



Downtown Community Planning Council San Diego

*Planning a Vibrant Downtown for All*

## **Downtown Community Planning Council Meeting Minutes**

**December 17, 2025, 5:30 PM**

**12th Floor Committee Room, City Hall,**

**202 C Street, San Diego, CA, 92101**

### **I. Call to Order & Roll Call**

Meeting was called to order at 5:30 PM.

**In Attendance:** Bargmann (Chair), Hewitt (Vice-Chair), Werve (Secretary), Barr, Link, Eddy, Helmer, Baham, JP Schwarz, E. Schwarz (online)

### **II. Non-Agenda Public Comment**

### **III. Reports**

#### **A. Christina Gaffney, Office of Council Member Steven Whitburn:**

- The City of San Diego is recommending the allocation of \$15 million in Bridge to Home funding to support the development of 528 new affordable homes, as part of Round Six of the gap financing program, which has invested approximately \$108 million to expedite the construction of 2,148 affordable homes across 24 projects.
- Following a City Council vote to allocate \$1.8 million in community parking district meter revenue to the Transportation Department, city crews began work on October 27. From October 27 through December 16, 292 streetlights were repaired downtown and 24 potholes were patched.
- Council Member Werve will continue as Chair of the Active Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, remain on the Public Safety Committee, and join the Land Use and Housing Committee.
- Public feedback on the North Central Square Park draft design was noted; the online submission form has since closed.

**A board member** raised the question of whether DCPC had previously submitted comments on the North Central Square Park design. The Chair confirmed the council had submitted comments requesting the park be safe, well-maintained, and not include pickleball. Discussion noted that the design did not appear to fully reflect those comments.

#### **B. Danny Avita, Office of County Supervisor Paloma Aguirre**

- The office is focused on air filter distribution and healthcare enrollment efforts, particularly in advance of anticipated changes to federal health programs.
- The Air Pollution Control District program continuation was recently approved after a contested vote.

**Discussion on Air Quality:** Board members noted a recent period of poor air quality in downtown San Diego. Causes discussed included regional climate patterns and emissions from cruise ships docking in the bay. The County Supervisor's representative noted ongoing efforts to distribute air filters to residents.

**C. Ethan Paul, Airport Liaison Report**

- The Quieter Homes Program, funded by FAA grant money, provides noise mitigation treatment for homes within the 65-decibel zone near the airport. Treatment options include double-pane windows and sound-absorbing doors.
- Historic homes had been excluded from the program since 2020. A new agreement with the FAA has restored their eligibility, allowing the use of historically appropriate materials such as wood rather than aluminum.
- The program recently received a \$15 million grant allocation, expected to treat approximately 250 homes. Properties in Little Italy and the Portside area may be among those eligible.

**D. Ballpark District Update**

- Statistics from the Ballpark District's Clean & Safe program for the period July 1 through October 31 were provided: 2,900 tickets were reported, 31% were responded to within 15 minutes, 89% were resolved within one hour, and the trash haul totaled approximately 162,000 pounds (roughly 1,300 pounds per day).
- The Ballpark District indicated it plans to begin posting public-facing monthly maintenance reports to its website starting in December.

**IV. Action Items**

**A. Minutes Approval – November 2025**

No board comments were raised on the November 2025 minutes.

**Motion** to approve by a board member; seconded. Approved without objection.

**B. Land Development Code and Downtown Community Plan Update**

The Chair provided context: the Land Development Code (LDC) is updated annually with amendments implementing the guidance of the Community Plan. The 2025 LDC Update includes 32 Downtown-specific amendments. A Downtown Community Plan Update is proceeding concurrently. Draft code language and discussion drafts are available for public review, and DCPC is providing formal feedback on behalf of the Downtown Community.

Ryan Baham, Chair of the Community Plan Update Subcommittee, presented a comparison document showing existing Community Plan language, proposed city changes, and additional subcommittee recommendations not yet incorporated into the city's initial draft.

**Overview of Subcommittee Recommendations:**

- The overarching theme of the recommendations is to reorient downtown from being primarily a daytime job center to a set of human-centered, livable neighborhoods supportive of families, working-class and middle-class residents.
- Proposed language updates include removing dated references to 'minimizing growth pressures' and replacing them with language encouraging organic, dynamic residential growth.
- Recommendations include expanding affordable and middle-class housing opportunities, incentivizing two- and three-bedroom units, and broadening where small-scale ground-floor retail and service uses (such as cafes and dry cleaners) are permitted.
- Language was added referencing a proposed education corridor along Park Boulevard in East Village, a planned hospital/research institution in East Village, and a Smithsonian-style research museum to serve as an anchor for life sciences downtown.
- Recommendations related to air quality management were discussed, including strategies for reducing vehicular particulate matter emissions downtown.
- A proposal for a perimeter path around Balboa Park — approximately six miles — was presented, intended as a shared pedestrian, running, and cycling amenity. A corresponding linear park along Sixth Avenue connecting downtown to Balboa Park was also proposed.
- A recommendation was made to explore a highway cap over the I-5 in the Cortez Hill area, potentially serving as a first step toward an eventual lid, modeled in part on a public-private partnership example from Columbus, Ohio.

**Discussion Highlights:**

- Board members noted this is the 11th update to the Downtown Community Plan since its adoption in 2006; a major comprehensive update is not anticipated in the near term.
- The relationship between the subcommittee's recommendations and the City's formal draft was clarified: the subcommittee's green-highlighted language represents additional feedback being submitted during the formal notice and comment period.
- A board member suggested that the subcommittee's human-centered planning approach could serve as a model for other community planning groups, particularly as other neighborhoods undergo major updates.
- It was noted that the City is statutorily obliged to consider DCPC's recommendations. A request was made to also ask the City for feedback on

which recommendations were not incorporated, and why, to inform future planning cycles.

- Public comment from a Little Italy resident expressed strong support for the proposed hospital and healthcare infrastructure in East Village, noting that in-person medical services will remain necessary regardless of broader economic shifts.

**Motion** to submit the subcommittee's recommendations to the City as part of the formal notice and comment process on the 2025 LDC and Downtown Community Plan Updates. Motion by a board member; seconded. Roll call vote:

Greg Helmer – Yes | Brendan Bargmann – Yes | Elizabeth Schwarz – Yes | JP Schwarz – Yes | Gary Hewitt – Yes | Greg Barr – Yes | Ryan Baham – Yes | Bob Link – Yes | Gabrielle Werve – Yes

**Motion passed.**

### **C. Election Preparation**

Annual DCPC elections are scheduled for March 2026. The Chair noted that 2025 election turnout was significantly lower than expected and that broader public participation is needed to maintain the legitimacy of the council and its recertification with the City.

#### **Seats Up for Election:**

- Ryan Baham – At Large (Community Org, BikeSD)
- Elisabeth Schwarz – Cortez Hill (Resident)
- Gabrielle Werve – At Large
- Gary Hewitt – East Village South (Resident)
- Christopher Eddy – At Large (Community Org, Balboa Park Committee)
- Bob Link – East Village North (Resident)
- Greg Barr – Little Italy (Resident)
- Damon Robles – Horton/Gaslamp/Core (Business)
- Several additional vacant seats across Marina, Little Italy, East Village North, and At Large (Community Org and Business)

#### **Discussion Highlights:**

- The Chair noted that in-person pop-up voting at high foot-traffic locations was the most effective outreach strategy from prior election cycles.
- A public commenter (Mary, online) confirmed that past in-person voting at locations such as a cafe in Little Italy and the SANDAG office was effective.

- Board members discussed improving the technology infrastructure for elections, including replacing the Google Form process with more user-friendly voting software used by other community planning groups (e.g., Uptown). A suggestion was made to create separate tools for candidate registration and voting.
- The County Supervisor's representative offered to assist with targeted email outreach using registered voter lists and demographic targeting, and to help build and manage an ongoing contact database. The board was encouraged to add this representative to the Communications Committee.
- Board members discussed the importance of outreach to neighborhood sub-associations, council members' newsletters, the Downtown Partnership, and other organizations that send regular communications downtown.
- Physical flyers with QR codes were proposed as an accessible, board-wide outreach tool for coffee shops, restaurants, and residential building elevators. A one-page summary of DCPC's mission and election details was identified as a key deliverable.
- A suggestion was made to implement a mailing list sign-up for election registration and voting reminders to allow the council to contact prior participants in future cycles.

#### **Formation of Elections Committee:**

The Chair noted that board members who are running for reelection are conflicted from serving on the elections committee. The Chair agreed to chair the elections committee, with support from non-conflicted members and the County Supervisor's representative.

#### **Timeline:**

- January 2026: Elections committee to bring a draft outreach plan, key messaging, and a list of partner organizations to the January DCPC meeting.
- February 2026: Outreach activities and candidate recruitment.
- March 2026 (prior to the regular DCPC meeting): Election completion and results certified, enabling the new board to be seated at the March meeting.

**No formal motion required;** the board reached consensus on the committee formation and timeline.

#### **V. Remainder Non-Agenda Public Comment**

- No additional non-agenda public comments.

#### **VI. Adjournment at 7:35pm**