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TOP STORY

Development

Yountville contemplates allowing 3-story buildings downtown

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V Marketplace, a shopping and dining complex off Washington Street, is part of a section of downtown that may be rezoned to allow buildings of up to three stories, according to a draft of a new general plan to guide land use in Yountville.

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YOUNTVILLE — In years to come, things in Yountville may be looking up – literally.

A general plan being drafted by the resort town may give some developers the option to build as high as three floors on a stretch of the west side of Washington Street, in the heart of Yountville’s downtown area.

In a compact commercial district almost fully built out – and heavily devoted to the resorts, restaurants and wine tasting rooms that have spread Yountville’s fame among visitors worldwide – the proposal to grow upward may open up room for housing, shops and office space focusing on residents even as tourism increasingly dominates town life, according to members of a committee helping to draft the new guidebook for local development.

In looking vertically for some of its future growth, Yountville “seeks a diversity of businesses that provide a benefit to the community, such as affordable housing and a mix of retail and services,” the Town Advisory Group, a team of 10 advisers, said in a draft general plan they released last Thursday night at Town Hall.

The possibility of higher construction is one of the key elements of Yountville’s new general plan, which will replace the existing plan adopted in 1992 and pass through several months of review and revisions in public forums scrutinized by various town

commissions. A vote by the Zoning and Design Review Board, Yountville's land-use authority, may take place as early as February, with the Town Council possibly making the final decision in early March.

The building height policy pondered by the Yountville committee likely would not give developers an automatic right to a third story, but instead base such approvals on a project's community benefit, according to Sandra Liston, the town planning and building director. Local benefits that could clear the way for taller construction may include offices, upstairs housing, and retail and service categories focusing on Yountville's roughly 2,800 residents.

Only the portion of Washington Street from California Drive north to Humboldt Street would be rezoned to allow three stories, and only the street's west shoulder – an area bracketed to its west by Highway 29 and dominated by hotels and the V Marketplace retail-office complex. The existence of large parking lots to the west of Washington makes the district a suitable place to meet unfilled housing and office needs, advisers said in the draft plan.

Authors called on Yountville to carefully study any three-story designs in order to preserve a small-town and easily walkable character – including close attention to setbacks from streets, varied rooflines and facades to reduce bulk, and preserving views of the surrounding wine country and valley hills.

Even in a compact and low-slung downtown, the near-absence of available land compels Yountville leaders to seek new ways to meet local needs, according to Whitney Diver McEvoy, president of the Yountville Chamber Commerce and one of the general plan advisers.

Business owners with the chamber “were excited for the opportunity for the combination of housing on second and third floors for our workforce, and office space on the second and third floors, which we desperately need in Yountville,” she said after the meeting.

“We’re pretty much built out; the only option is to go up – while maintaining the historic and aesthetic character people expect of Yountville.”

Other proposals in the new general plan include allowing the addition of second floors to Vista Condominiums’ 15 one-story dwellings near Vista Drive, as well as mapping six Washington Street parcels between Creek and Pedroni streets to permit live-work buildings with housing on the upper floor and businesses – but not alcohol sales – below.

What’s next

Oct. 13: Open house, noon to 4 p.m. at the Yountville Community Center, 6516 Washington St.

Information

Yountville draft general plan: envisionyountville.com

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Howard Yune covers the city of Napa and the town of Yountville. He has been a reporter and photographer for the Register since 2011, and previously wrote for the Marysville Appeal-Democrat, Anaheim Bulletin and Coos Bay (Oregon) World.

