

SAN RAFAEL TRANSIT CENTER COMMUNITY DESIGN ADVISORY GROUP

MEETING #3
WHAT WE HEARD REPORT

SEPTEMBER 2023



Prepared by
DIALOG

Introduction and Purpose of CDAG

The Community Design Advisory Group (CDAG) is a collaborative group of selected stakeholders with a mandate to provide input into the architecture, design, and amenities of the new transit center. As an advisory group, CDAG provides valuable expertise and perspectives, but is not a decision making body. The group is consensus-based, with a facilitator providing support to the process, and seeks to bring diverse and broad input to the design. The formation of the CDAG was a collaborative effort between the City of San Rafael (the City) and the Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District (GGBHTD).

CDAG will meet four times over a six month period during concept design; see timeline below. The third meeting was held in September 2023, and was an opportunity to expand on the conversations initiated in the first two meetings as well as review the scale and massing of architectural and urban elements. The CDAG reviewed opportunities for the partial relocation of Whistlestop, a new transit plaza, and the size and position of bus shelters.

Meeting #3

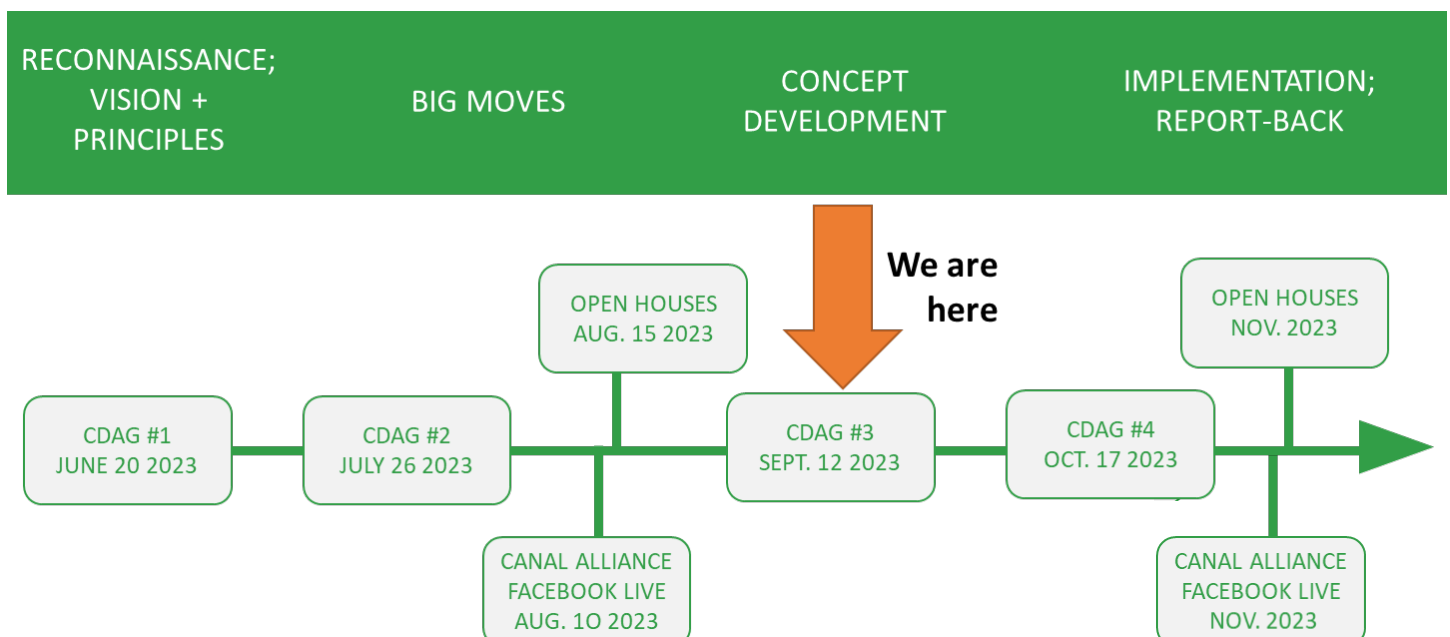
The CDAG Meeting #3 was held on September 12, 2023, at San Rafael Community Center from 5:30-7:30 pm. Participants reviewed highlights from the CDAG Meeting #2, the Canal Alliance Facebook Live event and the Public Open House. DIALOG used Miro, an online whiteboard tool, to track comments. The group discussed various design elements including the design approach to the arcade and the historical elements; program layout options; shelter configurations and materials; and landscape design.

This is a “participatory design” process, which is an iterative process of seeing and hearing comments from the CDAG then filtering back understandings to the group for confirmation.

Outcomes of the meeting will help to guide design decisions. Additional input will be requested at CDAG meeting #4, followed by a second Canal Alliance Facebook Live event and a second public open house.

The following content reflects comments made during the CDAG meeting #3. Comments are presented without edits except where useful for clarity or context.

Timeline



Design Principle Highlights

The project team shared Design Principle Highlights that were presented at the public open house and a CDAG member had a comment on language:

- *Use the correct name - not the "Whistlestop" name, but the "Northwestern Pacific Depot"*

Design Options

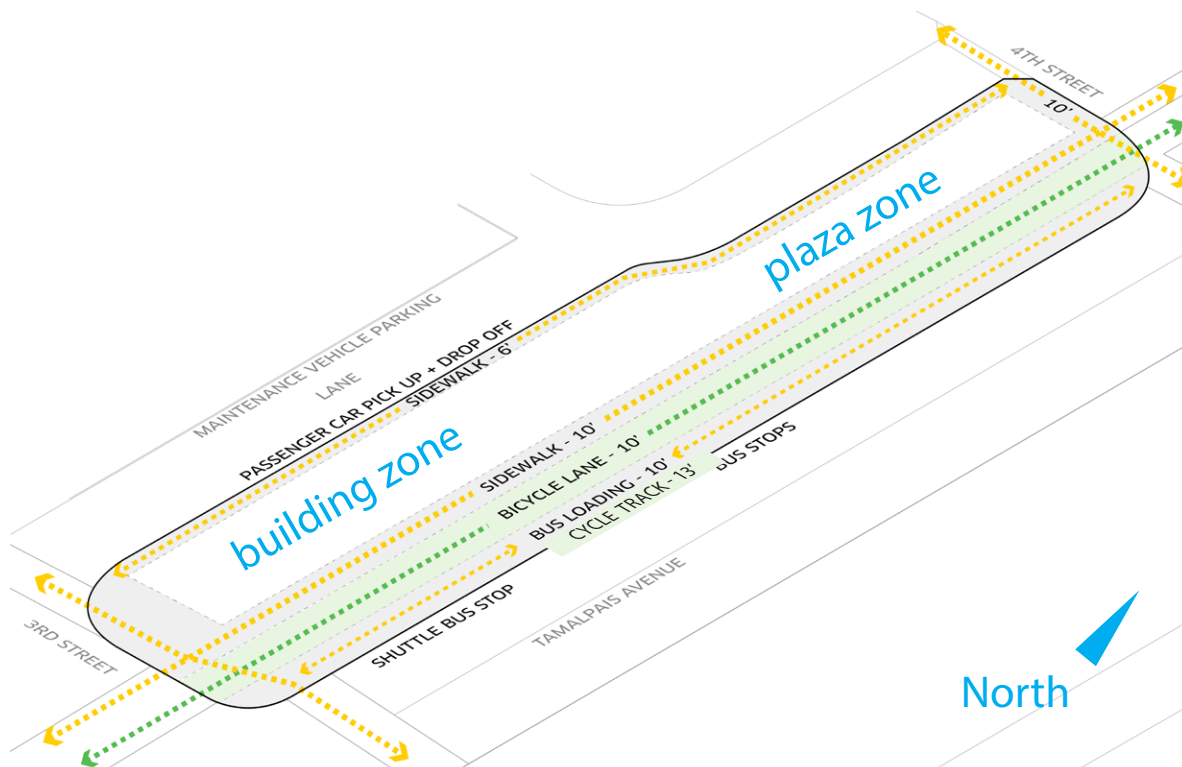
DIALOG initiated a conversation on design options and opportunities. Before DIALOG shared these, a CDAG member commented:

- *Full reconstruction of the building is important to many people*

Relocated Whistlestop Building and Plaza Site Constraints

The project team shared constraints that limit plaza site development area:

- The SMART tracks bisect the overall transit center site, with the relocated Tamalpais Ave. falling just west of the SMART station. The plaza will be located on the west side of Tamalpais Ave., such that Tamalpais Ave. defines the eastern edge of the plaza. Adjacent to Tamalpais Ave., the plaza will include a 10' passenger loading zone, a 13' zone for the cycle track and physical barriers, and a 10' public sidewalk. These three amenities occupy the eastern edge of the plaza block.
- On the north end of the east side of the plaza, the plaza is constrained by the Tavern and access drive to the multifamily residential housing building.
- On the south end of the east plaza, the plaza is constrained by the passenger pick up and drop off area.
- The plaza is bordered by 4th St. on the north and 3rd St. on the south.



Architectural Elements of the Whistlestop Building

A comparison of the original building and the current building was presented to the CDAG, including definitions of architectural elements.

East Facade - 1935



The 1929 Building had an open Arcade

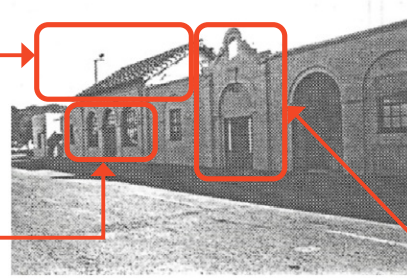


East Facade - Today



Today the Arcade is filled in and the building has been modified numerous times

West Facade - 1976

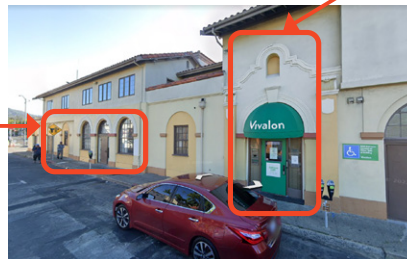


Pitched Roof

Arches

Entry Portal
"Shaped Mission Parapet"

West Facade - Today



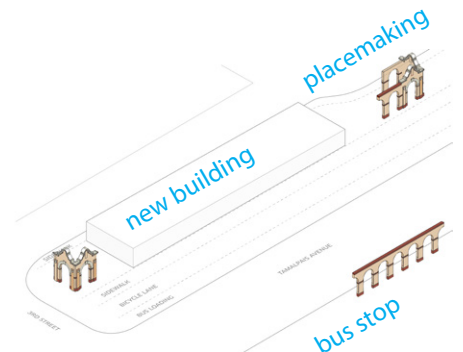
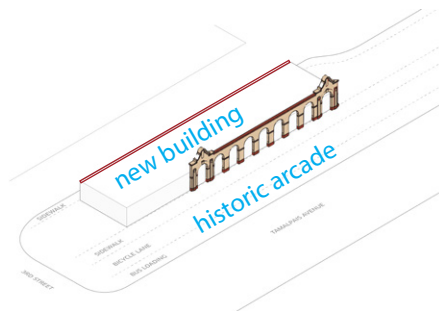
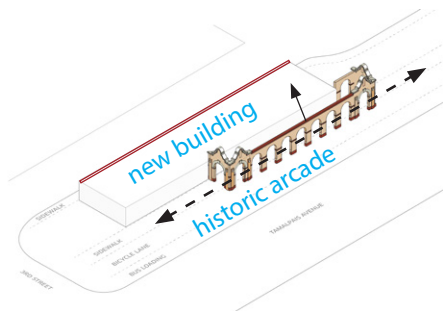
Arches

Design Approach to Arcade & Historic Elements

Option 1: Incorporate the outdoor arcade in the manner of the early Railroad condition (1929)

Option 2: Retain the arcade with building filled in, in the manner of the later Railroad function (as is the case today)

Option 3: Use elements of the historic Whistlestop Building in a manner new and unique to the Transit Center, to call attention to the history and to support placemaking



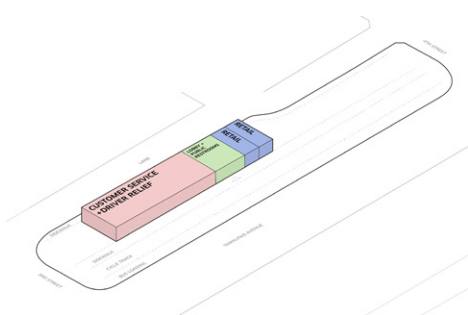
The project team shared three different approaches to the location of the arcade and historic elements and asked CDAG for input. The CDAG offered the following comments on both the historic elements and on overall site layout. Responses to CDAG questions are provided for informational purposes where appropriate. Responses are not provided to questions that are exploratory (e.g. "what if").

CDAG comments and design team responses, where applicable:

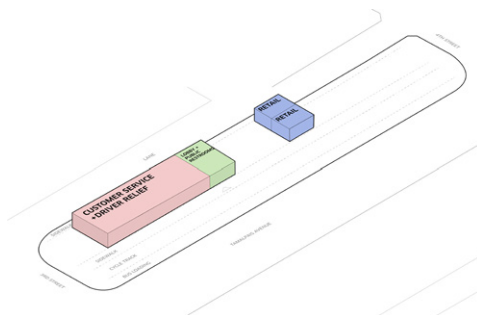
- *Is it possible to integrate the sidewalk into the arcade?* Design Team: Yes, as shown in Option 1
- *Is the sidewalk one and the same with the arcade?* Design Team: Yes, the public sidewalk moves through the arcade in Option 1
- *What does the 'new building' mean?* Design Team: The new customer service center, which includes part of the relocated Depot Building (aka Whistlestop)
- *Will the dimensions of the new building be the same as the historic Depot?* Design Team: No. The new building will be smaller due to site constraints. The building from the rail era (1929, 1944) is too large. The building is also sized based on future needs.
- *What does a section through the 1929 Depot building look like? Does the same dimension fit on the site?* Design Team: The original Depot building is wider than the space available on the site.
- *What does a recreation of the arcade look like on the site?* Design Team: Multiple options are being explored (reference to later in the presentation)
- *Visualize arcade as closed - restaurant? Enclosure on the back to get the rhythm of the arcade.*
- *Don't see the arcade as a walkway - could be enclosed with glass*
- *Red flag - hard to manage if the arcade needs to be closed at night*
- *Can the arcade become part of a cafe with tables and chairs?* Design Team: Yes, this could be possible.
- *Numerous examples of arcaded walkways in the walk - Paris, Lisbon*
- *Don't reject the idea in response to the concern over security - but it does need to be addressed*
- *Is the arcade the place where patrons have shelter from the elements?* Design Team: Yes, this could be possible.
- *Why is the bike lane set so far back from Tamalpais?* Design Team: Tamalpais Ave. has multiple bus stops at this location. The bike lane is positioned to not be between the buses and the passenger loading zone.
- *Sidewalk / bike lane / bus loading does not make sense; potential for conflict between bikes and people*
- *Maybe this is a block without a cycle track - think of it as a plaza*
- *Designated spaces for pedestrians and cyclists is the international best practice - keeps people [cyclists] out of bus loading zone*
- *Cycle track will let people know where to expect bikes*
- *Need to accommodate through- traffic for cyclists*
- *Use architectural features to control traffic / create a safe environment*

Program Layout Options

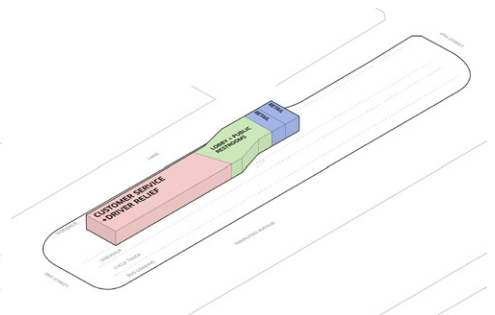
DIALOG shared three different approaches to distributing program across the building. The pink shape represents the District's Customer Service and Driver Support spaces. The green shape represents the public lobby and restrooms. The blue shape represents retail/cafe spaces.



Simple Bar Building



Separated Bar Building



Modified Bar Building

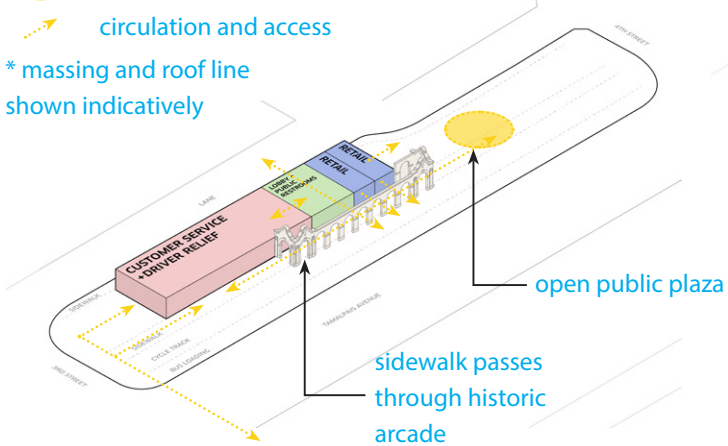
The design team presented combined approaches to historic building elements, approaches to program layout, and different architectural opportunities into three design options. The CDAG provided comments across each option.

Building Option A: Open Arcade

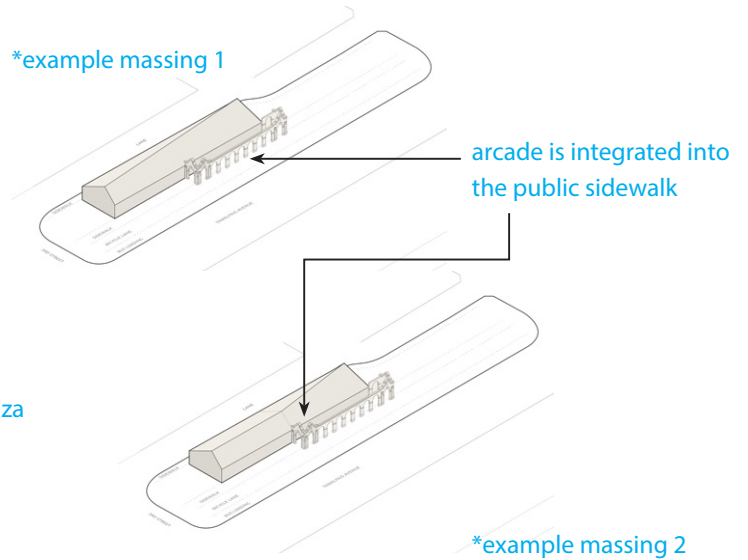
 placemaking opportunity

 circulation and access

* massing and roof line shown indicatively



*example massing 1

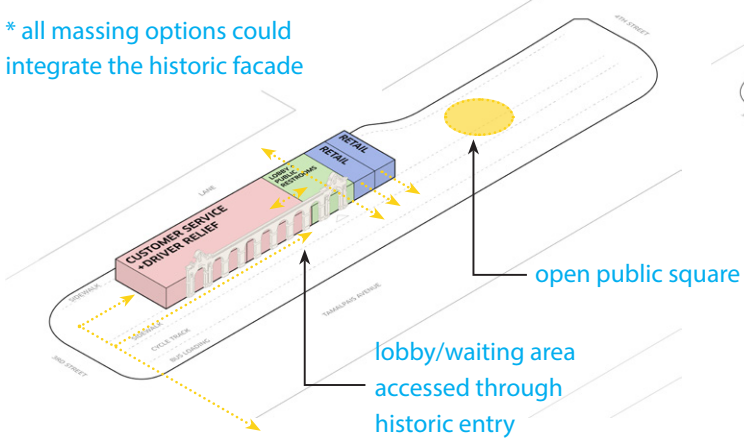


Building Option B: Enclosed Arcade

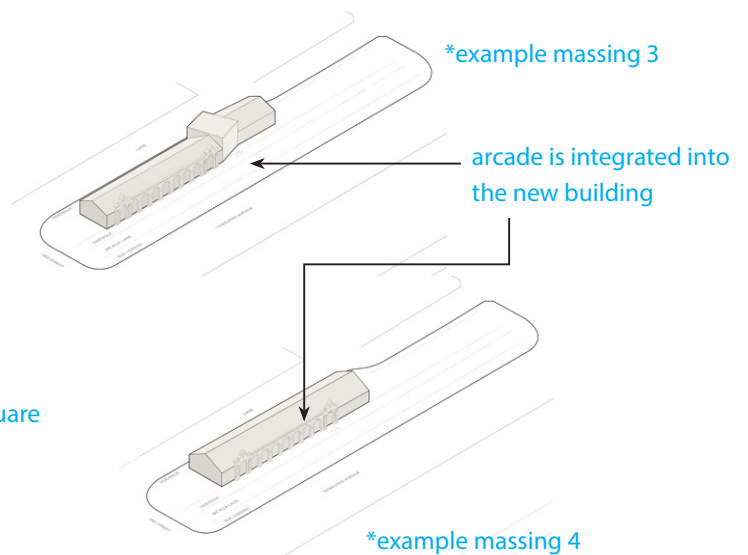
 placemaking opportunity

 circulation and access

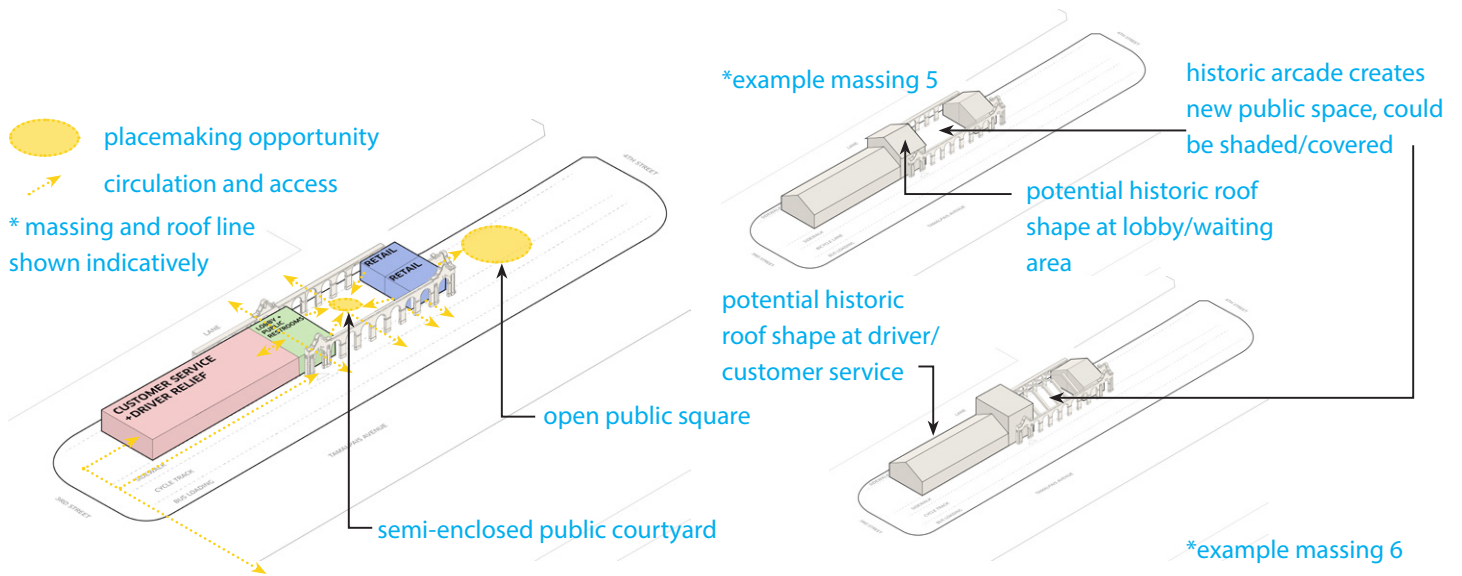
* all massing options could integrate the historic facade



*example massing 3



Building Option C: Central Courtyard with Open Arcade



Building Options

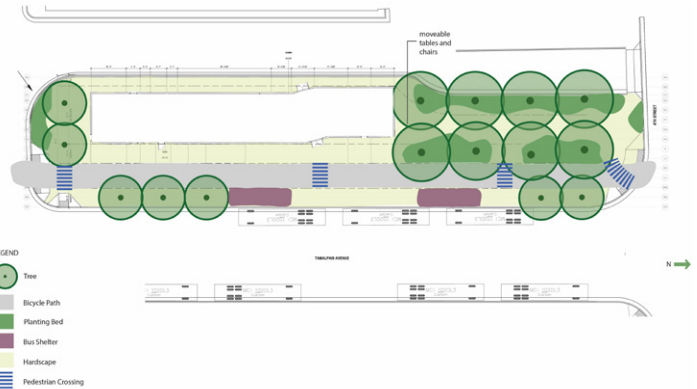
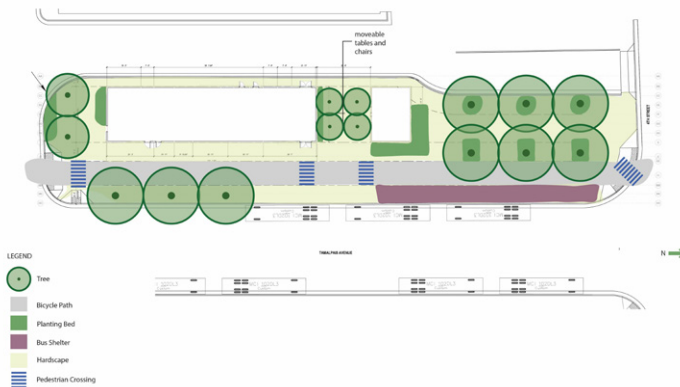
CDAG members provided the following comments for the three building options:

- *Option B: are there arches on both sides?*
- *Option B: graphics show pitched roof, the current one is flat*
- *Are we looking at a two story building? Can give more space to back of house*
 - Design Team: We are only looking at a one story building for functional reasons. Most spaces require direct access from the exterior, and stairs/ elevators would require a lot of extra floor area.
- *Second story could lose function in terms of accessibility and egress / ingress*
- *Interest in the staircase with tiles, inside the depot*
 - Design Team: Little if anything on the interior is historic, but some materials may be reused or be inspiration
- *Stairs are not original or historic*
- *What happens to the rest of the building?*
- *Can there be a tourist corner / welcome center / civic space in the ticket area?*
- *Concern over allocation of space between pink [customer service office and driver support spaces] and green [public lobby and restrooms]; was expecting more space for customers to wait*
- *How will the plaza get activated? It feels far away.*
- *Could be reminiscent of the shape of the former building*
- *Option C creates opportunity for shade*
- *Option C: Enclosed space ideal for families*
- *Option C is intriguing, compelling opportunity for a programmable usable space in the center*
- *Option C: The split in mass is nice*
- *Option C has more opportunities for placemaking on the plaza*

Plaza Options

Two different plaza options were shared by DIALOG: one with a linear, orthogonal form and a second with a curvilinear form. A CDAG member commented:

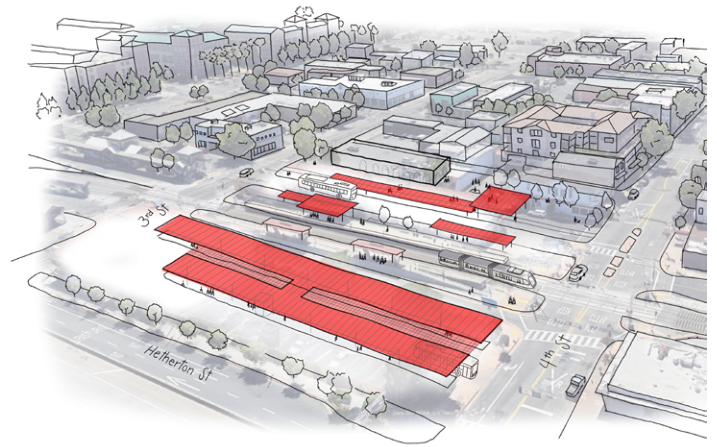
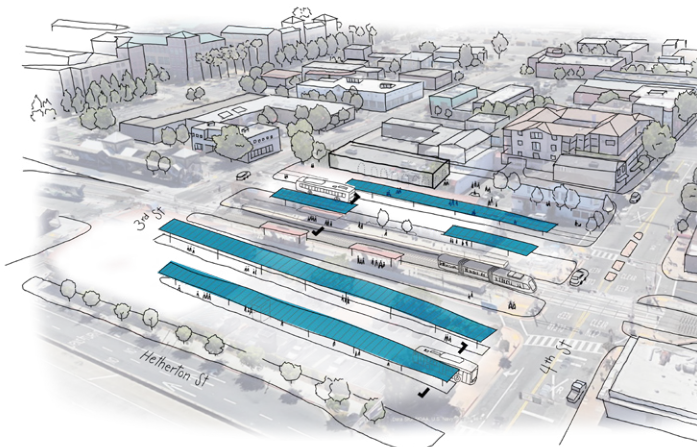
- *Curvilinear feels contrived*
- *Linear shade optimized more shelter*
- *People want along the streets, that is the space for really robust street trees*



Bus Shelter Concepts

Two different bus shelter shapes were shown as an advancement of the concepts shown at CDAG #2 and the Open House. The CDAG offered the following input:

- *Why pick up the rhythm of the arches?*
- *Community concern about a bus stop at the front door to the community.*
- *To get away from that, need to create a structure that is inspiring and contemporary, is striking and more than just a bus shelter*
- *Trees could ring the whole thing - London plane trees*
- *Number one concern is the amount of seating - both outside and inside*



More Shelter vs. More Vegetation

The bus bays along Tamalpais Ave can be structured with continuous shelter through and between the passenger loading area, or the architectural shelter elements can be broken up with trees and vegetation.



The design team opened the discussion for Plaza-Shelter and asked CDAG members provided different comments:

- *More vegetation*
- *Big shelter needs to be a real architectural statement - creates opportunity for big trees*
- *Needs to be a signature, statement of welcoming (shelter)*
- *Vegetation doesn't protect you from rain, needs water*
- *Break up the smaller shelters to distinguish them, allows space for trees*
- *More cover is better for bus users; function is more important than form*
- *Green is good but move to the side*
- *Commuters need protection from the elements, they care less about appearance*
- *Protection from wind and rain*

Additional comments:

- *Bike lane will help people know there are bikes here - common sense*
- *Create more space in the middle, have trees on the sides*
- *Where is the bike storage?*
- *Is the retail space for two? Could have some flexibility*

Bus Shelter Materials

DIALOG shared a series of images of different materials for the bus shelters, with options for both long, linear shelters and larger, continuous shelters that span multiple bus bays. The materials were grouped into three categories: wood and hybrid wood; metal and metal/glass; and concrete/formed materials. The following comments were provided about shelter materials and design opportunities.

- *Appearance of urban shade canopies - not bus shelter*
- *Metal is fire safe*
- *Concrete - ductile verses tensile*
- *Play off historic structure with a pergola type structure*
- *Pergola like form - major / minor structures across the site*
- *The arches are appealing*
- *Could be really heavy and thick - airiness is desired*
- *National art museum of Tokyo - no straight lines*
- *Landmark - don't want to overdo it, needs a light touch*
- *Wood is very humanizing*
- *Biophilic and wood is very Marin County*
- *Wood with something light and airy*
- *Architecture needs to speak to who we are as Marin County*
- *Avoid options that are too hard and urban - don't feel like San Rafael*
- *Metal too hot on hot days*
- *If fire isn't an issue then wood is best*
- *Don't worry about fire safety for mass timber*
- *Concrete doesn't represent San Rafael*
- *Wood is homey, reflects Marin's history*
- *A combination of materials might be nice*
- *Need to make sure these provide shelter*
- *What about solar collection?*
- *Metal is contemporary and modern, fits in with the city*
- *Love the warmth of wood, but nervous about it being not fire proof*

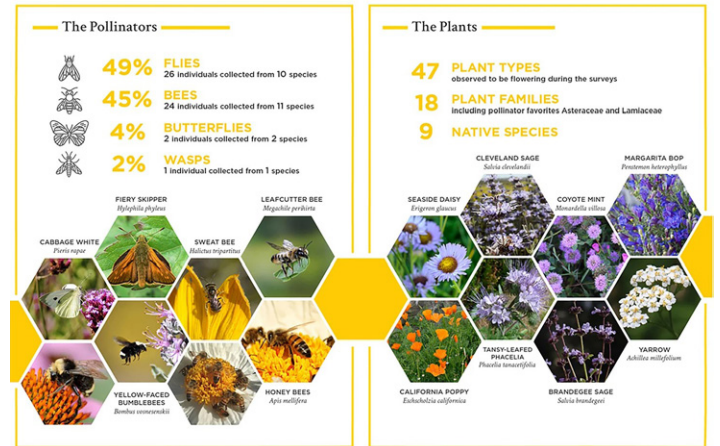
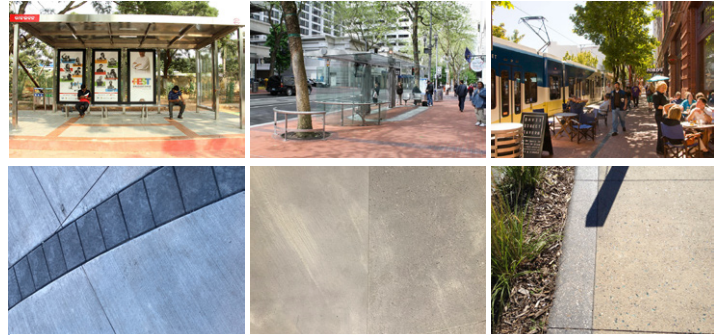
Stars represent preferred selections by CDAG members:



Plaza Materials

DIALOG presented different options for hardscape and plant materials for the plaza. CDAG provided the following comments:

- Use local materials wherever possible
- Maybe in the courtyard - landscape less logical in the greater plaza area
- Hardscape is easier to maintain, is more flexible
- If we have lots of landscaping can it be maintained?
- Likes earthy colors - warmth
- Speaks to traditional materials
- Avoid materials that absorb heat - think function
- Stormwater management
- Wood bench is nice to sit on
- Age friendly design - higher seats?
- Use local brick
- Maximum impact from big trees
- Opportunity for vertical surfaces - vines, climbers
- Hardscape needs maintenance as well as green spaces
- Avoid thorns





Summary of What We Heard

Plaza and Building Site Constraints: The CDAG discussed the various constraints that limit size and shape of the plaza and building site. Several members expressed frustration that these constraints would limit the project's ability to relocate the full dimensions of the current or the original 1929 building. Members expressed multiple perspectives on the cycle track (separated bike lane), including support for the current strategy as best practice and a preference for eliminating the bike lane due to space limitations. Some members expressed interest in clear wayfinding and access for different types of users (bus riders, cyclists, etc.)

Design Approach to Arcade & Historic Elements: CDAG members expressed a variety of perspectives on relocation of historic building elements, ranging from relocation of all possible parts of the building to the relocation of select 1929 elements. Members were interested in retaining the historic parts of both the west arcade and the east facade. Nighttime management and security of the arcade was a consistent concern. Some members expressed interest in using the area within the arcade for a restaurant or cafe that would take ownership over the space.

Building and Plaza Options: The CDAG members expressed broad consensus for Option C, for a variety of reasons. The arcade and arches from the original Whistlestop Building highlight the original building's history while creating a usable courtyard space. It has the potential to include a shade structure, and it may be more friendly to families with young kids who need a more enclosed environment. Suggestions were made for incorporating materials from the current Whistlestop interior or using them as inspiration for new design elements. Additionally, ideas were proposed for a welcome center or similar civic space in the lobby area. Concerns about sufficient space allocation for customer waiting areas were voiced. Comments highlighted the importance of activating the plaza, "ownership" of outdoor space by retail establishments, accessible design, and flexible use of space within the plaza.

Bus Shelters: CDAG members representing bus riders favored longer shelters along Tamalpais Ave. that optimize around protection from the elements with ample seating, while other members favored smaller shelters that provided space for additional street trees. Some participants also emphasized that a large shelter, particularly on the eastern block, should serve as a significant architectural statement that serves as a signature welcoming feature for downtown San Rafael.

Shelter Materials: Participants expressed a desire for a structure that has an airy feel and is not overly heavy. Wood was favored for its humanizing and biophilic qualities, aligning with Marin County's identity. The warmth of wood was appreciated, while metal was considered contemporary but fitting for a larger city. The need for shelter and the potential for solar collection were also mentioned, emphasizing the importance of materials that reflect Marin County's character while considering practicality and aesthetics. A bus rider also highlighted the importance of weather protection, including the need to avoid exposed metal that becomes hot and uncomfortable to touch.

Plaza Materials: Members expressed interest in local materials where possible, while considering both practicality and aesthetics. Ease of maintenance, functionality, stormwater management, local brick, and flexibility of hardscape materials were identified as important considerations. Preferences leaned towards earthy colors and traditional materials that ideally also limit heat absorption. There was appreciation for wood benches, benches with arm rests that limit the ability to lie down, and age-friendly design opportunities. Large trees was also favored, with a potential consideration for vertical vegetation like vines.

