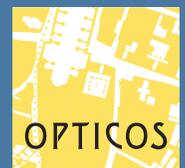




Recommendations Memo

City of Healdsburg
Downtown Housing
Capacity Study
March 29, 2024



Prepared For:

**City of Healdsburg
Community Development Department**

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Introduction



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1.1 Project Background

Key Issues

High housing demand with limited housing stock results in unaffordability for children of longtime residents and for many people who work in Healdsburg. In particular, **housing production in Downtown is at a standstill** despite its ideal location near amenities, walking distance to jobs, and close to a planned SMART station.

One key barrier to housing production that the City has identified is the **General Plan maximum density of 16 dwelling units per acre**. The City's hypothesis entering into this study is that this number is far too low to generate the kind of mixed-use development that utilizes the allowed zoning envelope and also provides a range of unit types (i.e. not only luxury units with vast square footages). Existing densities have driven downtown development opportunities toward hotels and luxury condominium projects as the highest and best use in terms of economic return.

Project Intent

This study will **test the density limit** to understand if increases in density and/or **other regulatory changes can enable and encourage more housing production in downtown, particularly workforce housing**.

These recommendations aim to **increase diversity of housing types** offered in the area, while preserving the overall scale and character of Healdsburg's charming downtown core and completing this pattern at infill opportunity sites in the

Service Commercial (CS) and Downtown Commercial (CD) zoning districts.

This project seeks to accomplish the following goals:

- Evaluate the capacity for additional housing in Downtown Healdsburg (in CS and CD zoning districts)
- Visualize what form and scale of additional housing would be compatible within Downtown's character
- Identify existing zoning and policy barriers to housing production in Downtown
- Provide recommendations to enable housing production at a desirable scale

To meet these goals, the consulting team tested development potential on a selection of underutilized sites with building prototypes and site plan designs, and created site visualizations to inform scale.

Project Team

This document was prepared through collaboration between the City of Healdsburg and Opticos Design, Inc.

Opticos Design provided community planning and urban design expertise, prepared site testing illustrations and visualizations, and facilitated community engagement.

In parallel with this project, Economic & Planning Systems produced a feasibility analysis to complement the discussion of increased density and affordability.

1.2 Community Engagement

Public Workshop

The consultant team led a public workshop to present the findings of the capacity study and discuss how to enable additional housing Downtown. The workshop began with a presentation from the consulting team that included a walk-through of each site tested in Downtown, a comparison of existing zoning standards, and a summary of a development feasibility analysis for a selected site.

The community was able to engage in a Q&A to clarify doubts and share their input on the scale and form of what future development could look like in Healdsburg. Following the Q&A, community members were invited to leave written feedback on site testing summary boards and engage in further conversation with City staff and the consultant team.

To meet the needs of Healdsburg's community, the outreach event provided Spanish translation.

The feedback from the workshop showed the community was generally pleased with the tested scale, but some were interested in pushing the zoning envelope further to increase density and affordability of new units.

Below: The consultant team and city staff facilitated a presentation and Q&A followed by an open house where community members could engage one-on-one with the consultant team and staff.







Opportunity Site Testing

CHAPTER

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2.1 Site Testing

Site Testing Overview

Site testing is essential to understand compatible physical form with the existing surrounding context and to identify regulatory barriers to developing particular housing types. Five site tests were completed across two study areas: the Service Commercial (CS) zoning district and the Downtown Commercial (CD) zoning district.

Site Selection

Site testing was performed using real sites, which were selected based on:

- Potential capacity for new housing
- Current site location and conditions (vacant/underutilized, etc.)
- Repeatability of findings across multiple sites throughout Downtown Healdsburg

Site Testing Process

- Identify prototypical sites.
- Develop “high” and “low” yield scenarios. “High” yield maximizes site potential with structured parking; “low” yield maximizes site potential with surface parking.
- Select a preferred scenario with staff direction.
- Use this preferred scenario to identify existing barriers (e.g. policy, zoning) and shape recommendations.

CS Development Assumptions

- Maximum height: 40 ft
- Parking ratio: 1 space per unit minimum
- Maximum lot coverage: 60%
- Minimum building and parking setbacks: 10 ft rear

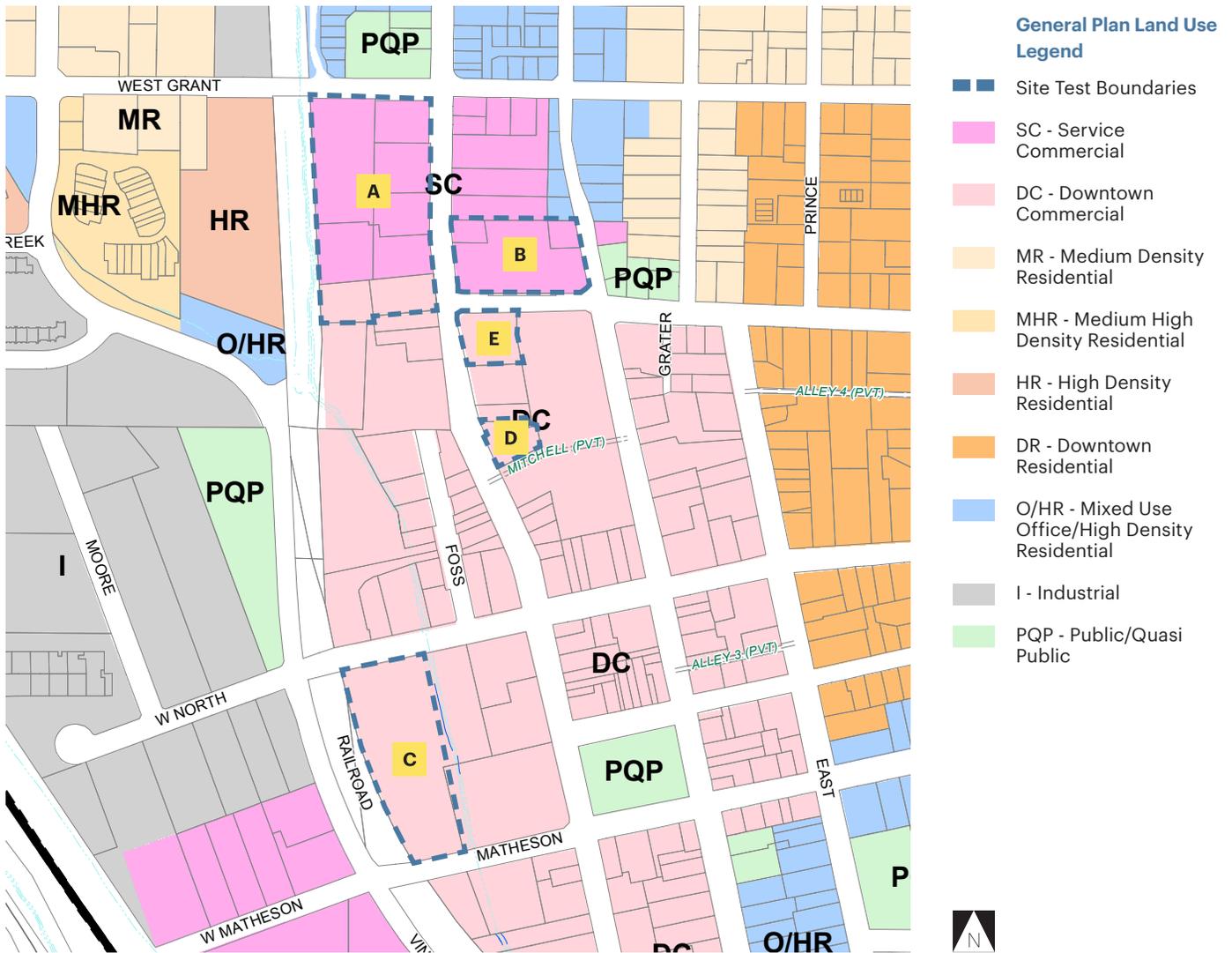
CD Development Assumptions

- Maximum height: 50 ft
- Parking ratio: 1 space per unit minimum
- Maximum lot coverage: 100%
- Minimum building and parking setbacks: None

Target Unit Mix

| Unit Type | Area | Mix |
|-----------|---------|-----|
| Studio | 500 sf | 20% |
| 1 Bedroom | 700 sf | 30% |
| 2 Bedroom | 900 sf | 40% |
| 3 Bedroom | 1200 sf | 10% |

Final Site Testing Selection



- A** Site Test A: Rite Aid
525 Healdsburg Avenue
- B** Site Test B: Bank of America
502 Healdsburg Avenue
- C** Site Test C: West Plaza Parking Lot
Between Matheson and North Streets
- D** Site Test D: City-owned Parking Lot
434 Healdsburg Avenue
- E** Site Test E: Gas Station
456 Healdsburg Avenue

Site A

Rite Aid

Overview



Address
525 Healdsburg Ave.

Targeted study area
Service Commercial Zone

Current site condition
Commercial uses with supporting parking lot

Site dimensions
600 ft wide x 330 ft deep (approx.)

Existing Conditions

This site is at the southwest corner of Healdsburg Avenue and Grant Street where the downtown transitions to residential zones to the north. The site consists of one-story strip retail buildings with parking in front and it backs onto the SMART railroad right-of-way and Foss Creek.

new address on this deep parcel. Surface parking is placed behind buildings to shield the view from Healdsburg Avenue. All corridor and mixed-use buildings also include tuck-under parking screened from the public realm with active ground floor uses.

Vision

The design concept for this site focuses retail along Healdsburg Avenue, responds to residential context to the north and introduces a new pedestrian pathway through the site. Healdsburg Avenue is lined with three-story mixed-use buildings with non-residential uses at the ground floor and residential dwellings on the upper floors. House-form multi-unit buildings front onto Grant Street to respond to residential context to the north. Multi-unit corridor buildings front onto an intimate pedestrian way, forming a



Above: Example of corridor buildings fronting onto a pedestrian way

Design Concept + Site Testing Outcome

Renderings and site plan are illustrative only. They represent hypothetical build-outs used to calculate potential new housing and do not represent an actual development proposal.



Above: Views of existing conditions and renderings depicting the design vision for this site.



Above: Conceptual site plan. Arrows indicate vantage point for perspective renderings.

| Site Test Assumptions + Yields | | | |
|--------------------------------|------------------------|-----------|------------------------|
| # of Units (du) | 189 | | |
| # of Buildings | 13 | | |
| Bldg type | Mixed-Use | Multiplex | Double-loaded Corridor |
| Height (stories) | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Bldg width (ft) | 120-151 | 60 | 94 |
| Bldg depth (ft) | 60-95 | 60 | 60 |
| Density (du/ac) | 45 | | |
| FAR | 1.4 | | |
| Parking spaces (sp) | 211 | | |
| Parking ratio (sp/du) | 1.1 | | |
| Parking type | Surface and Tuck-under | | |
| Front setback (ft) | 5 | | |
| Lot width (ft) | 600 (approx.) | | |
| Lot depth (ft) | 330 (approx.) | | |
| Lot area (ac) | 4.2 | | |

Key Regulatory Barriers

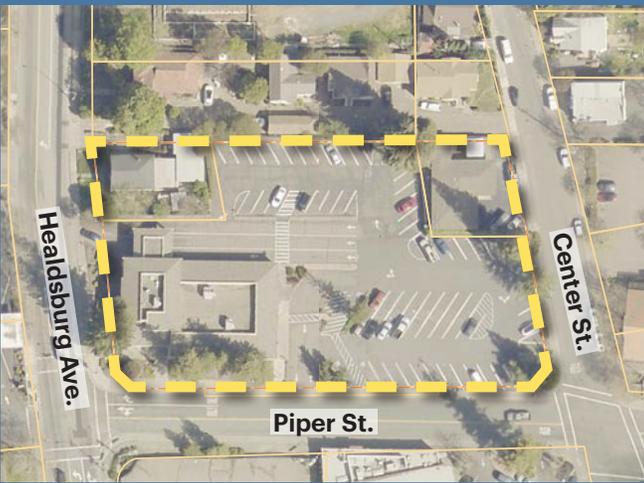
Parking standards. Currently, the site requires **1.5 spaces per unit, and 1 guest space per 3 units**. The design concept provides **1.1 spaces per unit**. Commercial parking is also required (**1 space per 150-300 sf**, depending on specific use). The design concept **does not include commercial parking**.

Density. The prototype tested **45 du/acre**, exceeding the current maximum of **16 du/acre**.

Site B

Bank of America

Overview



Address
502 Healdsburg Ave.

Targeted study area
Service Commercial Zone

Current site condition
Bank of America building with supporting parking lot and two residential outparcels

Site dimensions
330 ft wide x 185 ft deep (approx.)

Existing Conditions

This site spans from Healdsburg Avenue to Center Street where the downtown transitions to residential zones to the east. The site consists of a one-story commercial building with parking in front and incorporates two adjacent outparcels.

Vision

Mixed-use buildings front onto Healdsburg Avenue, Piper Street and Center Street.

These buildings have non-residential uses at the ground floor and residential dwellings on the upper floors. The mixed-use buildings frame a pedestrian path leading to a mid-block cottage court. The one and a half story cottages front semi-private green space shielded from the busy streets by the mixed-use buildings. This cottage court responds to conditions to the north of the site which include two existing cottages fronting a shared drive.

Tuck-under parking is provided under mixed-use buildings with additional surface parking to meet a one-to-one parking ratio. Parking is intentionally placed behind buildings to reduce its impact on the public realm.

Below: Rendering of the mid-block cottage court envisioned in the center of the site. The semi-private green space connects to Piper Street via a pedestrian path between the mixed-use buildings lining the street.



Design Concept + Site Testing Outcome

Renderings and site plan are illustrative only. They represent hypothetical build-outs used to calculate potential new housing and do not represent an actual development proposal.



Existing



Existing

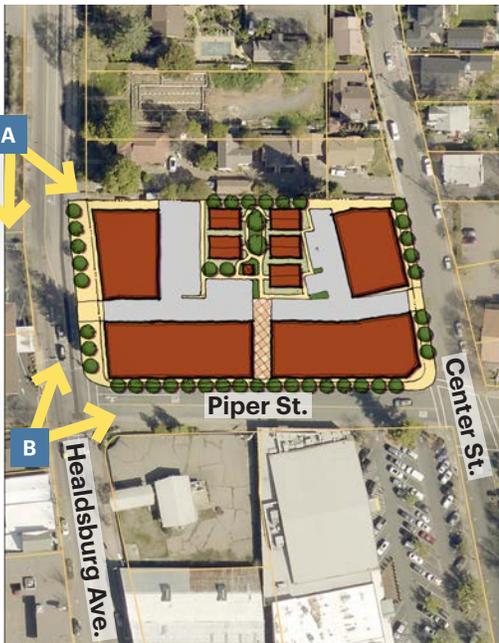


A



B

Above: Views of existing conditions and renderings depicting the design vision for this site.



Above: Conceptual site plan. Arrows indicate vantage point for perspective renderings.

| Site Test Assumptions + Yields | | |
|--------------------------------|------------------------|---------------|
| # of Units (du) | 65 | |
| # of Buildings | 9 | |
| Bldg type | Mixed-Use | Cottage Court |
| Height (stories) | 3 | 1.5 |
| Bldg width (ft) | 83-155 | 24 |
| Bldg depth (ft) | 60 | 31 |
| Density (du/ac) | 45 | |
| FAR | 1.3 | |
| Parking spaces (sp) | 65 | |
| Parking ratio (sp/du) | 1.0 | |
| Parking type | Surface and Tuck-under | |
| Front setback (ft) | 5 | |
| Lot width (ft) | 330 (approx.) | |
| Lot depth (ft) | 185 (approx.) | |
| Lot area (ac) | 1.5 | |

Key Regulatory Barriers

Parking standards. Currently, the site requires **1.5 spaces per unit**, and **1 guest space per 3 units**. The design concept provides **1.0 spaces per unit**. Commercial parking is also required (**1 space per 150-300 sf**, depending on specific use). The design concept **does not include commercial parking**.

Density. The prototype tested **45 du/acre**, exceeding the current maximum of **16 du/acre**.

Site C

West Plaza Parking Lot

Overview



Address

East of Vine St. between North St. and Matheson St.

Targeted study area

Downtown Commercial Zone

Current site condition

Public surface parking lot

Site dimensions

220 ft wide x 540 ft deep (approx.)

Existing Conditions

This is a large surface parking lot providing public parking for Downtown. It is adjacent to a multi-use pathway (Foss Creek Pathway) on the west side of the parcel, and Foss Creek/Foss Creek Parkway on the east side of the parcel. On the east side, there is a pedestrian bridge crossing over Foss Creek that connects the parking lot to the Foss Creek Parkway and provides a direct connection to Healdsburg Plaza a half block away.

Vision

The design concept for this site includes three buildings: a four-story mixed-use podium building along North Street, a four-story mixed-use building with tuck-under parking along Matheson Street, and a parking garage with a residential liner between the mixed-use buildings. The mixed-use buildings include non-residential uses at the ground floor, residential dwellings on the upper floors,

and a fourth story setback to reduce the scale and provide semi-private open space for residents. The mixed-use building fronting North Street has fourth story setbacks on the north, east, and west elevations and would include a usable terrace over podium parking in the back, giving residents another amenity. The mixed-use building fronting Matheson Street has a fourth story setback on the south elevation. The parking structure in the center would supply parking for other uses in Downtown and is shielded from view with apartment units.

A new street connects North Street to Matheson Street. This creates frontage onto the existing park, increases connectivity across the large block, and provides vehicular access to alleys on site. The design concept also introduces different pedestrian experiences along the ground floor including a new landscaped pathway on the western front, a pocket plaza space, and an expanded sidewalk on North Street with shopfronts.

Design Concept + Site Testing Outcome

Renderings and site plan are illustrative only. They represent hypothetical build-outs used to calculate potential new housing and do not represent an actual development proposal.



Existing



Existing



A



B

Above: Views of existing conditions and renderings depicting the design vision for this site.



Above: Conceptual site plan. Arrows indicate vantage point for perspective renderings.

| Site Test Assumptions + Yields | | | |
|--------------------------------|--|------------------|---------------------------|
| # of Units (du) | 151 | | |
| # of Buildings | 3 | | |
| Bldg type | Mixed-Use | Mixed-Use Podium | Parking Garage with Liner |
| Height (stories) | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| Bldg width (ft) | 126 | 174 | 244 |
| Bldg depth (ft) | 149 | 104 | 158 |
| Density (du/ac) | 57 | | |
| FAR | 1.4 | | |
| Parking spaces (sp) | 465 (see Parking Summary in bottom left) | | |
| Parking ratio (sp/du) | 1.0 | | |
| Parking type | Structured and Tuck-under | | |
| Front setback (ft) | 0 | | |
| Lot width (ft) | 220 (approx.) | | |
| Lot depth (ft) | 540 (approx.) | | |
| Lot area (ac) | 2.6 | | |

| Parking Summary | |
|-----------------|-------------------|
| Residential | 151 spaces |
| Non-residential | 264 spaces* |
| SMART parking** | 50 spaces |
| Total | 465 spaces |

*This is the number of existing spaces on site today.

**At time of evaluation, site was under consideration for future SMART station location. Excess parking could be repurposed as additional public parking.

Key Regulatory Barriers

Parking standards. Currently, the site requires **1.5 spaces per unit**, and **1 guest space per 3 units**. The design concept provides **1.0 spaces per unit**. Commercial parking is also required (**1 space per 150-300 sf**, depending on specific use). The design concept **does not include commercial parking**.

Density. The prototype tested **57 du/acre**, exceeding the current maximum of **16 du/acre**.

Site D

City-owned Parking Lot

Overview


Address

434 Healdsburg Ave.

Targeted study area

Downtown Commercial Zone

Current site condition

Public surface parking lot

Site dimensions

140 ft wide x 145 ft deep (approx.)

Existing Conditions

This is an infill lot fronting Healdsburg Avenue. There is an alley in the rear. It is surrounded on the north side by a small, vacant, one-story building, and on the south side by a driveway. One-story strip retail buildings are located directly behind the site across the rear alley. The site is used as a public parking lot serving commercial uses downtown.

Parking for this project would be located within the podium at the ground floor. Commercial space and a residential lobby serving the units above line Healdsburg Avenue, screening the structured parking in the rear.

Vision

The design concept for this site includes a four-story mixed-use podium building with non-residential uses at the ground floor and residential dwellings on the upper floors. The fourth story steps back to reduce the scale and provide semi-private open space for residents. There would be a usable terrace over podium parking in the back, giving residents another amenity and providing a nice view for units facing east. The blank wall along the south side is an opportunity for public art.

Design Concept + Site Testing Outcome

Renderings and site plan are illustrative only. They represent hypothetical build-outs used to calculate potential new housing and do not represent an actual development proposal.



Existing



Existing

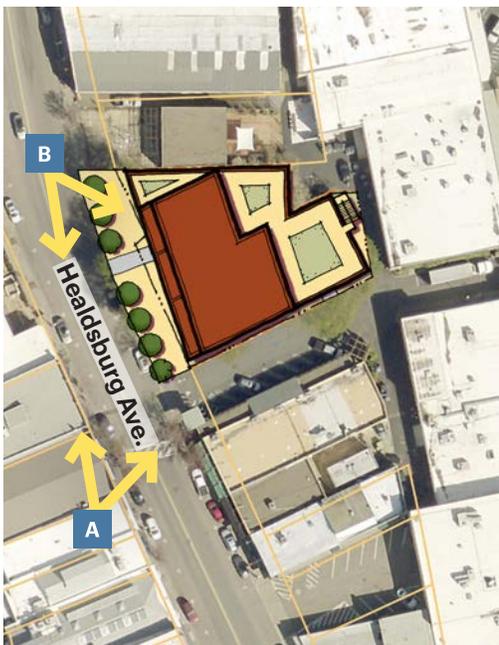


A



B

Above: Views of existing conditions and renderings depicting the design vision for this site.



Above: Conceptual site plan. Arrows indicate vantage point for perspective renderings.

| Site Test Assumptions + Yields | |
|--------------------------------|------------------|
| # of Units (du) | 21 |
| # of Buildings | 1 |
| Bldg type | Mixed-Use Podium |
| Height (stories) | 4 |
| Bldg width (ft) | 135 |
| Bldg depth (ft) | 130 |
| Density (du/ac) | 65 |
| FAR | 1.9 |
| Parking spaces (sp) | 21 |
| Parking ratio (sp/du) | 1.0 |
| Parking type | Structured |
| Front setback (ft) | 0 |
| Lot width (ft) | 140 (approx.) |
| Lot depth (ft) | 145 (approx.) |
| Lot area (ac) | 0.3 |

Key Regulatory Barriers

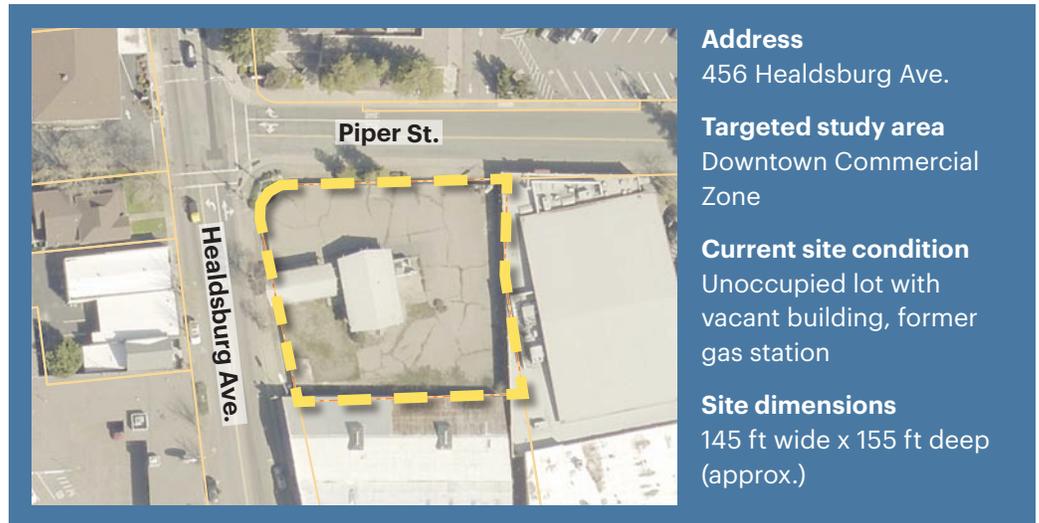
Parking standards. Currently, the site requires **1.5 spaces per unit**, and **1 guest space per 3 units**. The design concept provides **1.0 spaces per unit**. Commercial parking is also required (**1 space per 150-300 sf**, depending on specific use). The design concept **does not include commercial parking**.

Density. The prototype tested **65 du/acre**, exceeding the current maximum of **16 du/acre**.

Site E

Gas Station

Overview



Existing Conditions

This is an unoccupied corner lot fronting Healdsburg Avenue and Piper Street. It is surrounded on the south side by a one-story commercial building, and on the east side by a one-story strip retail building. The site was formerly used by a gas station, but currently does not have a tenant.

Commercial space and a residential lobby serving the units above line Healdsburg Avenue and Piper Street, screening the structured parking behind it.

Vision

The design concept for this site includes a four-story mixed-use podium building with non-residential uses at the ground floor and residential dwellings on the upper floors. The fourth story steps back along Healdsburg Avenue and Piper Street to reduce the scale and provide semi-private open space for residents. There would be a usable terrace over podium parking in the back, giving residents another amenity and providing a nice view for units facing southeast.

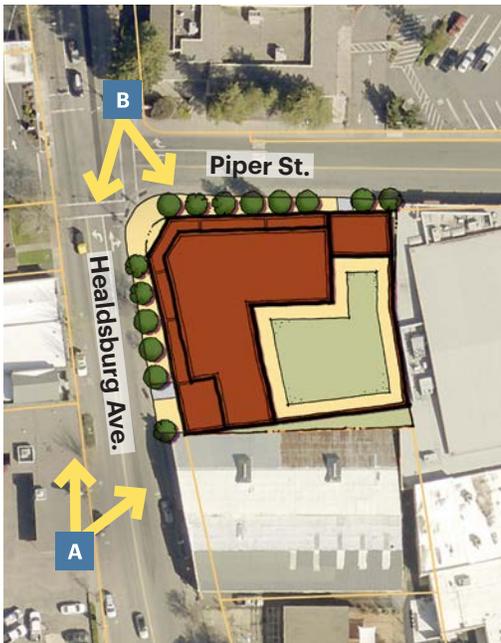
Parking for this project would be located within the podium at the ground floor.

Design Concept + Site Testing Outcome

Renderings and site plan are illustrative only. They represent hypothetical build-outs used to calculate potential new housing and do not represent an actual development proposal.



Above: Views of existing conditions and renderings depicting the design vision for this site.



Above: Conceptual site plan. Arrows indicate vantage point for perspective renderings.

| Site Test Assumptions + Yields | |
|--------------------------------|------------------|
| # of Units (du) | 32 |
| # of Buildings | 1 |
| Bldg type | Mixed-Use Podium |
| Height (stories) | 4 |
| Bldg width (ft) | 145 |
| Bldg depth (ft) | 155 |
| Density (du/ac) | 63 |
| FAR | 1.9 |
| Parking spaces (sp) | 32 |
| Parking ratio (sp/du) | 1.0 |
| Parking type | Structured |
| Front setback (ft) | 0 |
| Lot width (ft) | 145 (approx.) |
| Lot depth (ft) | 155 (approx.) |
| Lot area (ac) | 0.5 |

Key Regulatory Barriers

Parking standards. Currently, the site requires **1.5 spaces per unit, and 1 guest space per 3 units**. The design concept provides **1.0 spaces per unit**. Commercial parking is also required (**1 space per 150-300 sf**, depending on specific use). The design concept **does not include commercial parking**.

Density. The prototype tested **63 du/acre**, exceeding the current maximum of **16 du/acre**.

Sites B and E

Form and Character Study

Right: This photo shows the existing conditions – the “before” condition for the rendering to the right. Site E is currently a defunct gas station that has been cleaned out and is ready for redevelopment. It neighbors one-story retail buildings like the one at the far right of the photo. In the background of this photo is the Bank of America site, which is Site B in this study.



Visualizing the Northward Extension of Downtown's Character

This illustrative rendering depicts the preferred massing from the site tests of both Site E (Gas Station site, shown in the foreground) and Site B (Bank of America, shown in the background).

The deeper study provided the opportunity to apply design guidelines such as:

"6.41 Articulate a building to express a human scale, reduce perceived mass and create visual interest"

- The site includes setbacks at the fourth story, pilasters, awnings, and stringcourses. (See above for a previous iteration without setbacks to see the impact to scale.)

"6.42 Where compatibility with traditional buildings is important, such as Downtown, articulate a building into modules that relate to the traditional building form and scale"

- Proportion and massing as well as moldings, openings, materials and colors found in downtown were carried through the design.





This type of drawing helps illustrate hypothetical new infill development in the character and style of Downtown Healdsburg. This rendering is illustrative only. It represents hypothetical build-outs used to calculate potential new housing and does not represent actual design intent.

2.2 Estimating Downtown's Housing Capacity

Methodology

Based on the densities achieved from the site tests in the Service Commercial (CS) and Downtown Commercial (CD) zoning districts, it is reasonable to assume that other opportunity sites throughout Downtown Healdsburg could yield similar densities. The City identified five additional opportunity sites to estimate a housing yield throughout the Downtown. Assuming a density of 45 du/ac on CS opportunity sites and a density of 65 du/ac on CD opportunity sites, density calculations were applied to these sites to estimate potential for housing Downtown.

Estimated Housing Capacity

| Housing Capacity on Parcels studied in Site Tests | | | | |
|--|------|------------------------|--|------------|
| Site | Zone | Address | Parcel Number(s) | Yield |
| Site A | CS | 525 Healdsburg Avenue | 002-113-007, 002-113-022, 002-113-027, 002-113-036, 002-113-037, 002-113-038, 002-113-039, 002-113-040 | 189 |
| Site B | CS | 502 Healdsburg Avenue | 002-112-003, 002-112-017, 002-112-025 | 65 |
| Site C | CD | West Plaza Parking Lot | 002-182-033 | 151 |
| Site D | CD | 434 Healdsburg Avenue | 002-171-041 | 21 |
| Site E | CD | 456 Healdsburg Avenue | 002-171-038 | 32 |
| Total Housing Capacity on Site Tested Parcels | | | | 458 |



| Housing Capacity on Additional Vacant/Underutilized Parcels | | | | |
|--|------|--------------------------|--------------------------|------------|
| Existing Conditions | Zone | Address | Parcel Number(s) | Yield |
| Ford Dealership | CD | 453 Healdsburg Avenue | 002-113-042, 002-113-043 | 110 |
| Strip Retail | CD | 415 to 455 Center Street | 002-171-042 | 220 |
| Vacant | CD | 330 Center Street | 002-193-015 | 8 |
| Office Building | CD | 150 North Street | 002-193-016 | 31 |
| Bank | CD | 450 Center Street | 002-163-007 | 25 |
| Total Additional Housing Capacity on Other Vacant/Underutilized Parcels | | | | 394 |

Adding the housing capacity of parcels studied in Site Tests and additional vacant/underutilized parcels results in a **total Downtown Housing Capacity of 852 units.**

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Recommendations

CHAPTER

3

In this chapter

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3.1 Zoning District Recommendations

| Recommendations for Service Commercial (CS) and Downtown Commercial (CD) Zoning Districts | | | | |
|---|--|--|---|---|
| Regulation | Existing Standard | Proposed Standard | Implementation Tool | Rationale |
| Density | 16 du/acre max. | CS Zone: 45 du/acre max. CD Zone: 65 du/acre max. | General Plan amendment or Specific Plan | <p>These recommended densities reflect the findings from the site testing analysis described in Chapter 2.</p> <p>In the Service Commercial (CS) zone, 45 du/acre was the resultant density of the City's desired unit mix within the existing zoning envelope and achieving a 1 space/unit residential parking ratio. This density reflects an assumption of surface and tuck-under parking behind ground-floor retail.</p> <p>In the Downtown Commercial (CD) zone, 65 du/acre was the resultant density of the City's desired unit mix within the existing zoning envelope and achieving a 1 space/unit residential parking ratio. This density reflects an assumption of one level of podium parking behind ground-floor retail.</p> <p>This increased density can enable smaller, more attainable units on infill parcels where a developer's best options today are large luxury units or hotels.</p> |
| Parking for Multi-Unit Dwellings | 1.5 spaces per unit min. | 1 space per unit min. | Zoning code update or Specific Plan | <p>This reduced parking ratio aims to make infill development at the desired density more financially feasible for developers. As parking is space-intensive and expensive, higher parking ratios will disincentivize developers from offering more units, discouraging residential development that approaches the new density maximum. 1 space per unit is a minimum parking requirement that has worked well in other places. This reduced parking ratio should be paired with alternative mobility strategies like onsite car-share.</p> <p>See Section 3.4 (Right-Sizing Residential Parking) for more detail.</p> |
| Parking for Retail | 1 space per 150 sf to 300 sf min. (depending on use) | No parking required | Zoning code update or Specific Plan | <p>Particularly on small infill sites, parking requirements make it difficult to realize development potential due not only to the cost of providing parking but also because of the physical constraints of the lot. The parking ratio for retail square footage is more demanding than the parking ratio for residential square footage and can be difficult to physically accomplish.</p> <p>The City maintains public parking lots throughout the downtown which can serve visitors to new non-residential uses. It is also unlikely that each new infill use will generate a unique additional demand for parking, as opposed to visitors "parking once" and walking to a series of nearby shops or restaurants. Eliminating the parking requirement for small retail spaces, provided there is adequate parking on nearby parcels, can help enable mixed-use development on this corridor.</p> |

| Recommendations for Service Commercial (CS) and Downtown Commercial (CD) Zoning Districts | | | | |
|---|---|---|-------------------------------------|---|
| Regulation | Existing Standard | Proposed Standard | Implementation Tool | Rationale |
| Adjacency standards | 10' height reduction for a lot adjacent to a residential zone | 10' height reduction for the first 50 ft adjacent to a residential zone | Zoning code update or Specific Plan | Two of the opportunity sites tested in the CS zone (Rite Aid and Bank of America) were adjacent to lots with residential zoning. Because these opportunity sites are large parcels, or would likely undergo lot consolidation prior to redevelopment, this height reduction would apply over the entire large parcel. This reduces the development potential beyond what meaningfully impacts the adjacent parcel. Establish an impacted distance from the triggering lot line, such as 50 feet, after which the height limit is no longer reduced. |
| Ground floor non-residential uses | Ground-floor non-residential use required in CS and CD zones | Eliminate this standard in the CS zone, if supported by a retail study | Zoning code update or Specific Plan | <p>Non-residential uses are currently required on the ground floor in both CS and CD zones. Evaluate in a retail study whether there is enough demand to support additional non-residential uses on opportunity sites in these zones. There was some public perception during the public engagement for this study that there is limited demand for additional retail space; this should be confirmed.</p> <p>If this limited demand is confirmed through a retail study, eliminate the requirement for ground-floor retail in the CS zone since this covers a broader geography and is further from the downtown. Keep this requirement as it is in the CD zone since this is the heart of downtown.</p> |
| Additional Strategies to Consider | | | | |
| Density minimums | Consider density minimums that capture the City's housing goals for priority infill sites. | | | |
| Unbundling parking | Unbundling parking, i.e. offering tenants the option to lease a dwelling unit without also leasing a parking space, can help bring down unit costs for individual tenants and can reduce the number of parking spaces required in a development. | | | |
| Massing and articulation | Consider requiring massing strategies such as upper-story setbacks and facade articulation to reduce the perceived bulk of new development. These are currently captured in design guidelines, but could be included in objective design standards. | | | |

3.2 Complementary Actions to Consider

| Recommendations for Complementary Housing-Supportive Actions | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|--|
| Housing-Supportive Action | Implementation Tool | Rationale |
| Streetscape improvements that include wider sidewalks at pinch points downtown (such as Healdsburg Avenue) | Streetscape Plan or Specific Plan | As the fabric of the downtown continues north, some sidewalks may need to be expanded to accommodate the increased pedestrian activity. |
| Growth Management Ordinance (GMO) adjustment | GMO amendment | Exempt the CS and CD zones, or another specific geography of priority infill site(s) in downtown such as the West Plaza Parking Lot, from the Growth Management Ordinance. |
| Additional public parking | Downtown Master Plan or Specific Plan | Preserve and expand the city's public parking pool in downtown in order to enable new residential mixed-use buildings in the downtown. |

3.3 Right-Sizing Residential Parking Requirements

What is the right ratio?

This study presents a recommended change to reduce the parking minimum to 1.0 spaces per unit. This lower parking requirement opens up possibilities for new kinds of development, particularly on infill parcels that are physically constrained.

While most households own cars, not all do. Some household types may not have a car and rely instead on carshare, rideshare, or active transportation like walking or biking – for example, a single person who may want to live in a studio apartment. Other household types may have more than one car, like a family who may want to live in a two- or three-bedroom apartment.

Some cities choose to respond to these trends by regulating parking through a sliding scale of parking requirements based on unit type. For example, studios may require 0.5 spaces per unit, while two-bedroom units may require 1.5 or 2 spaces per unit.

In a multifamily project that includes a diversity of unit types (like studios, one-bedroom units, two-bedroom units, and three-bedroom units), this sliding scale approach often yields a resultant parking ratio of approximately one space per unit, which is the minimum parking ratio recommended in this study.

Note that there is no recommendation to impose a parking maximum at this time. A developer may choose to offer more parking spaces than this required minimum if they determine that the market demands it.

Podium Parking and Parking Lifts

The site testing and density recommendation for the Downtown Commercial (CD) zone assumes that this 1.0 space per unit parking requirement would be accommodated in a single story of podium parking at the ground floor.

As some downtown hotels have proven, parking lifts can be an excellent tool to accommodate extra parking in an efficient way. Parking lifts can effectively double the parking capacity of a single-level podium, removing the cost burden of expanding the podium to a second level and preserving the rest of the zoning envelope for housing. This also means that a developer who chooses to provide more than 1 space per unit using parking lifts could still achieve the maximum density recommended in this study.

Note that while parking lifts are well-suited for hotel uses and residential uses, they are likely not the best parking strategy for short-term customer parking for non-residential uses based on the modest additional time required to retrieve a vehicle.

3.4 Emerging Best Practices on Density and FAR

Density, FAR, and Predictability of Built Form

Density alone as a regulatory tool does not always result in predictable built form. Factors such as building length, size, and bulk, and the type and sizes of dwelling units can result in buildings with similar densities and different built outcomes. When the State Density Bonus is applied to mixed-income projects, the resultant building form can deviate even further from expectations. Density cannot yield predictable built form results.

FAR (floor area ratio) can result in more predictable buildings especially when used with other, form-based regulations to guide the outcome of the zoning envelope. FAR measures the ratio of total usable built floor area to the area of the lot. As an example, a single-story building that covers 100 percent of its lot has an FAR of 1.0, as does a two-story building that covers 50 percent of the lot. In this way, FAR directly regulates building square footage relative to lot size, which yields a level of predictability in a building's mass, an important aspect of built form that can complement other building form standards in the zoning code or Objective Design Standards.

Regulating with FAR Instead of Density

Given density's inability to deliver predictable built form, an emerging best practice is to replace density with FAR as a regulatory tool.

Some opponents of eliminating density requirements fear that it will result in buildings with very high numbers of micro-units or single room occupancy (SRO) units. While unlikely, additional standards can be considered to prevent this situation, such as establishing minimum requirements for "family units" or 2+ bedroom units in multi-family projects.

Eliminating density does not jeopardize density bonus projects. FAR can be used instead of density to determine base entitlements and also to determine density bonus allocations, as described in the El Cerrito example on the facing page.

Establishing FAR Standards

Rather than establishing FAR maximums up-front, determining FAR standards after other form standards have been established can better ensure that FAR furthers the City's goals for desired built form.

The process of determining potential built outcomes in the opportunity site testing in this project can be helpful to determine an appropriate resultant FAR for projects in Healdsburg. Further site testing can help to determine appropriate FAR levels for future housing projects in Healdsburg.

Examples From Other Communities

Several other California cities have begun to eliminate density standards and rely on FAR instead. The following are some examples from Northern California.

Roseville

Roseville has recently adopted standards that allow projects to meet either density maximums or FAR maximums, whichever is more permissive. With its moderate density maximum (36 du/ac) and relatively high FAR maximum (4.0), FAR is likely to effectively replace density as the applicable regulatory tool for new projects.

San Rafael

In its 2020 General Plan, San Rafael eliminated density standards for

its downtown and now relies on FAR instead. The intention behind this change was to increase the predictability of built form as the City pursues its housing goals. This policy change was implemented in the Downtown Precise Plan, which makes no mention of density.

El Cerrito

In its 2014 San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan, El Cerrito eliminated density standards for the San Pablo Avenue Specific Planning Area. The City has established the legal precedent for using FAR in awarding state density bonuses by awarding additional square footage rather than additional density to state density bonus recipients.



Above: Locations of example communities in Northern California

3.5 Implementation Tools

Increasing Maximum Density

Modifications to the density maximum would require an amendment to the City's General Plan as well as the applicable zoning districts. Depending on the scope of the required changes, this may trigger environmental review, but would provide development streamlining for future projects.

Consideration of density increases will also require assessments of available infrastructure and may raise questions about the need for public realm improvements and or downtown programs that can help to accommodate additional density.

Zoning Changes

Any zoning amendment or update process may want to incorporate objective design standards to further streamline the review process for new housing.

Planning Processes

In order to concurrently address multiple elements related to downtown housing, a downtown planning process could offer an efficient path to comprehensively considering these changes. The planning vehicle for these changes may be a Specific Plan, a Master Plan, or a Precise Plan.

Specific Plan

A Specific Plan could provide a vehicle to consider both private development potential and public infrastructure, policy, and programs, and tailored development and design standards in one central

document. A Specific Plan would provide a vehicle for program-level Environmental Review of the impacts that adding additional density to the downtown might create and how/where they could be mitigated.

However, Specific Plans can be costly and can take a long time to prepare (for example, two to three years). This may not be required or may not be an optimum use of resources, for example, if public investment is not expected to be significant.

Master Plan or Precise Plan

A Master Plan or a Precise Plan process is a more streamlined alternative to a Specific Plan. This planning process could keep a narrower focus on new downtown housing, even though environmental work will still be required to amend the General Plan.

The city may want to consider the timing of the next General Plan update and whether or not it would be appropriate to time this concurrently with a downtown Master Plan or Precise Plan. This way, the downtown area could be considered as part of a citywide environmental impact assessment.

Based on the need for environmental review to accompany a density increase, it will take time to efficiently realize the potential for new housing downtown through either the Specific Plan route or a Master Plan/Precise Plan route.

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