



# City of Rohnert Park PRESS RELEASE

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## **For Immediate Release**

### **Rohnert Park City Council Reviews Design Options for Future Downtown**

**Rohnert Park, CA (Mar. 3, 2023)** – The City of Rohnert Park undertaking an exciting project: Downtown Rohnert Park! Creating a vibrant downtown is one the highest priorities for residents.

In Apr. 2022, the city purchased its future downtown site at the corner of Rohnert Park Expressway and State Farm Drive. Since then, city staff have met with developers and planning experts to explore what is feasible for a new downtown. The city reviewed several downtown concepts to ensure plans aligned with residents’ interests. Earlier proposals had challenges like expensive parking garages and unneeded office space, particularly after COVID-19.

Rohnert Park staff is also looking at the potential to add more retail stores at the site. Even before COVID-19, it was challenging to attract retailers as so many exist already. There was also a growing use of online buying. The analysis suggests that the downtown site could support up to 140,000 square feet of retail and restaurant space—about the size of a typical Costco store. While the analysis is encouraging, attracting new retail is likely to be the most challenging part of creating a downtown.

The city is placing high importance on its “look and feel” and intends to meet the desire for a walkable place with new food, art, and beverage establishments and interesting public spaces. It will feature interconnected streets, pocket parks and a central green space. It will also provide downtown residential living. Buildings will blend together—regardless of whether the building is a two-bedroom apartment, a hot new restaurant or a fun retail business. People and the environment will be the center of downtown instead of automobiles.

It will include:

- **Market rate housing units (300 to 375):** As with all of Sonoma County and California, there needs to be more housing to help moderate prices and make it possible for folks such as teachers, nurses and firefighters to live in the community. Adding market rate housing will help to meet this need. It will also allow the city to sell part of the property to a developer. The proceeds will help to fund other exciting aspects of downtown. The new units will most likely be townhouses and/or apartments.

- **Affordable housing units (100 to 125):** Increasing affordable housing is a statewide requirement. In fact, the state will not allow downtown development without providing significant amounts of affordable housing, with at least 25% of the units available to those with lower incomes. Adding housing, particularly affordable housing, increases the supply and is part of the solution to homelessness.
- **New retail and restaurants:** Dining and retail are among the highest priority for Rohnert Park residents.
- **Hotel:** Hotels attract customers for shops and restaurants that will support the downtown. They also generate taxes from visitors; they receive over \$4 million per year in hotel taxes to fund services for residents.
- **Parks and green spaces:** Residents will be able to enjoy outdoor spaces for a wide range of activities. It is anticipated to be a place for community events in what will be the heart of Rohnert Park.

One unfortunate issue in recent months is that some of the trees on the property are in poor health. Rohnert Park expects that 33 trees will need to be removed to ensure the public's safety when on the property. The city was not pleased that the prior owner cut down so many trees before deciding to not proceed with the project and will remove trees only when absolutely necessary. The city's arborist has determined that 20 Coast Redwoods have declined beyond recovery and will need to be removed at some point. Plenty of new trees will be planted as the downtown is built.

While residents are eager to see construction begin, several steps must first be taken. The next one, which the City Council will consider at their March 14 meeting, is to pass a resolution to comply with the state [Surplus Lands Act](#) and commits to building affordable housing on the property. This is the state law that requires cities to make housing a priority for vacant public land.

Another step is to remove the approvals for the project proposed by Laulima, the prior owner. The city is not going to build the Laulima project because it was deemed unfeasible by the Laulima. Removing the approvals allows the city to "clear the table" for what is to come. Rohnert Park will also need to set aside an additional acre or so to expand their corporation yard next to the site, which houses many Public Works functions.

In the coming months, the City of Rohnert Park will seek public input on an important part of the project: The name for the future downtown. Residents will have an opportunity to share their thoughts on that topic in the future.

The city is already working to develop a request for qualifications and proposals from qualified development partners. Rohnert Park is looking for developers who will focus on market and affordable housing, open spaces and parks and building retail and restaurants that residents have asked for.

For more information regarding downtown updates and progress, visit the [city's website](#).

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