

## Historic Railroad Square Business Development Committee Meeting

Tues, April 21, 2026 4 pm 1 hr

Zoom Video recording

<https://us06web.zoom.us/rec/share/aOG78C8gr8UqJ-yuyQ3-ePpu76pzBMeJJSBni4wGXZpdWRPIplv03QJ0Ayn40ULI.018aUrDkhVRstPW1>

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Attendees: A.J. Trombetta (chair), E.D. Amanda Janik, Noelle Hermann (board member), Rafael Rivero (City liaison, Ec Development), Paul Schwartz (Corcoran Icon Properties), guest Jann Eyrich, merchant Mayacamas Home

Press Democrat article: [Santa Rosa Downtown Real Estate Leasing Picks Up Yet Retail Gaps Linger](#)

## Meeting Summary

The committee refined its 2025 strategy to prioritize direct property owner engagement through in-person interviews before launching broader surveys, while continuing broker outreach efforts with realistic expectations about participation rates. Paul Schwartz will develop an initial questionnaire for 1:1 property owner conversations, with findings used to inform a comprehensive survey later. The Visit Santa Rosa stakeholder meeting on May 5th at noon will be attended by committee members, with virtual participation available.

## Decisions Made

- **Property owner outreach approach:** Conduct 5-6 in-person interviews with strategic property owners first, using relationship-based invitations rather than open sign-ups, then develop a broader survey based on initial findings
- **Survey platform:** Use Google Forms instead of SurveyMonkey for property owner surveys, as it saves responses directly to spreadsheets
- **Data accessibility:** [Placer AI analytics](#) are open to all. Encourage broker engagement for listing updates and guest speakers rather than sending a blanket email with placer data to all brokers.
- **Next meeting:** Tentatively scheduled for **June 16th at 3:30 PM** to accommodate committee members' schedules. Let AJ know if change is needed.

## Committee Updates

- **Executive Director transition:** Amanda Janik announced an upcoming transition period; the new ED's skills and focus areas may influence committee priorities

- **New merchant participation:** Jann from Mayacamas Home attended as an observer, expressing interest in SMART train coordination and Visit Santa Rosa meetings

## Real Estate and Leasing Activity

- **145 3rd Street (Sole Desire building):** Cocas Diko taking approximately 4,000 sq ft for storage (not retail); potential books-and-wine bar tenant ("Tina") exploring front portion of 15,000 sq ft building
- **Corcoran Icon Properties ground floor:** Paul Schwartz hosting broker open house with 12 of 35 invited agents attending; space being marketed for ICSC conference in Las Vegas
- **Market conditions:** Very limited office and retail availability in Railroad Square compared to downtown Santa Rosa; Paul's Press Democrat article provides current tenant activity analysis

## Broker Outreach Challenges

Paul Schwartz provided candid assessment of broker engagement barriers: most commercial agents are too busy to participate without tangible benefits, with only 16 of 35 agents responding to multiple invitations for his recent open house. The merchant mixer at Corcoran in March attracted only Corcoran agents, despite A.J.'s extensive outreach to all Railroad Square listing agents. Committee agreed to maintain realistic expectations while continuing targeted outreach with Paul's comprehensive broker database.

## City Resources and Programs

- **Conditional Use Permit (CUP) over-the-counter process:** Going to City Council as consent item May 19th; Rafael Rivero emphasized most brokers remain unaware despite previous presentations
- **Business concierge video:** Economic Development Department filming promotional video May 14-16 featuring Paul Quattrochi and Old Town Furniture as successful local business example
- **Follow-up broker meeting planned:** City scheduling another check-in with approximately 17-18 real estate professionals who attended previous session 10 months ago
- **Parking policy education:** Paul advocating for better communication about new downtown parking policies and costs, which remain widely misunderstood

## Analytics and Data Resources

A.J. consolidated all [2025 Placer AI reports](#) into single shareable document including a visitor origin analysis by zip code, similar to retail customer tracking methods. The analytics help merchants understand foot traffic patterns, peak visit times, and customer demographics for boutique districts like Railroad Square. Scott Adair spoke at the merchant mixer stating that City of Santa Rosa is losing \$1B in retail sales annually to neighboring regions. The Placer data [RRSQ Visits by City of Origin](#) shows where visitors are coming from, and where there is

opportunity to draw more regional and tourism visitors to the district. This data was either generated by or reviewed by the City Economic Development Analyst. Committee agreed to use this data strategically in broker outreach, requiring engagement rather than freely distributing to maintain association value.

## Property Owner Interview Strategy

Paul Schwartz proposed structured approach based on Chamber business interview model: develop 4-6 core questions addressing profitability, desired tenant types, and support needs; conduct private interviews with significant but quieter property owners who may not speak publicly; use findings to create targeted survey for all 30-35 property owners. 54344 Key question identified: "Are your current rents making ownership profitable?"—critical because unprofitable owners cannot invest in Railroad Square improvements. 5 Noelle suggested property owners in other historic districts (Petaluma, Yountville, Sonoma) might share insights about thriving business types near railroad tracks.

- Paul Schwartz to provide comprehensive broker contact list with email addresses for approximately 30-35 commercial agents working Railroad Square market
- Rafael Rivero to share city's list of 17-18 real estate professionals from previous meeting for cross-reference with Paul's database
- Rafael to compile city resource links for inclusion in Railroad Square newsletter to help new business owners
- Amanda Janik to verify and update property owner contact database, comparing against Paul's title company records
- Committee members to identify 5-6 strategic property owners for initial interviews using relationship-based approach to hone larger survey questions

## Visit Santa Rosa Stakeholder Meeting (May 5)

Quarterly meeting typically covers hotel occupancy statistics, visitor demographics, event attendance data, and upcoming regional events—providing broader Santa Rosa context for Railroad Square analytics. Amanda usually attends on behalf of Railroad Square as chamber member but will be on vacation; meeting offers both in-person and virtual attendance options at noon. Paul Schwartz expressed interest in attending or joining virtually; Jan from Mayacamas Home also interested and can attend as Paul's guest since individual store membership not required.

## Marketing and Visibility

- **High-visibility advertising budget:** \$3,500 available under marketing committee for strategic placement (Bohemian, Go Local, sip-and-stroll promotion with QR codes to business opportunities, etc)
- **Best of North Bay recognition:** Seven Railroad Square merchants voted best in Bohemian's North Bay awards
- **Newsletter enhancement:** A.J. planning to add city resource links and permit webinar recordings to reach new business owners not yet on mailing list

- **Retail leakage context:** Scott Adair's presentation noted Santa Rosa losing \$1 billion annually in retail sales to other cities—opportunity to attract those consumers to Railroad Square

## SMART Train Coordination

Jann raised questions about Railroad Square's relationship with SMART train and opportunities to leverage increasing visitor traffic from train passengers. 37 Noelle Herman explained ongoing efforts: SMART representatives have spoken at mixers, southbound service extended to 8:30 PM (versus 11 PM northbound), but advertising costs remain prohibitive for association's budget. 3839 Committee encourages merchants to attend board meetings where SMART coordination is regularly discussed.

## Business Updates

- **Aroma de Cafe name change:** Now operating as "Besame" due to name confusion with Aroma Roasters; location consistently busy with strong customer feedback
- **Railroad Square Music Festival analytics:** A.J. created detailed analysis document from city data, available for committee review but not requiring discussion

## Action Items

- **Paul Schwartz:** Draft initial property owner questionnaire (4-6 questions) in shared Google Drive folder for committee review
- **Paul Schwartz:** Provide comprehensive broker contact list with email addresses to A.J.
- **Paul Schwartz:** Send Press Democrat article analyzing Railroad Square and downtown tenant activity to committee members and Rafael
- **Rafael Rivero:** Share city's real estate professional contact list from previous meeting for database consolidation
- **Rafael Rivero:** Compile city resource links for Railroad Square newsletter
- **A.J. Trombetta:** Email brokers about available Placer AI data, requesting engagement rather than providing unrestricted access
- **A.J. Trombetta:** Follow up with Paul Schwartz on broker list and property owner interview approach
- **Committee members:** Identify strategic property owners for initial interviews using personal relationships

## Open Questions

**Q: What percentage of Railroad Square property owners are absentee landlords?**

A: Amanda estimates 10-15% are absentee, with most being somewhat local (e.g., San Francisco) and only one or two from distant locations like Iowa. Total property ownership spans approximately 30-35 owners across 56 parcels, though Amanda's database needs updating as

ownership information often exists informally in people's knowledge rather than documented records.

**Q: How does the Historic Railroad Square Association connect with SMART train marketing?**

A: The association has invited SMART representatives to merchant mixers, communicated about service extensions (southbound now runs until 8:30 PM), and explored advertising opportunities, but SMART's advertising costs exceed the association's tight budget. Deeper coordination discussions occur at board meetings, which merchants are encouraged to attend. Supervisor Chris Corse, who represents the 3rd district, also serves on SMART's board of directors.