



August 26, 2022

SUBJECT: Correcting the Record on Building Heights and Historic Structures

Dear Ventura Residents and Business Owners,

There is incorrect information on social media about City plans involving downtown buildings and historic structures, resulting in misunderstandings between the City and Downtown Ventura Partners (DVP). The City and DVP have discussed how this happened and are looking forward to working together on this and future projects.

To be clear, ***there is no City plan to put six-to-seven story buildings throughout downtown or to remove historic buildings.*** For additional information, please read below:

Background

The City is in the process of updating its General Plan. The General Plan sets goals, policies and objectives to achieve the community's vision for the next 30 years. The aspect of the General Plan that normally gets the most attention are the land uses which relate to the uses and intensities of what could be built in the City. More specifically, what allowed building heights should be in different parts of the community. And that is where we are at right now in the process. For more information on this, please visit Planventura.com, the City's website for the General Plan update.

Over the past two years, there has been significant community input that has led to the City Council endorsing a Vision statement: [Link](#). We are approaching the next phase, the discussion of land use alternatives that implement that vision. On August 30, 2022, at the Museum of Ventura County (100 East Main Street) at 6:00 p.m., three land use alternatives will be presented to the community. Each shows different ways the City can plan for growth over the next 30 years. The alternatives are based on community feedback to date, and each alternative has tradeoffs, there are pros and cons for each depending on your perspective.

The purpose of these alternatives is to generate community dialogue. No decisions are being made on August 30. This meeting kicks off a community engagement period that will last at least two months. There will be pop-up events, "office hours" where individuals or groups can ask questions, meetings with each Community Council, and an online survey.

The results of the upcoming engagement on these alternatives will be synthesized into a single alternative that staff will bring forward to meetings with the General Plan Advisory Committee (GPAC), the Planning Commission, and then to the City Council for endorsement. These meetings are not scheduled yet, because we want to give as much time for community engagement as possible.

Social Media Narrative and Downtown Ventura Partners

The narrative on social media that the City has a plan to build six-to-seven story buildings throughout downtown and remove historic buildings in the process is not true. That narrative ended up being published on a Downtown Ventura Partners (DVP) website last week.

Once the site was posted, the City informed DVP of content that was not accurate, and DVP has updated the site to address to shift to more of an informational page encouraging public involvement. This week, the City met in person with members of the DVP board and talked through the situation. The DVP members in the meeting explained what led them to their decision to post the website. The City explained how the narrative is not accurate, and those board members left the meeting relieved, and continued to work towards improving the content of their website.

We have no objections to DVP, or any individual, group or organization, strongly advocating positions on the future of downtown or any other part of the community. We welcome such input. The City had concerns that the website repeated a narrative that the City was doing things that were not true. And a false narrative in social media can lead to heightened emotions and make it harder for the community to have a civil, open dialogue. Tensions have certainly been raised.

There is a complete agreement between the City and DVP that we want everyone to be open and listen to other community members that may have a different perspective. There are many in the community that believe we need to build a lot more housing, while there are many that are very concerned with how greater heights may impact their quality of life in Ventura. The City and DVP want all to be able to safely and freely express their perspectives.

Moving Forward

I encourage all of you to see these alternatives for yourself and give input on how you think the City should plan for the next thirty years. Again, Planventura.com has information on upcoming engagement activities, as well as materials that show how we got to this phase of the General Plan update process. Also, please be aware of the following:

- There is no City plan to remove historic resources.
- There is no City plan to put 6-7 story buildings throughout downtown, and no consideration of increased heights beyond what is currently allowed in the historic section of Main Street where Main Street Moves is located.
- The land use alternatives provide are options and choices that reflect the perspectives of both sides of the issue, in a manner that tries to balance them as sensitively as possible.
- There has been significant community input supporting allowing greater heights in certain areas, including parts of downtown, to bolster economic development and to address local housing needs. Also, local zoning regulations already allows six-story buildings in many parts of the City. Downtown regulations today happen to not allow six-story buildings, though in the past taller buildings were allowed and there are a couple of buildings over six-stories. Given those facts, it is

not unreasonable for some in the community to suggest considering allowing six-stories in some parts of downtown over the next 30 years.

- There has been significant community input suggesting we avoid increasing heights as much as possible to minimize change to the community. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to being sensitive about where heights might be increased, which could require that growth to be spread over more land area, combined with considering lowering heights in certain areas. In fact, the three alternatives reduce the overall land area where 6-story buildings are allowed in the City.

There will be a lot of materials presented at the August 30, 2022 community meeting. The materials are not something anyone is going to be able to digest quickly. This is also why an extended engagement process is planned. We hope you take this information, speak about the ideas with your family, friends, colleagues, and community groups, ask us for explanation or questions on aspects that you want more information on, and then take the online survey to give your feedback.

In conclusion, I encourage you to participate in the land use alternatives community engagement. If you do, I believe you will see that there are a variety of options proposed for the purpose of generating dialogue. And if we can have a *constructive* dialogue, then what ends up being the City plan will be the best balance of community perspectives as possible. And lastly, if you hear something that bothers you about what the City may or may not be doing, please ask City staff. We have a lot on our plates, but we want to help answer any questions you have.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Pgilli".

Peter Gilli, AICP
Community Development Director
City of Ventura

CC: City Council, Planning Commission, Design Review Committee, Historic Preservation Committee, General Plan Advisory Committee