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Dublin plans for denser downtown

San Francisco Business Times - by [Blanca Torres](#)

The City of Dublin is working on a specific plan to encourage denser development in its downtown core — a 284-acre area city officials believe is ripe for more multi-family housing, retail and transit-oriented projects near a new BART station.

The city is still refining the details of the plan, but expects to adopt it next summer, said Linda Maurer, who handles economic development for Dublin.

According to city documents, the existing plan for the downtown allows for more density than previous zoning rules, but current policies have not spurred the development the city wanted to see. Currently, the downtown area has about 2.5 million square feet of built space.

Dublin secured a \$200,000 grant from the Bay Area's regional Metropolitan Transportation Commission to pay for the specific plan and complete an environmental impact report that will clear a hurdle for future projects.

The plan will also outline new policies including zoning by district versus zoning by land parcel so that property owners and developers won't have to seek individual approvals for uses.

Another component of the new plan is to determine how much cumulative space can be developed on each parcel and then create a "development pool" with the space that is unbuilt.

If the property owners want to build beyond their allotted space, they can get space from the in pool in exchange for paying the city or providing a community benefit, such as building a park.

A staff report on the plan states: "By utilizing the development pool concept the city will ensure that the additional square footage development potential is available to those that will use it rather than assigning it to a specific property which may never use it."

The "development pool" is a different approach than most other cities take, said Frederick Etzel, a professor of city and regional planning at the [University of California, Berkeley](#).

"Cities set the zoning envelope and if you want to exceed that, you have to go through a general plan amendment or zoning change and impose impact fees," he said. "The twist (in Dublin) is that you have to go through the entitlement process and then pay for the excess density. ... It's a different mechanism."

Being able to go directly to a "development pool" could make it easier for property owners depending on how the city sets the base development densities per parcel, said Dan Muller, an attorney with [Miller Starr Regalia](#) in Walnut Creek who specializes in land use issues.

"From a developer's perspective, the devil is in the details," he said. "What developers don't like is another layer of exactions or conditions they have to pay to (complete a project) that just adds layers and layers of cost."

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