



Vision Summary



In this chapter

I. A 20-Year Vision for Downtown	x
II. Key Themes and Areas of Focus	xii
III. Precise Plan Organization	xiv

I. A 20-Year Vision for Downtown

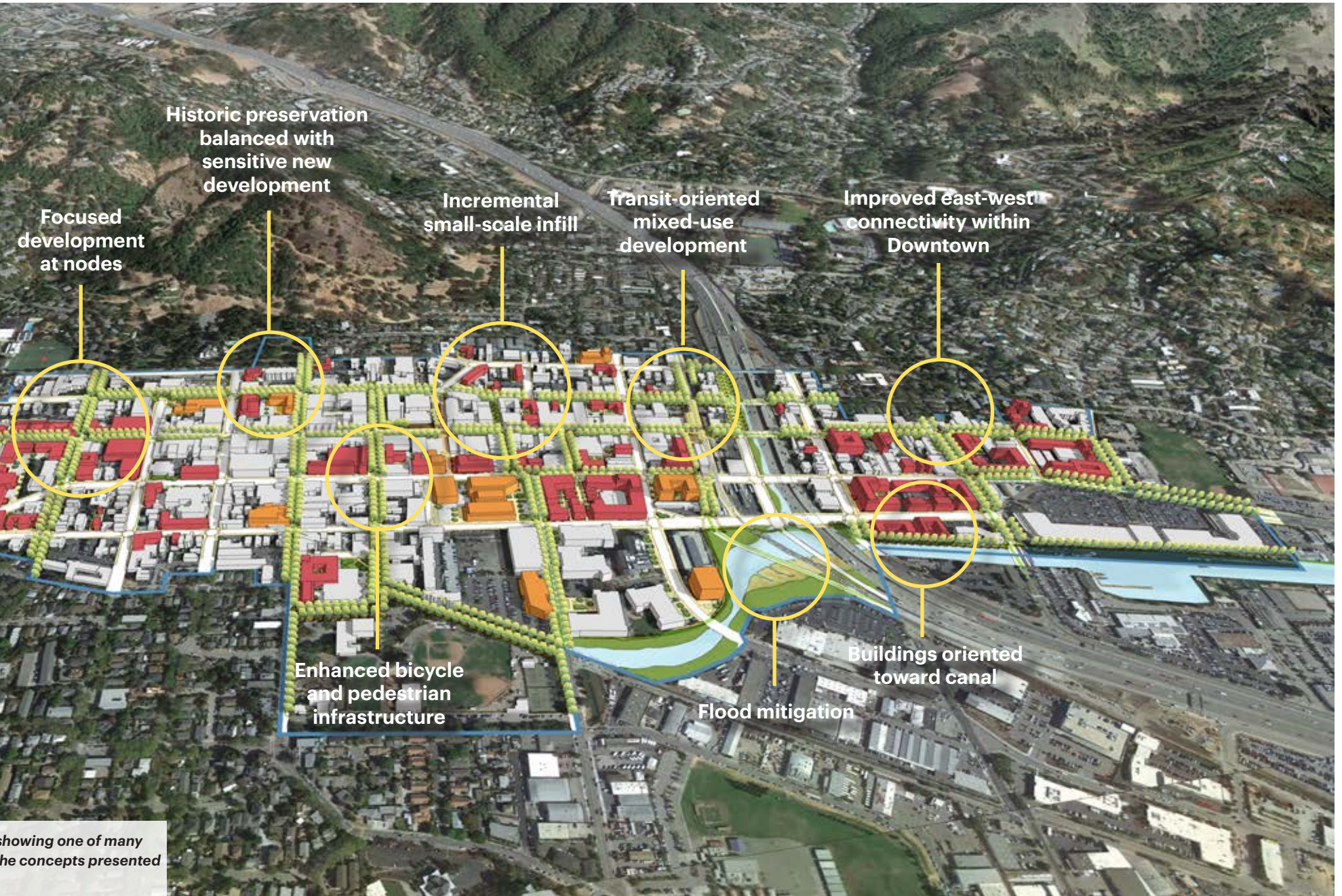
What is the Downtown Precise Plan and what will it do?

The Precise Plan is the culmination of a two year planning effort led by City staff and an inter-disciplinary consultant team to develop a vision for Downtown San Rafael. It will provide a roadmap to achieve the City's goals such as increasing housing diversity and equity, improving walkability and transportation choices, and advancing resiliency to climate change. It will also align the City's goals with state-mandated streamlining of housing production. Guided by active public participation at every stage, the Precise Plan will allow Downtown San Rafael to grow and evolve over the next 20 years in accordance with the community's shared vision. The vision is implemented by policies and standards to help prioritize public investment and regulate private development to achieve this design.

At the time of preparation of this Plan, there are several "unknowns" that can influence the implementation of the Precise Plan. One such "unknown" is the relocation site for the San Rafael Transit Center, a decision that could significantly influence the amount of development in Downtown. The Precise Plan has tried to resolve such issues with a degree of flexibility in design, as described in Chapter Four: Design Vision. Another "unknown" is how Downtown may change as the City emerges from the disrupting impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. It is difficult to accurately predict the long-term impacts on cities and downtowns across the country, particularly for the retail sector. The Plan's policies and actions are aligned with the 20-year vision for Downtown. However, they may need to be amended to meet the challenges of the immediate future.



An illustrative of the Precise Plan vision for Downtown San Rafael showing possible built outcomes. Circular call-outs highlight examples of outcomes in the Plan.



II. Key Themes and Areas of Focus

The Precise Plan process has been guided by active community input at all stages of the design process, and is shaped by key themes that emerged as a result of that process.

Several key themes emerged as a result of the community engagement, that have helped guide the future vision for Downtown. These varied themes, summarized on the facing page, have been used to create the framework for the Precise Plan. They have laid the foundation for the Plan's policies (described in Chapter Three: Design Principles and Guiding Policies) as well as the recommended built form and public realm improvements (described in Chapter Four: Design Vision and Chapter Six: Transportation and Parking). The themes have influenced decisions on historic preservation (described in Chapter Five: Historic Resources), as well as promoting affordable housing and preventing the displacement of the existing community (described in Chapter Seven: Affordable Housing and Anti-Displacement).

Unique "Home Town" quality

A strong theme that emerged was the importance of Downtown's "home town" quality to its residents. The layers of history are evident in the character of Downtown's buildings and spaces, and have shaped its culture and sense of community. The Plan strives to protect and enhance this quality that makes Downtown unique.

Balancing the old and the new

The Plan invites new development to support Downtown's long-term economic vitality and sustenance. At the same

time, it also establishes policies to protect its historic character, cherished institutions and local businesses. It lays the foundation to promote walkability, accessibility and an active lifestyle. It encourages innovation in built form, tempered with guidance to ensure human scale and sensitive transitions to the existing context.

Downtown as a neighborhood

The Precise Plan lays strong emphasis on mixed-use development and increasing housing in Downtown. This is both to ensure the continued evolution of Downtown and for it to stay regionally relevant; as well as a direct response to the significant housing crisis in the Bay Area. It aligns with State mandates to increase the supply of housing, in particular workforce and affordable housing, set in the form of the Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) for most jurisdictions. As a transit-rich Priority Development Area with easy access to amenities and services, Downtown is a prime location within San Rafael to deliver much-needed housing at all income levels.

A resilient, adaptable Downtown

The Plan acknowledges the reality of climate change and its potential impacts on Downtown, particularly sea-level rise, and aims at shaping a future for Downtown that is resilient and can adapt to future challenges.

Key Themes

- 1** Recalibrate the role of Downtown from a retail and employment district into a mixed-use center.
- 2** Promote housing in Downtown to meet a variety of needs and lifestyle choices.
- 3** Foster a continued sense of identity through focused investments at important Downtown nodes.
- 4** Preserve Downtown's unique history and built heritage while encouraging new development.
- 5** Create an exemplary public realm to improve pedestrian and bicycle connectivity.
- 6** Ensure that future development patterns can adapt to climate change and sea-level rise.
- 7** Create a predictable development review process to allow streamlining of project proposals.

III. Precise Plan Organization

The Precise Plan is organized into the following chapters:



Chapter

1

Introduction + Community Engagement

Establishes the Precise Plan's purpose and its relationship to the existing regulatory framework, and provides an overview of community engagement milestones.



Chapter

2

Existing Conditions

Gives an overview of existing conditions in Downtown including a summary of challenges and opportunities.



Chapter

3

Design Principles + Guiding Policies

Sets design principles, guiding policies, and expected Plan outcomes.



Chapter

6

Transportation + Parking

Defines strategies and provides policy direction for modal prioritization, street design and parking.



Chapter

7

Affordable Housing + Anti-Displacement

Sets strategies to promote affordable housing in Downtown and nurture a sense of community.



Chapter

4

Design Vision

Defines Downtown’s future built environment, including physical form and character, public realm, and development program.



Chapter

5

Historic Resources

Describes historic resources in Downtown and provides recommendations for historic preservation.



Chapter

8

Implementation

Describes the implementation approach, project prioritization, and financing strategies to achieve the Precise Plan vision.



Chapter

9

Downtown Form-Based Code

Establishes form-based zoning districts for Downtown that regulate the future built character of Downtown.



Chapter

10

Glossary + Appendices

Includes a glossary of specialized terms, and collects supplementary documents referenced and developed throughout the Precise Plan process.

