn Avenue and El Camino Real, there are 18 ground floor vacancies. Of those ground floor vacancies, eight have tenants working through the permitting process, and six spaces are experiencing prolonged vacancy (greater than three years). Within the greater Downtown (excluding Castro Street) there are another 10 ground floor vacancies with two of those vacancies with tenants in the permit process.

On the upper floors (2nd story or greater) providing office space, there are an additional 24 vacancies throughout the larger Downtown area, totaling approximately 154,000 Square Feet. The current Downtown office vacancy rate is 20.2%, which is comparable to regional rates and reflective of a transitioning economy and new patterns of remote work.



City Actions to Address Vacancies



Marketing Vacancies

The Economic Development team has been marketing the ground-floor vacancies for potential investment on the City's website and meets frequently with property owners and prospective tenants to help secure new leases.



Collaborations and Conferences

Staff recently attended educational opportunities on the retail sector produced by the Econic Company and Retail Strategies. The Economic Development team will be attending the Internal Council of Shopping Centers (ISCC) conference at the end of March to talk with prospective retailers about opportunities in Mountain View. Staff is also collaborating with our neighboring jurisdictions to host a broker breakfast in the spring.



Consultant Services

The Economic Development team is also in the process of bringing on board a consultant (Retail Real Estate Resources) to work with selected Downtown properties to assess the desirability and market conditions of the vacant storefront units. The purpose of the assessment is to understand:

1. How the units are being marketed;
2. Whether asking rents are viable; and
3. If the units are market ready, can be made market ready, or are functionally obsolete given market demands and costs of required building code updates.



Assessment

An assessment will be provided to the City to determine if other program considerations should be evaluated to support the revitalization of these spaces.

Foot Traffic and Weather Reports



There is a seasonality to Downtown activities and winter months are universally challenging for outdoor activities in particular.

Since November, Mountain View has had several weeks of rain, leaves have fallen from the trees, and there has been a dip in foot traffic as individuals tend to favor indoor activities during inclement weather.

Even with the challenging weather conditions, we continue to see an uptick in activity during prime lunch and dinner dining times, especially later in the week. Weekends also bring an uptick in foot traffic, with sunny Saturdays often being the peak time for bustling activity.

The City has used these past months of reduced outdoor activity to complete projects and prepare for the very active Spring and Summer seasons.

We anticipate a notable surge in pedestrian activity, attributed to favorable weather conditions that encourage people to visit and explore the Downtown area.



New Downtown Businesses

New and expanded businesses bring with them added investment and energy, further enriching the diversity and vitality of our Downtown. Business openings and expansions from the last six months include:

- Joyous Cuisine (100 block) opened in February 2024 and is serving traditional Chinese cuisine.
- Sushi Arashi (200 block), a Japanese-style restaurant, opened in October 2023.
- InOrbit (200 block) tripled their square footage by expanding into the neighboring vacant space in February 2024.
- Ice Cream Kween (200 block) underwent a rebrand, transitioning from the Icicles Franchise to an independent operation in February 2024.



Small Business Outdoor Furnishings Grant Program



In 2023, the City of Mountain View released the Small Business Outdoor Furnishings Grant Program to help address the lingering impacts of COVID-19 on the Mountain View small business community. The City allocated \$200,000 to the grant program, providing 40 eligible businesses with one-time grants of \$5,000 for the purchase of outdoor furnishings.

To date, 25 applications have been approved and those businesses are currently in the contracting process.

The program can accommodate an additional 15 grant recipients, and the City will continue to accept applications until the funds are depleted.

Facade Improvement Program

The City of Mountain View Facade Improvement Grant Program is designed to stimulate investment in commercial retail buildings with first floor storefront businesses. To encourage economic vitality and commercial viability of storefront businesses, the City will share the costs of improving and enhancing commercial facades with grants of up to \$15,000 for projects that meet the eligibility criteria. Staff is currently finalizing the grant program guidelines and will begin accepting applications soon.



Window Display Grant Program

The City of Mountain View is preparing a Window Display Grant Program to provide financial support to retailers and businesses to design and enhance their window displays.

To help create attractive and inviting streetscapes and shopping centers, the City will retain the services of one or more qualified Visual Merchandisers to provide \$2,500 worth of window display related services, including business consultations, display design, installation, and development of a maintenance plan.

Staff is currently finalizing the grant program guidelines and will begin accepting applications soon.



Spring and Summer Events



The City will be bringing back several major events to Downtown this spring and summer, including:

- Music on Castro on Wednesdays starting in April.
- KidStock on the third Saturday in May, June, and July.
- Concerts on the Plaza on Fridays starting in June.

These events are sure to bring with them increased foot traffic, activation, and sales in our Downtown.

Decorative Street Treatment

The City is working to create place-making opportunities with the incorporation of decorative street treatments in the central walkway of the 100, 200, and 300 blocks of Castro Street. After presenting three street treatment options to the Visual Arts Committee on Jan. 17 and the Council Transportation Committee on Jan. 30, both committees recommended proceeding (with slight modifications) with the “Ribbons” concept and proposed colors.



This item will be brought to the City Council for final approval by June 2024. The City is also planning to implement more aesthetically pleasing barriers at the Castro Street intersections.

Wayfinding and Signage Program

The City is in the process of developing a wayfinding and signage program for the Downtown.

The goal is to create a welcoming environment with signage that helps Downtown visitors easily find points of interest and introduce them to new locations that may not have previously been on their radar.

Key Benefits of the Wayfinding Program

- **Enhanced Visitor Experience:** Making navigation intuitive, providing clear directions to points of interest and uncovering unique destinations.
- **Increased Visibility:** Shining a spotlight on locations that may have been overlooked in the past. This not only benefits local businesses but also introduces visitors to the diverse offerings within our community.
- **Community Connectivity:** Strengthening the connection between residents and businesses, fostering a sense of community pride and engagement.

The City is currently working with a consultant on the development and design of the wayfinding signs.

Lighting for Safety and Comfort

Staff is currently researching additional lighting options within the Downtown pedestrian mall. The aim is to enhance visibility and safety for patrons by improving alleyway illumination and addressing areas where string lighting may not be viable.

Research by the Responsible Hospitality Institute underscores the significance of well-lit spaces in attracting patrons, emphasizing that dim or poorly lit areas can be deterrents. The City is working to implement strategic lighting improvements that not only align with these findings but also foster a lively and secure environment for all Downtown visitors.



Walk Your Bike A Frames

These new A-frame signs bring a fresh, modern aesthetic, aligning with the current Downtown design. They not only contribute to the visual appeal, but also offer messaging, incorporating welcoming language and featuring a QR code that directs visitors to a comprehensive Downtown map.

These two-sided signs have been printed in English, Spanish, and Chinese for broader accessibility. While a small enhancement, these signs contribute to creating a more enjoyable and informative experience for residents and visitors alike.



Preserving Public Safety in the Downtown



Issues surrounding road safety, parking, homelessness, unpermitted food vending, theft, and auto burglaries in Downtown are always a top priority for the Police Department. The Police Department has increased its physical presence and is actively utilizing both enforcement and outreach to contribute to community safety and accessibility.

Like many cities with economic hubs and transit corridors like the Downtown, there are homeless individuals, and the City partners with local service delivery sites such as Hope's Corner to alleviate any concerns of business owners. For example, business owners within the 400 block have reached out to the Economic Development Division about the unhoused loitering, littering, and sleeping in alcoves and entryway areas. In response, the Economic Development team works with the Police Department, Human Services Division, and other City Departments to find solutions to mitigate these concerns, ranging from increased outreach and education - to defensive place planning with fencing or other measures - to enforcement of illegal activity.

Business and property owners are encouraged to reach out to Police@mountainview.gov or 650-903-6344 should they need assistance with any non-emergency safety concerns. For all emergencies dial 9-1-1.

Social Zones

The City has installed furniture and planter boxes within the 200 and 300 blocks of Castro Street. Staff anticipates installation of additional elements, games, and activities in April 2024 to provide added fun and entertainment for Downtown visitors.



March Downtown Committee Meeting

The Downtown Committee (DTC) meets on the first Tuesday of the month and advises on all things Downtown.

At the March 5 meeting, the Committee received updates on Castro Street projects and Downtown Development, heard a presentation from the Fire Department on the event celebrating the Department's upcoming 150th anniversary, provided feedback on the Active Transportation Plan, and received a presentation on the Sister Cities program.

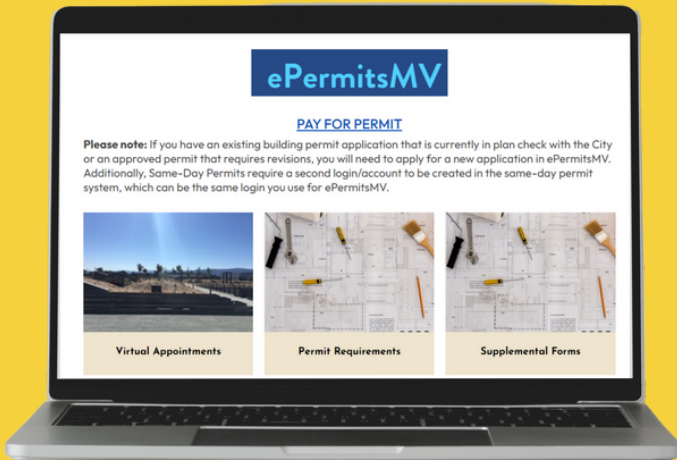


Permit Liaison and Ambassador Program

The Community Development Department has developed two teams to aid both developers and small businesses with understanding and navigating the entitlement and permitting processes.

Team 1: Navigators from Planning, Building and Public Works oversee and ensure seamless handoffs between internal teams.

Team 2: An ambassador team, made up of interdepartmental staff, has been developed to help small businesses understand and work through the permit process. The ambassador team helps to identify the types of permits needed and then acts as a liaison with small businesses to obtain those permits.



Downtown Meetings and Ongoing Lines of Communication

Every day, Mountain View staff works to support and implement Downtown projects and initiatives, with coordination meetings happening weekly. Each month there are formal meetings of the Downtown Committee and Downtown Business Association. Staff from multiple departments meet weekly to address key issues, and department leadership convene once a month to discuss Downtown trends, challenges, and opportunities. Economic Development staff also has weekly meetings with the Mountain View Chamber of Commerce and have near-daily discussions with Downtown property and business owners.



From left to right: Amanda Rotella, Economic Development Strategist; Kirstin Hinds, Economic Development Strategist; John Lang, Economic Vitality Manager.