

SAN RAFAEL TRANSIT CENTER COMMUNITY DESIGN ADVISORY GROUP

MEETING #2
WHAT WE HEARD REPORT

JULY 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 (the District).

CDAG will meet four times over a six month period during concept design. The second meeting was held in July 2023, and was an opportunity to expand on the conversations initiated in the first meeting 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 #2

CDAG Meeting #2 was held on July 26, 2023, at San Rafael City Hall. Golden Gate Bridge District General Manager Denis Mulligan and San Rafael Mayor Kate Colin both offered opening remarks. Participants reviewed highlights from CDAG Meeting #1 and offered input on “big moves” that drive design thinking. DIALOG used Miro, an online whiteboard tool, to track comments. The group discussed various design elements such as pedestrian flow, bicycle parking, street furniture, landscape design, the options of tables and chairs versus benches, where the building and plazas could be in relation to one another and bus shelter size and position. Some comments were provided following the meeting from a CDAG member who was not available to attend.

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.

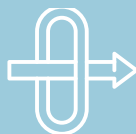
Project Vision and Big Moves



**Consolidate Transit Center
Improve bike & pedestrian safety**



Create gateway to downtown San Rafael



Retain sense of historic rail building



Sustainability and Resilience



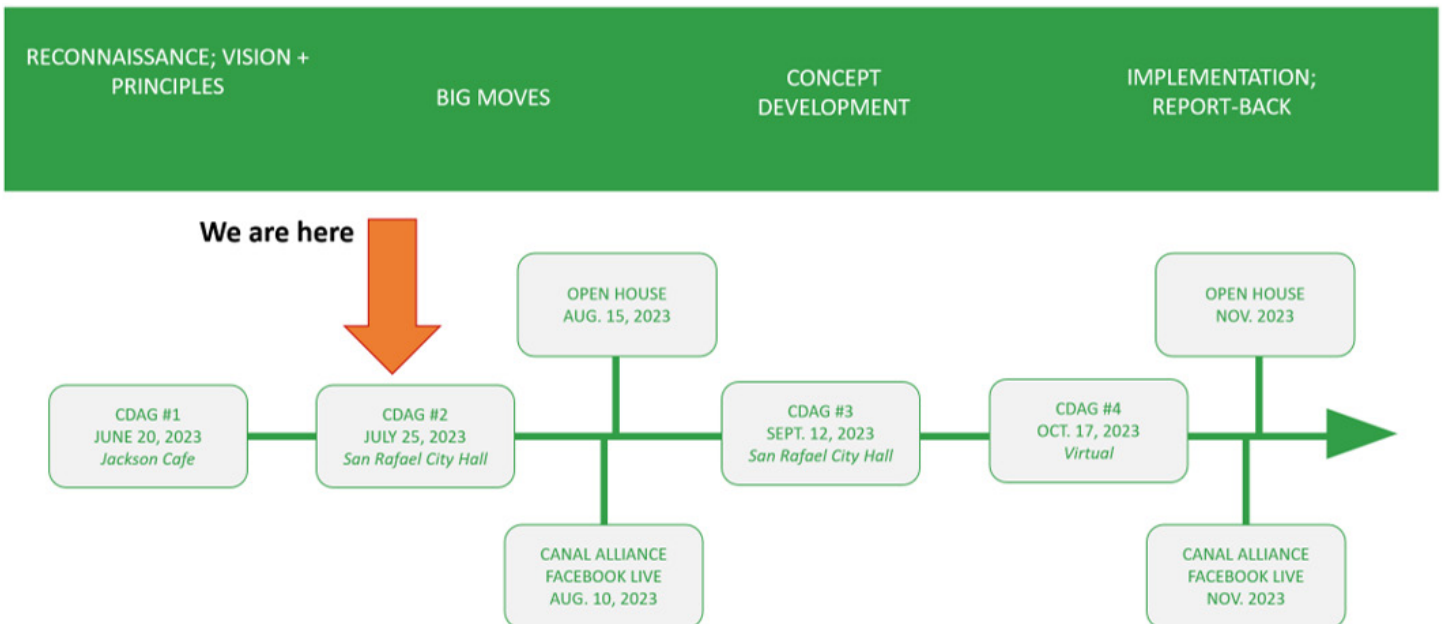
Created by Lemon Liu



Outcomes of the meeting will help to guide design decisions. Additional input will be requested at two upcoming events in August 2023: a Canal Alliance Facebook Live Event in Spanish, and a public open house in English and Spanish. A conceptual design for the site will be presented at the third CDAG meeting in September 2023.

The following content reflects comments made during the CDAG meeting and/or immediate follow up responses. Comments are presented without edits except where useful for clarity or context.

Timeline



Improve Bike and Pedestrian Safety

What destinations and adjacencies should we be thinking about?

- *4th street corridor very important for connections W-E. This is the most challenging connection to bring people from the East of the site.*
- *Tamalpais main connection N- S*
- *People coming from Canal District will come from 4th St.*
- *Increase pedestrian safety*
- *Unsafe crossing for pedestrians*
- *Lack of bathroom*
- *Tamalpais pedestrian crossing is always blocked by taxis. Always people jaywalking*
- *Opportunity for placemaking on Tamalpais corridor*
- *Circulation of passengers - map flows of pedestrians*
- *Envision Tamalpais as a plaza extending pavement to street - causing cars to slow down, increase safety*
- *Connection to Tamalpais north is awkward - need to make it safe and intuitive*

What kind(s) of bicycle storage is needed?

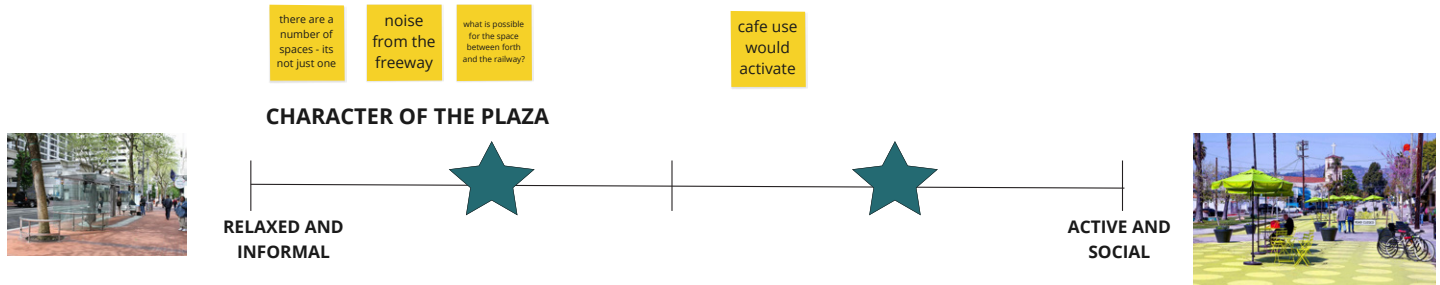
- *Bike parking available for minimum half day - 2-4 hours*
- *Short and long term are needed*
- *Short term spaced well, well lit, where people pass by*
- *The bike storage can be integrated into the building*
- *19th St. precedent*
- *Bike lockers can accommodate a variety of bike types (cargo bikes, etc.)*
- *Programming to support valet / could support bathrooms*
- *Consolidated bike parking is preferred*
- *Inverted U racks could be distributed*
- *Free? or low cost*
- *No need for e-bike charging*



This long term, secure bike storage system was identified as a useful precedent for the Transit Center.

Urban Gateway

CDAG members reviewed key topics related to the urban gateway experience. Each bar offers a range of different options. In some cases, the concepts at each end of the bars represent discreet choices while others represent a continuum of choices. The stars indicate general consensus around the types of choices that the CDAG members prefer. Multiple stars on a single bar indicate multiple sets of preferences for a given topic. The content of the digital post-it notes is copied as text below.

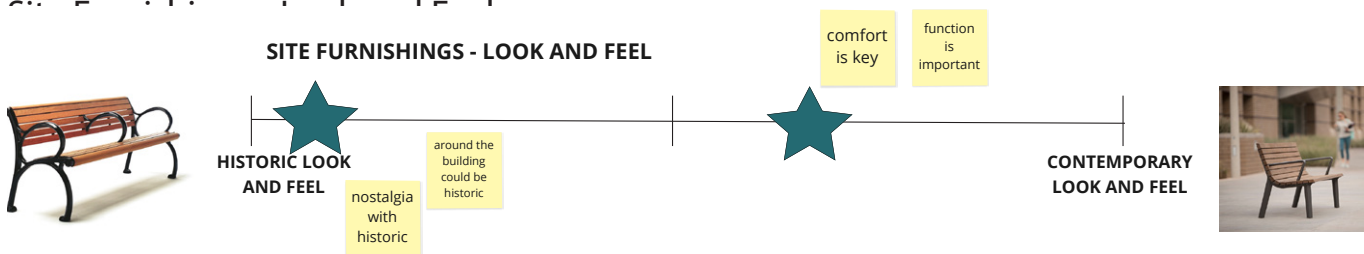


Character of the Plaza

Relaxed and informal or active and social?

- *There are a number of spaces - not just one*
- *Noise from the freeway*
- *What is possible for the space between Fourth St. and the railway?*
- *Cafe use would activate*

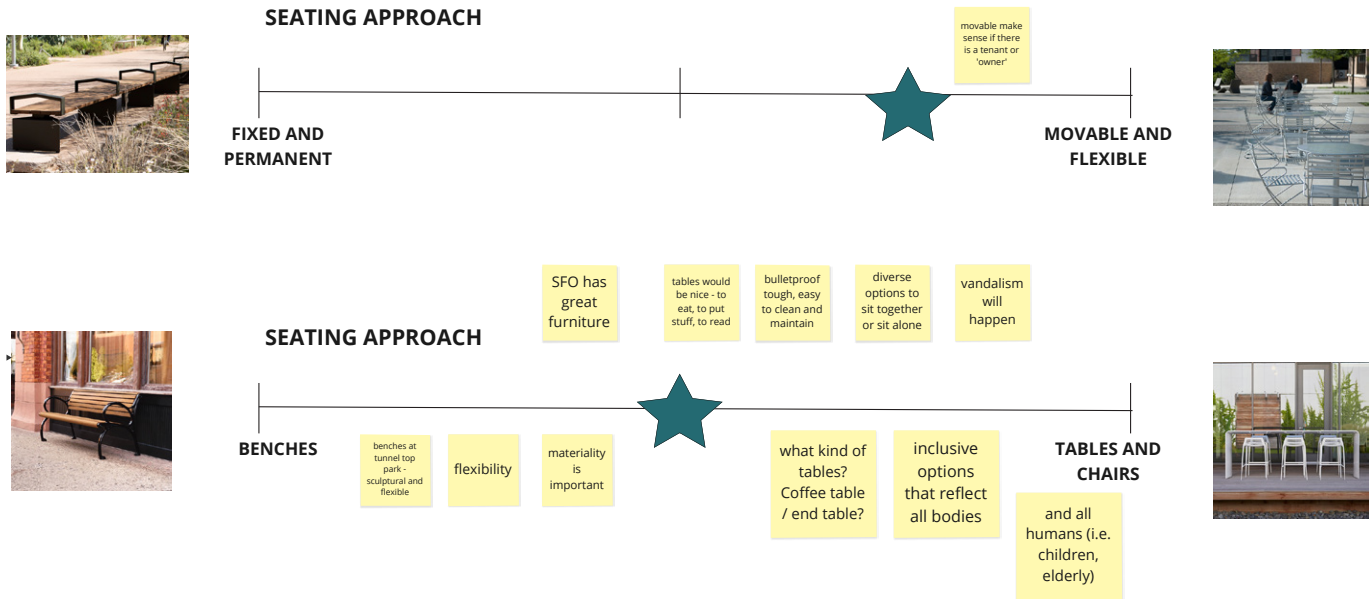
SITE FURNISHINGS - LOOK AND FEEL



Historic look and feel or contemporary look and feel?

- *Nostalgia for historic*
- *Around the building could be historic*
- *Comfort is key*
- *Function is important*
- *Curved black metal garbage bins (not concrete) to match benches*
- *Recycling containers, clearly marked*

Seating Approach



Fixed and permanent or movable and flexible? Benches or tables and chairs?

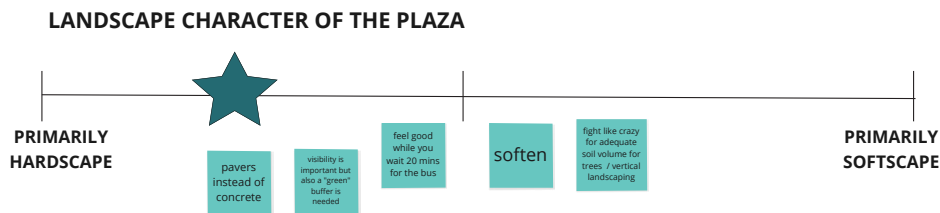
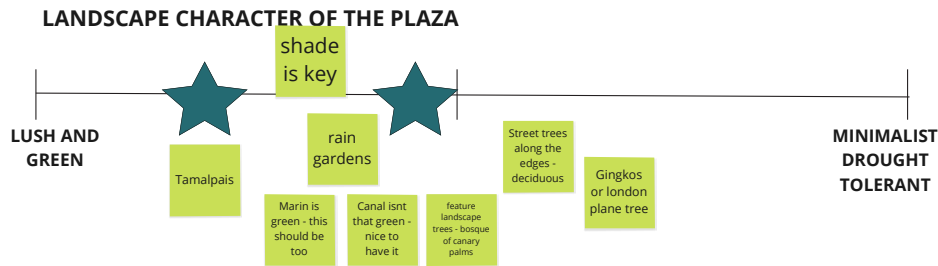
- *Movable seating works well if there is a tenant or 'owner' such as a cafe*
- *SFO has great furniture*
- *Tables would be nice - to eat, to put stuff, to read*
- *Bulletproof tough, easy to clean and maintain*
- *Vandalism will happen*
- *Flexibility*
- *Fixed metal benches with dividers to discourage sleeping*
- *Several small picnic tables to match the benches, again benches with dividers*
- *Benches at Tunnel Top park - sculptural and flexible*
- *Materiality is important*
- *What kind of tables? Coffee table? End table?*
- *Inclusive options that reflect all bodies*
- *Inclusive options that reflect all humans (i.e. children, elderly)*

Program for the Plaza



- *A safe and cool space for students*
- *Desirable spaces between Whistlestop and 4th St.*
- *Bus stops are bus stops. Most of the energy around Whistlestop*
- *A place not just to hang out, but to get your coffee*
- *What if it all reads as public space?*
- *Mill Valley - can we accomplish the same or better?*
- *Welcoming*

Landscape Character of the Plaza



Lush and green or minimalist and drought tolerant?

- *Tamalpais should be lush and green*
- *Shade is key*
- *Marin is green - this should be too*
- *Rain gardens*
- *Canal isn't that green - nice to have it*
- *Street trees along the edges - deciduous*
- *Plantings should be native to attract pollinators like butterflies. Shows San Rafael's priority for environmental care*

Comments on tree species

- *Feature landscape trees - bosque of canary palms*
- *Gingkos or London Plane trees*
- *Plant many large London Plane trees around the plaza - at least 20. We need shade and London Plane's (Sycamore) big leaves provide it. It's a signature species for many of the neighborhoods (Gerstle Park, Dominican). It's very pretty. Used in Paris and London because of their beauty and shade.*
- *No ornamental trees or trees with tiny leaves. They provide little shade and are dwarfed by large adjacent structures.*

Primarily hardscape or primarily softscape?

- *Pavers instead of concrete*
- *Visibility is important but also a "green" buffer is needed*
- *Feel good while you wait 20 minutes for the bus*
- *Soften*
- *Fight like crazy for adequate soil volume for trees / vertical landscaping*

Retain Aspects of Whistlestop Building

What opportunities do you see for ground floor activity? What does the building look and feel like?

- *Flexibility on the interior of the building*
- *Mix of contemporary architecture/structure and the existing building*
- *Do not try to replicate the historic style*
- *Arches can be incorporated into a contemporary design*
- *1944 entrance can become the transit entrance - keep a part of the 1944 building*
- *Bathrooms and kitchen*
- *Depot should serve as info and transit center. There should be a counter for transit information. At the counter, there might be a Chamber/BID person for business info and someone from an environmental group to advise hikers, bikers.*
- *Ticket machines inside*
- *Consider installing an ATM*
- *Have QR codes for transit and history information*
- *Digital running sign with bus and train info*

Additional opportunities to celebrate the history of the site and the City of San Rafael

- *One brown Heritage signpost indicating direction to historic buildings in SR such as the depot, Historic B St. downtown, historic San Rafael High School, historic San Rafael Film Center - consult SR Heritage for help*
- *QR code to a tour of historic buildings in town*
- *Brown historic marker in front of the depot*
- *Self guided audio/cell phone tour of depot. Have Heritage write it*



1935



After 1951; before 1978

Sustainability and Resilience

What is the sustainability “story” or message for the project?

- *Not necessary to overtly advertise that it is green*
- *The building doesn't have to be a billboard*

Additional sustainability comments

- *No grass, plenty of planters with drip irrigation*



Canary palm, ginkgo, and London plane trees were all identified by CDAG members as potential options for the site.

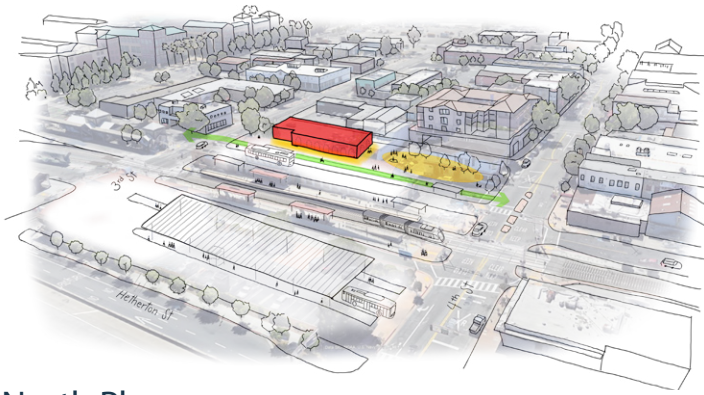
Additional Transit Center Comments

- *Efficient*
- *Provide transit info & access*
- *City must empty bins #5 & 6 daily**
- *Clear signage with simple conservative lettering. No one should get lost!*
- *QR code posted for in depth digital map to area businesses (Chamber/BID help)*
- *Posted schedules of all bus routes with QR codes for updates*
- *In central location: digital sign that announces bus, train arrivals*
- *Bathrooms are cleaned sparkling clean several times daily + regular patrol by transit people**

**These items are not within the scope of the transit center design, but are noted for documentation purposes.*

Building Massing and Position on the Site

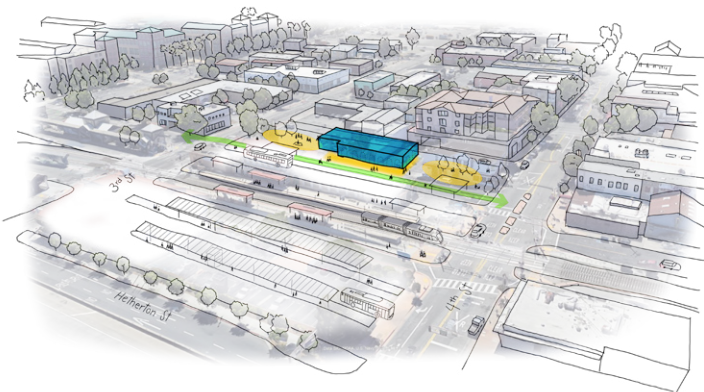
CDAG members were shown three positions of the building within the plaza space: one with the plaza at the north end, one with the building in the center of the block and smaller plazas on both sides, and one with the plaza at the south end. The group identified benefits of each.



North Plaza

Plaza Location Comments

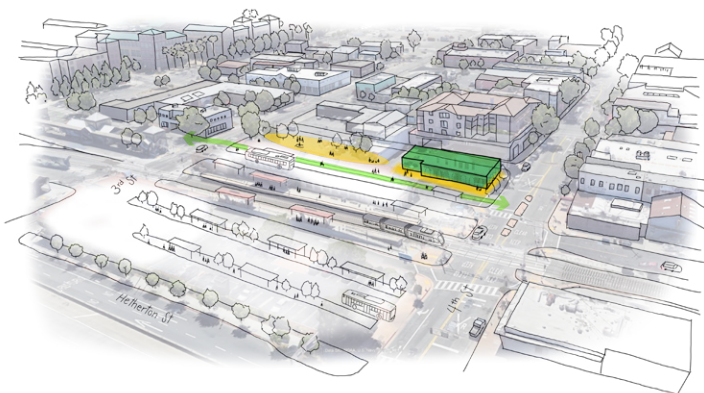
- *Like the main plaza to the north but keep some setback to the south - a mini plaza*
- *Importance of the scale of the plaza*
- *Orienting space away from 4th St. is not good*
- *3rd St. is noisy*
- *Programming/activation of the plaza will be key to success of the space*
- *Maintain the footprint/proportion of the 1929 building*



Building in the Center, Distributed Plaza

Additional Comment

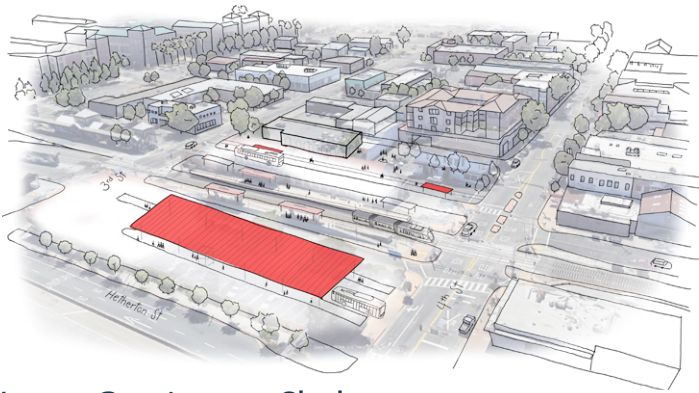
- *Update the drawing to include the 4th St. Tavern*



South Plaza

Bus Shelter Size and Position

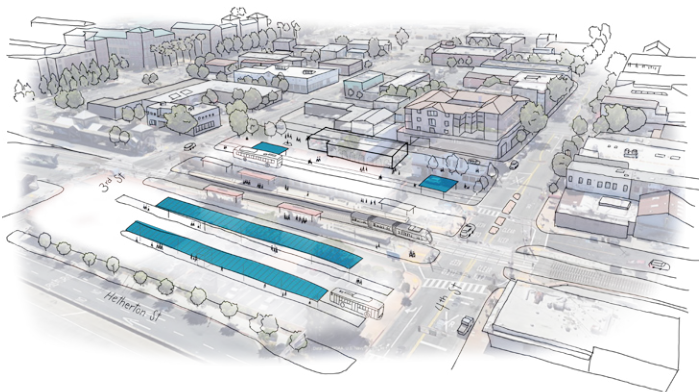
CDAG members were shown three sizes and positions for the bus shelters for the bus bays located east of the train tracks. The first option is one large shelter that spans across bus lanes and bus bays. The second option is separate bus shelters that each span the full length of bus bays on opposite sides of the bus lanes. The third option is separate small bus shelters at each bus bay with trees planted between the shelters. The group suggested that the third option for smaller shelters not be brought forward at the public open house.



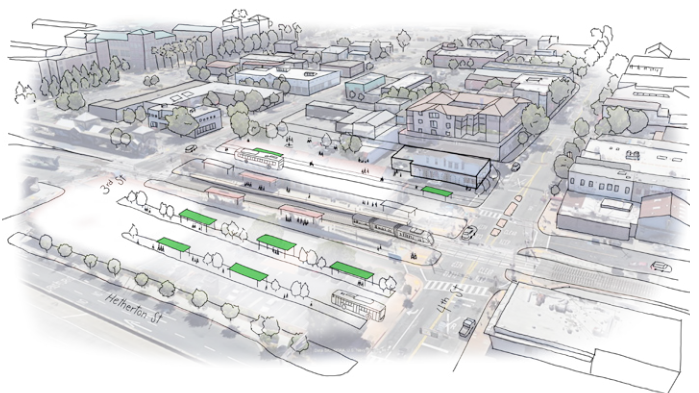
Large Contiguous Shelter

Bus Shelter Comments

- *Large, contiguous shelter is the preferred option*
- *Also provide a large shelter on Tamalpais side*
- *Opportunity for an interesting structure*
- *The more shade the better*
- *Smaller shelters do not accommodate transferring riders*
- *Weather protection is important - protection from the small shelters isn't enough*



Two Linear Shelters



Multiple Smaller Shelters

Summary of What We Heard

Pedestrian connections: Tamalpais (north/south) and 4th St. (east/west) are critical connections. Bringing people in east of the site will be challenging and will mostly be via 4th St. Improving pedestrian safety is essential.

Bicycle storage: A variety of bicycle storage would be useful, including both short and long term options. Most bike parking should be centralized but some inverted U racks could be distributed.

Plaza uses: The plaza should have multiple spaces; some would be relaxed and informal while others could be active and social. The plaza is both a space to wait for the bus and a space to hang out.

Site furnishings: Site furnishings around the Whistlestop building should have a historic, nostalgic look and feel. Furnishings further from Whistlestop could be more contemporary (while complementing the historic elements). Comfort, function, durability and flexibility are important. Options should include benches and tables and be inclusive of all bodies, abilities, and ages.

Landscape design: Greenery is important, with an emphasis on large shade trees such as London Plane trees that provide a balance of visibility and buffer from noisy streets and freeway.

Rail Depot: The historic elements of the Whistlestop building should be celebrated. New construction should demonstrate sensitivity to and alignment with the historic elements, but not try to replicate the historic style. Ground floor activity should support transit users, e.g. restrooms.

Sustainability: Sustainability should be integrated throughout the site but this does not need to be overtly obvious to visitors.

Building and plaza position: There are benefits to multiple plaza locations, though at least some of the plaza should be at the north end of the site, adjacent to 4th St.

Bus shelter size and position: A large shelter is preferred both at the east site and along Tamalpais. Protection from the elements is important. Bus canopies can become a signature gateway element.

