

Public input key to success of Fairfield downtown plan

By [Brian Miller and Karl Dumas](#) May, 2017

Million Thai Cuisine had its official grand opening and ribbon-cutting ceremony Wednesday, and a fine feast of Thai appetizers and Pad Thai was served to an appreciative crowd of customers. Million Thai is located at 825 Texas St. (under the arch) in a downtown Fairfield building that has received a complete makeover.

Million Thai Cuisine is the first in what we hope is a new wave of restaurants and retail establishments in downtown Fairfield, joining other locally owned restaurants like Crush and Evelyn's Big Italian as well as longtime anchors of downtown like China Palace and Joe's Buffet.

Restaurants are one of the elements in an appealing, successful downtown business district – and a key objective in the new Heart of Fairfield Plan.

With adoption May 2 of the Heart of Fairfield Plan, the City Council selected a vision for the Heart of Fairfield focused on a more dynamic downtown and West Texas Street corridor.

The plan was developed with extensive public outreach and a diverse range of views and concerns. For example, the owner of the Million Thai Cuisine building reached out to city staff to discuss design concepts envisioned in the specific plan prior to designing the new facade. The resulting facade improvement exhibits characteristics that we hope can be repeated in the downtown area.

Public input was vital to developing the specific plan, and the continued interest in the Heart of Fairfield shown by the attendance at the Fairfield Main Street Association film event last month shows how important a vital, prosperous downtown is to the residents of Fairfield.

Now, the real hard part begins: implementing the plan.

One of the first steps in implementing the plan is finalizing the zoning regulations that will guide new construction and land uses in the Heart of Fairfield. While the Heart of Fairfield Plan itself contains design standards, these guidelines must be adapted and incorporated into the official Zoning Ordinance.

The Zoning Ordinance is the comprehensive ordinance that defines permitted land uses and the specific development standards that will be applied when reviewing a new building proposal. Zoning addresses issues like building setbacks, height, massing, open space and landscaping requirements, separation and parking. The zoning for the Heart of Fairfield will incorporate the design concepts and guidelines adopted in the plan as well as addressing specific issues in the city's existing zoning, where appropriate.

As part of this project, the specific land uses which will be permitted in the plan area will be an important issue. In much of the area, significant changes to the permitted land uses are not anticipated. The blocks of downtown south of Texas Street will continue to be residential in character, with the Zoning Ordinance adapting the plan's guidelines to help ensure quality infill development on key sites like the former Sem Yeto property and other vacant and underutilized properties.

For the downtown core, the Heart of Fairfield Plan re-emphasizes the importance of active retail and restaurant uses on Texas Street. This may mean limiting office uses on the first floor of core blocks.

On West Texas Street, the plan encourages a higher density, mixed-use corridor. Rather than traditional strip commercial, the plan envisions more residential development intermixed with neighborhood-serving retail uses. One major change is anticipated to be a de-emphasis on heavier service commercial and automobile-oriented uses. Car sales, auto repair, body shops and drive-thru restaurants will have a lesser role on West Texas Street.

The plan also enables major long-term changes for the blocks near the Suisun City pedestrian bridge. Dubbed the "Mixed Use Transit Oriented Development" area, the plan permits higher density housing with limited office and retail uses. The goal is to attract regional transit users who may find a location near the train station appealing.

Writing the zoning for the Heart of Fairfield is a complicated task, and public input is critical. City staff will conduct a community workshop in early June to discuss the Zoning Ordinance. The focus of the workshop will be on how the land use tables and development standards can help guide development and implement the Heart of Fairfield Plan. Look for specifics of the date and time on the city's website. Or, if you are interested in receiving notice, send an email to bkmiller@fairfield.ca.gov.

Million Thai Cuisine's grand opening was the celebration of a new business, but its new building facade was garnered from a vision developed with valued public input. The forthcoming June meeting concerning the Heart of Fairfield Zoning Ordinance is another opportunity to express your vision.

Economic Notes is an update from Fairfield City Hall written by Brian Miller and Karl Dumas of the Fairfield Planning and Development Department. They can be contacted at 428-7461 or email at kdumas@fairfield.ca.gov or bkmiller@fairfield.ca.gov.