

# *THE CONTEXT*

How Our Vision  
Was Developed

The Setting

Our Analysis

## *How Our Vision Was Developed*

In the spring of 1991, the City of San Rafael launched a collaborative approach to planning the future of its Downtown. The focus was on discovering what the community valued and wanted for Downtown. The City Council and Redevelopment Agency selected a Downtown Community Plan Committee to guide the process. The Committee reflects a diverse group of interests: residents, business owners, cultural, retail, community and government.

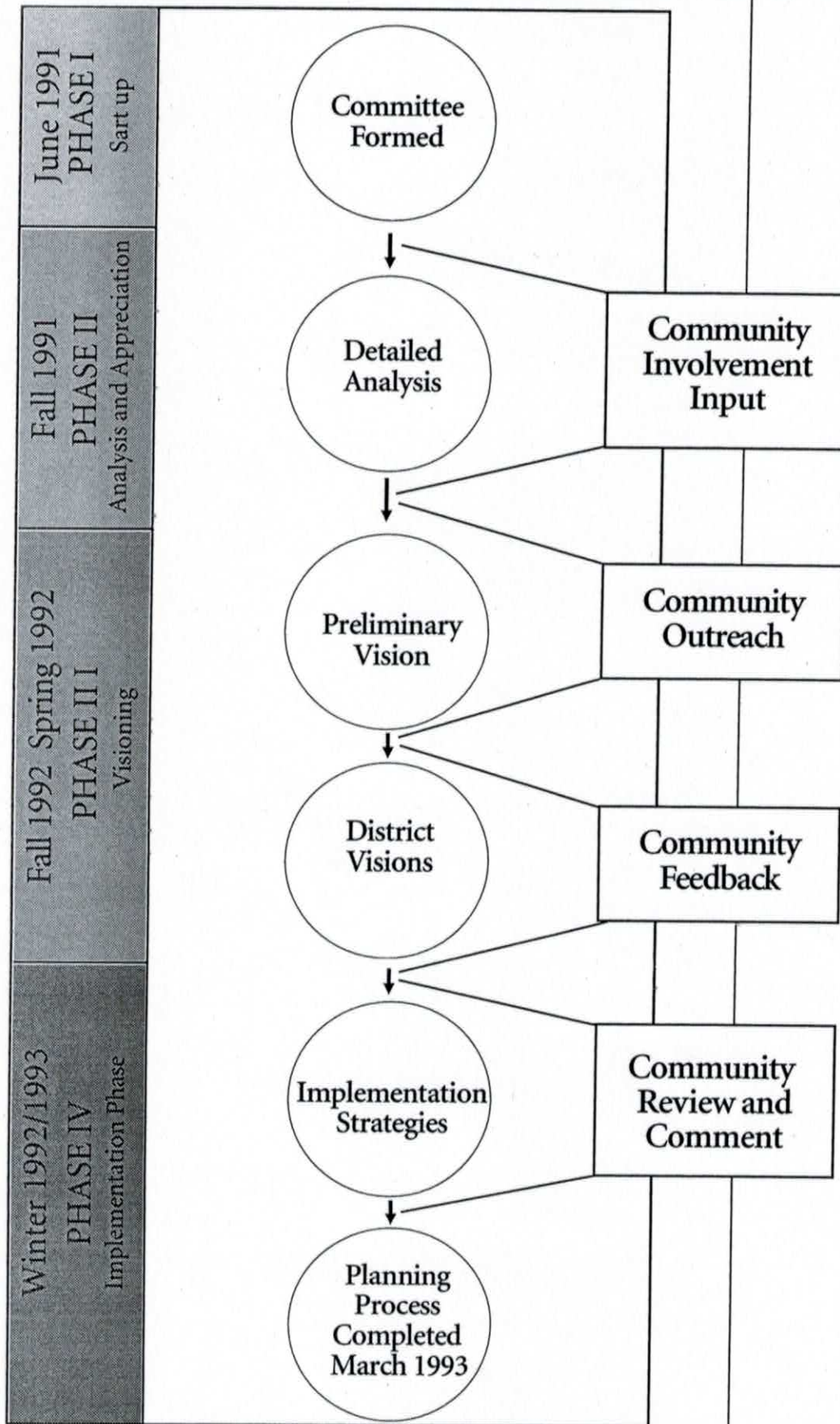
In the summer and fall of 1991, the Committee analyzed Downtown and identified its strengths and weaknesses from an economic, social and cultural perspective. We reviewed the economics of the Downtown, compared it to other downtowns and considered national and local trends. We interviewed merchants and users of Downtown, visited other downtowns and listened to national experts on the future of downtowns and public spaces. We asked our sponsor groups for their input and viewpoints. There was remarkable consensus on Downtown's strengths and weaknesses, what people liked about Downtown San Rafael and wanted to keep, and where improvements, changes and breakthroughs were desired.

This analysis and appreciation investigation gave us a solid foundation of information for our Vision and strategy. We shared this analysis with the community and asked for help in developing the Vision in a series of Visioning Sessions. Three community-wide sessions with 250 participants and nine children's sessions with 270 children and their parents were held in the spring of 1992. In these Vision Sessions, we asked, "If we were very successful, what would Downtown San Rafael look, feel, and be like in 15 years? What would it be like to shop, work, visit and live there?" Again there was a remarkable agreement among the visions generated, and a consensus Vision began to emerge.

In the summer and fall of 1992, with the help of our economic, transportation, and urban design professionals, we started to develop detailed visions for six distinct districts Downtown. We tested the validity of our visions with consultants and made revisions to insure the final vision was feasible and could be implemented.

In January 1993, we began circulating a draft Vision and Implementation Strategy to all our Sponsors. A public participation session involving 150 people was the high point of the review process. Overall, the response to the Vision was enthusiastic and supportive, and hundreds of implementation ideas were generated. The Vision presented here includes the community input generated in the review process. The Downtown Community Plan Committee officially endorsed the Vision and Implementation Strategy in April, 1993, and sent it to the San Rafael Redevelopment Agency and the City Council in May.

# Our Vision Process and Timetable





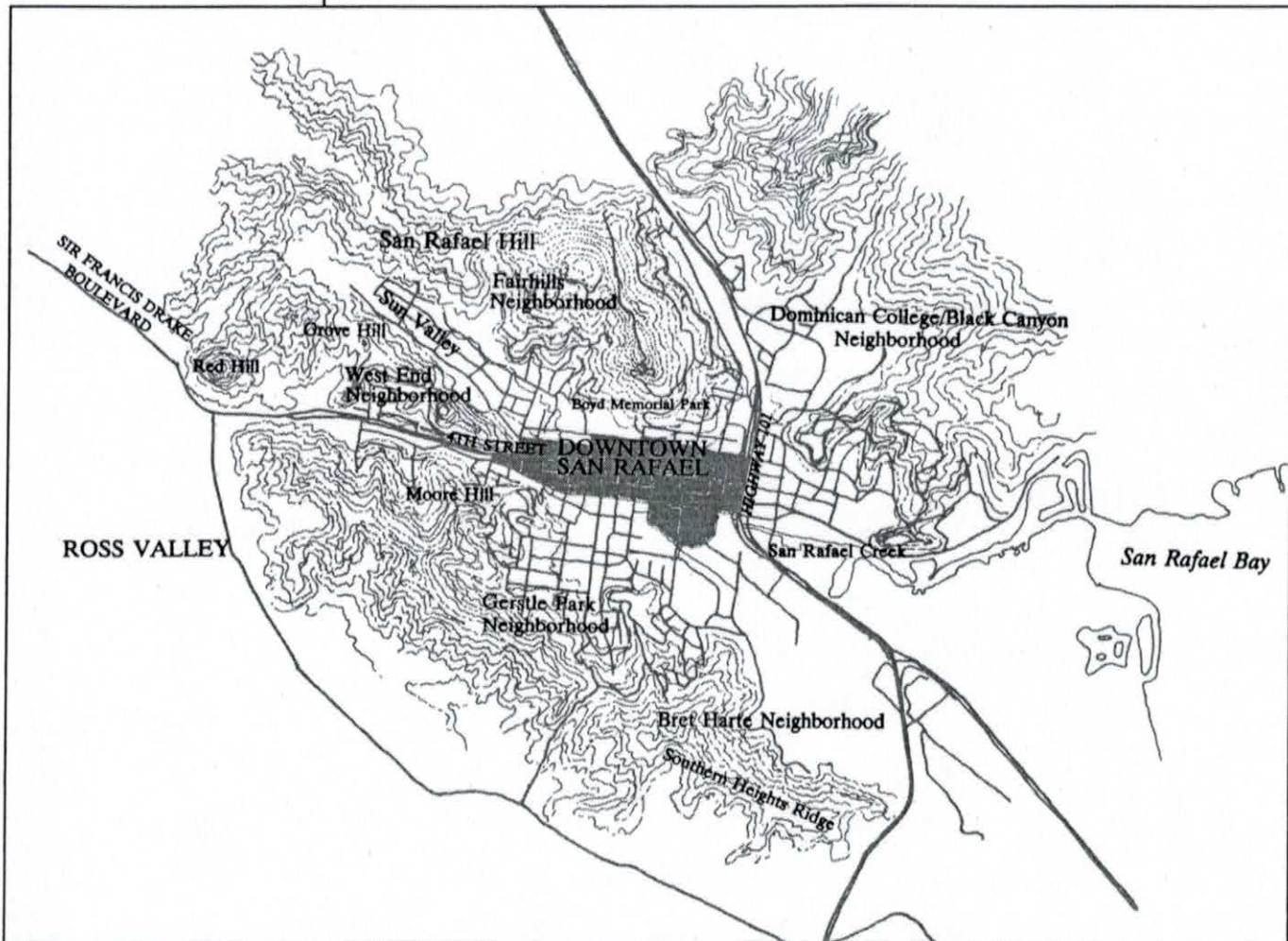
## The Setting

### BAY AREA

San Rafael is located on the western shore of San Francisco Bay, in a series of valleys surrounded by wooded hillsides. The city is in the center of Marin County's Highway 101 Corridor, and is approximately 17 miles north of San Francisco and the Golden Gate Bridge.

### SAN RAFAEL

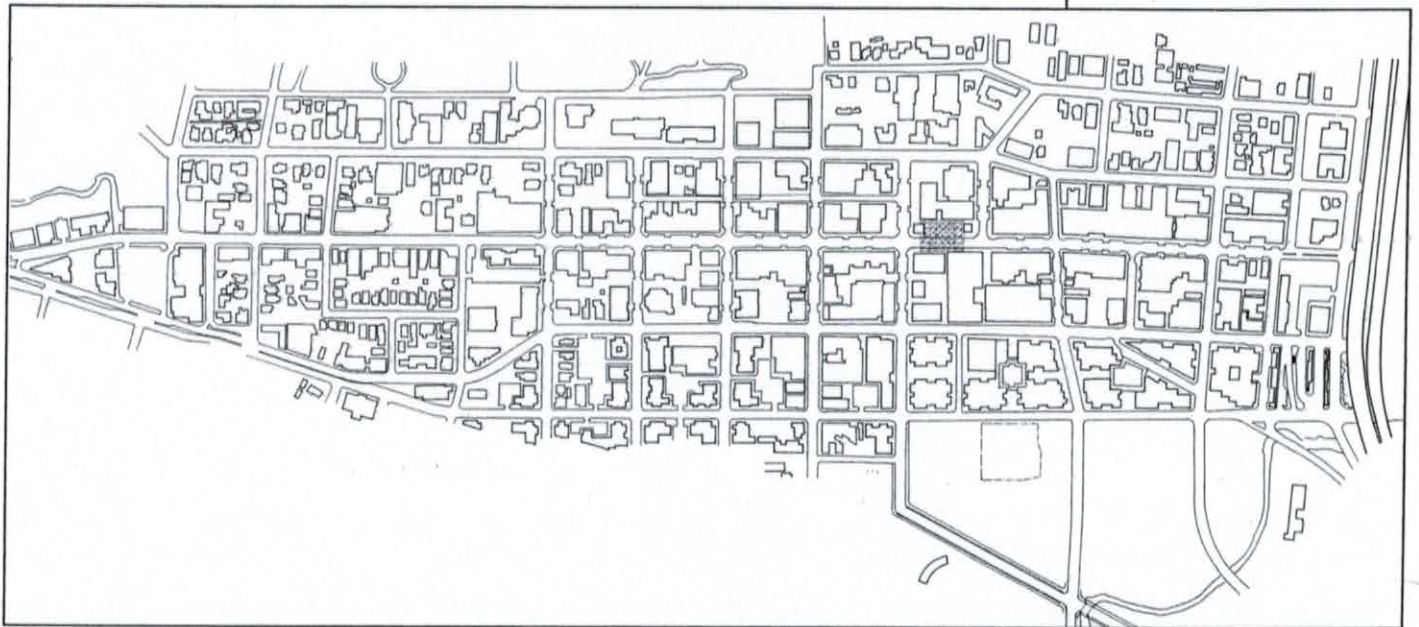
San Rafael developed around the Mission San Rafael Arcangel, and eventually became the largest city in Marin County and the county seat. Over time, San Rafael evolved into the employment, financial and cultural center of Marin and remains in that preeminent position today. When development spread out from the Mission into the surrounding valleys, it took on a suburban character. One exception was the area immediately around the Mission, which was Downtown.



## DOWNTOWN

Historically, Downtown has been the only urban place in the County; it had the largest buildings, the most intense development, the best shopping and the county courthouse. Downtown was the center of action and activity. Today, there are bigger buildings, competing shopping areas, a County Government Center and other activity points that challenge the traditional role of Downtown. Downtown is still our urban place; its urban development pattern is unique and cannot be found anywhere else in the city. But what else is Downtown and how should we, the citizens of San Rafael, address the challenge posed to our Downtown? How do we want to guide Downtown's development into the 21st century so it can prosper, be relevant and serve our needs?

Downtown San Rafael is the area defined by Mission Avenue, Highway 101, Second Street, and the beginning of the Miracle Mile.



*Downtown San Rafael*



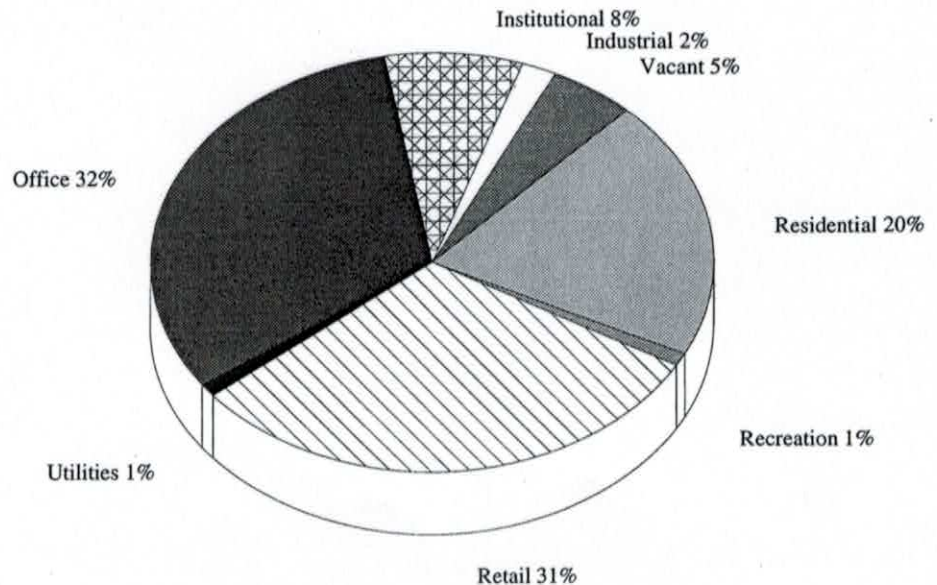
## Our Analysis

**A** vision must be grounded in reality and start with understanding what exists now, the current situation. We therefore began with an analysis of Downtown's economic, social and business situation in 1991 and 1992. Inquiries were also made into what people liked and didn't like about Downtown and what they wanted changed. From this analysis, Downtown's strengths, weaknesses and opportunities were identified.

### In 1992 Downtown San Rafael had:

- 200 acres of land - one third of a square mile and 0.5% of the city
- 1 million square feet of retail and service uses - 30% of all Downtown building area and larger than Northgate Mall
- 1 million square feet of office space - 30% of all Downtown building area, primarily lease spaces less than 10,000 square feet, and 15 to 20% of all office space in Marin County
- 760 residential units - including 78 single family houses and 4% of the city housing units
- 5,500 people employed in office uses
- 7,346 public and private parking spaces - more parking per square foot of building area than Northgate Mall
- 17% of all sales taxes in the city in 1990

### Building Space by Type of Use



## People liked many things downtown including:

- Events, especially the Farmers Market
- Hometown, my hometown, real downtown atmosphere
- Diversity and variety in shops, mix of retail, office and service uses
- Bookstores, restaurants and specialty shops
- Trees, landscaping, the old look, Mission Avenue and Fifth Avenue
- Parking, especially the inexpensive rates

## People Didn't Like:

- Panhandlers and street people, with aggressive behaviors
- Lack of parking, lack of long term parking, and parking meters
- Lack of good places to shop
- Vacant stores and lots, littered sidewalks
- Traffic congestion, especially on Second and Third Streets

## Changes People Want Downtown:

### Major Changes to:

- Upgrade our Downtown's image and identity
- Become a more interesting, exciting place

### Moderate changes to:

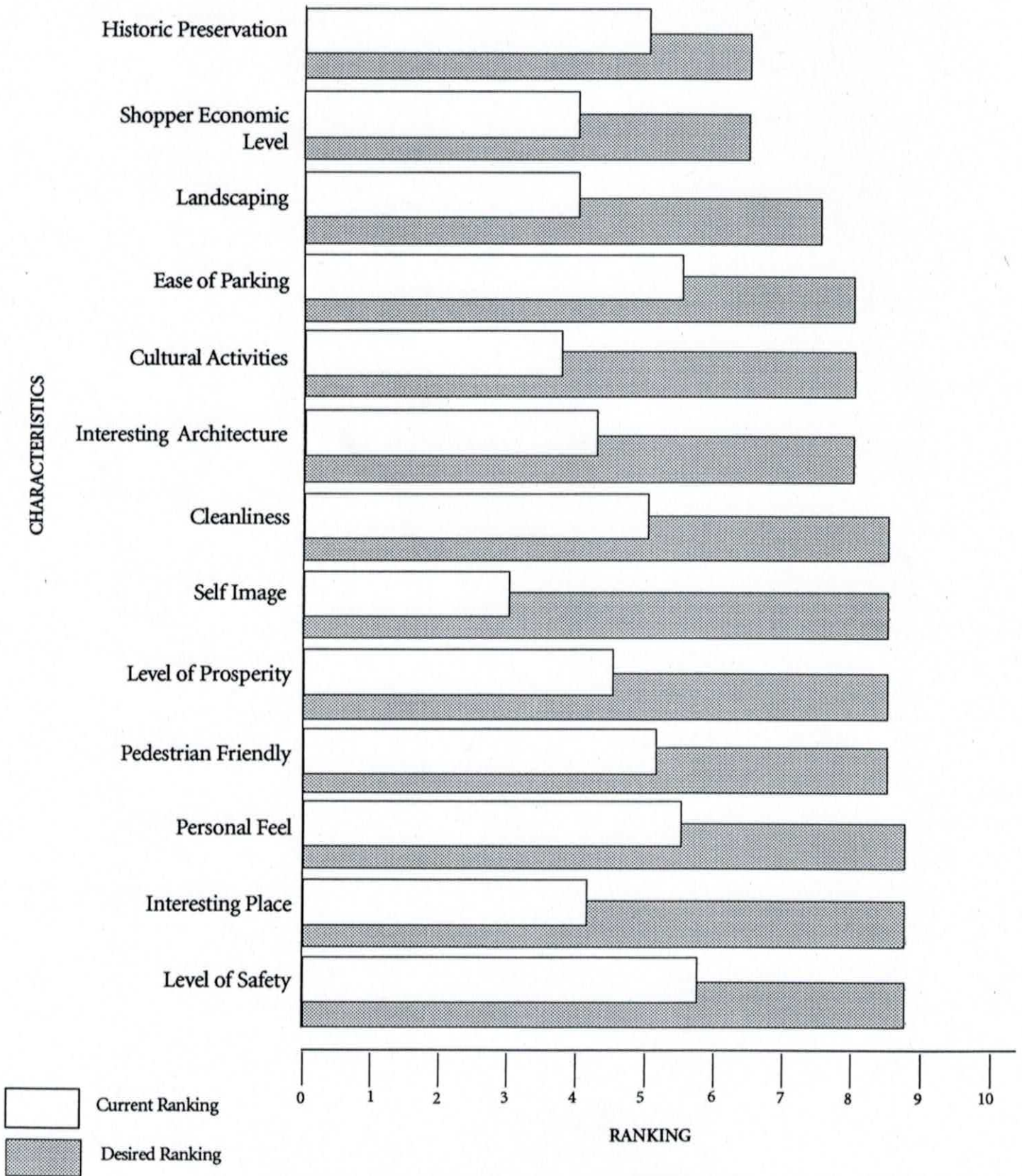
- Be a more prosperous place
- Increase the variety of cultural activities
- Achieve a higher level of cleanliness and safety
- Be a more personal and friendly place, be everything a mall isn't
- Be pleasantly walkable
- Have interesting and varied architecture

### Small changes to:

- Park more easily
- Have slightly more upscale shoppers
- Achieve the right amount of historic preservation



## Comparing Existing and Desired Characteristics



*This graph was developed from a survey where people were asked to rank Downtown on a scale of 1 to 10 comparing the current situation to where they wanted it to rank in the future.*



***Downtown's Strengths, Weaknesses And Opportunities Are:***

	STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES	OPPORTUNITIES
<b>IMAGE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People like the hometown feel of Downtown; it is a real town, unlike any other place in Marin.</li> <li>• Downtown is a complete community providing all aspects of community life; housing, shopping, services, entertainment, education, recreation, religion and culture.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Downtown does not have a strong image or a positive identity.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be the community gathering and celebration place, the City's heartbeat, where people of all ages come together.</li> <li>• Recognize that the hometown feel is more than building appearance; it has social and cultural elements.</li> <li>• Take advantage of the unique urban character of Downtown.</li> </ul>
<b>PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is room to grow on vacant land and remodeled sites.</li> <li>• Revitalization tools exist, including a Business Improvement District and Redevelopment Agency.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parking is perceived as a problem.</li> <li>• Downtown's appearance needs upgrading.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop an urban parking strategy.</li> <li>• Use new development and rehabilitation to improve Downtown's appearance and image.</li> </ul>
<b>ECONOMICS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Downtown has a broad economic base to buffer changes in economic conditions.</li> <li>• Downtown has a concentration of cultural and historic resources.</li> <li>• Downtown is easily accessible.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Downtown lacks activity especially at night and on weekends.</li> <li>• Downtown lacks an overall marketing and managing function.</li> <li>• The retail sector of Downtown is fragile.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be the cultural and entertainment center of San Rafael.</li> <li>• Establish a public / private effort to promote the interests of all portions of Downtown.</li> <li>• Develop a clear economic strategy to address all aspects of Downtown's economy as an interrelated whole.</li> </ul>
<b>SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People want to be proactive in creating the future of San Rafael.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• San Rafael's ethnic populations are not well integrated into Downtown's economy or community life.</li> <li>• Many people are uncomfortable with the hostile conduct of some street people.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expand Downtown's market population to include San Rafael's ethnic communities.</li> </ul>