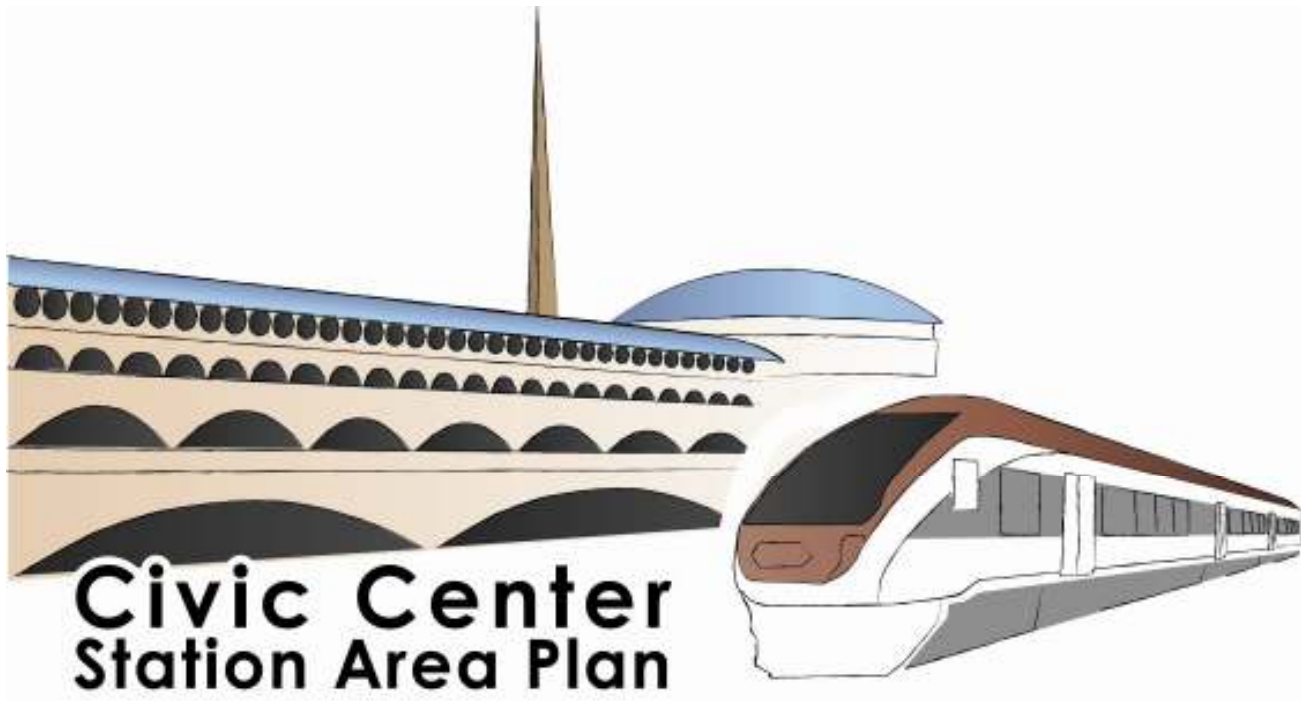


Workshop Summary Report

San Rafael Civic Center Station Area Plan – *Community Visioning Workshop*



*Wednesday March 9th, 2011
San Rafael Corporate Center, 750 Lindero Street*



Acknowledgements

The Civic Center Station Area Plan Advisory Committee includes:

- Damon Connolly, City Council*
- Emily Dean
- Michael Fryer
- Elissa Giambastiani
- Bob Huntsberry, Design Review Board*
- Nicholas Kapas
- Stanton Klose, Golden Gate Bus Passenger Advisory Committee*
- Greg Knell
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- Judy Schriebman, Las Gallinas Valley Sanitary District*
- Jean Starkweather
- Tammy Taylor
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- Craig Thomas Yates

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Many people contributed to the success of this visioning workshop. They include:

- City of San Rafael
 - Linda Jackson, Principal Planner
 - Rebecca Woodbury, Planning Coordinator
 - Stephanie Lovette, Economic Development Coordinator
 - Daniele Petrone, Planning Intern
- Fehr & Peers Transportation Consultants
 - Chris Mitchell, Principal
 - Ben Larson, Senior Transportation Engineer/Planner
- BMS Design Group
 - Barbara Maloney, Partner
 - Joy Glasier, Landscape Architect
- Association of Bay Area Governments
 - Jackie Reinhart, Regional Planner
- Volunteers
 - Sahar Shirazi
 - Cheryl Newman

Workshop attendees included Andrew Chance, Austin Sos, Barry Taranto, Bill Carney, Bob Spofford, Cameron Stewart, Carol Harris, Carolyn Lenert, Charles Harris, Dan Steckline, David Schonbrunn, Elaine Lyford-Nojima, Ericka Erickson, Fani Hanson, Gary Ciolino, Gary Hanson, Greg Andrew, Heather Gass, Jack Beggs, Jack Lee, Janet Franklin, Jannicka Murphy, Jean O'Leary, Joakim Osthus, Joanna Jones, Judy Edmonson, Kathy Clinton, Kay Karchevski, Lori Kennelly, Marge Macris, Pat Kendall, Ray O'Leary, Rissa Shaw, Roger Barber, Ron Albert, Ron Giambastiani, Ron Porter, Scott Stokes, Shirley Fisher, Steve Boyer, Stuart Shepherd, Sue Beittel, Sue Mace, Tyler Grossman, Valerie Taylor, Vicky Smirnoff

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To retrieve a copy of this report, visit www.cityofsanrafael.org/stationareaplans or contact Rebecca Woodbury at planning.coordinator@cityofsanrafael.org or 415-485-3076.

Introduction

The San Rafael Civic Center Station Area Plan effort, funded in part by a \$175,000 grant from the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC), is one of two station area plans being created by the City of San Rafael. These plans for the neighborhoods around San Rafael's two new Sonoma Marin Area Rail Transit (SMART) rail stations will set the stage to create vibrant, mixed-use, livable areas supported by a mix of transit opportunities, including passenger rail service. The Civic Center Station Area Plan is a multi-agency collaborative planning effort between the City of San Rafael, SMART, Golden Gate Bridge Highway and Transportation District (GGBHTD), Marin Transit, the San Rafael Redevelopment Agency, the County of Marin, and the Transportation Authority of Marin (TAM). As a partner in MTC's grant program, the Association of Bay Area Governments is also involved in the planning project.

The planning project for the Civic Center Station Area Plan includes two community workshops, the first of which occurred on Wednesday, March 9th, 2011 at the Guide Dogs for Blind Campus, 350 Los Ranchitos Road. This workshop was open and advertised to the public and project stakeholders, and attended by approximately 64 neighbors, property and business owners, civic leaders and interested community members. The event began with introductions and a brief presentation on the progress of the planning effort. The core of the workshop was a series of small group discussions facilitated by volunteers in the community, members of the consultant team, and City staff.

The workshop concluded with facilitator sharing highlights from discussions at each station.

Outreach Efforts

Prior to the first workshop, the Civic Center Station Area Plan Advisory Committee members and City staff conducted extensive outreach efforts through various outlets to maximize public awareness of and involvement in the planning process. These efforts included:

- A series of eight informational loop outs attended by over 200 people in total. The groups included Contempo Marin Homeowners Association, Rafael Meadows HOA, Workforce Housing and Economic Development Committee (San Rafael Chamber of Commerce), Marin Conservation League, Marin Environmental Housing Collaborative, Embassy Suites (Management Team), Friends of SMART, GGBTD Bus Passenger Advisory Committee, League of Women Voters, Community Development Department staff, and County of Marin (Civic Center employees).
- Email notification to various stakeholder groups and their constituents
- A mailing to all property owners in the plan area
- A write-up in *Snapshot*, the newsletter of the San Rafael City Manager
- A press release to local newspapers

As a result, 64 members of the public representing a diverse group of interests engaged in the 3-hour visioning process, providing valuable input and insight as the community plans for the future of San Rafael's Civic Center station area.

Presentation Highlights

To open the workshop, Al Boro, Mayor of San Rafael, offered introductory remarks. He stressed the importance transit plays in reducing Greenhouse gas emissions, and gave workshop attendees an update on the SMART project. Mayor Boro discussed the importance of this area and of *Vision North San Rafael* (1997). The goals defined by that planning process still ring true today, and include protecting natural hillsides and creeks, creating community gathering places, building connections between places, and making improvements to and beautifying the area.



Linda Jackson, Principal Planner, provided participants an overview of the project. The final plan will be completed by May 2012. The overall objective of the planning effort is to set the stage for creating a vibrant, mixed-use, livable area supported by a mix of transit opportunities. Specific objectives include:

- Leverage investments to maximize riders
- Explore opportunities for a bus hub
- Improve access for pedestrians and bicyclists
- Maximize adjacent land uses
- Design an attractive station area
- Leverage the rail station for housing & economic development

The final plan will include the following elements:

- Vision of the Station Area
- Station Access and Connectivity
- Accessible Design
- Pedestrian-Friendly Design
- Housing/Land Use
- Parking
- Implementation Plan

Chris Mitchell, Principal of Fehr & Peers Transportation Consultants, presented key insights based on the consultant team's existing conditions research and site studies. These included current conditions for drivers, walkers, bikers, and transit riders in the Civic Center station area. Key insights from the background report include the following:

- There are missing pedestrian connections and facilities
- There is a large area within a reasonable bike ride of the SMART station
- There exists regular transit service to/from the area
- There is a good amount of available parking
- Traffic conditions at key intersections are currently within the City Standard

Chris Mitchell then introduced Barbara Maloney of BMS design group who discussed the current land uses and urban form of the area around the future rail station. She discussed the essential elements of transit oriented development (TOD), which include an accessible urban framework, supportive land uses and densities, and an attractive urban environment. Successful transit-oriented districts encourage travel by all modes, exhibit a walkable urban fabric, mix a variety of uses at a variety of densities that respect neighboring communities, and exhibit attractive public amenities such as continuous sidewalks, lighting, shade, crosswalks, wayfinding measures, and the like. Maloney then described the design character of the four quadrants of the station planning area.



Following Barbara's presentation, Jackson presented the comments received so far from various outreach efforts conducted by City staff and members of the citizen's advisory committee. These were organized in terms of what respondents like about the current Civic Center area, what they don't like, and what they'd like to see change in the future. A summary of the most common comments is presented below:

- Likes
 - Natural beauty
 - Close to employment centers
 - Marin County Civic Center
 - Attractive neighborhoods
 - Housing for seniors
 - The County Fair
 - Connection east/west under Highway 101
- Dislikes
 - Highway 101 is a noisy barrier
 - Area under and around the freeway is ugly
 - Not comfortable for pedestrians and bicyclists
 - A lot of asphalt
- Changes
 - Better connections for people walking and biking
 - No more ministorage units
 - More attractive appearance
 - Creek restoration
 - New housing
 - Neighborhood restaurants, shops and services



Jeff Schoppert, Co-Chair of the Civic Center Station Area Plan Advisory Committee then shared highlights from various research fact sheets prepared by committee members. The seven fact sheets cover the following topics:

- SMART
- Circulation
- Retail
- Housing
- Parking
- Complete Streets
- Green Streets

The facts sheets have been compiled into a document available online at:

<http://www.cityofsanrafael.org/Assets/CDD/Planning/CC+SAP+Fact+Sheets+03+2011.pdf>

Linda then led participants in an exercise to imagine the station planning area in the year 2035 in preparation for the small group discussions. Participants were asked to focus on their vision of the future of the area in 2035 – how they envisioned it to look 25 years from now – in terms of the physical appearance of the station area, the bicycle and pedestrian experience, the driving and parking experience, the transit rider's experience, and the mix of different land uses (office, retail, and different types of housing). Participants then broke out into small group discussions at each of five stations.

Visioning 2035

Visioning

Each visioning group received a large scale map of the Civic Center area, along with various markers and paper cut outs that represented the following improvements and interventions:

- Higher density housing
- Retail
- Office
- Bike path
- Improved sidewalks
- Pedestrian lighting
- Intersection improvement
- Tree-lined street



Pictures of the maps created by each group are presented in the sections that follow.

Small Group Discussions

The following presents a summary of each visioning group, and the comments from the breakout station discussions. Groups were asked:

General access & connectivity

- Back in 2011, a dislike was difficulty in walking N/S & E/W. What changes were made to improve the pedestrian experience?
- How does the train station fit into the larger context of the area?

Bikes

- What changes have been made since 2011 that made it easier to ride a bike today?

Driving and parking in the Area

- Is there more land dedicated to parking or less than there was in 2010?
- What does the parking look like (structured, surface, on-street)?



Transit

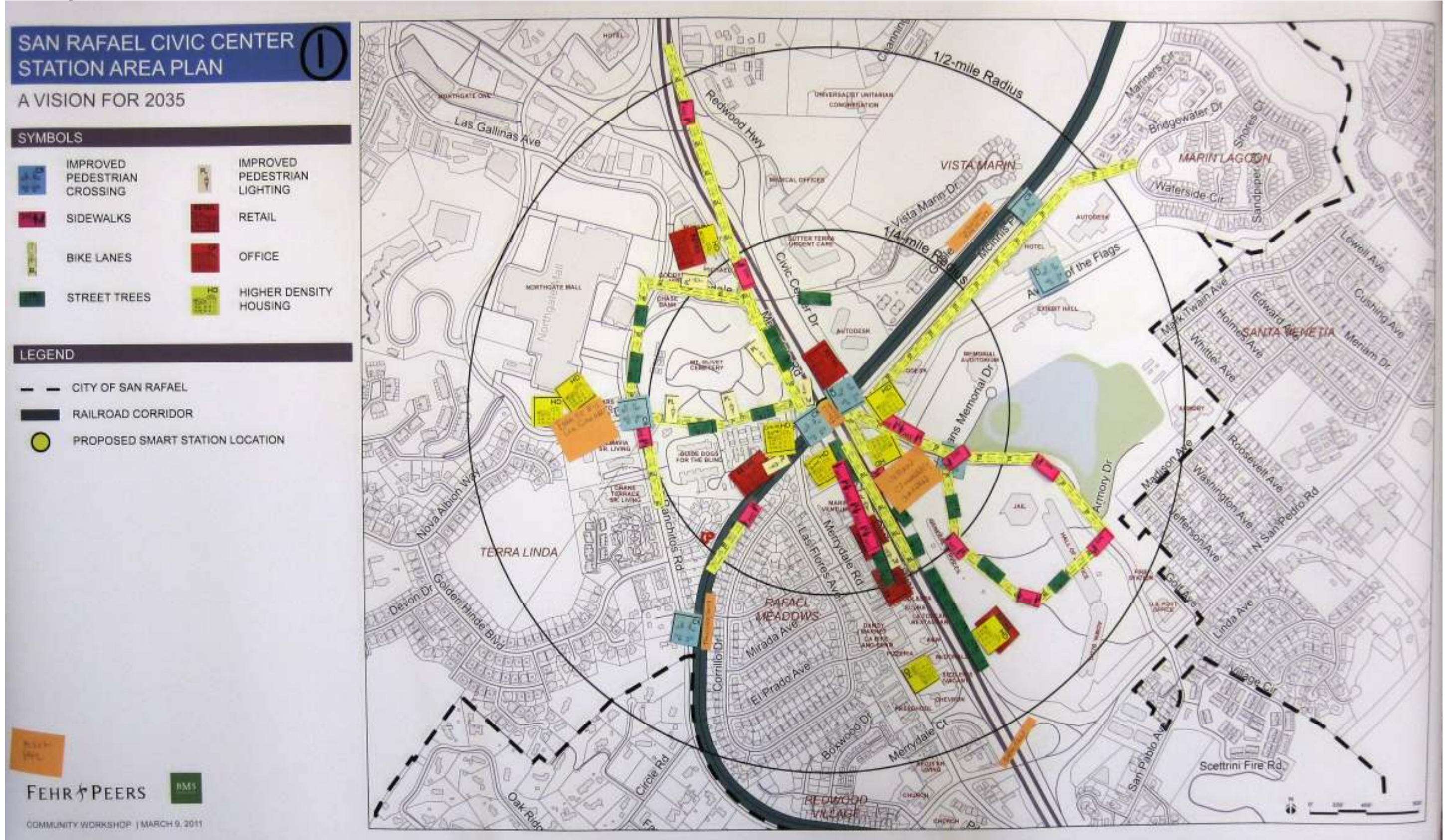
- How has bus transit changed since 2011?
- How do the buses interact with the train station?

Land use opportunities

- What new businesses have sprung up in the area since 2011? Where?
- There is some new housing in the area. Where is the housing located? What does it look like?

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Group 1



Group 1

Visioning comments:

- Commute in to work, services to cater to commuters (dry cleaning, gym, restaurants, all within walking distance)
- No need for high density housing/retail
- Multi-use path from residential areas to station and mall
- Take over Merrydale for bikes/pedestrians
- Civic Center Drive has bike lanes and sidewalks
- Lighting that does not pollute sky
- Biking/walking prioritized
- Civic Center recreational uses maintained
- Mixed use, retail (local shops/restaurants)
- Storage sites converted to mixed use apartments with decks
- Housing has interior courtyards/gathering spaces
- Parking lots turned into mixed use development and open space
- Parking is tree-lined and covered with solar panels
- People are carpooling/carsharing
- There are electric car charging stations
- Good connections with shuttle bus (connects to big places like Civic Center, Mall, and Senior housing)
- More housing at mall, mixed use at Northgate III
- More attractive mixed-use development along Old Redwood Highway
- The right kind of trees (Redwoods)
- Urban farm/community garden
- More directional signs
- Benches/tables for people to sit and eat outside
- Affordable housing (overlay zones)

What were the major changes in 2035?

- Village feel to the area (bustling)
- Area is designed for bikes and pedestrians
- Urban farm/community garden
- Creeks are open with trees along creeks
- Less cars/parking lots
- Village around the station
- Salt marshes are bigger than ever
- New village-like development along Redwood Highway, Merrydale, storage sites, and the Mall.
- Los Ranchitos Rd is quiet and manageable
- More TOD (2-3 stories)

What stayed the same since 2011?

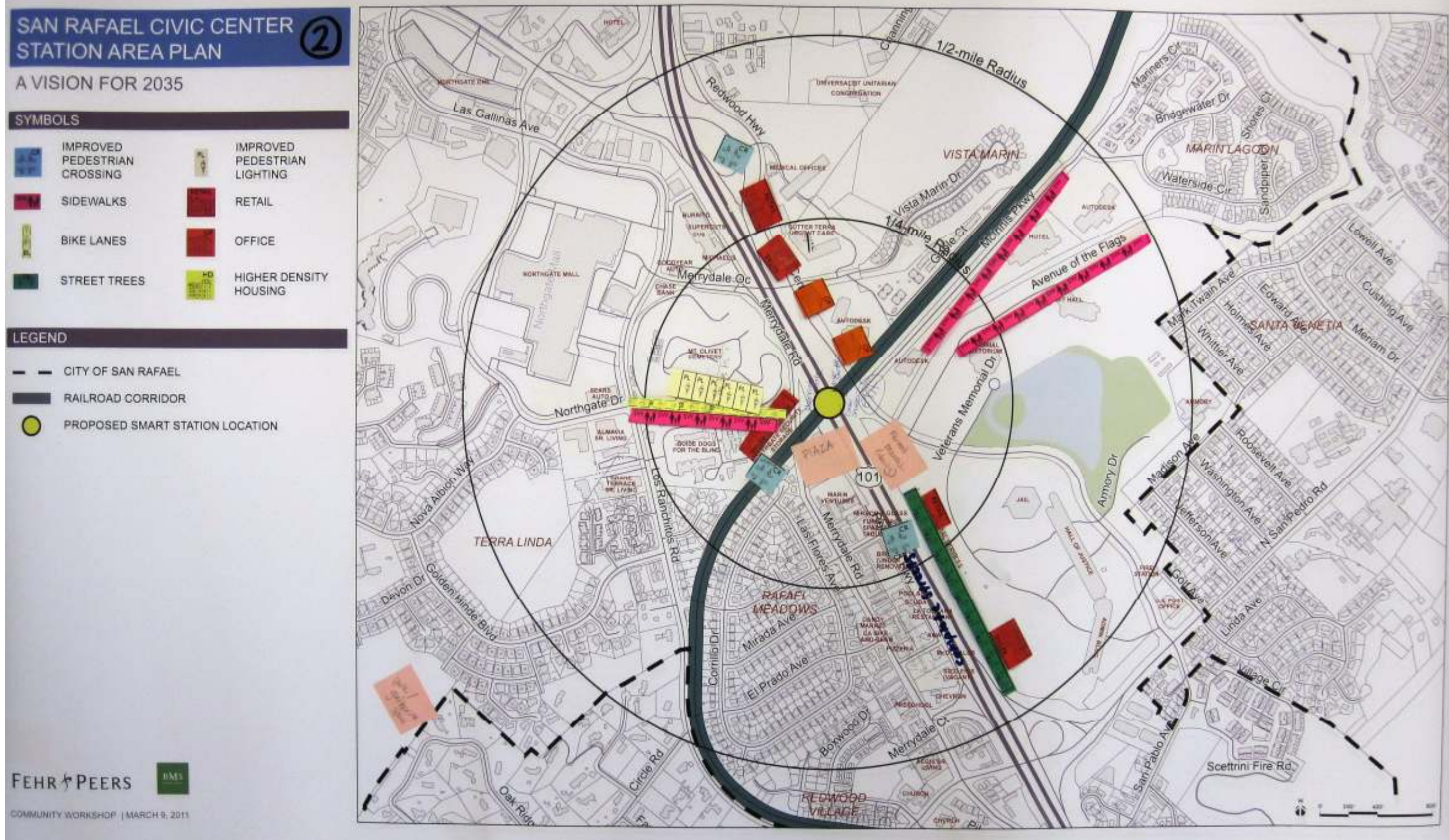
- East side of 101 stays the same
- Natural setting is preserved (creeks, wetlands, open space)
- Open space around Civic Center

What changes are you most proud of creating?

- Community—people care
- Community where people don't need a car
- Community where walking can be primary means of travel
- Redefining what the Civic Center is for the 21st Century—sense of community
- Continue to protect the environment
- Beautify the Civic Center
- A sustainable community

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Group 2



Group 2

Visioning comments:

- Farmer's Market
- Village feel (grocery stores, dry cleaners, ATM, wine bar, etc.)
- Plaza created at station with train coming through gateway (like West Portal in San Francisco)
- Surrounding neighborhoods to be left as they are
- Adequate corridors for transportation away from the station
- Office space where Autodesk is
- Along Civic Center Drive: pathways/bike lines, wifi opportunities
- Retail on Civic Center Drive where there is currently office space
- Improve pedestrian access from mall and retail to the station
- Shuttles on both sides of the station (one to Kaiser, one to Northgate)
- Keep open space
- Complete Streets along Redwood Highway

What were the major changes in 2035?

- Redwood Highway
- Living locally
- Use of public transportation
- Civic Center Drive
- Walkable community
- Basic retail
- European sensibility
- Living/working locally

What stayed the same since 2011?

- Civic Center
- Guide Dogs campus
- Rafael meadows
- Home town feel
- Open space

What changes are you most proud of creating?

- Bike/pedestrian path from station to Northgate Mall
- Design implemented in all changes
- Another exit from McGinnis
- Retail options for Civic Center employees
- Parkland with mixed-use/village like development

[Intentionally left blank]

Group 3



Group 3

Visioning comments:

- Sea level rise is an issue – water access to the station
- Connection from Northgate Promenade to Merrydale Road
- Daylight the creek, recognize it on both sides of the freeway
- Fix access to/from Chase Bank
- Control access into neighborhoods (Merrydale) for parking during the county fair
- Golden Gate Transit needs to serve this station
- Drop off (roundabout) at the end of Merrydale on the west side of freeway
- Shuttles should serve: Scotty's, Northgate Mall, North San Pedro/Santa Venetia, Kaiser, Sutter Health
- Development should be mixed use with ground floor neighborhood serving retail (15 feet high ceilings) with residential uses on top. No more than 2-stories for a total height limit of about 35 feet
- Mix of types of housing (studios to 3 bedrooms)
- Encourage family housing
- Four stories for housing would be appropriate
- The train should serve the entertainment venues

What were the major changes in 2035?

- Completion of the promenade to go under the freeway and along Civic Center Drive to connect to Santa Venetia
- Sea level rise
- More pedestrian and bike activity

What stayed the same since 2011?

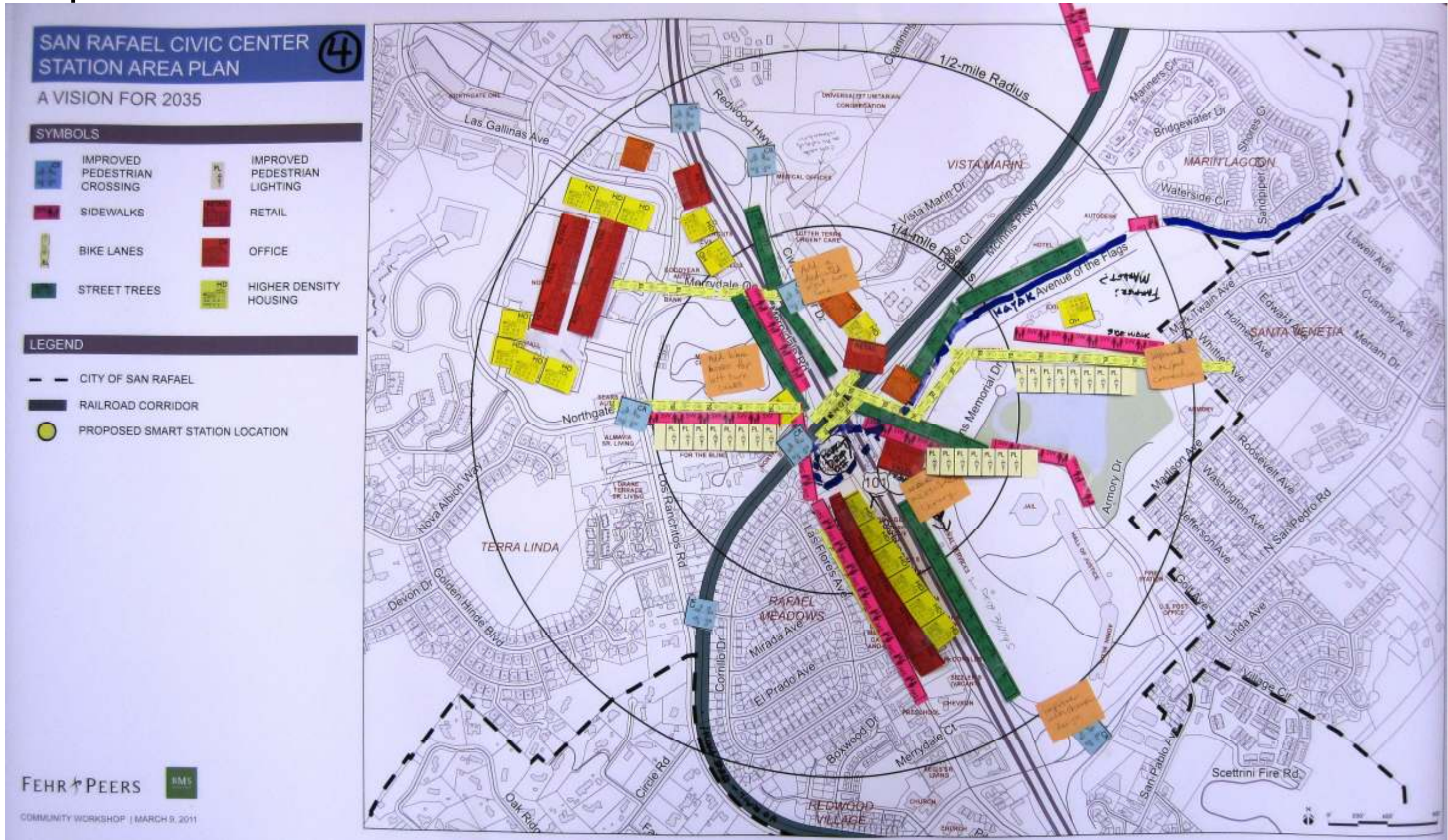
- Open space
- Civic Center and its historic nature

What changes are you most proud of creating?

- Healthy life for people and the environment
- Vibrant/alive
- Natural and man made aesthetics work together
- Diversity
- Families/kids
- Safety
- Pedestrian/bike friendly area
- Accessible to all modes (even horses and kayaks)
- Functional beauty (it works and it's pretty)
- Preserving the environment
- Good design/enlightened design
- Storm water management

[Intentionally left blank]

Group 4



Group 4

Visioning comments:

- Connection between western neighborhoods and the Civic Center (bike/ped infrastructure)
- Housing along Merrydale Rd (mixed use with graduated heights—highest at Highway 101, tapering down to two stories near Rafael Meadows neighborhood)
- Mixed use development at storage sites
- Parking for SMART on west side of 101, at end of Merrydale
- Shuttles pick up/drop off on west side of 101
- Christmas tree lot as a place of civic interaction (gathering, retail, etc). Can accommodate the Farmer's Market, but site needs more frequent activity
- Corresponding improvements to Merrydale (bike lanes, sidewalks, trees)
- Preservation of existing wetlands, restored creek
- Pedestrian pathway between the cemetery and Guide Dogs for the Blind with lighting
- Rafael Meadows preserved as single family
- Move library close to station so it is more accessible

What were the major changes in 2035?

- Mini storage sites become 2-4 story housing developments
- Housing at Northgate Mall
- Repurpose Northgate III with housing/retail
- Trees along Redwood highway to buffer highway noise
- Vibrancy and connectivity
- Enhanced pedestrian environment
- Area is safe and attractive
- Pleasant walk
- Mix of retail and commercial

What stayed the same since 2011?

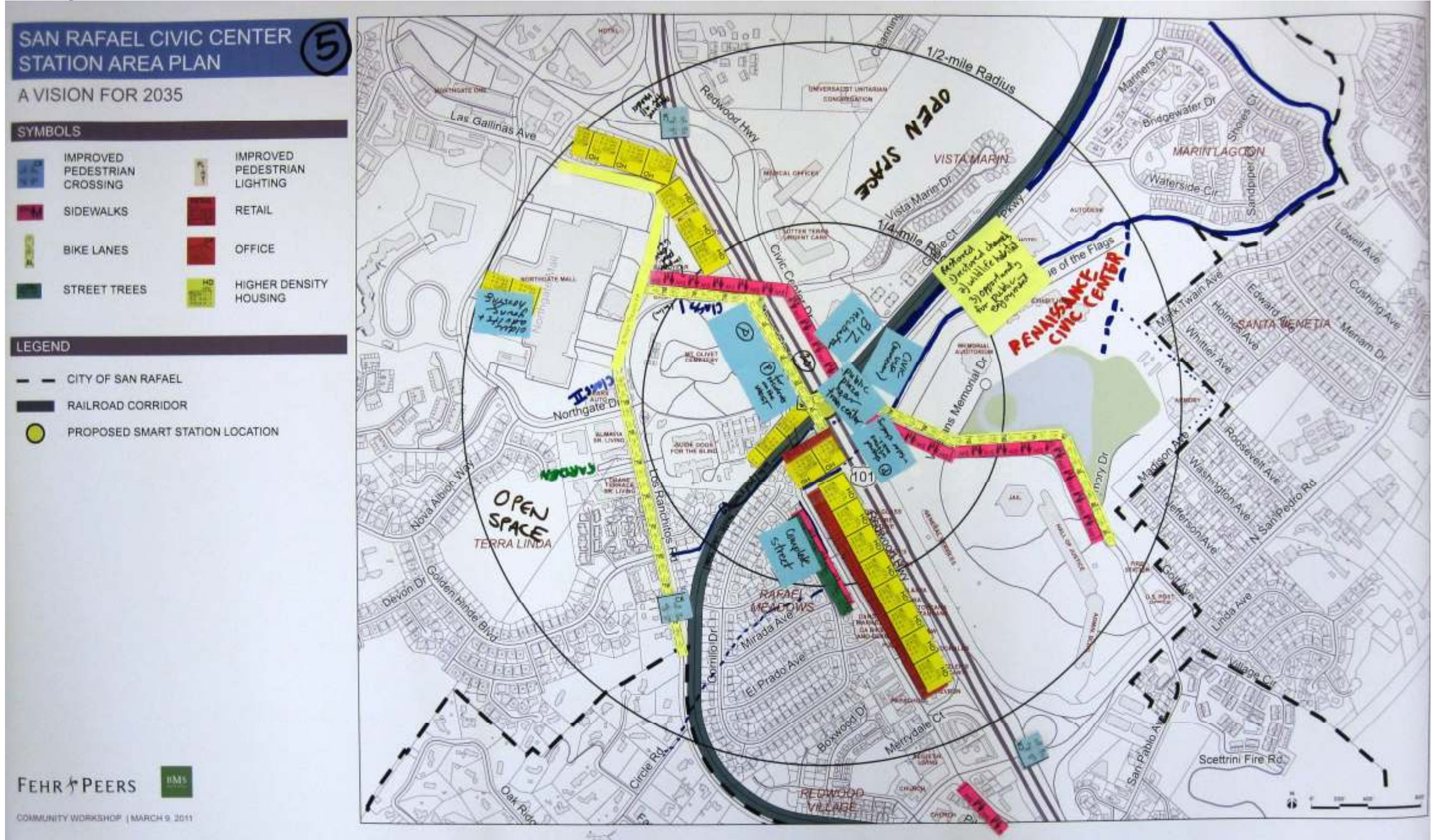
- Civic Center area
- Hall of Justice
- Lagoon/County Fair
- Rafael Meadows neighborhood
- Access to Highway 101
- Natural surroundings preserved

What changes are you most proud of creating?

- Cultural center and vibrancy (people around and "something happening" even after 5 PM)
- Improved access and connections for all modes
- Housing at appropriate sites (Northgate Mall, storage sites)
- Tapered density in respect to existing single-family neighborhoods
- Pedestrian pathway in between cemetery and Guide Dogs for the Blind

[Intentionally left blank]

Group 5



Group 5

Visioning comments:

- Waterways: restore riparian corridor, wildlife corridors, public enjoyment, paths, trees, etc.
- Complete streets (Merrydale)
- Bicycle access (Class II along Los Ranchitos, Class I along promenade)
- Pedestrian access (sidewalks along both sides of Civic Center Drive)
- Automobiles (improve Freitas Parkway/101 interchange)
- Higher density housing/mixed use at storage facility
- Housing at Northgate
- Shaded parking with solar panels
- Housing along Las Gallinas, north of Chevy's
- Merrydale pedestrian/bicycle connection across tracks
- Optimization of safe pedestrian movement

What were the major changes in 2035?

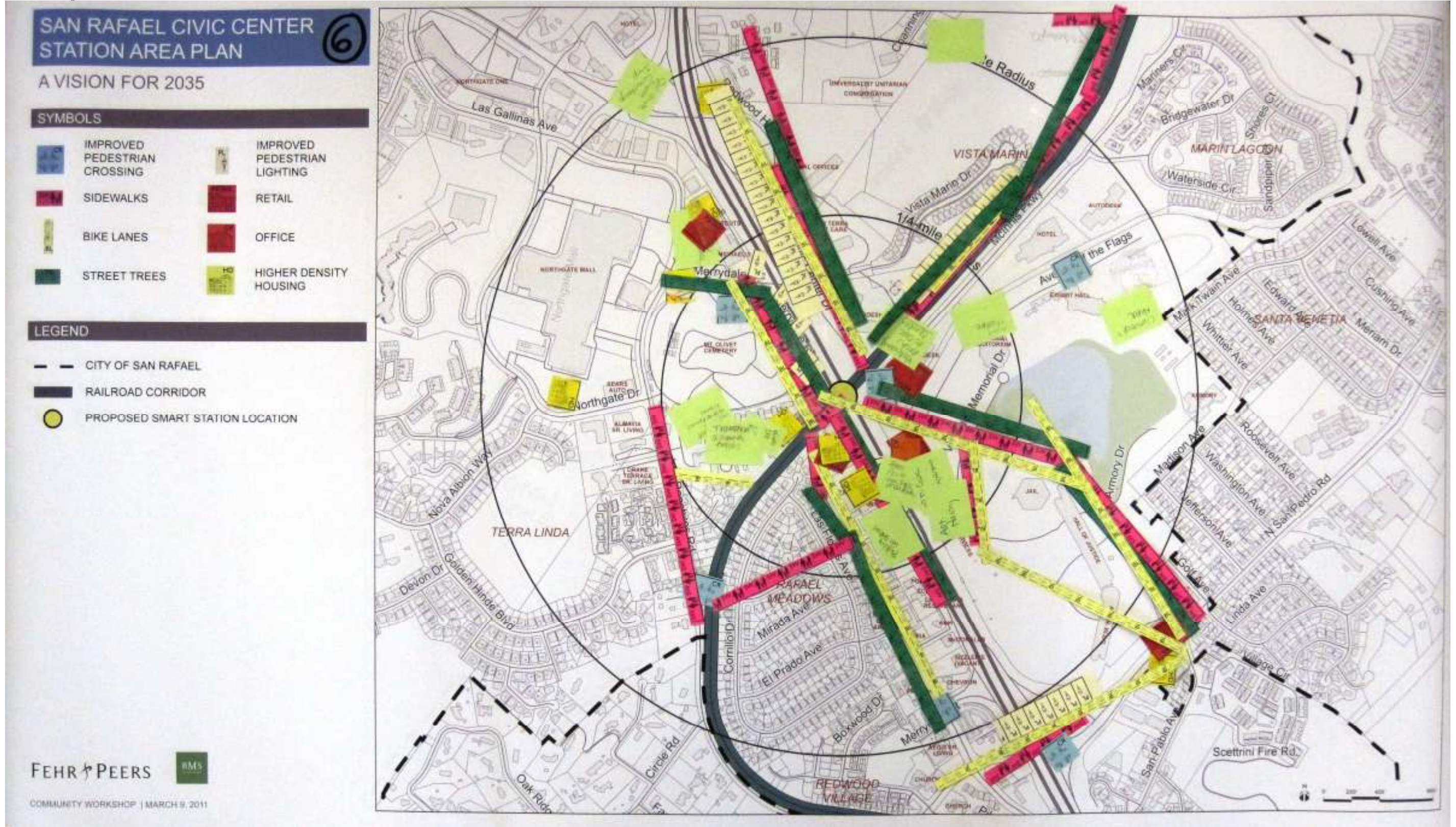
- The station is there; it's the heart of the area; the hub
- Walkable community; safe pedestrian and bicycle connections
- More efficient circulation; less cars on the road
- TOD/mixed-use near the station will take advantage of the station as hub
- Reclaimed the natural environment; reclaimed riparian corridor
- The North San Rafael Promenade is complete!
- Activities for youth
- Renaissance of Civic Center
- Public plaza near station

What stayed the same since 2011?

- Frank Lloyd Wright & the County Fair
- Preserved hillsides and open spaces
- Preserve existing single family neighborhoods
- Preserve the Knoll

[Intentionally left blank]

Group 6



Group 6

Visioning comments:

- Underpass should be multiuse pathway only, no train
- Improve ditch along Merrydale
- Ensure Rafael Meadows residents can walk to station
- Street trees along Merrydale
- Ideal location for transit village at storage area near Guide Dogs for the Blind, should also have affordable housing
- Four stories is out of character with the existing neighborhood
- Others say four stories would be appropriate
- Buildings should not detract from view of historic Civic Center
- Entry to permanent Farmer's Market at Civic Center (with arches)
- Improve interchange at Freitas Parkway for all users
- Sidewalks should be wide enough for strollers and electric wheelchairs
- Redevelop parcels along North San Pedro Road
- Some people will be commuting north to work
- Offices should only be on Civic Center Drive, near station
- Bike shop near station
- Movie theater by Civic Center
- Hard to get to retail area/Mall from station
- Guide Dogs for the Blind should try to find another location
- Old Redwood Highway is underutilized
- Improve sidewalk and path along McInnis Parkway, Avenue of the Flags, Los Ranchitos Rd, Las Gallinas
- Opportunity site at the end of Avenue of the Flags (housing?)

What were the major changes in 2035?

- Pedestrian bridge over/under 101 to connect Merrydale
- Pedestrian improvements along Merrydale through the rail station, North San Pedro Road, and Civic Center Drive (bike lanes and lighting as well)
- New development in northeast quadrant of study area
- Lighting along Merrydale
- Finish the Promenade from Civic Center to Northgate Mall
- Make a permanent home for Farmer's Market
- Add bike lanes on all streets
- Retail and high density housing on storage sites
- Housing at Northgate Mall and Northgate III
- Housing along Old Redwood Highway
- Bike lane behind Guide Dogs for the Blind
- Connection for mobile home park and from Contempo Marin to the train station (sidewalks, trees, bike lanes)

What stayed the same since 2011?

- View of the historic Marin County Civic Center

Wrap Up

Following the small group discussions, the facilitators reported back to the larger group on the highlights of public input from each station, as well as the maps created as a part of the visioning processes of each group.

Linda Jackson thanked all the participants and reminded them that they would all be invited to the next public workshop, scheduled for the fall of 2011, after the draft alternatives were developed and evaluated.