



City Council Study Session: Downtown Options

Downtown San Rafael
Precise Plan

October 7th, 2019



Contents

Introduction	1
Progress to Date	2
Community Feedback	3
Illustrative Plan + Sub-Areas	4
Multimodal Street Framework	5
Development Program + Phasing	6
Next Steps	7

1. Introduction



Downtown Precise Plan

What is the Precise Plan?

- **A 16-month planning effort led by City staff to develop a 2040 Vision for Downtown San Rafael, guided by active community input at all key stages.**

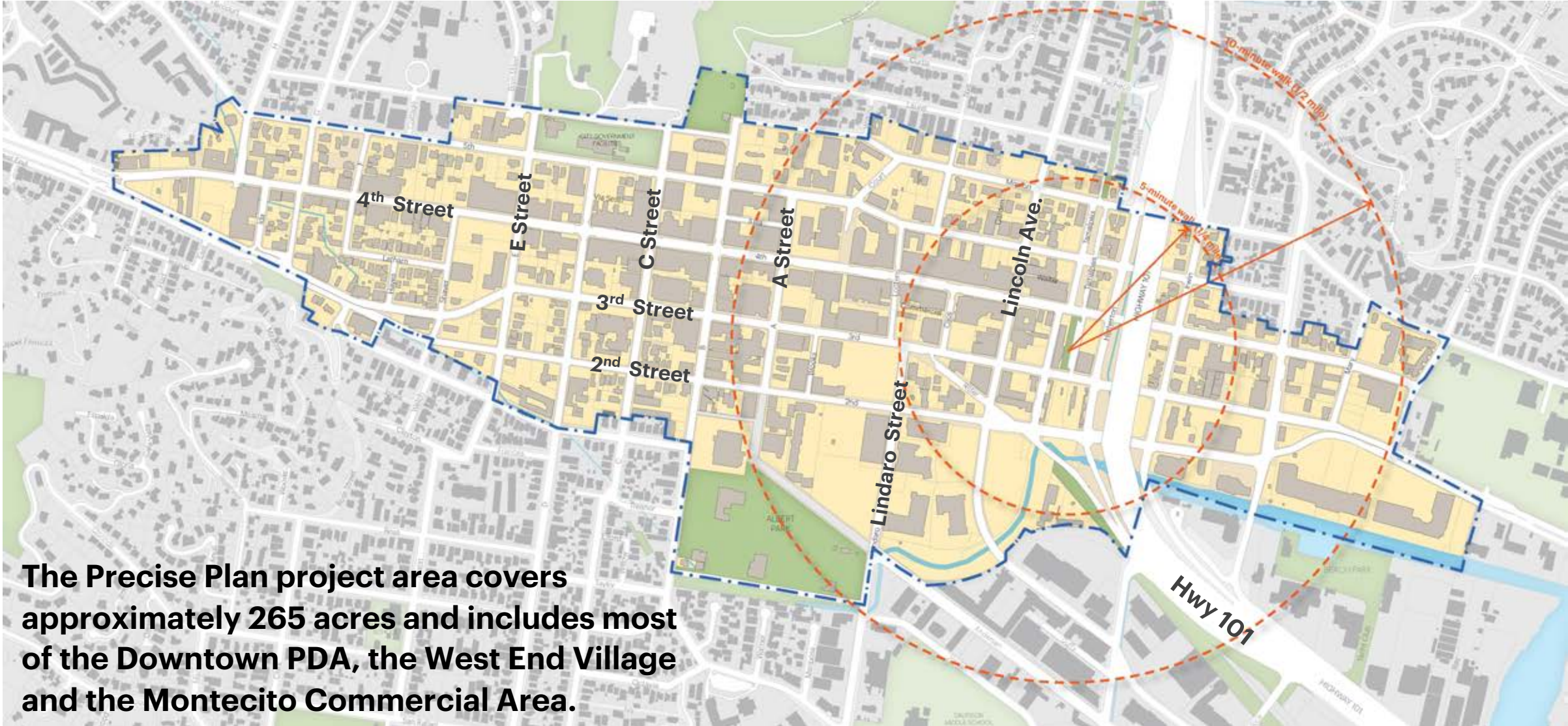
What will the Precise Plan do?

- **Assess previous planning efforts.**
- **Analyze current Downtown conditions and identify development opportunities.**
- **Establish a Downtown Vision for the next 20 years with zoning-level development standards and design direction for architectural quality, streetscape design, and historic preservation.**

The Precise Plan is a continuation of previous and ongoing Downtown planning efforts including:

- Downtown Station Area Plan (2012)
- Good Design Guidelines for Downtown (2017)
- San Rafael Bicycle & Pedestrian Master Plan (2018)
- Downtown Parking and Wayfinding Study (2018)
- San Rafael Transit Center Replacement Project (ongoing)
- Third Street Rehabilitation Project (ongoing)

Precise Plan Study Area



The Precise Plan project area covers approximately 265 acres and includes most of the Downtown PDA, the West End Village and the Montecito Commercial Area.

2. Progress to Date



Precise Plan milestones to date

January 30th 2019

Project Kick-Off

March 13th 2019 +
April 10th 2019

**General Plan Steering Committee Presentations:
Visioning + Prioritization Exercises**

April 12th 2019

Visioning Pop-Up Workshop at 2nd Friday Art Walk

May 2nd 2019 +
May 8th 2019

**Focus Group Meetings with Downtown
Stakeholders**

May 8th – 11th 2019

**Multi-Day Design Charrette: Opening + Closing
Presentations, Brown Bags, Open Studio**

June 10th 2019

Downtown Profile Report



Precise Plan milestones to date

August 16th 2019

Draft Downtown Options Report

August 29th 2019

Downtown Options Pop-Up at Thursday Farmer's Market

September 10th 2019

Study session with Planning Commission

September 27th 2019

Final Downtown Options Report

October 7th 2019

Study session with City Council



3. Community Feedback



Key takeaways

Community Support for:

- **Infill and reinvestment in Downtown, focusing on key Opportunity Sites such as the Bettini Transit Station Area**
- **Encouraging residential mixed-use development**
- **Maintaining existing and creating new public space**
- **Preserving and integrating important historical buildings such as Whistlestop**



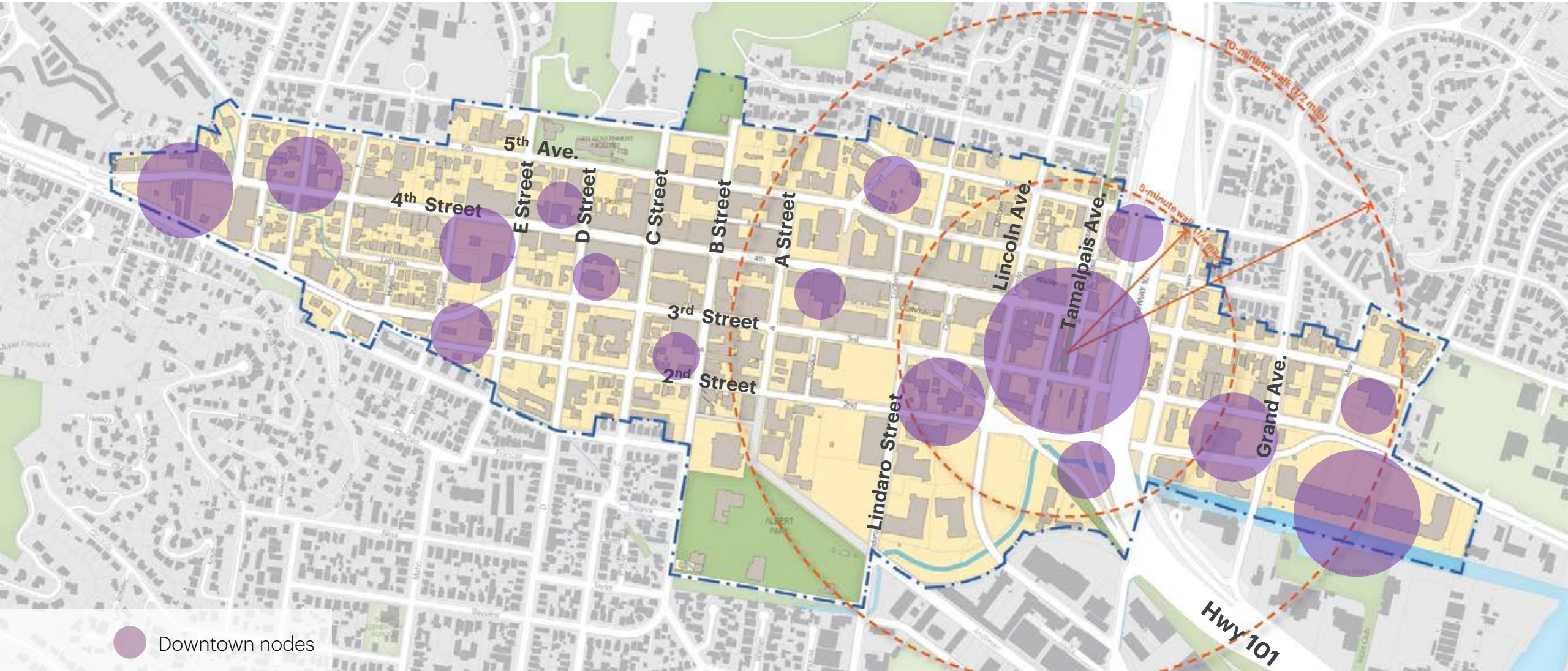


Design Principles

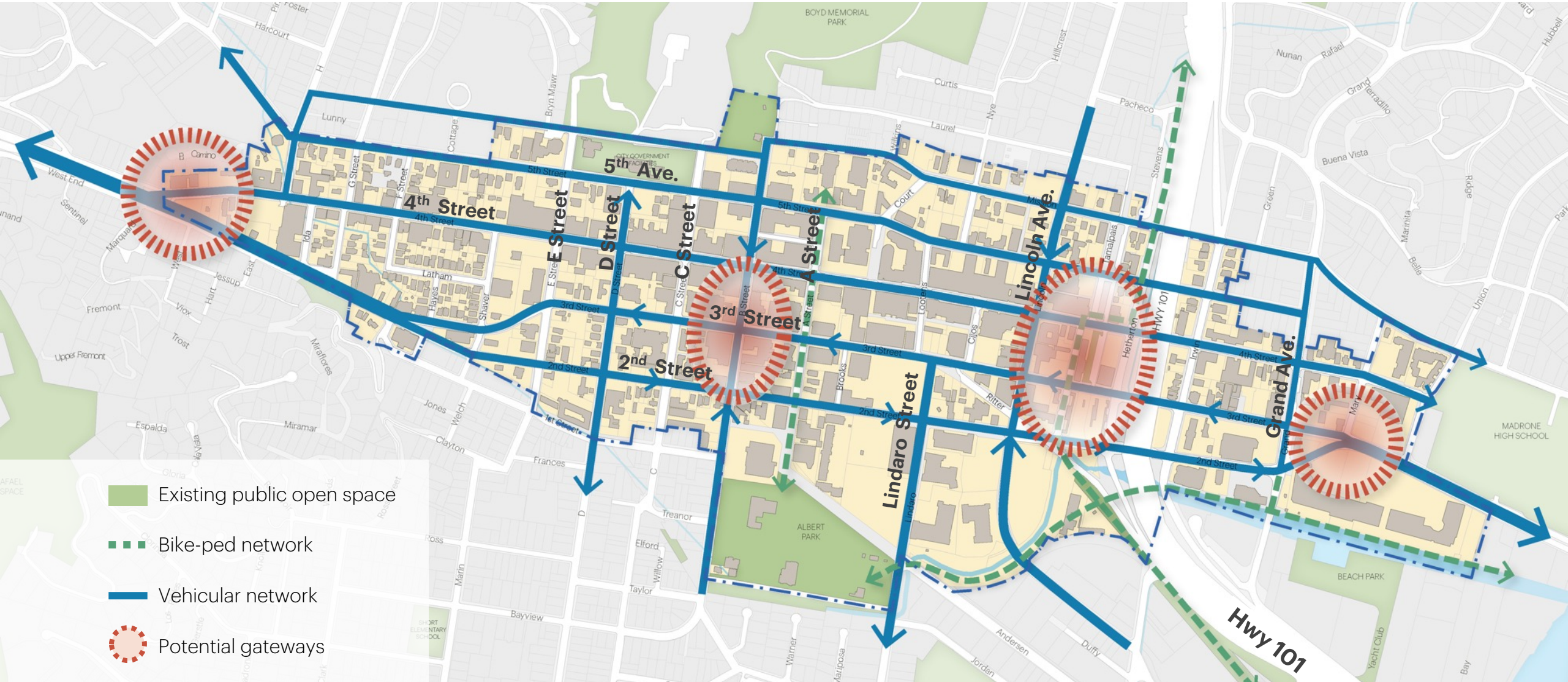


- 1. Focus development at key nodes to establish a distinct Downtown experience and identity**
- 2. Reinforce gateways and design the Transit Station to create a sense of arrival**
- 3. Strengthen multimodal connectivity, prioritizing pedestrian and bicycle safety and access**
- 4. Create a cohesive public realm through an interconnected network of civic spaces**
- 5. Generate a development program and policies that support City goals related to TOD, mixed-use development, affordable housing, and jobs-housing balance**
- 6. Recommend growth and adaptation strategies that are resilient to climate change, in particular sea-level rise**

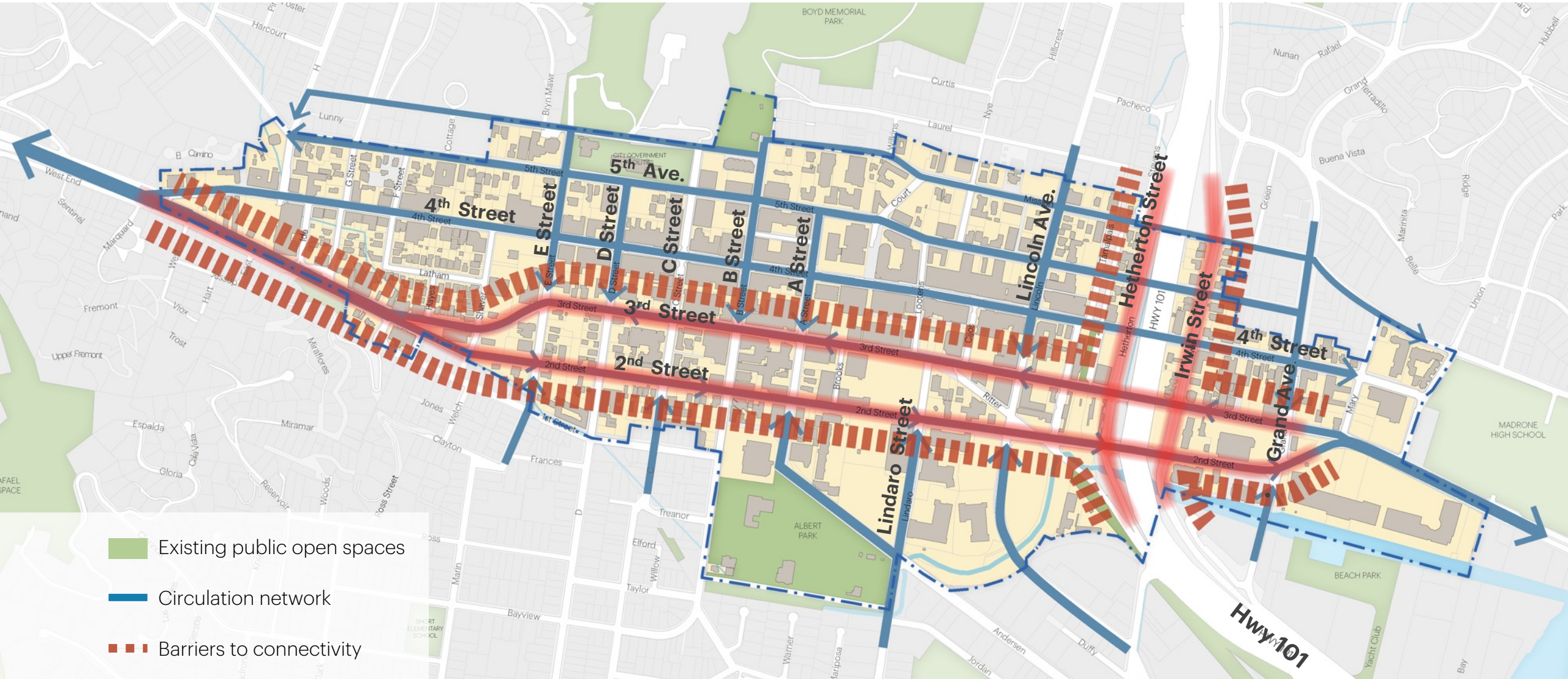
1. Focus development at key nodes



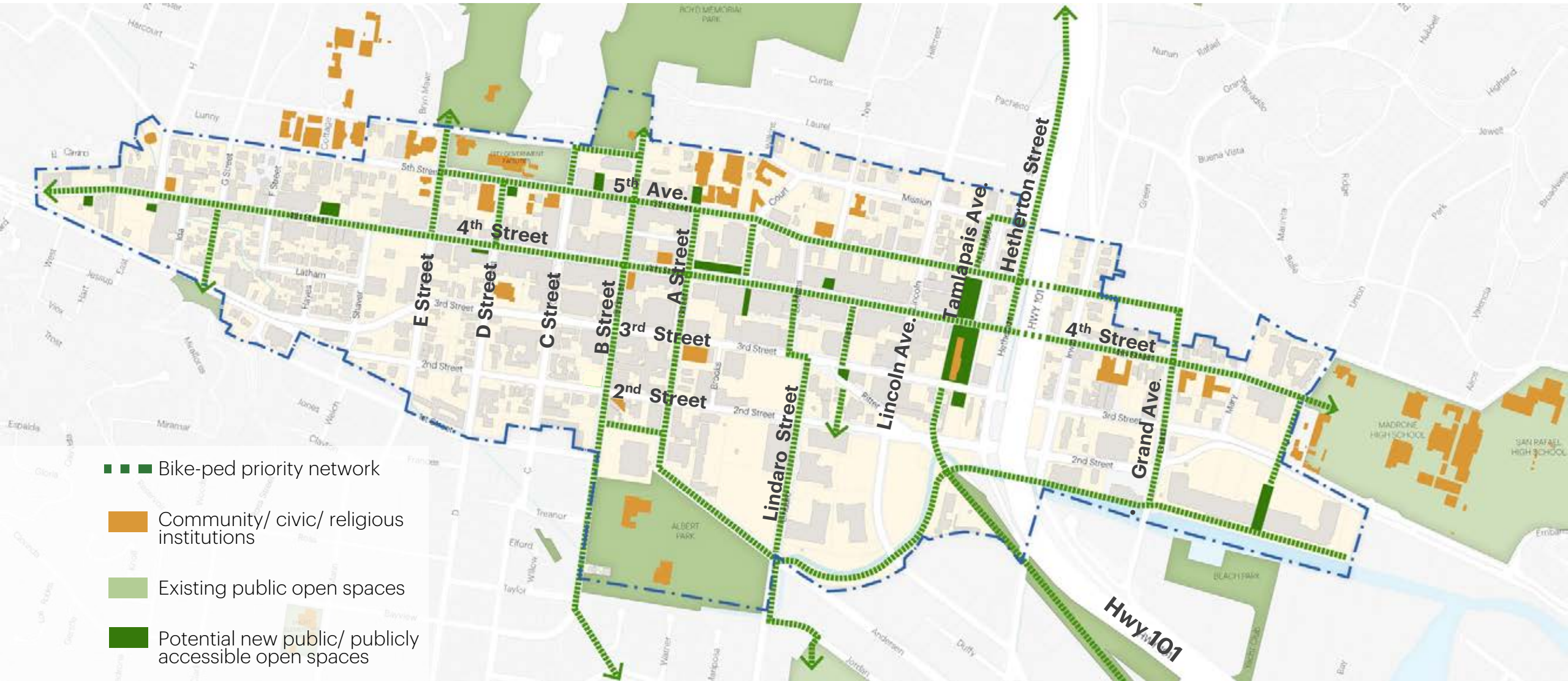
2. Reinforce gateways + sense of arrival



3. Strengthen multimodal connectivity



4. Create a cohesive public realm



5. Development program + policies

A development program that supports:

- Transit-oriented development
- A mixed-use Downtown
- Greater housing access and affordability
- Improving the City's jobs-housing balance

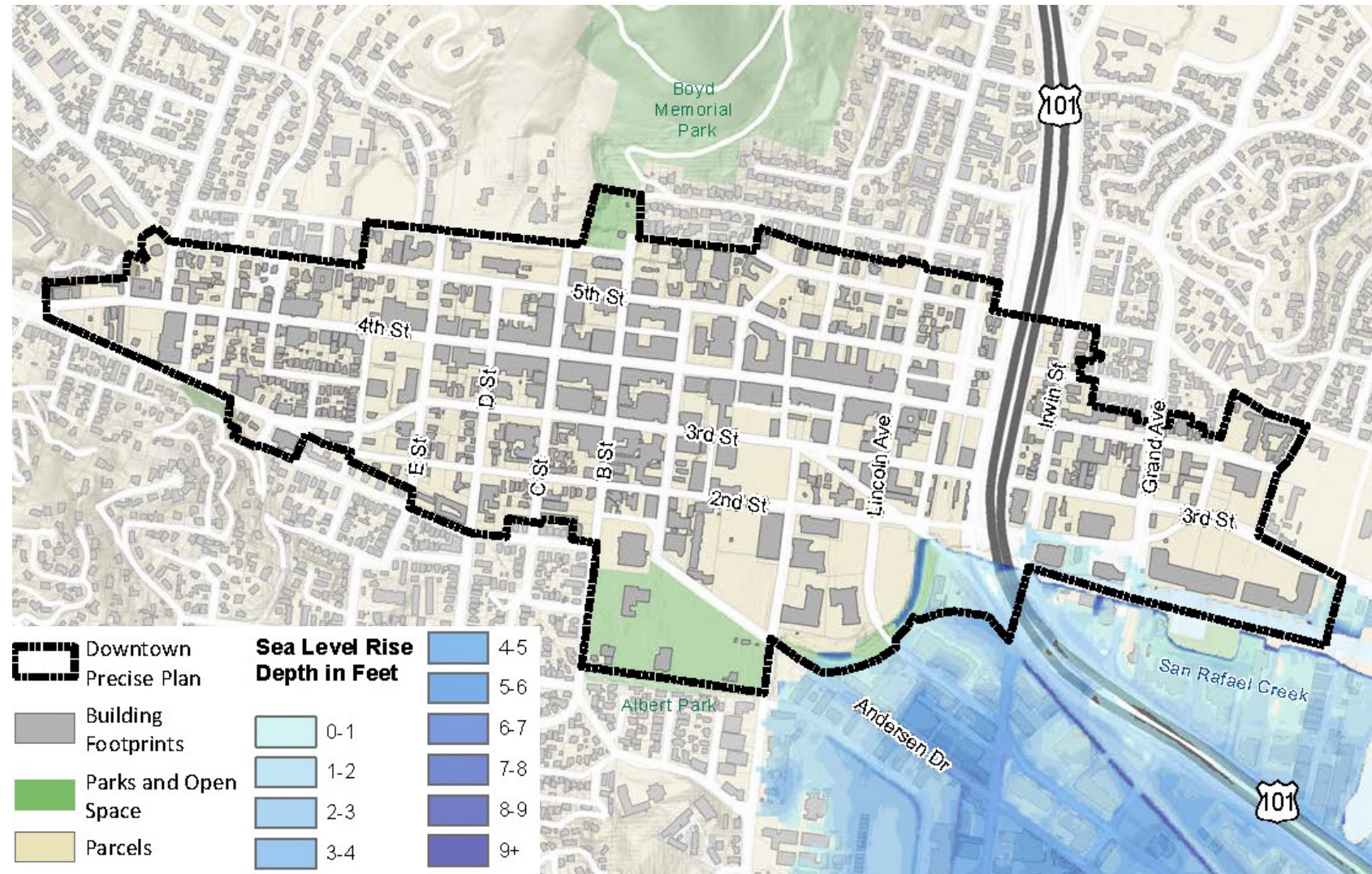


A visualization of a mixed-use, pedestrian-scaled environment

6. Climate change + sea level rise

Adaptation strategies that respond to:

- Climate change and sea level rise
- Development standards for resiliency at both building and district level



4. Illustrative Plan + Sub-Areas



Four sub-areas in Downtown

Four Downtown sub-areas recognize differences in form and character, and suggest potential phasing for implementation.

The vision for each sub-area has the following goals:

- Reinforce the existing character of various Downtown areas and their distinct roles within Downtown
- Create variety and interest while adding to overall Downtown identity
- Establish a hierarchy of form and intensity of use to improve wayfinding, reinforce a sense of place and protect views



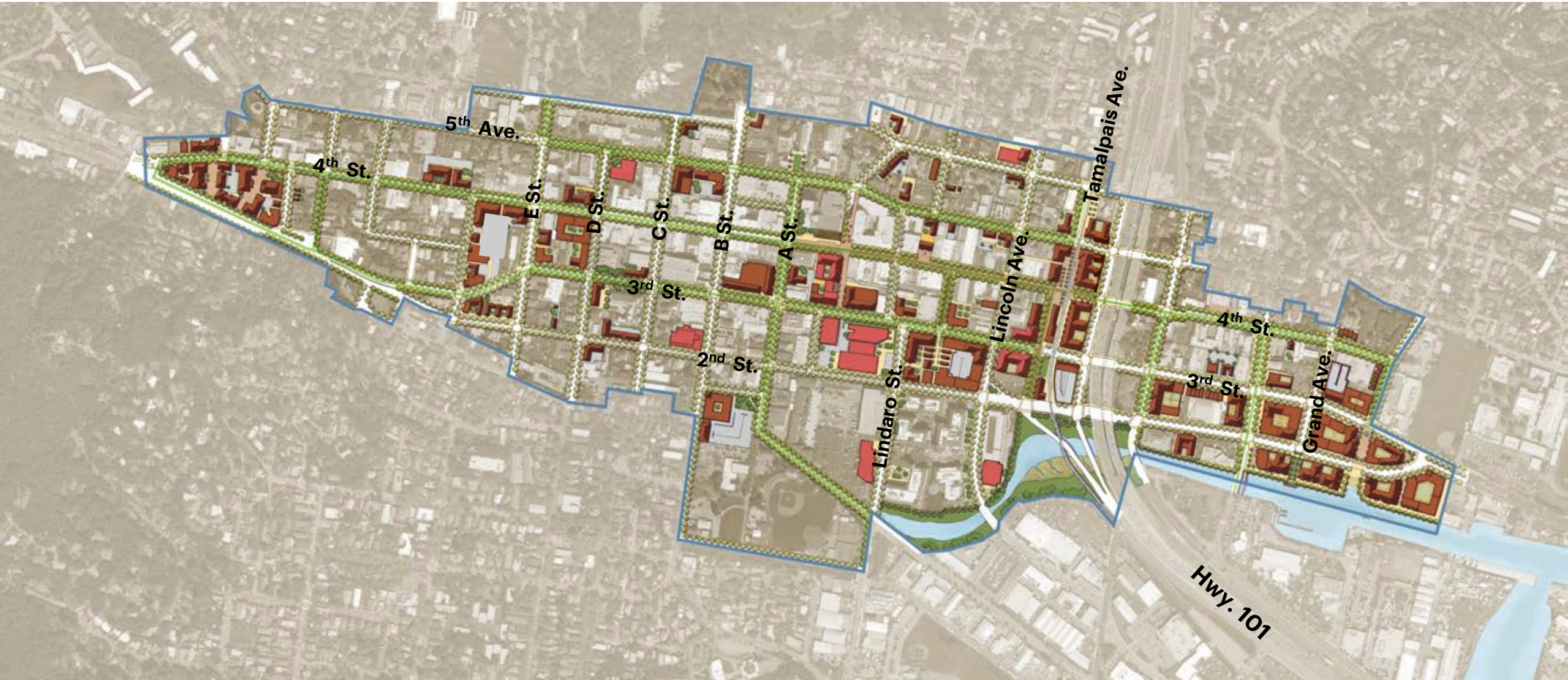
III. West End Village

II. Downtown Core

I. Transit Station Area

IV. Montecito Area

Downtown illustrative plan





Sub-Area 1

Transit Station Area



Illustrative plan



General study area for relocating Bettini Transit Center. Several design options are currently under review



1. Transit-oriented development integrates historic Whistlestop building
2. New SMART station public plaza extends north till 5th Avenue, links to the new 4th Street Shared Street; wayfinding strategies for orienting visitors
3. Bettini Transit Center relocation: several options currently under review
4. Traffic calming and enhanced bicycle facilities improve bicycle and pedestrian connectivity on 3rd and 4th Streets
5. New mixed-use buildings with active ground floor uses enliven sidewalks and the new transit center plaza
6. Small-lot infill development provides additional housing close to transit
7. Podium and detached buildings fill in Ritter Street and provide a direct connection from BioMarin to downtown



Transit Plaza (existing)



Today, the SMART station area lacks sufficient public open space to accommodate transit riders and others entering downtown. Although the area is an entry point for both traffic from the highway and those using SMART and the bus depot, its built form does not currently provide a gateway experience.

Underutilized land along the rail lines and south of 2nd Street provides an opportunity to envision infill development that could support a more vibrant activity node at this location.

The transit station area sits between the 4th Street corridor and the neighborhoods east of Highway 101, including the Canal District. Currently, there is poor pedestrian and bicycle connectivity between these neighborhoods and districts. The transit station area offers an opportunity to address this lack of connectivity.



Transit Plaza (proposed)



The proposed Transit Plaza includes the following components:

1. A public space adjacent to the rail line, extending from the SMART station across 4th Street, integrating the historic Whistlestop building as an iconic feature
2. An activity node with with amenities, streetscape improvements, and space for community activities that serves as a gateway feature at a major entrance to Downtown
3. New mixed-use development with active ground floor uses
4. Traffic calming and bicycle facilities along 4th Street, transformation of the existing street to a Shared Street





Sub-Area 2

Downtown Core



Illustrative plan



1. A portion of 4th Street is reconstructed with a paving pattern designating it as a pedestrian-friendly, traffic-calmed shared street, extending from the transit plaza to the downtown core
2. Pedestrian-friendly design promotes north-south connectivity across 3rd Street
3. New ground-floor development lines existing parking garages, providing active ground-floor uses
4. Pipeline projects and additional proposed development on opportunity sites throughout the downtown core provide new employment opportunities and housing options
5. Small-lot infill development integrates a variety of building types suited to Downtown's context



Downtown Core (existing)



Currently, the Downtown core has the potential to introduce new housing, both to take advantage of proximity to amenities and transit and to help enliven the area. Vacant and underutilized parcels offer promising opportunity sites for new development.

Pedestrians and cyclists currently face obstacles in unsafe or uncomfortable crossings at 2nd and 3rd Streets.

The Downtown core has an opportunity to strengthen its identity as the main destination for residents in the surrounding neighborhoods.



Downtown Core (proposed)



The proposed improvements to the downtown core include the following components:

1. Improved public space along 4th Street that includes a network of open spaces along a shared street environment
2. New mixed-use development to support the active environment along 4th Street, enlivening the pedestrian realm and serving the retail and service needs of residents and visitors
3. Streetscape enhancements, including wide sidewalks, street trees, and public art
4. 4th Street transformed into a Shared Street





Sub-Area 3

West End Village



Illustrative plan



1. New residential development includes a variety of housing types that reinforce the unique identity of the West End, responding to the existing form and scale of the neighborhood while providing additional housing choice
2. Pedestrian and bicycle improvements prioritized on 2nd and 4th Streets help connect this area to the Downtown core and Transit Station area
3. New development at the western edge of downtown helps create a gateway experience that indicates a special downtown environment
4. New neighborhood-scale public space, such as a pocket park, serves surrounding residents and activates the 4th Street corridor



West End Village (existing)



The current streetscape has “missing teeth”, where the sidewalk is not spatially contained or met with active uses.

The West End Village contains a residential neighborhood between 3rd and 4th Streets with a unique character in downtown. The neighborhood lacks small-scale public outdoor gathering places to serve these residents. While larger parks are nearby, neighborhood-scale amenities are missing.

Some parcels are used for purposes that are not the highest and best use of land in this location, such as surface parking lots and a retail center with parking in front. This area is not very well served by transit, and will need future improvements; with some parking provisions in the near term.



West End Village (proposed)



The proposed improvements to the West End Village include the following components:

1. New mixed-use buildings with active ground floor uses
2. Streetscape improvements and sidewalk amenities like street furniture, outdoor seating for restaurants and cafes, awnings and canopies for shade, and bicycle storage
3. A neighborhood-scale public open space such as a pocket park
4. Improved bicycle facilities along 2nd Street and 4th Street





Sub-Area 4

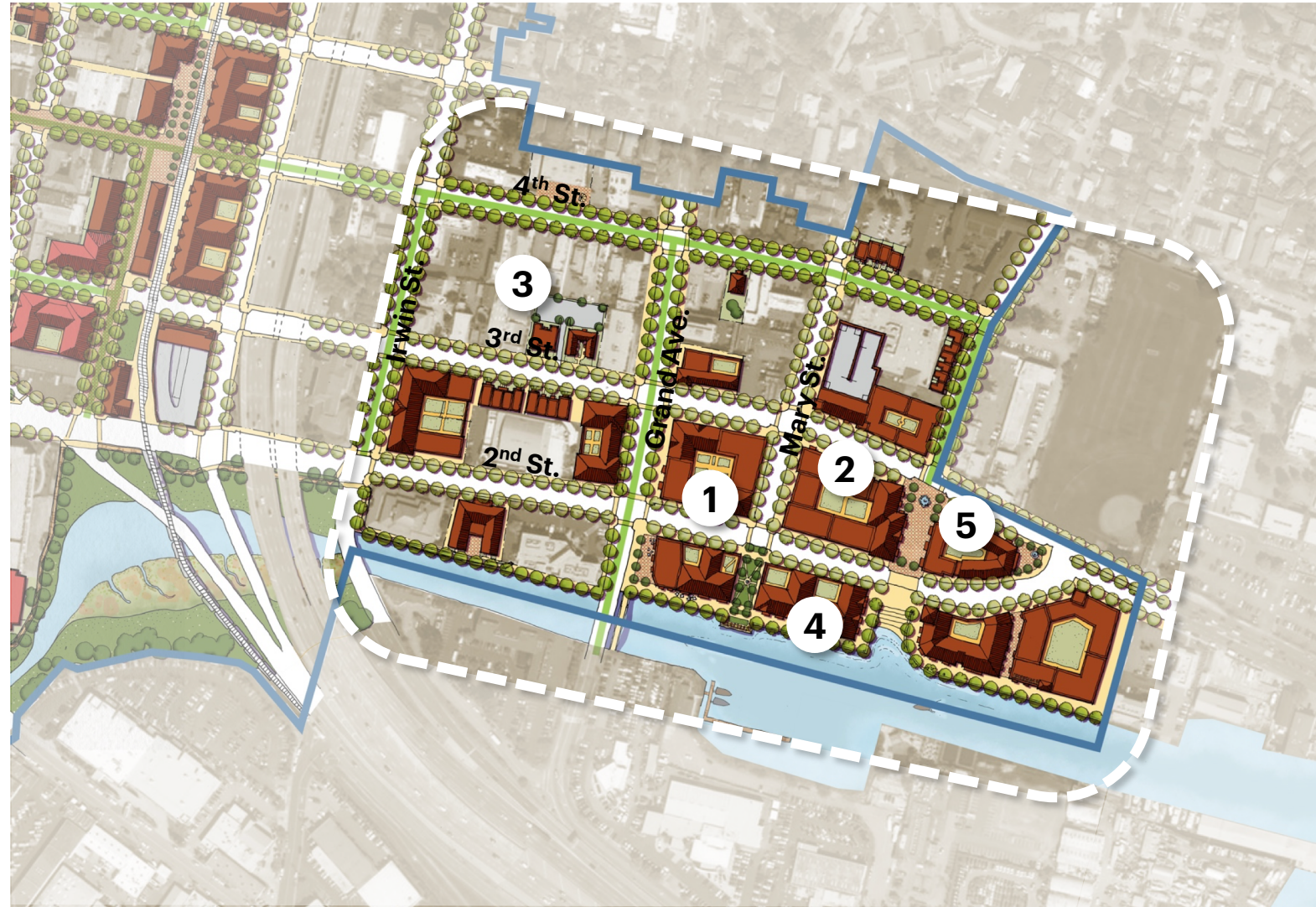
Montecito Area



Illustrative plan



1. Extension of street network into the existing Montecito Plaza, subdividing shopping center into a series of streets and blocks
2. New block-form mixed-use buildings with active ground floor uses provide housing and employment options in proximity to the transit center
3. Smaller-scale infill with Missing Middle building types (multi-family units in house-form buildings) on smaller opportunity sites
4. Buildings adjacent to the canal are oriented towards the water and an improved waterfront promenade resilient to sea-level rise
5. New public space includes a new public plaza framing a view of the canal, with an opportunity for canal improvements, water access, and water-related recreation



Montecito Area (existing)



The Montecito area is located between the canal, San Rafael High School, and Highway 101. The western blocks adjacent to the highway contain retail and services and some housing. The eastern blocks contain large-scale auto-oriented uses, including a Whole Foods Market and Montecito Plaza, a large shopping center that is set back from 3rd Street up to 250' behind a surface parking lot.

A new bicycle and pedestrian bridge at Grand Avenue connects this area to the Canal District and other neighborhoods. However, the area lacks active frontages and adequate bicycle or pedestrian infrastructure that would contribute to connectivity within the Montecito area.

The waterfront is minimally engaged by Montecito Plaza. Two pedestrian passages between buildings provide access to the canal, and there is a publicly accessible path along most of the water, but currently the buildings of Montecito Plaza use this path for service functions and it is not attractive or welcoming for the public.



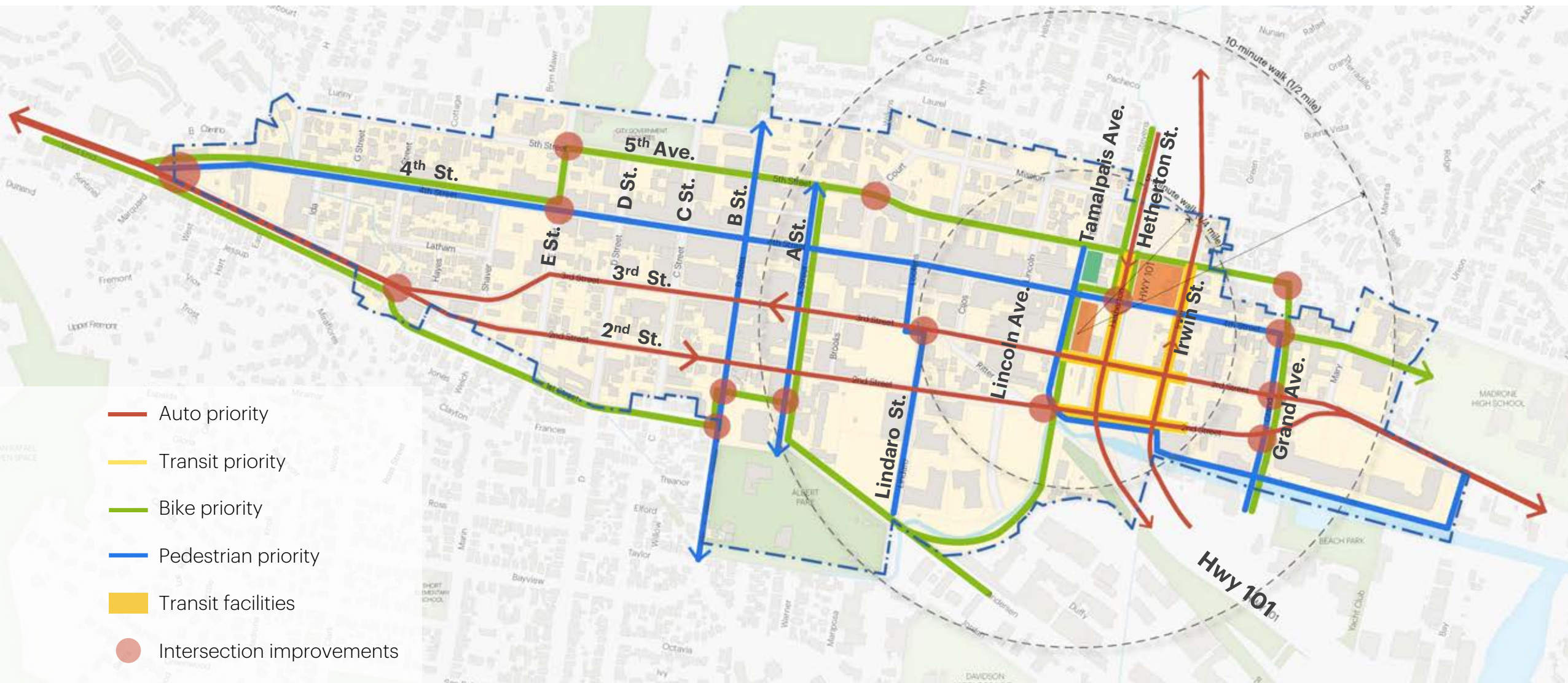
5. Multimodal Street Framework





Street Prioritization

Street framework + prioritization

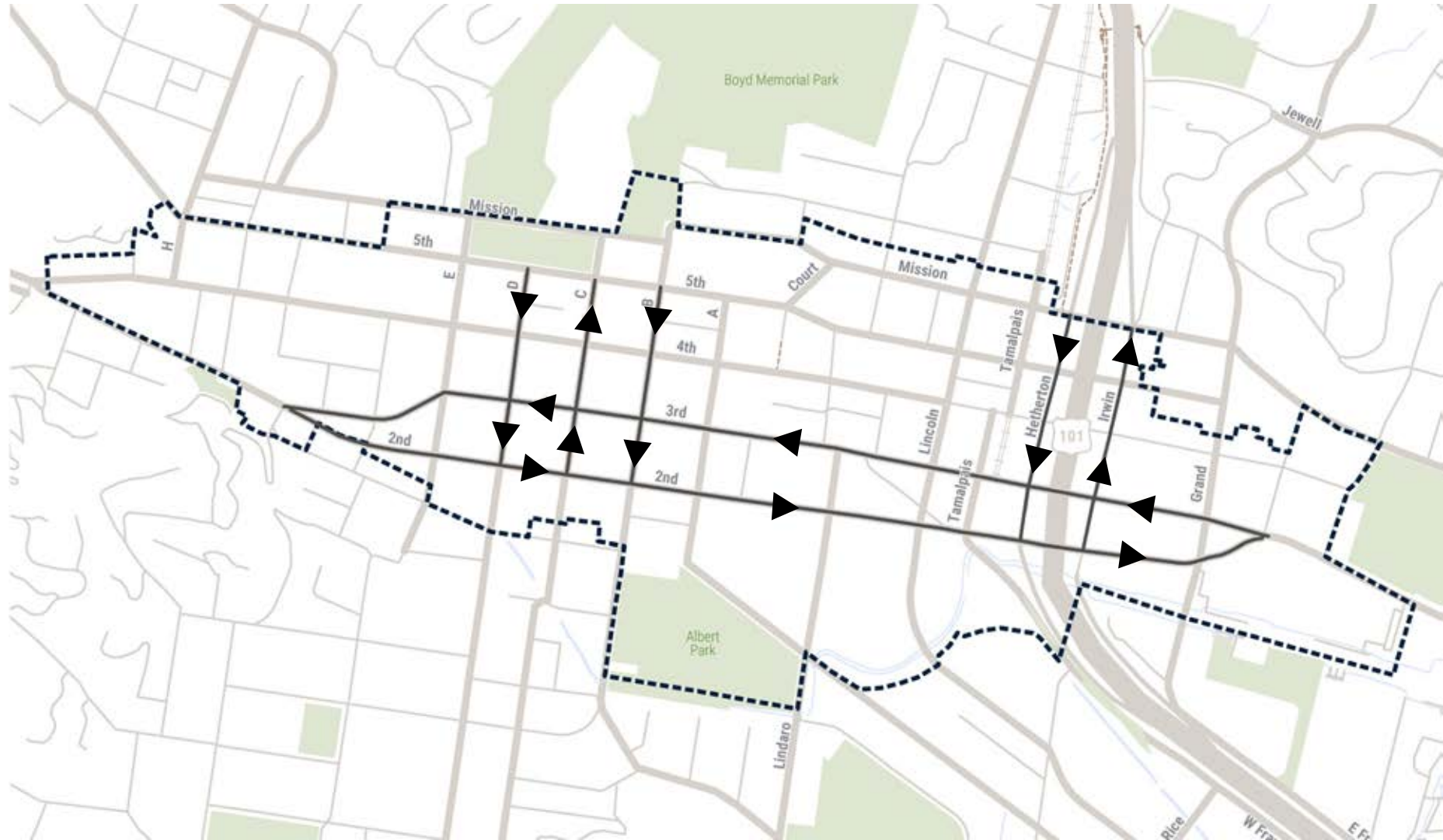


One-way streets

The primary east-west vehicular traffic is on the **Second and Third Street** couplet.

Hetherton and Irwin Streets also act as a one-way couplet feeding US-101.

Within Downtown, **B, C and D** are north-south one-way streets that can be converted to two-way, for better circulation and wayfinding.



6. Program + Phasing





Program + Phasing

Development capacity

Residential

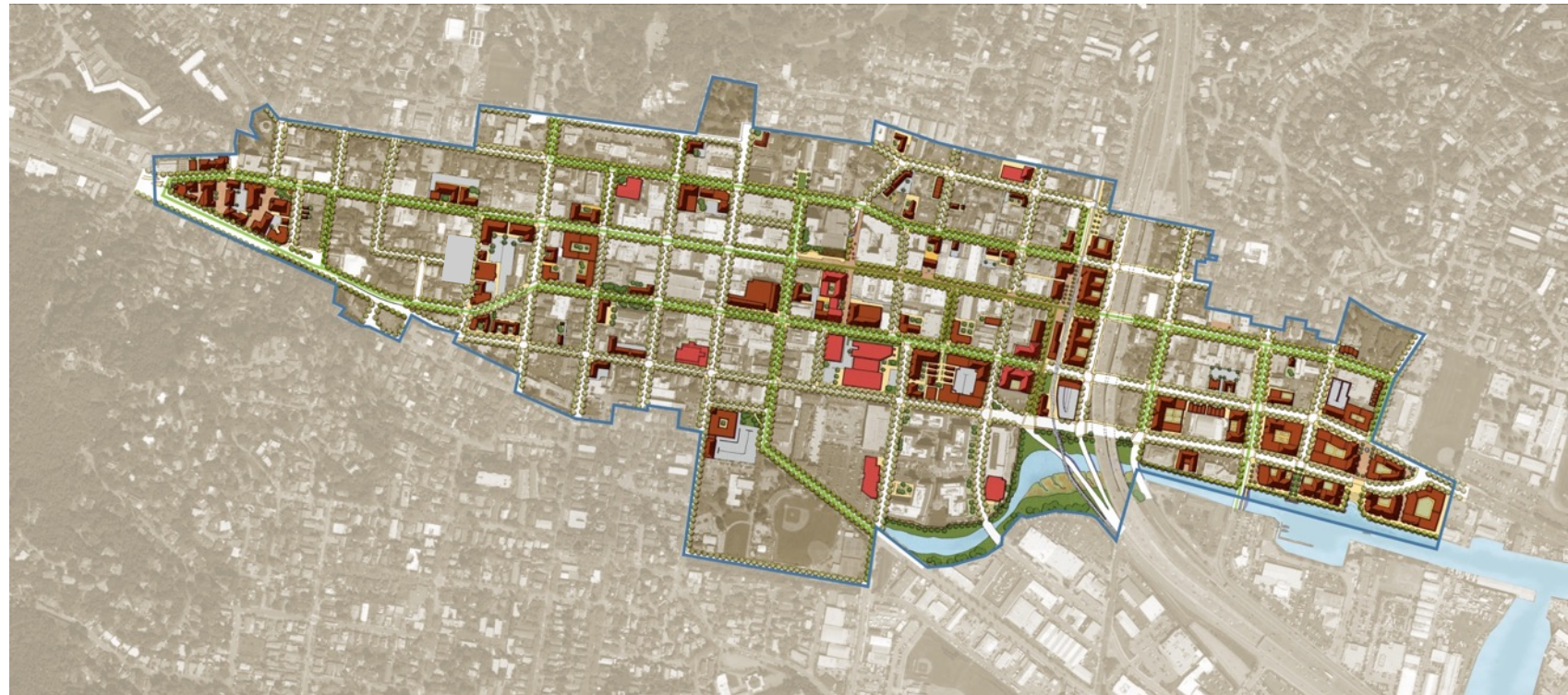
2,362,500 sf potential new residential BUA

~2,250 new DUs @ 1,050 sf average unit size

Non-residential

518,000 sf potential new non-residential BUA

~1,480 jobs @ 1 job per 350 sf (gross BUA)



West End Village
378,000 sf res.
360 new DUs
70,000 sf non-res.
200 new jobs

Downtown Core
708,750 sf res.
675 new DUs
169,750 sf non-res.
485 new jobs

Transit Station Area
908,250 sf res.
865 new DUs
143,500 sf non-res.
410 new jobs

Montecito Area
367,500 sf res.
350 new DUs
134,750 sf non-res.
385 new jobs

Program + phasing: things to consider

1. How much development should the Plan recommend?

ABAG projections Target jobs-housing numbers from ABAG ~1,000 new units ~900 new jobs	Current analysis Lot testing of opportunity sites in Precise Plan area ~2,250 new units ~1,480 new jobs	PDA analysis Match development to site capacity ~1,325 to 2,800 new units ~1,300 new jobs
--	--	--

2. How quickly should development happen?

Should the phasing focus on the near-term (0 – 10 years) or incrementally (0 - 20 years)?

3. Where should development happen across different phases?

Should initial phases focus on development at certain opportunity sites, or be distributed proportionally across the Study Area?

4. Should certain areas be more employment-focused than others?

Current policy direction envisions mainly office around the SMART Station. Should the Plan include residential development in addition to office, to create a mixed-use center?

7. Next Steps





What's next

Steering Committee Meeting: Downtown Options – October 9th 2019

Downtown Plan and Code Approach Memo – October 2019

Study Session with Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) – November 2019

Draft Downtown Precise Plan and Code – Early 2020

Thank you!





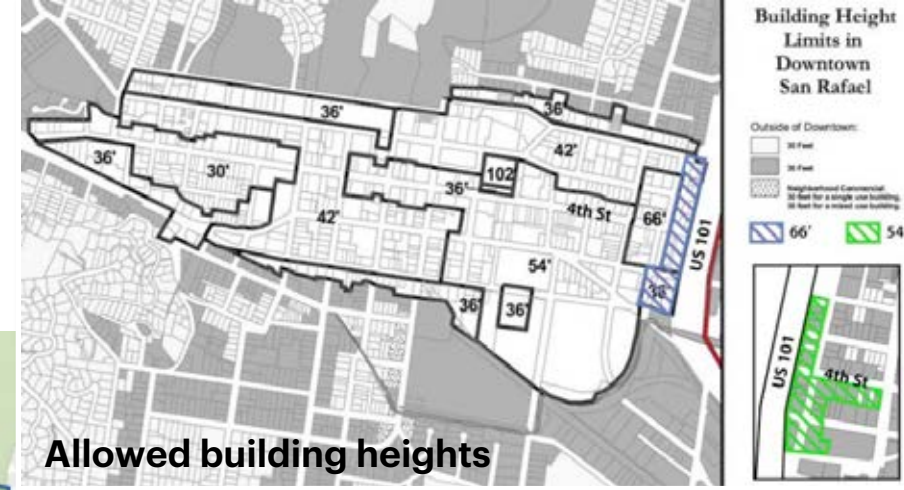
Other Topics to Consider

Urban form

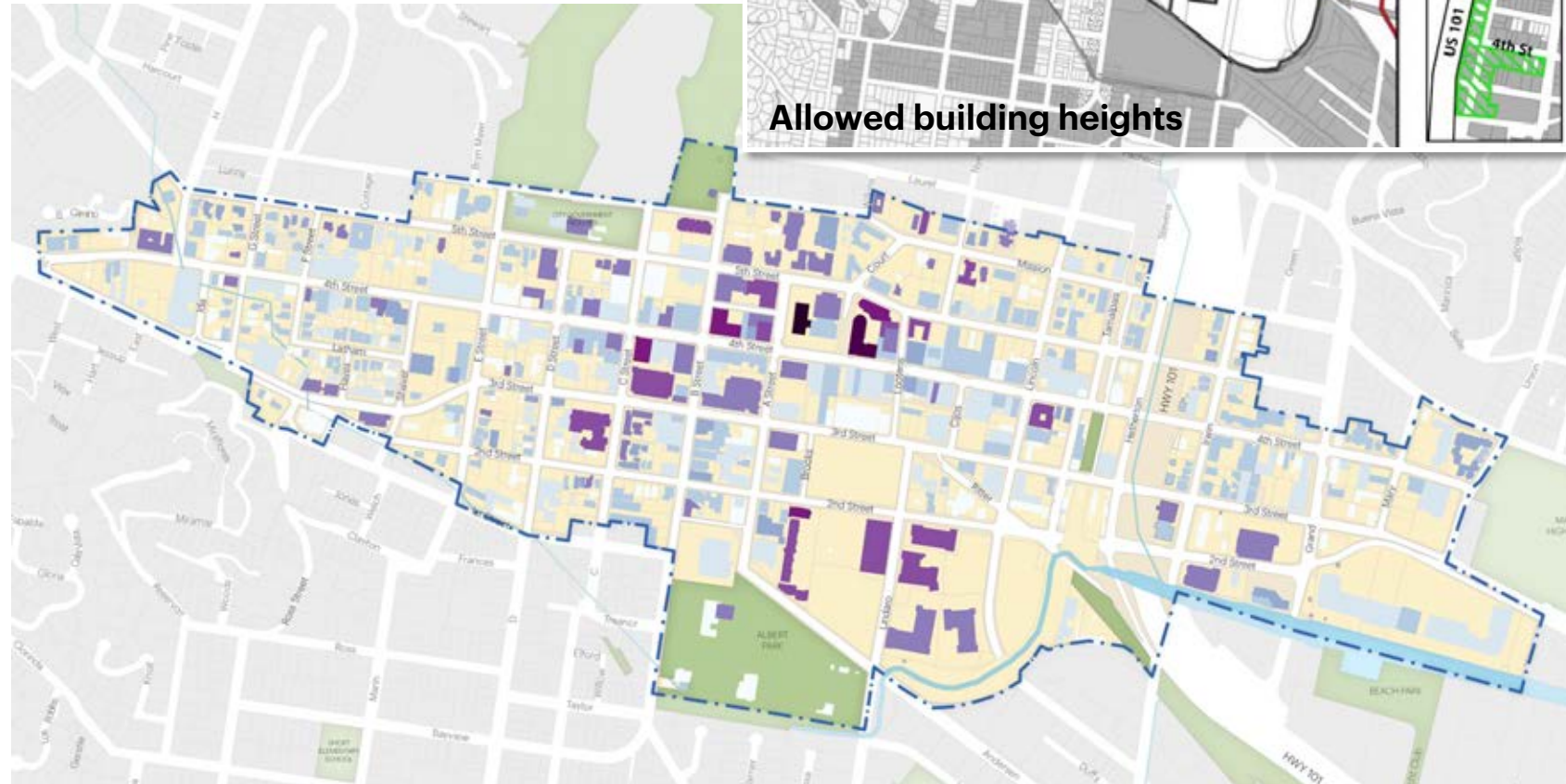
Building heights and Density bonus

Observed building heights in most of downtown are lower than maximum allowed by right. Additional height allowed as a density bonus is seen in a few cases only.

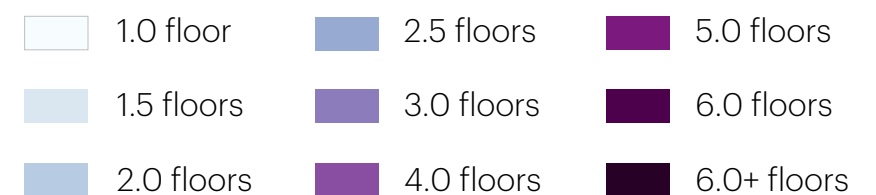
Should the Plan reconsider allowed heights in order to 'up-zone' key sites, or should it be a uniform maximum height envelope for each zone/ sub-area?



Allowed building heights



Observed building heights (number of stories)

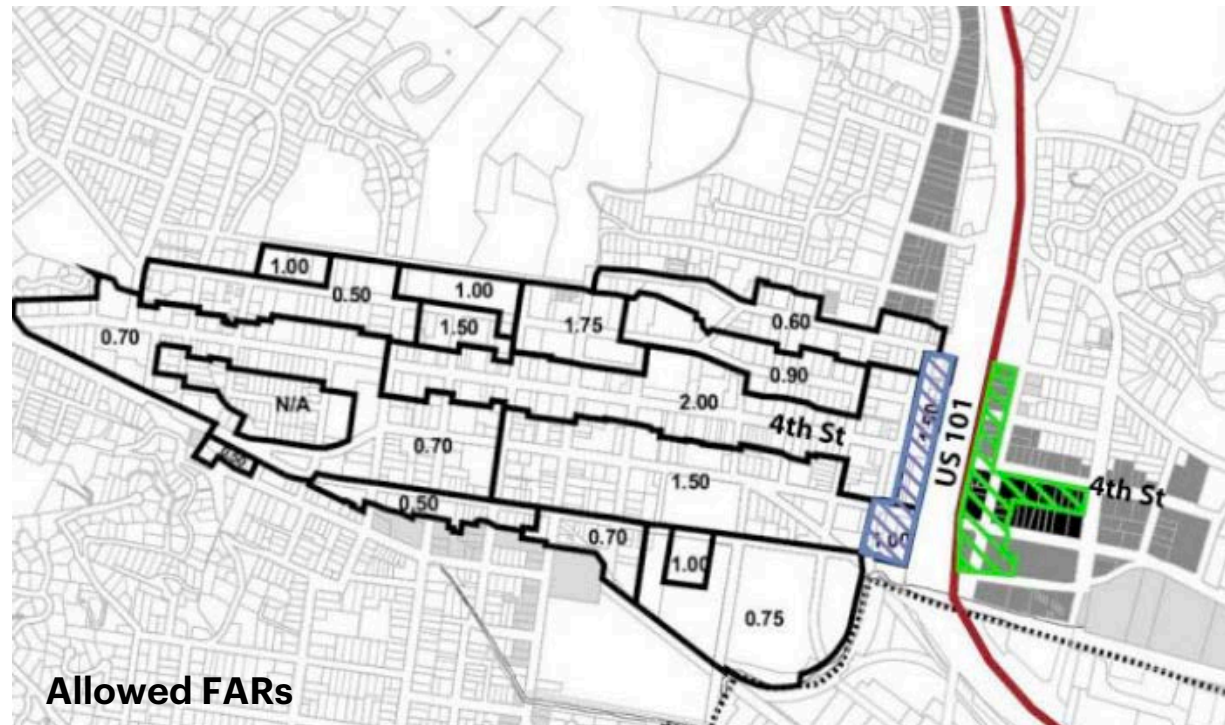


Urban form

Floor Area Ratio (FAR)

The maximum permitted FAR for Downtown has been set as 2.0 in the Draft General Plan 2040 Land Use Categories.

Initial testing of opportunity sites suggests that this envelope will not be exceeded even by the most aggressive development program option.



Floor Area Ratios in Downtown and Environs



NOTES: FAR for PGP and parks is 1.0, and for open space is generally 0.0. Ministorage in industrial and light industrial/office districts has an FAR of 1.0.

Downtown San Rafael (Maximum FAR 2.0)

This category corresponds to properties in Downtown San Rafael. It includes the highest development densities and intensities in the city, and contains a mix of housing, office, retail, service, and public land uses. Development in this area is guided by the Downtown San Rafael Precise Plan, which identifies a series of Downtown subareas, each with its own set of development standards and land use guidelines. The maximum FAR of 2.0 applies only where shown in the Downtown Precise Plan; lower FAR limits apply on most parcels within the Precise Plan boundaries. In addition, some of the zoning districts within the Downtown Mixed Use designation (characterized by existing residential uses) may be subject to maximum density standards rather than FAR standards. Properties with this designation may also be subject to *minimum* FAR and density requirements, to ensure that land is used efficiently and that the City's housing and economic development goals may be achieved.

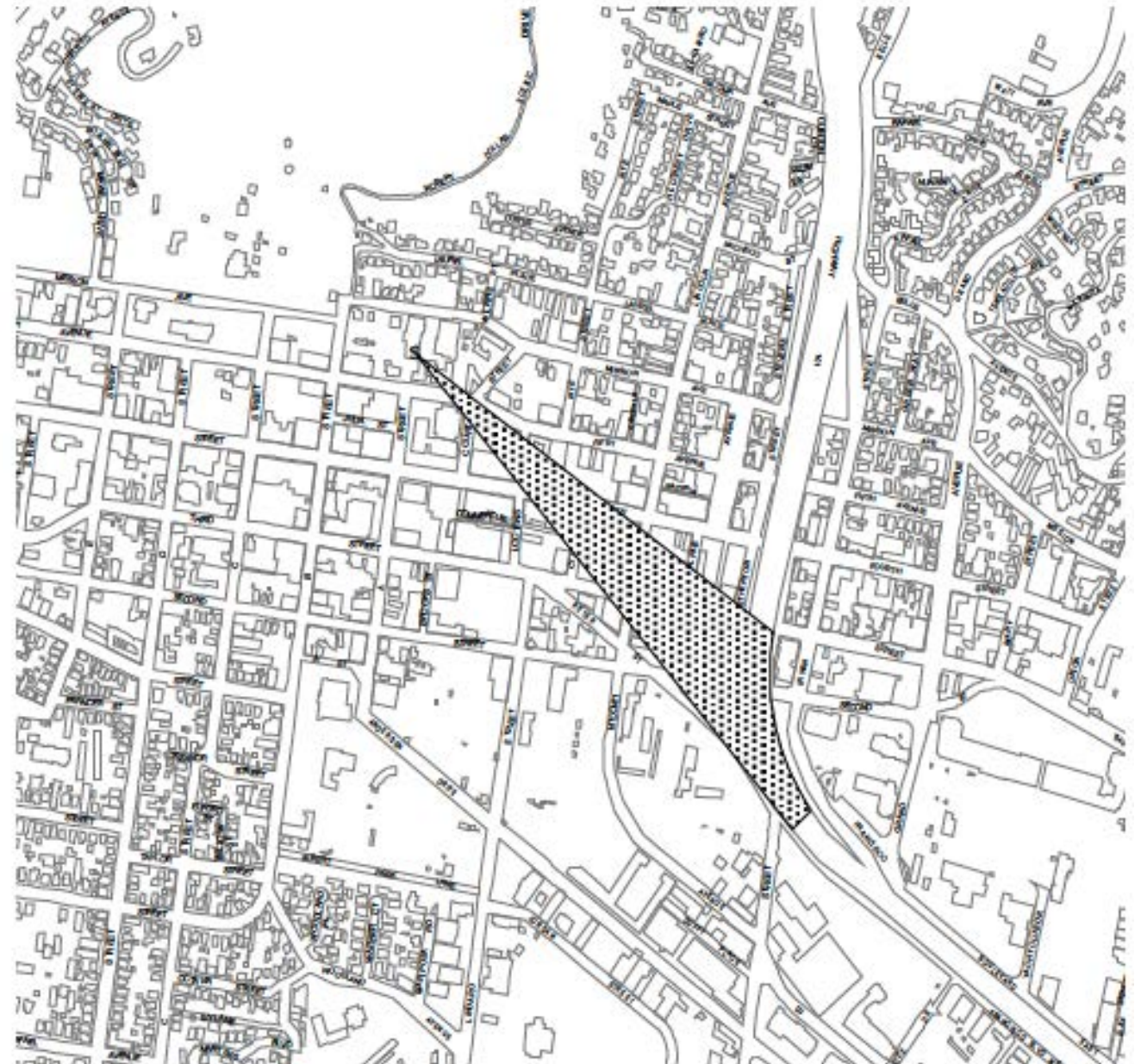
General Plan 2040 Draft Land Use Categories

Urban form

View corridors

Downtown design guidelines suggest a view analysis to avoid obstructing views of St. Raphael's church spire.

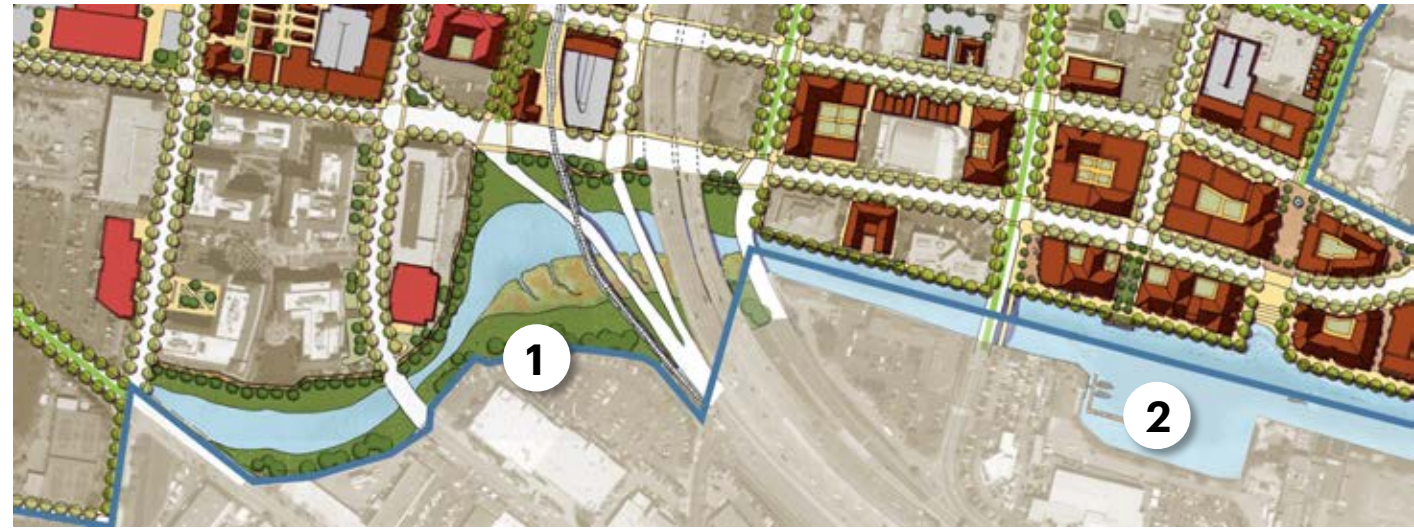
Any redevelopment around the SMART station and current Transit Center parcels is likely to be impacted by this requirement.



Climate change + sea level rise

Downtown is susceptible to both flooding and sea-level rise, requiring a range of short-term and long-term adaptation strategies. Recommended design strategies (to be analyzed for feasibility):

1. Wetland restoration on an underutilized site (if feasible) to alleviate flooding, provide habitat
2. Dredging and other improvements to San Rafael Creek to increase navigability and decrease flooding; explore opportunities to increase capacity of Irwin and Mahon creeks and connect to new urban wetland
3. Shared street on 4th can be designed with permeable paving and underground tanks to temporarily store runoff during severe storm conditions and improve runoff quality



Open space

Privately owned, publicly used spaces

This strategy is recommended to create new public spaces within existing downtown conditions which is largely built, with few vacant parcels.

Suitable incentives need to be provided to encourage the provision of such spaces, and standards established for the design, degree of access and allowed uses. Mechanisms such as creating a Community Facilities District/ other Special Assessment Districts need to be considered for implementing and maintaining such spaces.



Illustrative examples of new privately owned, publicly accessible open spaces in downtown.

Open space

Transit Plaza

The SMART Station area provides an opportunity to design a new public plaza for station access as well as community gathering.

Extending the existing small plaza fronting the Whistlestop building to north of 4th Street can create an attractive new public space at a key location, framed by new mixed-use buildings with active ground floor uses. Activities can be temporary such as a Farmer's Market or permanent such as kiosks or a Market Hall.



Illustrative of Transit Plaza (left, top right) and Del Mar Station, Pasadena, a precedent.

Open space

Shared Street

4th Street is the established Main Street for downtown and its role can be further enhanced through traffic calming and public realm improvements. The Plan proposes its transformation to a Shared Street that would accommodate all modes but will prioritize pedestrian movement.

Improvements such as removing curbs and repaving will enable the street to function as a flexible public plaza. Permeable pavers can help in absorbing stormwater runoff, and potentially drain to underground cisterns for storage.



Shared Streets in Asheville (top), Massachusetts (bottom left) and Halifax, Nova Scotia (bottom right)

Historic resources





Historic preservation, rehabilitation, adaptive reuse

A survey of Downtown properties is underway that might result in additional historic resource sites being added to the Downtown inventory

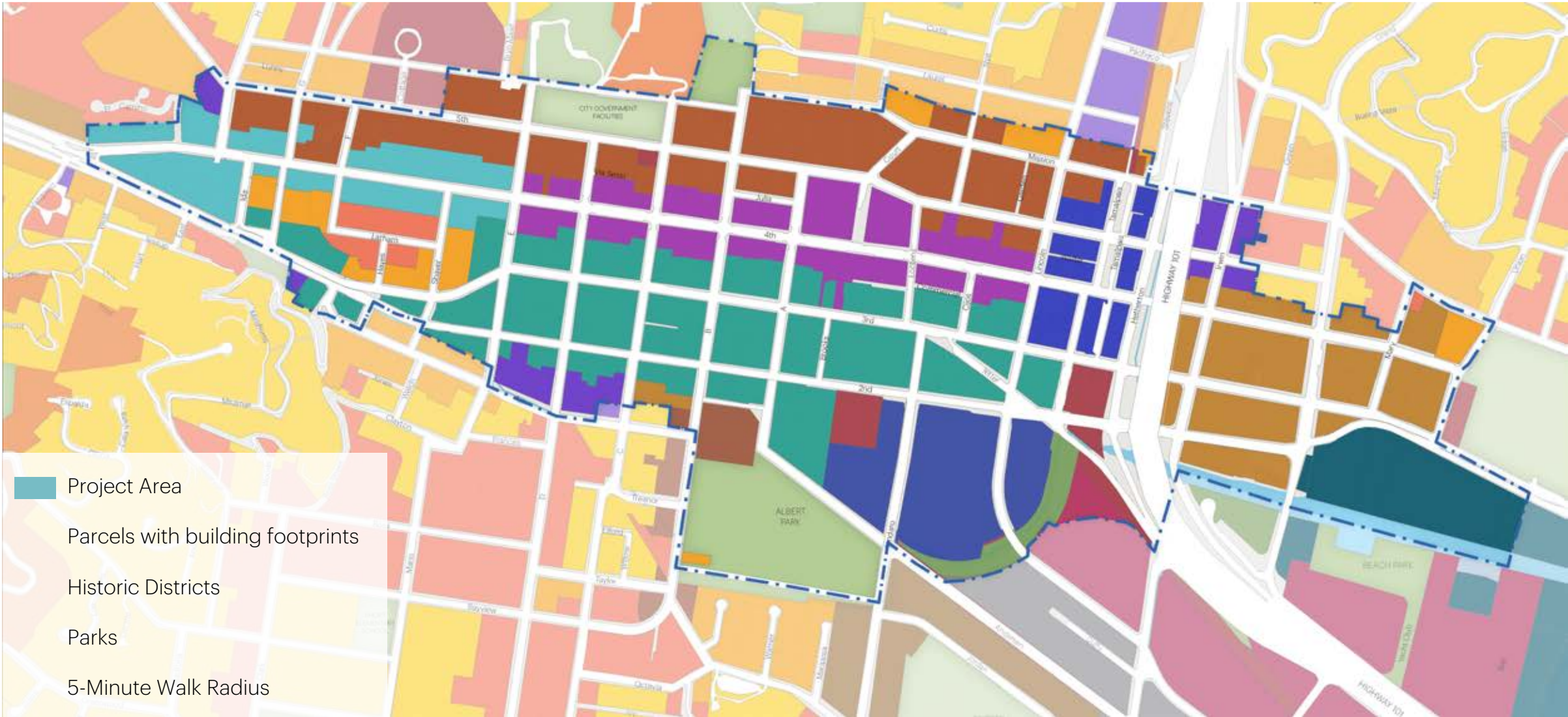
The Plan needs to consider a balanced approach between preservation and adaptive use to protect Downtown's built heritage and character while not encumbering new development



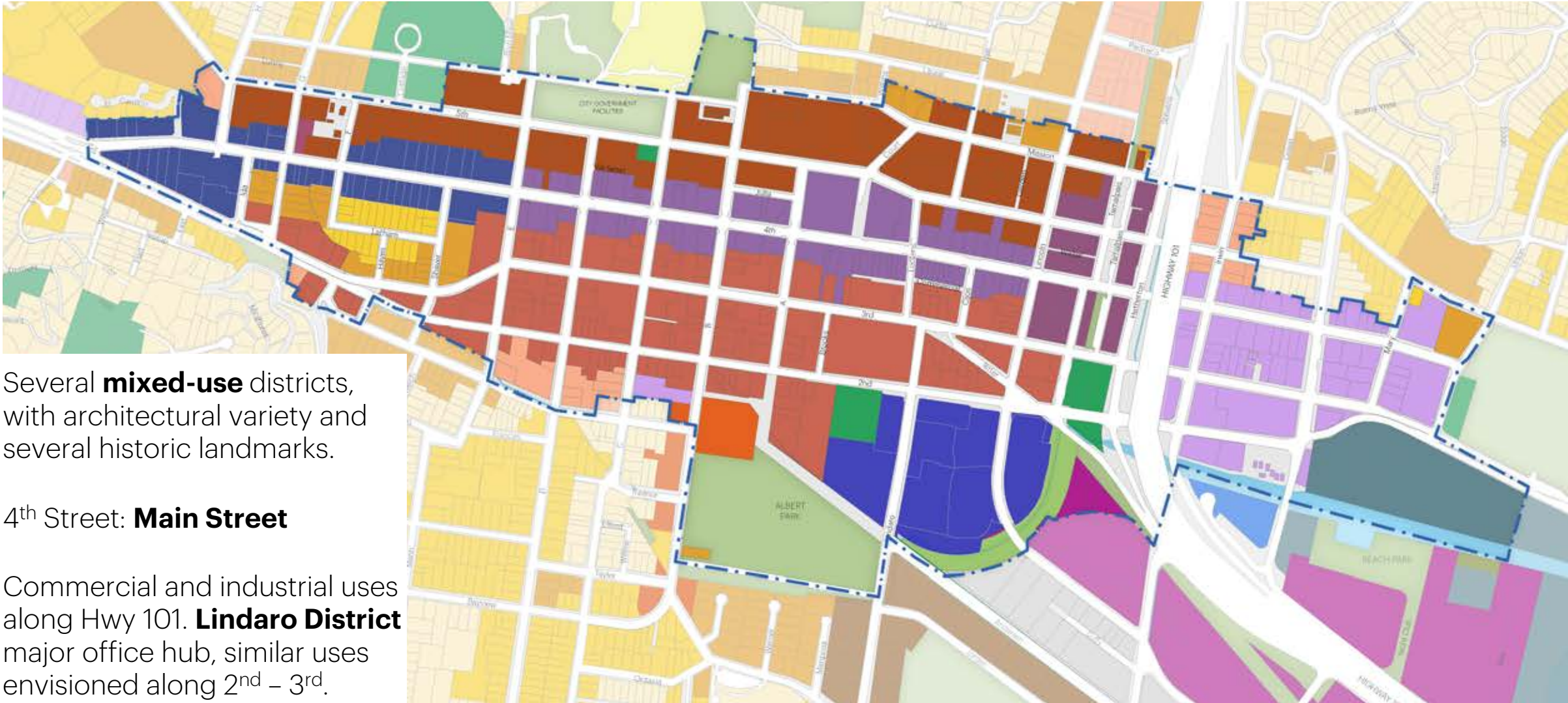
Opportunity sites that are potentially eligible for historic status

-  No condition/ No listed address or construction date
-  Listed in survey
-  Needs re-evaluation
-  Pre-1969 construction but not listed in survey

Existing zoning



Existing land use



Several **mixed-use** districts, with architectural variety and several historic landmarks.

4th Street: **Main Street**

Commercial and industrial uses along Hwy 101. **Lindero District** major office hub, similar uses envisioned along 2nd – 3rd.

Allowed building heights (partial)

