

A Vision for San Anselmo



Observations on Positioning and Branding San Anselmo for the Future

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Introduction

In mid-2015, San Anselmo's Economic Development Committee (EDC) developed an action plan to establish finite goals and objectives to advance programs to help revitalize the Town's economic well-being. The Action Plan defines two major goals.

Goal 1: Attract, retain and nurture local businesses.

Goal 2: Facilitate the development and targeting of new businesses and the revitalization of existing businesses through education and communications about best practices in navigating the entire approval process.

Along with these goals, the EDC identified the objectives that define how the goals will be achieved. The objectives were assigned to sub-committees who are taking responsibility for developing plans and programs to implement the goals.

A first step for the sub-committees is to clearly understand the San Anselmo brand and determine if there is any need or desire to change it. The sub-committee charged with examining the brand started by exploring the Town's current brand to clearly define it and create an actionable vision for the future. Their process includes 3 steps

1. SWOT Analysis to gauge the Town's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. A fundamental business planning tool.
2. Inventory of current Brand Attributes. Characteristics and factors that contribute to the Town's vision
3. Draft Vision statement that captures the desired brand position.

This report presents the sub-committee's findings to date and invites review and comments from the entire ECD and other interested parties.

SWOT Analysis

A SWOT analysis is a benchmarking process used to inventory all internal and external attributes of a place, both positive and negative. It delineates the internal strengths that can have a favorable influence and potentially be incorporated into a positive presentation of the Town as well as weaknesses that must be overcome. The analysis identifies external opportunities and threats that are beyond the Town's control but can potentially affect its viability.

The SWOT analysis also identifies values and virtues of the Town that can be the focus for physical, marketing and promotional improvements and changes as well as deterrents and obstacles to the Town's potential success. The SWOT analysis helps identify the attributes that are the DNA of the brand and drive the way the San Anselmo revitalization program will be codified.

The following SWOT attributes were identified by the sub-committee.

Strengths

Strengths are the attributes of the Town that make it different and special.

- Beautiful, picturesque and peaceful place to live, work and play.
- An authentic ‘hometown’.
- Residents love and are passionate about the town and about Marin.
- Residents care and are engaged.
- Great schools
- Strong and supportive community environment – family, friends, neighbors, peers.
- Safe
- Great small town appeal
- Good housing mix
- Geographic proximity to SF
- Accomplished population base in terms of demographics, education and income.
- Physical plan
- Natural context – Baldy, Red Hill, Mt Tam
- Location/access – major transit corridors
- Scale
- Streetscapes, avenues, ‘main street’
- Highly visible with major thoroughfares transecting the middle of the three business districts
- Parks
- Seminary
- Upscale demographics
- Town management and staff
- Events
- Heritage and history
- Distinct downtown area that is separated enough from surrounding town to feel like its own place (vs. ongoing sprawl and many commercial areas of San Rafael)
- Three distinct business hubs – San Anselmo Avenue, Greenfield Avenue and Red Hill.
- Pervasive views (seminary, town hall, Mt Tam, Baldy, Red Hill)
- Surrounded by green hills
- Good inventory of historic buildings from both turn of century and 1950s
- Home of ILM, Star Wars, Indiana Jones, etc.
- Wide boulevards in and through town
- Charm

Weaknesses

Weaknesses are limitations and/or problems that negatively affect the Town's capabilities and success.

- Empty shopfronts give down-at-heel feel; Business turnover (esp. poor business/financial planning)
- Significant traffic through major corridors
- Difficult parking, limits desirability of “going into town.” Limitations on parking will continue to discourage visits of people coming in from out of town.
- Limited commercial building stock that is suitable for a variety of businesses
- Layers of regulatory oversight that present barriers for new business development
- No real anchor businesses that establish an identity for San Anselmo – raising the question of “what attracts people to the retail/office/restaurant combination in San Anselmo?”
- Limited public or private investment in the town business infrastructure, needed for a healthy business environment.
- Needs that exceed budgets
- Lack of sufficient awareness by non-residents
- Restaurants without liquor licenses.
- No distinct feel or uniform character to signage, architectural styles, landscaping and other infrastructure.
- Increasing housing density, especially number of apartment buildings, is making town feel less “homey” and increasingly transient.
- Very limited opportunities to do things at night.

Opportunities

Conditions not caused by the Town but that impact its success. They may be ever present or point in time and are factors that can be capitalized upon in the economic development program.

- Better business retention, increased business engagement with community/town, increased economic development; better utilized spaces.
- There is more that can be offered through programming and events such as larger Farmer's market/ live music.
- The changing demographics (younger families) and economic base in San Anselmo is strong if the interests and needs of the residents can be more directly addressed by the town retail mix.
- The town is an attractive and interesting place if a more cohesive imaging and marketing plan can be developed.
- Solve the parking problem – find the resources to improve parking options.
- The downtown is attractive but needs upgrading.
- Devote resources to improving the public spaces.
- Encourage private property and building owners through incentives to improve their building images and conditions.
- Town is a canvass for all sorts of programs and improvements.
- San Anselmo can be a go to Marin County destination.
- “Maker” and “artisan” trends are growing with great interest in local, organic, sustainable businesses and products – both food and other.
- Current Bay Area economic strength and growth.
- Growth of jobs in San Rafael (biotech industry) and elsewhere in Bay Area is lifting whole area.
- SMART light rail will improve public transit and hopefully lessen traffic throughout North Bay.

Threats

Conditions beyond the Town's creation that have negative impact. These are factors that must be mitigated if possible.

- Other Marin towns, or online stores, are taking business from San Anselmo. People leaving or not shopping because opportunities are not optimal - they do not realize what is available or they are not interested in what is here.
- Other towns have businesses that are more interesting to Marin residents.
- The economic base for business in San Anselmo is very limited. Can businesses survive other than those that are “vanity” businesses?
- Flood exposure deters potential merchants and businesses.
- While restaurants contribute to the tax base restaurants are not sustainable as standalone businesses.
- Macro threats – economy, weather/floods, and earthquakes.
- Competing towns and retailers.
- Price of homes.
- Increasing traffic makes commuting to city, East Bay more difficult.
- Traffic during rush hour is increasingly bad.

Brand Attributes

Positioning San Anselmo

Codifying San Anselmo's brand begins with an exploration of the attributes that make it different and special. The vision for a town can be best described as the dream for what the place is to become. Vision defines the town in terms of the following attributes:

- Physical qualities
- Environmental conditions
- Sociological dynamics
- Character
- Values
- Quality of life
- Economic Promise
- Commitment to execution

Physical Qualities

Describe the Town's compelling physical features including location, plan, building attributes, architecture and design vernacular and other elements of the built and natural environment.

- Location/access – major transit corridors; Connected and enhanced via bus to ferry and planned train service, San Rafael transit hub
- Town located along three axes that meet at the Hub: SFD towards Ross, SFD towards Fairfax and Redhill towards San Rafael
- Great small downtown feel that is easily walkable from the main residential areas.
- Eclectic architecture
- A great classic residential ambiance with architecture dominated by Arts and Crafts period bungalows, with pockets of Spanish-revival and California brown shingle homes.
- Commercial architecture is a mix of Victorian (Cheda Building), Mission revival (Town Hall), mid-century (Three Cycles, Flamingo), and contemporary California (Redhill shopping center).
- Classic Carnegie Library, City Hall and Imagination Park create a town classic center.
- Many streetscape structures, arbors, signs (bus stops, etc.) are Arts and Crafts style
- Effective urban plan
- Highly livable scale
- Gracious and generous sized avenues with medians
- A real 'main street'
- Historic seminary
- Compelling views throughout the Town
- Good infrastructure for cyclists

Environmental Conditions

Describe the town's natural and manmade environmental qualities.

- Picturesque, great weather, extraordinary setting and beauty
- Abundance of active and passive parks
- Surrounding mountains and hills with their variety of beautiful vistas
- Natural topographic features – Baldy, Red Hill
- San Anselmo creek as a natural corridor
- Access to outdoor activities (parks, biking, hiking)
- Mature trees and vegetation
- Green ethic in the Town and the County
- Valley setting
- Easy urban-woodlands Interface

Sociological Dynamics

Describe the human conditions and interactions that characterize the town, including the features, amenities and programs that foster the social dynamic.

- Engaged and committed residents. The town is small enough to encourage involvement and give a sense of being able to have an impact
- Residents who are passionate about the Town
- Town events nurture community involvement and interactions
- Residents engage in Town activities contributing to its small town dynamic
- Healthy demographic mix of longtime residents to younger families
- Excellent public and private schools
- Attractive parks that draw people to public spaces.
- Retail and restaurants businesses in downtown that draw for residents to browse, shop and dine.
- Lots of children with a supportive infrastructure
- Attitude of care and concern and respect among residents
- Great library programs
- In addition to downtown, Redhill Center and Greenfield Avenue are catalysts for interaction
- Significant population of Seminary students
- Varied mix of people and occupations

Character

Describe the traits that shape the look and feel of the Town.

- Charming
- Very livable
- Active
- Appealing physical beauty
- Classic small town feel
- Friendly
- Tradition
- Authentic
- Eclectic
- Peaceful
- Energetic
- Historic
- Suburban town
- Quiet
- Safe

Values

Describe the underlying values embraced by the town's residents

- Security
- High quality of life.
- Engagement
- Caring
- Open mindedness
- Traditional
- Unpretentiousness
- Neighborliness
- Health and fitness

Quality of Life

Summarize the experience and value of being a resident/visitor of the town.

- Great schools
- Great location; between SF, East Bay, Napa/Sonoma; mixed into Marin
- Appreciate and enjoy living in an intimate community, with good schools and charming downtown.
- Great walking town
- A town that encourages you to get to know other neighbors, residents, and downtown business owners.
- The right balance between a dynamic Marin town but able to retain classical traditional qualities.
- Good public transportation infrastructure
- All America (in the traditional sense)
- Best of Marin
- Easy
- Convenient
- Comfortable
- Economically challenging (bar is high to get in)
- Close at hand amenities
- Range of retail
- Services and “browsing” shops mainly focused towards women
- Many services for health, fitness and well-being
- Good range of quality restaurants

Economics

The EDC is conducting this evaluation to determine ways to increase the commercial and financial vitality of the Town. The economic vision is expressed in terms of the return on the investment for merchants and business who chose to locate in San Anselmo. It is also measured by the Town’s aspirations to support businesses while deriving the financial benefits of a healthy commercial base.

- Strong economic base with high home values.
- Building owners with potential to improve the character and quality of their properties.
- Opportunity to further support viability of local businesses
- Challenge of hiring and retaining support staff given the cost of living.
- Commitment of Town government to support businesses

Commitment to Execution

The stakeholders' intentions relative to the creation of the vision and implementation of any branding, positioning or other program of changes.

- There appears to be a shared desire to support change but it is unclear whether there is the political will and financial support to actually change.
- Historically, there has been a sense of “we like everything as it is” so this dynamic may ultimately resist change.
- Residents and government want a great town.
- Small, approachable and encouraging Town government and an active and committed Economic Development Committee.
- An active Chamber of Commerce with aligned goals.
- A willing and supportive merchant base.
- Residents who have expressed interest in improving the look and feel of the Town.

The San Anselmo Vision Statement

A complete vision statement captures the essence of the brand attributes and guides the positioning. It provides the road map upon which planning, uses, design, city services, management, construction, communications, marketing and promotions must be measured. The vision statement must be actionable. It must offer guidance for the behavior of everyone associated with the Town and provide the platform for building and telling the Town's story in an accurate and consistent manner.

San Anselmo – A Vision for the Future

The historic Town of San Anselmo lies in a bucolic Marin County valley that follows the flow of San Anselmo Creek and the Ross Valley watershed. It is surrounded a dramatic natural backdrop of imposing hills and mountain. San Anselmo evolved from the railroad corridors that once led north from San Francisco. Early on referred to as “Junction” because of the convergence of multiple rail lines, it remains a key transit hub with connections to south, east and west Marin

History and Legacy

From its origins as a railroad stop and postal station, San Anselmo took its place in the constellation of Marin County towns. Proximity to San Francisco, the Bay and natural and geographic features shaped the distinct

character of each of Marin's towns. Arguably, San Anselmo emerged as the most authentic.

Its logical land plan, with traditional grid streets on the flatlands and winding roads on the hillsides, makes for a mosaic of residences with differing lot configurations, sizes and orientations. The Town's natural setting with abundant natural vegetation and stands of heritage trees creates a highly desirable environment. Even in the face of threats to certain species, preservation of the Town's verdant landscape is of paramount value.

Homes and buildings in San Anselmo are eclectic reflecting 120 years of changing architectural styles and tastes. Most structures are designed with integrity and the mix of vernaculars contribute to the Town's character and charm.

San Anselmo's hometown legacy contributes to its authenticity. San Anselmo Avenue is an archetypal downtown with the physical presence of classic American main streets. Its variety of shops and merchants are interspersed with the Town's civic facilities - city hall, library, fire and police stations. Over the years commercial establishments have evolved to reflect the changing dynamics of consumerism in the country and county. Merchants have sought to accommodate the wants, needs and appetites of the residents. San Anselmo has seen a continuing ebb and flow of commercial enterprises with the changing face of retail trends and competition from surrounding towns.

The Residents

Residents of San Anselmo share a passion for the Town. From the mix of longtime residents who have enjoyed its special heritage, to newer residents attracted by its compelling natural, physical, educational, cultural and social attributes, every citizen is quietly, yet fiercely devoted. While home to residents of all ages, the Town is especially child friendly, with great schools, playgrounds and parks, programs and other amenities. People care intensely about the integrity of the environment, the well-being of their neighbors, the vitality and economic viability and preservation of the Town's legacy,

San Anselmo is relatively homogeneous demographically. Middle to upper class with considerable economic resources, its residents have many choices for their place to call home. With their selection of San Anselmo they have embraced San Anselmo's values and share the desire to preserve all that is good about the Town and contribute to its continuing vivacity.

Perpetuating the Vision

The future of San Anselmo is inexorably tied to its ongoing economic well-being. Success will be measured by the Town's commitment to preserving and celebrating all that is positive while striving for improvements and change that will enrich the quality of life for its residents, businesses and visitors. The San Anselmo vision statement expresses both fact and emotion and is at once passionate and actionable. Actionable means decisions that determine the Town's future can be evaluated by the principles set forth in this statement.

The Built and Natural Environment

- San Anselmo is a town that reveres its legacy while continually looking for ways to improve its built environment.
- San Anselmo is an important Marin County hub, always seeking ways to integrate major transit routes within the fabric of the Town.
- San Anselmo's eclectic downtown character, as well as its diverse architecture and design styles are important and will be preserved, maintained and perpetuated in the built environment.
- San Anselmo's major thoroughfares are a reflection of the Town's natural beauty and should be cultivated as signature features. The broad medians are welcoming points of arrival from the south and east.
- Streetscapes must be cultivated maintained and its street furniture and signage should capture the Town's brand attributes in design and messaging.
- Parks and open space must always be revered as jewels of the Town.
- Committee to add additional points

Sociology, Character, Values and Quality of Life

- San Anselmo values its residents and is committed to providing the best place to live in the Bay area. The Town works hard to offer a welcoming and attractive environment, exceptional support, well-conceived amenities and programs that are engaging and of the highest quality.
- Connection of the residents to the Town is paramount and the Town is committed to understanding the wants and needs of its citizens and doing its best to respond.
- San Anselmo's character and values are inculcated in the attitudes of the Town's residents and staff.
- Committee to add additional points

Economics

- The Town places high value on its merchant's success.
- Residents are proud of the Town and while wanting to preserve its legacy, are happy to attract visitors from near and far.
- The historic precedents for focal businesses such as the Town's antique phase suggest the Town can be positioned as a center for (fitness, restaurants).
- The Town's merchants and landlords are a significant force in the Town's economic success.
- Committee to add additional points

Positioning San Anselmo

Whereas the vision statement is a composite of the attributes that define how San Anselmo wishes to evolve, positioning identifies the propositions that will establish the Town's place in the market. Positioning is the means by which to create a competitive edge for the Town.

Four fundamental strategies can be used to position any real estate asset, including a town. They are:

- Differentiation
- Repositioning
- Finding an unserved or underserved niche
- (Re)Branding

Although these strategies are not mutually exclusive, one of them will usually dominate in determining the manner in which the town is packaged and presented. The dominant and secondary positioning platforms are derived directly from the brand attributes

Differentiation - This is the most common positioning strategy. While there are many issues that differentiate a place, they must directly benefit target audiences. San Anselmo has much to differentiate it from other Marin and Bay Area municipalities. The goals of the EDC are to determine how best to achieve differentiation. It must be noted that in a highly competitive market, too often price is the only point of differentiation.

Repositioning - The process of taking an existing product and turning it into something new or different. Given the accelerating rate of change in our society, repositioning becomes an important development strategy that allows an existing real estate asset (place) to adapt to a new uses in order to continue to be viable. In the case of San Anselmo, this would equate to the likes of re-tenanting a retail center. Redhill has done an admirable job of repositioning the Center.

Niche - Finding an unserved or underserved niche in the market and filling it is another method of positioning. Niches can include very specific types of uses to serve the special needs of distinct buyers and users. Virtually every class of real estate can be positioned according to the niche it occupies. In the case of a town, and specifically San Anselmo, finding and filling a niche is difficult but San Anselmo's precedent as the antique capital of the Bay Area is proof that it can be very successful.

(Re)Branding - While a much broader concept, branding typically builds on visual identification and communications to promote its position. The most often cited definition of branding is “a promise.” The promotion of the place must invoke expectations of the San Anselmo experience and the experience must meet the expectations. To that end, branding of a Town must support the reality of the place. The EDC’s Action Plan and the vision statement are the means towards defining the brand.

Next Steps

The Economic Development Committee will continue to implement the goals and actions called for in the Action Plan. His paper presents additional foundation for the rebranding and positioning of the Town.