

# Downtown San Rafael Precise Plan

City of  
San Rafael, CA

Adopted  
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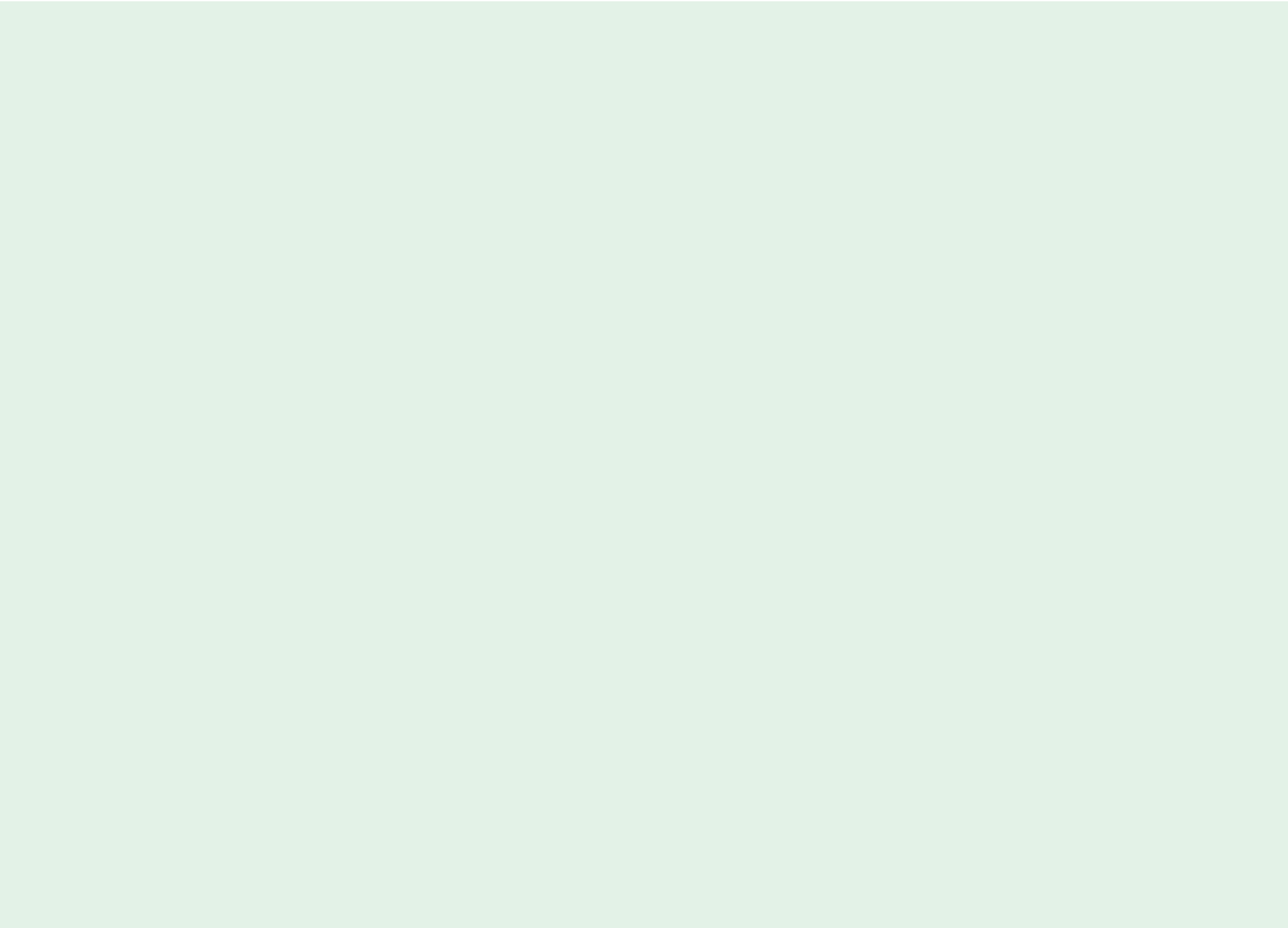
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# Vision Summary



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# I. A 20-Year Vision for Downtown

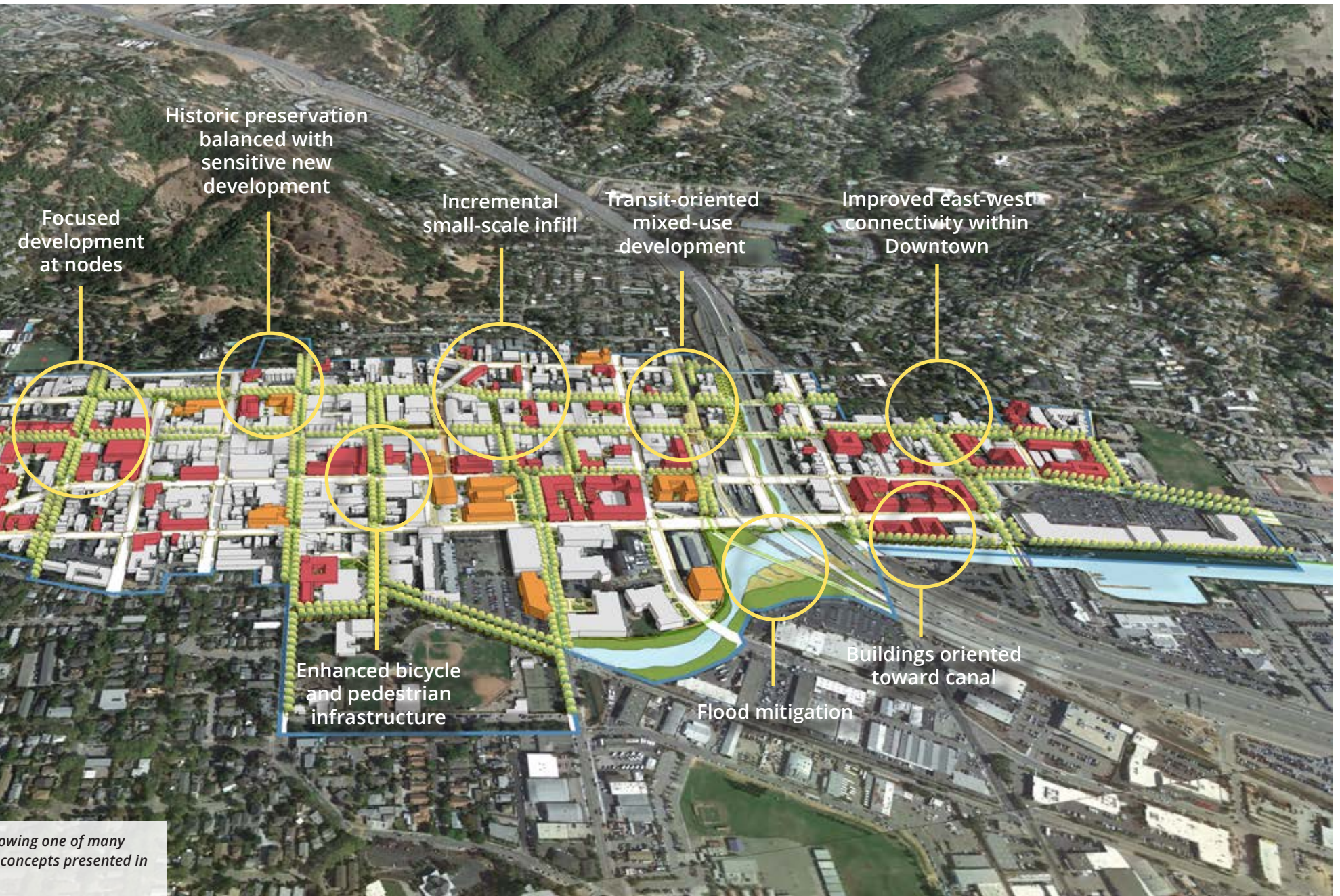
## What is the Downtown Precise Plan and what will it do?

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 the Plan.*



Showing one of many concepts presented in

## 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, prioritization of projects, 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.







# Introduction + Community Engagement

CHAPTER

1

*In this chapter*

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# 1.1 Purpose and Timeline



**Figure 1.1 The Precise Plan Area within San Rafael**

*Downtown San Rafael has good access from US-101 and the SMART rail line, and enjoys a central location within the City and Marin county.*

- City of San Rafael
- Downtown Precise Plan Area
- Transit Center and SMART Station

**The Downtown San Rafael Precise Plan implements the community’s vision to create opportunities for reinvestment and future development that is feasible, predictable, and consistent with the community’s priorities and aspirations.**

## Background

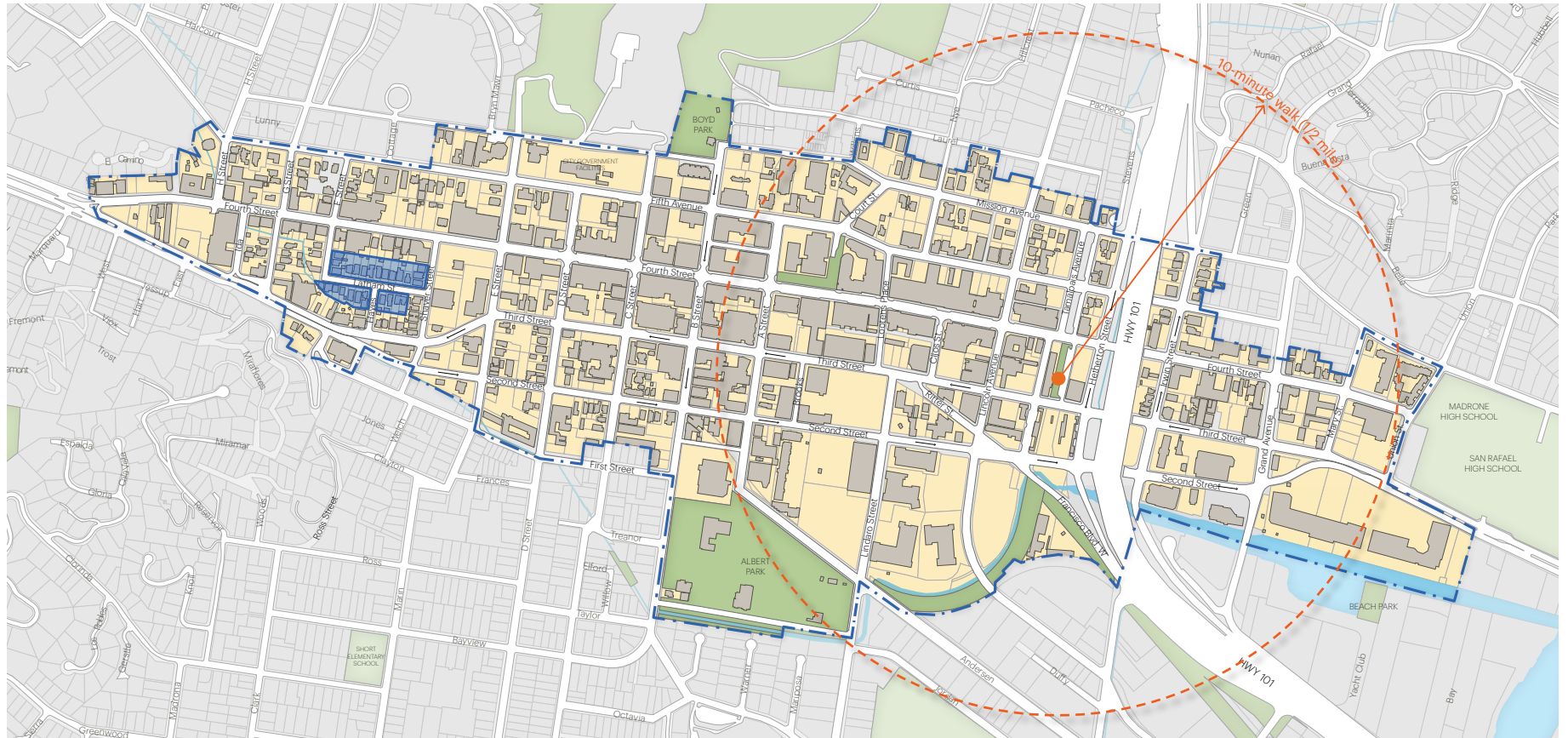
The Downtown San Rafael Precise Plan (Precise Plan) builds upon a legacy of previous planning efforts undertaken by the City of San Rafael (City) over the past 25 years. In 1993, the City adopted a study titled “Our Vision of Downtown San Rafael and Our Implementation Strategy” that laid the foundation for new zoning districts and many of the policies that shaped Downtown development over the next decade. In 2004, “Our Vision” was incorporated into the 2020 General Plan. Downtown has been the focus of several planning efforts, and was designated a “Transit Town Center” Priority Development Area (PDA) in 2009. In 2012, the City adopted a Downtown Station Area Plan, establishing a vision for land use and circulation improvements around the Downtown SMART station. The Precise Plan is the next step in guiding Downtown’s development, reinforcing a local vision in alignment with state-mandated legislation to streamline development and increase housing production.

The Precise Plan will be implemented over a 20-year timeframe, and its recommendations are expected to remain relevant even as near-term adjustments may be required to respond to disruptive events such as the global Covid-19 pandemic.

## Precise Plan purpose, legal authority and timeline

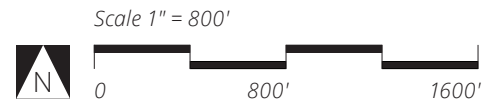
The Precise Plan has been prepared to enable Downtown San Rafael to continue to grow and evolve as a regional mixed-use center while enhancing its unique identity and culture. It is a comprehensive effort to assess previous design and planning efforts, and update the Downtown vision based on the analysis of current conditions and community outreach. The Precise Plan serves as both a policy and regulatory document. It identifies growth and development opportunities, provides the principles, policies, and programs to guide investment; and establishes form-based zoning standards to regulate built character and uses in Downtown.

The Plan Area covers approximately 265 acres, and forms the commercial, civic, cultural and connectivity hub for the City and surrounding region. The Plan Area is shown in Figure 1.2. It includes the Downtown PDA and the adjacent West End Village neighborhood. The San Rafael Zoning Ordinance will be amended concurrently with the adoption of the Precise Plan. The Precise Plan has a planning horizon of 20 years, through the year 2040.



**Figure 1.2 Downtown San Rafael Precise Plan Area**

- Downtown Precise Plan Area boundary
- Existing park/ open space/ school
- Parcels within the Plan Area
- Existing buildings
- Latham Street area (within Plan Area but will retain MR 2.5 zoning)
- SMART station
- 1/2 mile (10 minute walking distance)



## 1.2 Relationship to Relevant Plans, Policies and Studies

**The Precise Plan refines policies and sets design direction for a variety of topics in coordination with other plans and policy documents. It was prepared concurrently with the General Plan 2040 Update, and regulates development in the Plan Area with a Form-Based Zoning Code.**

### Relationship to the San Rafael General Plan 2040

The Downtown Precise Plan was updated concurrently with the General Plan and both processes shared a collaborative community engagement process.

The General Plan serves as the blueprint for the community's future growth and development, and includes actions and implementing policies. By law, the General Plan must address eight areas, known as "elements" that need to be internally consistent. The required elements are Land use, Circulation, Housing, Safety, Noise, Open Space, Conservation, and Environmental Justice. In addition to the required elements, the San Rafael General Plan 2040 has optional elements covering Neighborhoods, Community Design and Preservation, Economic Vitality, Community Services and Infrastructure, and Arts and Culture.

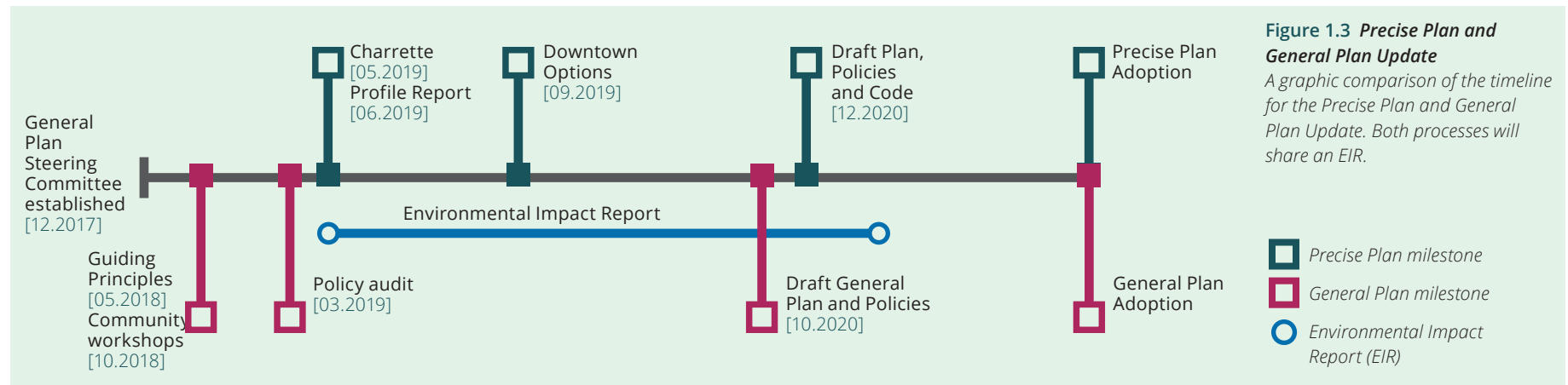
The General Plan establishes the Downtown Precise Plan Area as a land use designation on the General Plan Map. The designation encompasses the full range of uses envisioned by the Precise Plan, with Floor Area Ratio (FAR) standards that are consistent with the Precise Plan's height limits. The General Plan also includes a Downtown

section in its Neighborhoods Element, which is a high-level summary of the Precise Plan focusing on its policies and implementing programs.

### Relationship to Zoning Ordinance (Title 14)

The San Rafael zoning code had allocated zones to Downtown that reflected the 1993 "Our Vision of Downtown San Rafael" plan, and provided development and use standards including heights, density, setbacks, parking requirements, permits and procedures.

During the Precise Plan process, the existing zoning and standards were analyzed to determine if they could effectively implement the policy direction provided by the Precise Plan. It was determined that although there were 14 existing zoning districts (not counting "Public") applicable to Downtown, including six zoning districts developed expressly for Downtown and eight city-wide zoning districts that include parcels within the Precise Plan boundary, the existing zoning and standards lacked the details and comprehensiveness necessary to capture and predictably regulate the intended physical form and character described in the Precise Plan. With this in mind, a Downtown Form-Based Code (Downtown Code) was created and included as Chapter Nine in this document.



**Figure 1.3 Precise Plan and General Plan Update**  
 A graphic comparison of the timeline for the Precise Plan and General Plan Update. Both processes will share an EIR.

The Downtown Code consists of new zoning and standards that are organized into a coordinated set of articles. The new zones and standards apply to all parcels within the Downtown Precise Plan Area boundaries, with the exception of the Latham Street area, that will retain its MR 2.5 zoning. The intended physical form and character as described in the Precise Plan is implemented through four new form-based zones that replace the 14 zoning districts for Downtown.

**City-wide zoning map**

The Precise Plan Area is shown as one zone named "Downtown Mixed-Use (DMU) zone" in the city-wide zoning map. The Latham Street area is excluded from the DMU zone and retains its existing zoning.

In preparing the Downtown Code, a number of previous plans and documents were studied to get information about community-supported design direction for Downtown from previous efforts, in particular the 2017 "Good Design Guidelines for Downtown".

Relevant standards applicable only to the Plan Area have been either integrated into the Downtown Form-Based Code (refer to Chapter Nine of this document), or incorporated by reference. A full list of references is included in Appendix I: References to Planning Regulations. Should there be any conflict between the zoning ordinance and the standards in Chapter Nine: Downtown Form-Based Code, Chapter Nine shall apply.

### Relevant regulatory and policy documents, ongoing plans and studies

For the Precise Plan to be consistent with past planning efforts, a number of policy and regulatory documents were referred to, summarized in Table 1A.

Appendix I: References to Planning Regulations has additional information including a brief summary of each of these documents.

**Table 1A. Relevant documents** [Refer to Appendix I for additional information]

Document	Relation to the Precise Plan
"Our Vision of Downtown San Rafael" Community Plan and Implementation Strategy [1993]	Informs the Precise Plan.
San Rafael Downtown Station Area Plan [2012]	Design direction integrated into the Precise Plan policies, actions, and development standards for the Plan Area; including public realm and connectivity improvements, and design goals for the SMART station area.
"Good Design" Guidelines for Downtown [2017]	Design direction incorporated into the form-based development standards for the Plan Area.
City of San Rafael Climate Change Action Plan [2009, updated 2019]	Informs the Precise Plan, continues to apply city-wide including the Plan Area.
Downtown Parking and Wayfinding Study [2018]	Key recommendations incorporated into the Precise Plan actions, including the expansion of the Downtown Parking District and reduced parking requirements for new development in Downtown, in particular for ground floor commercial uses.
San Rafael Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan [2011, updated 2018]	Informs transportation-related policies, actions and development standards for the Plan Area.
San Rafael Wildfire Prevention and Protection Action Plan [2019, updated 2020]	Informs the Precise Plan, continues to apply city-wide including the Plan Area.
Canalfront Conceptual Design Plan and Design Guidelines [2008, 2009]	Where appropriate, proposed improvements for the Montecito area are incorporated into the Precise Plan.
San Rafael Transit Center Relocation Project [ongoing]	The Precise Plan studied the three site options under review, and incorporated the flexibility within the design recommendations to be coordinated with this effort. See Chapter Four for more detail.
Third Street Rehabilitation Project [2019]	The Precise Plan supports the continued implementation of this project.
Sea-Level Rise Adaptation Study [ongoing]	The Precise Plan recommends the City use the study to set adaptation strategies and development guidelines specific to Downtown.

## Other City policies

### ■ Affordable housing and Density Bonus program

Section 14.16.030 of the Zoning Ordinance of the San Rafael Municipal Code regulates affordable housing. The requirements apply to all new rental and ownership residential developments, with a few exceptions. At the time the Draft Precise Plan was published, new housing developments were required to set aside 10 percent of all units as affordable, depending on the size of the project. Affordable units for rental developments and resale restrictions for ownership units run with the land, and must remain for a minimum of 55 years.

The City of San Rafael allows a density bonus pursuant to State Law, as well as concessions or waivers on development standards, for provision of affordable units. The Precise Plan offers developers another option to the State density bonus, which is a local bonus that provides for up to 20 feet of additional height, as well as streamlined approval opportunities. Chapter Seven of the Specific Plan provides more detail on the local density bonus program.

*The Precise Plan and Downtown Form-Based Code establish provisions for bonus heights applicable to projects meeting the affordable housing requirements. Allowed heights in the Code have been refined to reflect current construction technology.*

### ■ Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program

San Rafael's TDR program is described in Sections 14.16.330 (transfer of density among properties) and 14.16.335 (transfer of FAR between or among properties) of the San Rafael Municipal Code. The code allows for transfer of development rights among properties under special circumstances, such as the preservation of historic

structures or wetlands, etc. and requires review by the Planning Commission through the use permit process. The density transfer, once approved, is permanent and runs with the donating and receiving tracts. Transfer of FAR among properties is permitted only under special circumstances and requires approval by the City Council, with recommendation by the Planning Commission through the use permit process. For approval, the following must be true:

- The development of the beneficiary parcel must be consistent with the General Plan, except that FARs or maximum densities may be exceeded; and/ or
- The proposed development will comply with all applicable zoning and design parameters and criteria as well as traffic requirements; and a special condition is found to exist that would cause significant environmental impacts if the transfer is not allowed, and/or the development provides a significant public benefit, such as securing a park, school, library, fire station, police station, etc.

*The Precise Plan recommends using the TDR program where applicable and consider refining the program to help meet the Plan goals. The TDR program will continue to apply to the City, including the Plan Area.*

# 1.3 Community Engagement and Visioning

**Robust community engagement was an integral part of the Downtown San Rafael Precise Plan at all stages of its development.**

## Community visioning process

Community participation has been critical to the Precise Plan process. Its importance derives from the idea that a plan's legitimacy and longevity require community input and ownership. Not only do community members have a deep understanding of a place that adds value to the design process, but they also have an intimate stake in the future of the Plan since the outcome will directly

impact them over the Plan's lifetime. The community provided feedback throughout the process through a wide range of events, including pop-up workshops, focus group meetings, a multi-day Design Charrette, and engagement with the General Plan Steering Committee at key milestones. For additional information about the community engagement and feedback received, refer to Appendix III: Community Engagement.

## Public Engagement: Key Events

March-April 2019



*Visioning Pop-Up Workshop at 2nd Friday Art Walk; General Plan Steering Committee Presentations #1 and #2*

May 2019



*Multi-Day Design Charrette; Focus Group Meetings with Downtown Stakeholders*

August 2019



*Downtown Options Pop-Up at Thursday Farmer's Market; General Plan Steering Committee Presentation #3*





**Figure 1.4 Downtown walking tour** was led by City staff and the consultant team and included members of the General Plan Steering Committee and interested residents.

## Focus Groups and Pop-Up Workshops

### Visioning Pop-Up Workshop

The consultant team hosted a pop-up visioning workshop during the Second Friday Art Walk in Downtown. During this popular community event, the team staged a booth with base maps, dot exercises, and surveys. The pop-up event also promoted the upcoming Design Charrette.

### Focus Group meetings

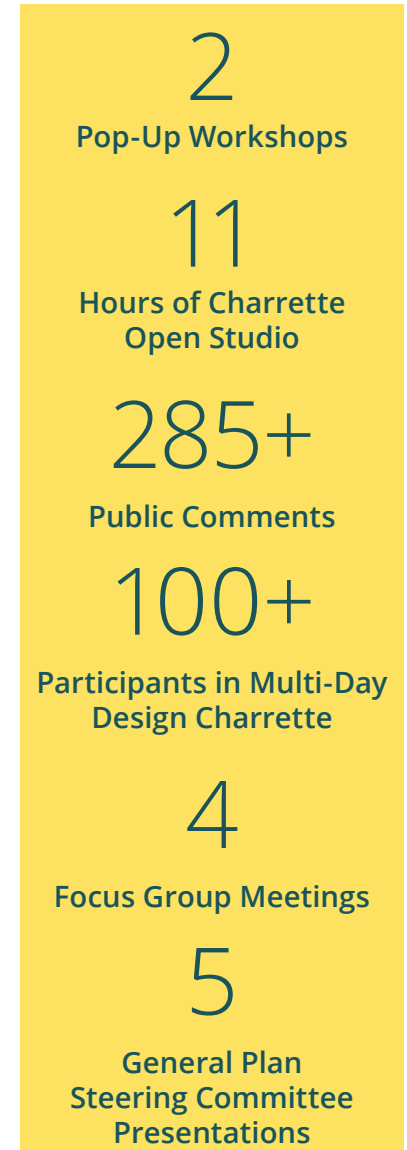
The consultant team met with Downtown stakeholders at a series of focus group meetings. The stakeholders represented a broad range of community interests, including business owners, service providers, residents, and property owners. Listening to their aspirations and priorities for Downtown helped to guide the design concepts developed during the Design Charrette.

### Downtown Options Pop-Up Workshop

Following the Design Charrette, the consultant team hosted a follow-up event during the Thursday farmer's market in Downtown. The team shared the vision developed during the Design Charrette and solicited public feedback on dozens of design elements and priorities presented through the lens of Downtown neighborhoods.

### Design Charrette

The Design Charrette was a multi-day public design process in May 2019 that engaged stakeholder groups, community members, and City staff to solicit feedback. Each design iteration received immediate public feedback, enabling the design team to incorporate public input in the next iterations of the design concepts.



Topics that received broad community support included re-imagining key opportunity sites, encouraging residential mixed-use development, maintaining existing and creating new civic space, and preserving and integrating important historic buildings. The main Charrette events are described below.

### **Walking Tour**

The Charrette started with a public walking tour of Downtown led by the City, during which the group talked about pedestrian and bicycle safety issues, general Downtown conditions, and opportunity sites.

### **Opening Presentation**

Following the walking tour was the Opening Presentation to a large audience at the Whistlestop building. The event began with an overview of the project, an introduction to design themes, and a table map exercise in which the participants, working in small groups, provided their ideas and priorities for Downtown.

### **Brown Bag Presentations**

The consultant team offered lunchtime "brown bag" presentations on the topics of economics, transportation, and historic resources during the Design Charrette. These were opportunities both to share focused information and to solicit feedback on topics relevant to the Precise Plan.

### **Open Studio**

Throughout the Charrette week, the public was invited to drop in during "open studio" to talk with the consultant team and City staff, check in on progress drawings pinned up on the studio walls, and record their feedback.

### **Mid-Point Pinup**

An informal pinup halfway through the Charrette gave the public an opportunity to comment on the in-progress diagrams and drawings explaining key ideas and design principles.

### **Closing Presentation**

The Design Charrette concluded with a Closing Presentation summarizing the design vision that the team had developed with community guidance. The team presented urban design, transportation, and development opportunities illustrated with graphics, and hosted a group discussion to hear feedback and answer questions.

### **Engagement with the General Plan Steering Committee and City agencies**

The Precise Plan process has been guided at critical junctures by the 24-person General Plan Steering Committee that included representatives of the City Council, Planning Commission, various Boards and Commissions, and other stakeholder groups. A Visioning Workshop held in March 2019, followed by a Prioritization Exercise in April, helped to define key issues and design priorities leading up to the Design Charrette. The third meeting was a study session in October 2019 to discuss Downtown options, prior to starting work on drafting the Precise Plan and Code. In February 2020, the Steering Committee participated in a discussion on Historic Resources, and in May 2020, received a presentation on the Draft Plan and Form-Based Code.

A number of study sessions with the City Council, the Planning Commission, and the Citizens Advisory Committee for Affordable Housing and Economic Development, provided valuable feedback at key junctures.

"Turn the first parking space on every block into a bike parking area.

Community Member  
Open Studio Post-It Comment



“ The backside of Montecito Plaza, along the creek, is very underutilized. One can imagine walks, parks, and al fresco dining along both sides of the creek.”

Community Member  
Open Studio Post-It Comment



Figure 1.5 The multi-day Design Charrette had a large number of participants who provided feedback in a number of ways.





# Existing Conditions

CHAPTER

# 2

This chapter includes a brief summary of the Downtown Area Profile Report to provide relevant context. A link to the complete Profile Report can be found in Appendix II of this document.

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# 2.1 Location, Demographics and Market Conditions

**Downtown San Rafael has a prime location at the entrance to the North Bay, and is within easy commuting distance from both San Francisco and cities in the East Bay. It is recognized within Marin County and the region as an important employment, civic, and cultural center.**

## Location and demographics

Situated in the North Bay region of the San Francisco Bay Area, San Rafael is the largest city in Marin County and is also the County seat. The City has a population of 59,000 and covers an area of approximately 22 square miles. The Downtown Precise Plan Area (Plan Area) covers approximately 265 acres (about three percent of the City's land area) and has 2,300 residents (2018 figures).

San Rafael is an important employment center in the San Francisco Bay Area, well connected to cities within the region by highways US-101 and I-580. The Sonoma Marin

Area Rail Transit (SMART) line from Santa Rosa to Larkspur has two stations in San Rafael, one within the Plan Area.

San Rafael has topography stretching from sea level to 1,000 feet above sea level, and development patterns respond to its hilly terrain and environmental features, as shown in Figure 2.3. Downtown occupies relatively flat land and has gridded streets, while some streets and development along the San Rafael Canal adjacent to Downtown run parallel to this waterway.

**Figure 2.1 (Right) Location of San Rafael within the region**

**Figure 2.2 (Far right) Downtown San Rafael has good access, with US-101 passing through it in the north-south direction, and linking to East Bay cities via I-580.**



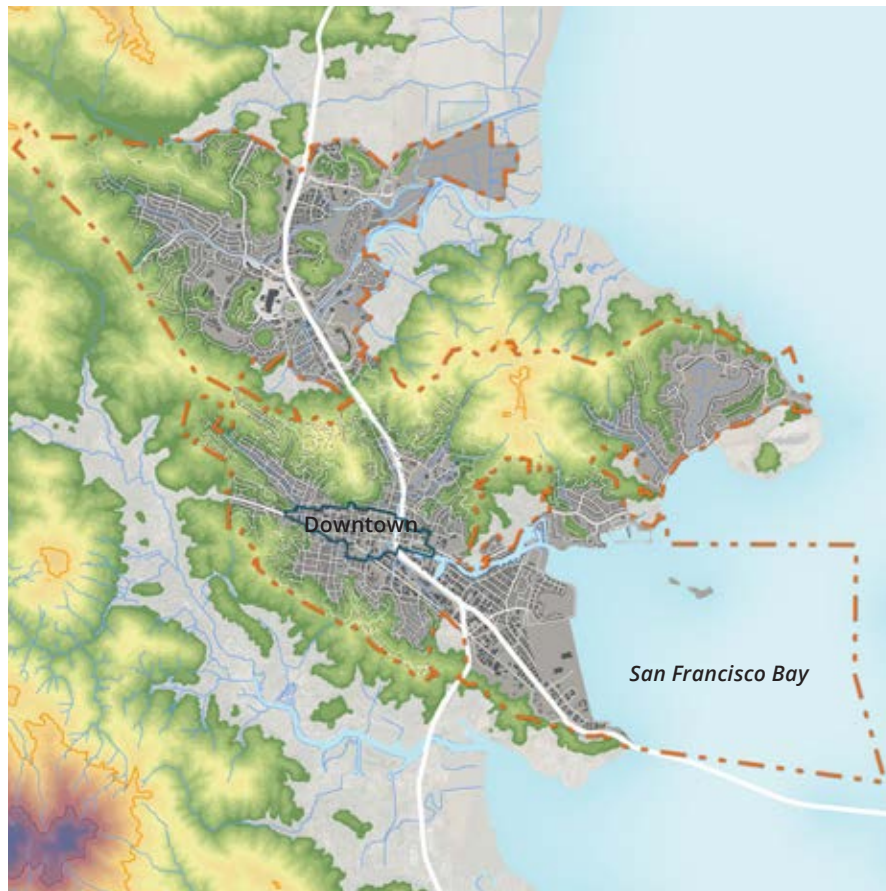


Figure 2.3 Natural setting and settlement patterns







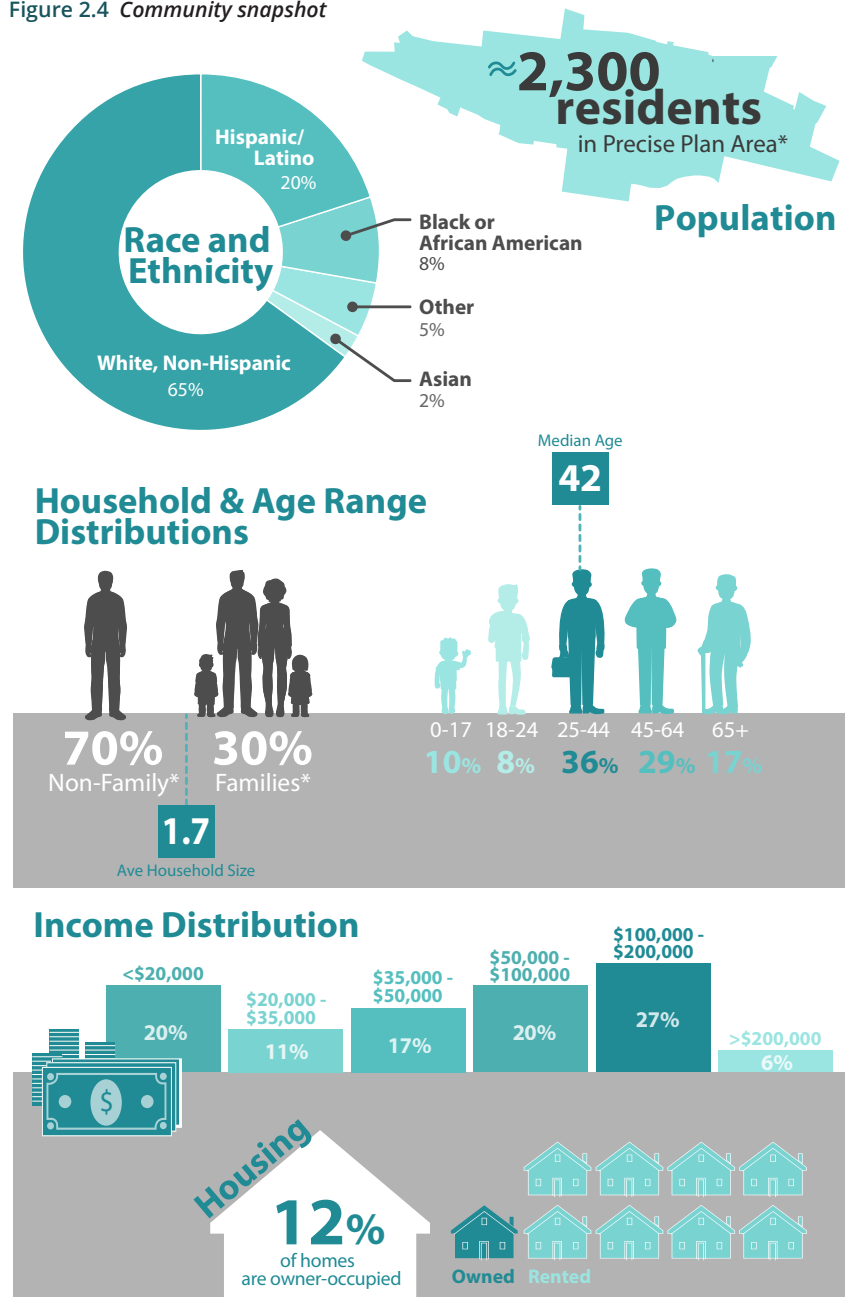
-  Hills ≥ 150 ft elevation
-  1000 ft elevation contour
-  2000 ft elevation contour
-  Building footprints and urbanized area
-  Downtown Precise Plan Area boundary
-  City boundary

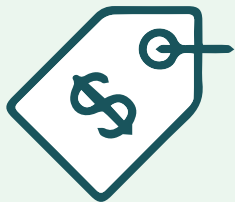
Figure 2.4 Community snapshot



**Table 2A. Downtown real estate market conditions**



**<5%** multifamily rental vacancy rate in Plan Area  
**<20** multifamily units constructed from 2009-19



**35%** of city-wide retail square footage located in Plan Area  
**14%** of city-wide taxable sales within Plan Area (2018)



**5.1%** office vacancy rate in the Plan Area  
**8.6%** office vacancy rate city-wide

**Existing economic and market conditions in Downtown**

Market conditions in Downtown for major real estate sectors are summarized in Table 2A and discussed below. Table 2B on the facing page details potential economic opportunities for Downtown, based on real estate trends. For more information, refer to Appendix II: Downtown Area Profile Report.

**Residential sector**

Downtown San Rafael has a strong multifamily rental market, with low vacancy rates of below five percent (2019 figures) and rising rents, signifying a strong demand for more multifamily rental housing. Similar to other communities in the Bay Area, San Rafael is experiencing a severe housing shortage; yet demand has not been matched by new multifamily construction. Between 2009 and 2019, fewer than 20 multifamily units were constructed in the Plan Area. San Rafael's for-sale residential market is likewise strong, but located almost entirely outside of Downtown.

**Retail sector**

Downtown accounts for 35 percent of San Rafael's retail square footage. While the retail market is strong city-wide, indicated by low vacancy rates and increasing rental prices, Downtown has a lower (and declining) percentage of taxable sales which are increasingly driven by the large-format retail stores in other parts of the city. However, while taxable sales have declined in the Plan Area, restaurant sales have increased, particularly in the core area Business Improvement District. Within the Plan Area, most retail activity occurs during the business day, with more limited activity evenings and weekends. This is a challenge for some retailers and limits appeal to some restaurateurs. Shopping and "food and beverage" establishments dominate Downtown's retail market,

which make it vulnerable to changing retail trends towards a more diverse range of uses.

**Office sector**

San Rafael is an employment hub within Marin County, accounting for 43 percent of the county's office space. The Plan Area has a low (1.2 percent) vacancy rate among Class A office properties, and lower vacancy rates (5.1 percent) for all classes of office space than city-wide (8.6 percent). Downtown's location, with amenities and multiple transit options, is preferred by many office tenants. According to brokers, there is demand and inadequate supply for small and mid-sized office tenants. Also, many existing office spaces in the Plan Area are older and smaller than what most prospective tenants seek. This potentially indicates demand for new construction. However, there is not much new construction underway. Developers may be hesitant to pursue speculative projects since reported rental rates are not high enough to justify new construction.

**Industrial sector**

San Rafael accounts for over half of Marin County's industrial and flex space. However, the Plan Area contains only 1.3 percent of the city-wide inventory. Although low vacancy rates indicate demand for industrial and flex space, Downtown may not be best suited for these kinds of spaces, with their large-floor plate single-story building forms, and issues of noise and servicing needs.



## Table 2B. Real estate market outlook for Downtown

*Downtown San Rafael is well positioned to capture new residential, office, and retail growth based upon the following findings and observations drawn from its economic existing conditions. For more information, refer Appendix II: Downtown Area Profile Report.*

- **Authentic urban environment.** Downtown San Rafael offers an urban experience at a scale that is attractive to both existing and prospective residents, shoppers, and office employees. Its sizable stock of historic buildings gives it character and authenticity.
- **Retail center of gravity.** Downtown is at the center of San Rafael's retail gravity with high traffic flows along Second and Third Streets, US-101, and other connections to many of the City's residential neighborhoods, making it a convenient destination for shopping and entertainment.
- **Transit hub.** San Rafael Transit Center and the SMART rail service enhance the marketability of Downtown by offering mobility options for both residents and workers.
- **Daytime worker population.** The Census estimates that there are approximately 6,700 persons who work in Downtown San Rafael and the relocation and expansion of BioMarin adds to the overall spending power of Downtown workers.
- **Strong household incomes.** While household income in San Rafael is close to the Bay Area median, the City is located in central Marin County which is one of the most educated and affluent counties in the nation, making it desirable for retailers.
- **Residential developer preferences.** Bay Area developers of multifamily residential seek transit-rich locations to give their projects a competitive edge and potentially higher rents.
- **Millennial housing preferences.** More millennials (persons born between 1981 and 1996) have been moving into prime household formation age, generating demand for additional housing. These renters prefer apartments that offer a rich set of amenities, including walkability to retail, restaurants, and entertainment.
- **Lodging and hospitality.** Downtown is lacking in hotel accommodation, with only one hotel, the Marriott on Fifth Avenue, under construction in 2020. The City's last hotel opening was in 2007. New hotels may be able to secure a competitive position in the local market due to the fact that many of the City's hotels are over 30 years old. Adding a hotel to Downtown will fill a gap in its existing mix of retail, office, and residential uses and will serve as an important amenity.

## 2.2 Historical and Cultural Context

**Downtown San Rafael has a 200-year legacy of being the cultural hub of Marin County. Through its significant history, the area has evolved into the commercial core of the City.**

San Rafael is the oldest city in Marin County. Originally a settlement inhabited by several Coast Miwok tribes, the City derives its present-day name from Mission San Rafael Arcángel, the 20<sup>th</sup> Spanish mission established in 1817 in what was then the colonial Mexican province of Alta California. Incorporated in 1874, San Rafael has grown to be the county's largest city, and has developed as an important cultural, civic, and employment center.

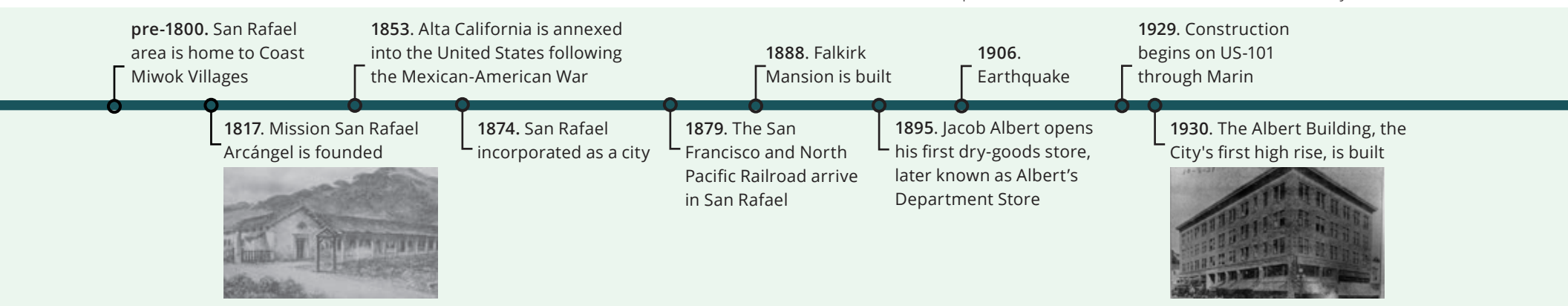
Plan Area, as shown in Figure 2.6. The existing survey of historic resources (conducted in 1977 and updated in 1986) was updated as part of the Downtown Precise Plan process, and identified resources eligible for listing as individual or contributing historic resources on the California Register of Historical Resources or the National Register of Historic Places. The newly eligible resources are discussed in Chapter Five: Historic Resources.

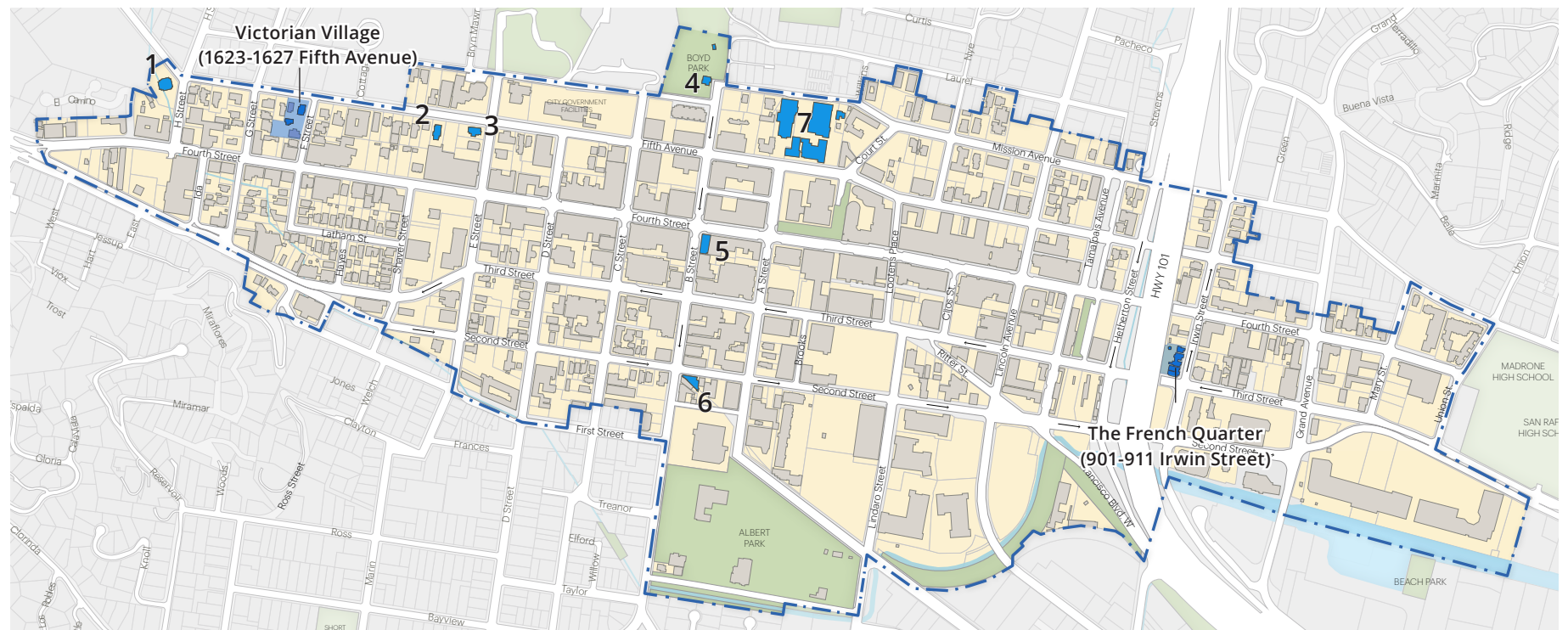
### Historic resources in Downtown

Currently San Rafael has 19 designated local landmarks, and three historic districts. Among these, seven individual resources (consisting of a total of nine buildings), and two historic districts are within the Downtown Precise

In 2017, San Rafael was recognized as one of California's 14 Cultural Districts. Under AB 189 (2015), Cultural District designations are awarded for five years to "well-defined geographic areas with a high concentration of cultural resources and activities" to encourage local artists and promote socio-economic and ethnic diversity.

**Figure 2.5 Major milestones in Downtown San Rafael's development** illustrated in the timeline below.

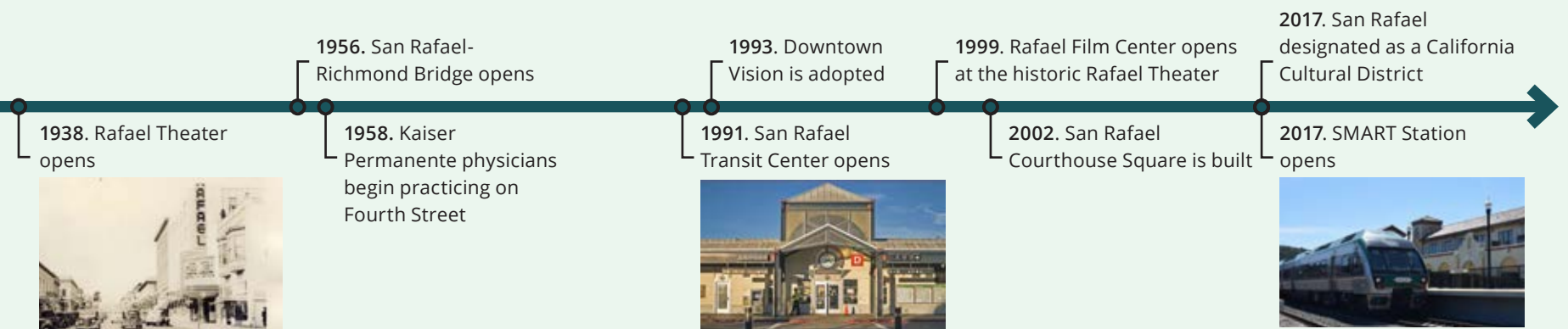




**Figure 2.6** Historic resources in Downtown (2020 conditions)

- Plan Area boundary
- Landmark buildings (listed on right)
- Historic districts

- 1. San Rafael Improvement Club (1800 Fifth Avenue)
- 2. The Chisholm Residence (1517 Fifth Avenue)
- 3. Schlosser-Cole Residence (1099 E Street)
- 4. The Boyd House and Memorial Park (1125 B Street)
- 5. The Mulberry House (1149 Fourth Street)
- 6. The Flatiron Building (724 B Street)
- 7. Mission San Rafael Arcángel (CA Historic Landmark)



## 2.3 Built Form and Character

**Downtown has a walkable environment with pedestrian-scaled street and blocks, memorable buildings and vistas, with a few inconsistencies in lot widths, building character and heights.**

Downtown San Rafael has a compact grid of small blocks approximately 330 feet by 330 feet in size, and streets that are 60 to 80 feet wide. Most of Downtown has retained the historic grid, and is pedestrian-scaled. However, some areas around Second, Third, Hetherton and Irwin Streets are more auto-oriented, with wider streets and greater traffic volumes.

### Character districts

Downtown is defined by several "character districts", the boundaries for which were initially defined in the 1993 Downtown Vision. Fourth Street is Downtown's "Main Street", the Lindero District and the Second/Third Street Corridor are employment-focused; and the West End and Montecito Commercial areas are more residential. The Hetherton Gateway flanks the SMART station area, and the Fifth/ Mission district has a civic and institutional feel.

### Built character

Parts of Downtown are very memorable due to its built form, historic buildings and vistas. Much of Downtown is mixed-use in character, which is reflected in the type and placement of its buildings. Most parts of Downtown have "block-form" buildings - attached buildings with small setbacks set close to the sidewalk, while its residential areas have more "house-form" structures - detached buildings with deeper front and side setbacks. The built form is inconsistent in places, and several blocks have large surface parking lots or buildings with deep setbacks that create gaps in the urban fabric.

The built form analysis in Figure 2.8 highlights how the built form (house-form or block-form) reinforces the character of the Downtown districts.

**Figure 2.7 Character of Downtown buildings**

*From left to right: a typical "house-form" building, the predominant "block-form" buildings in Downtown, and an example of a larger building on a consolidated lot.*



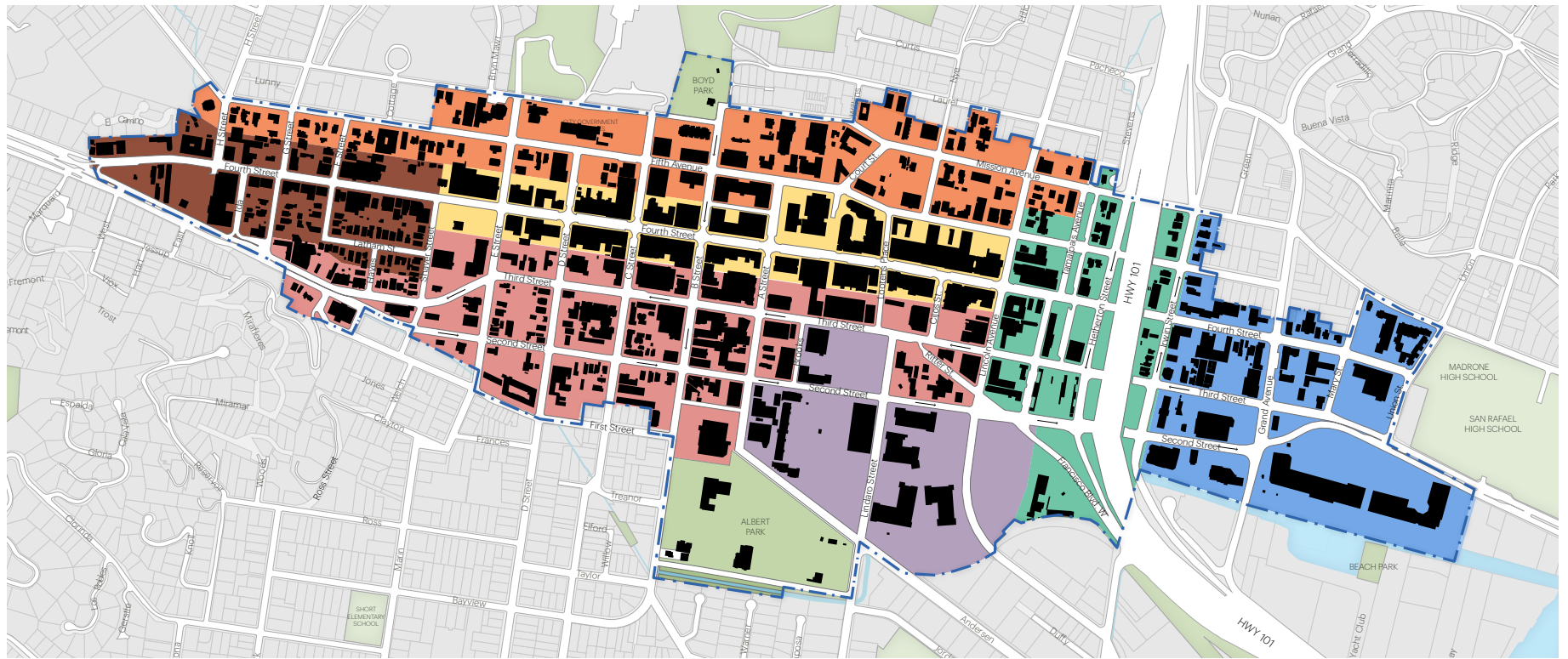
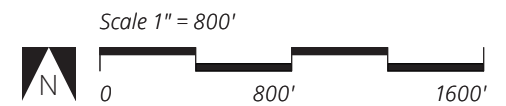
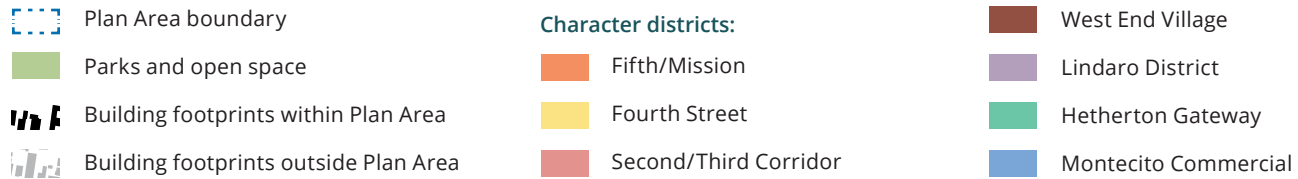


Figure 2.8 Built form analysis and Downtown's character districts



### Building heights

Existing buildings are predominantly two to three stories tall, as shown in Figure 2.9. Currently, allowed building heights in Downtown are from the General Plan and do not correspond with zoning districts in Downtown, nor do they take into account height bonuses. The Precise Plan is an opportunity to re-examine and adjust heights for future development.

### Lot sizes

There is a wide variation in block widths, as shown in Figure 2.10, and some lots are too narrow to make redevelopment feasible. Consequently, lots have been consolidated in many blocks to develop larger buildings, which do not always complement existing buildings. Several blocks have large surface parking lots or deep setbacks that create gaps in the urban fabric.

### Building frontages

Frontage can be simply described as the way in which a building interacts with the adjacent sidewalk, through the size and orientation of entrances and openings, spaces for outdoor seating, shade, etc. "Active" frontages enhance walkability and the quality and safety of the public realm. The design of the adjacent street, sidewalk, or civic space also determines the range of activities that can be accommodated. Ideally there should be space for pedestrians to walk comfortably and to window-shop, space for outdoor seating, street furniture, bicycle parking, planting strips and trees, etc.

As shown in Figure 2.11, existing frontage conditions in Downtown are not of consistent quality. Fourth Street is the only street to have coherent stretches of streetscapes with active, engaged frontages.

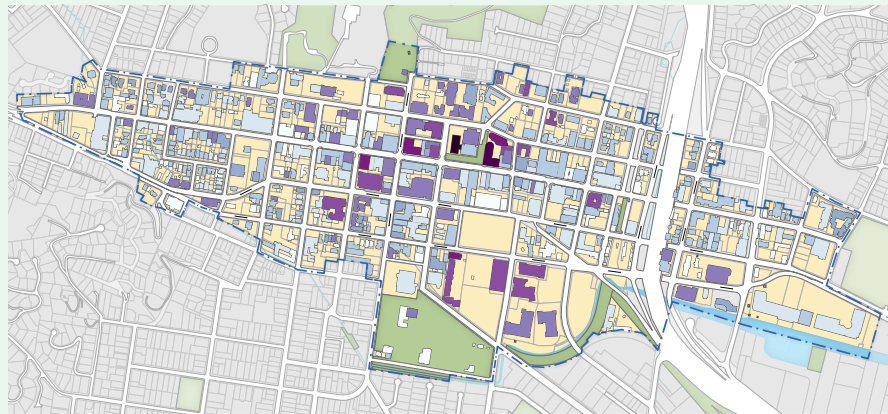


Figure 2.9 Existing building heights

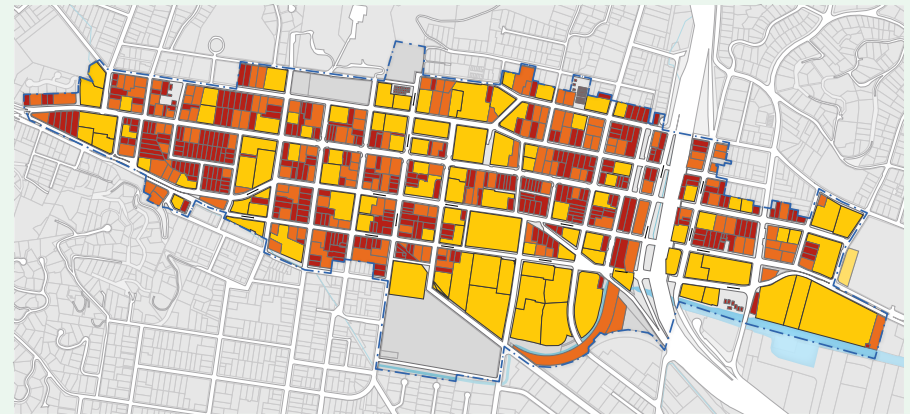
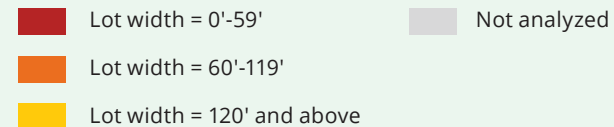


Figure 2.10 Existing lot widths



### Civic space, community amenities and services

Downtown is a recognized venue for a variety of events and activities, and is one of California's 14 Cultural Districts. Downtown's cultural, civic and community attractions include the Mission, San Rafael Theatre, City Hall and the library. Fourth Street is one of the City's most popular destinations for shopping, recreation, and events such as the weekly Farmer's Market, 2<sup>nd</sup> Friday Art Walk, May Madness car festival, and the Italian Street Painting festival, that attract visitors from all over the Bay Area.

Downtown has good access to open space with Boyd Memorial Park to its north, and Albert Park to its south that has recreational facilities. Courthouse Square is a centrally located plaza along Fourth Street, that is well-used and can be enhanced to support a wider variety of activities. The San Rafael Canal in the Montecito area

is a unique asset but lacks good pedestrian access and visibility.

Downtown San Rafael also has a high concentration of institutions providing social services and related to homelessness, as compared to other communities in Marin that do not currently offer as many related services. The availability of these services, and the spiraling housing crisis in the Bay Area, has led to an increase in Downtown's unsheltered population. This in turn has affected its perception by many as a safe and desirable destination. The Precise Plan is an opportunity to examine and attempt to resolve these issues in ways that benefit everyone.

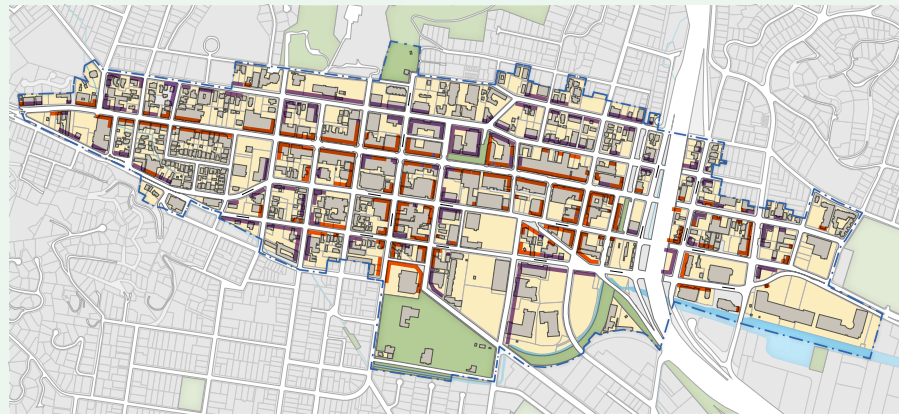


Figure 2.11 Analysis of building frontages

- Active retail or service frontage
- Active office or bank frontage



Figure 2.12 Community destinations: parks and institutions

- Institutions: civic/ community
- Institutions: religious
- Institutions: educational
- Historic resources

## 2.4 Multimodal Access, Circulation and Parking

**Figure 2.13** *Downtown's existing transportation infrastructure (2018)*

- **14 miles** of roadway
- **3 miles** of bicycle facilities
- **21 miles** of sidewalk
- **4,414** public parking spaces
- **3,785** private parking spaces
- **282** bicycle parking spaces

**Figure 2.14** *Downtown travel characteristics*

Source: American Community Survey (ACS) 2017 data

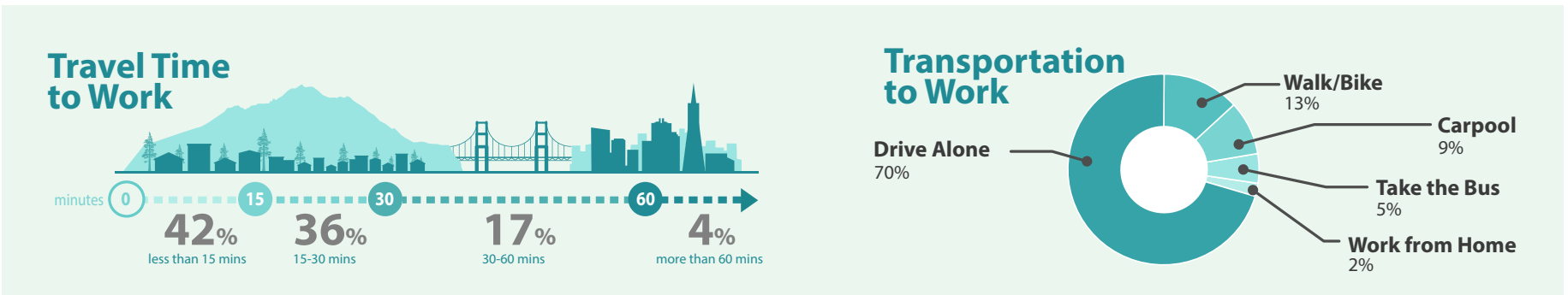
Downtown San Rafael is located at the gateway to Marin county from San Francisco and the East Bay. US-101 provides highway access and the Downtown Transit Center provides local and regional bus service as well as SMART rail service.

### Roadway network

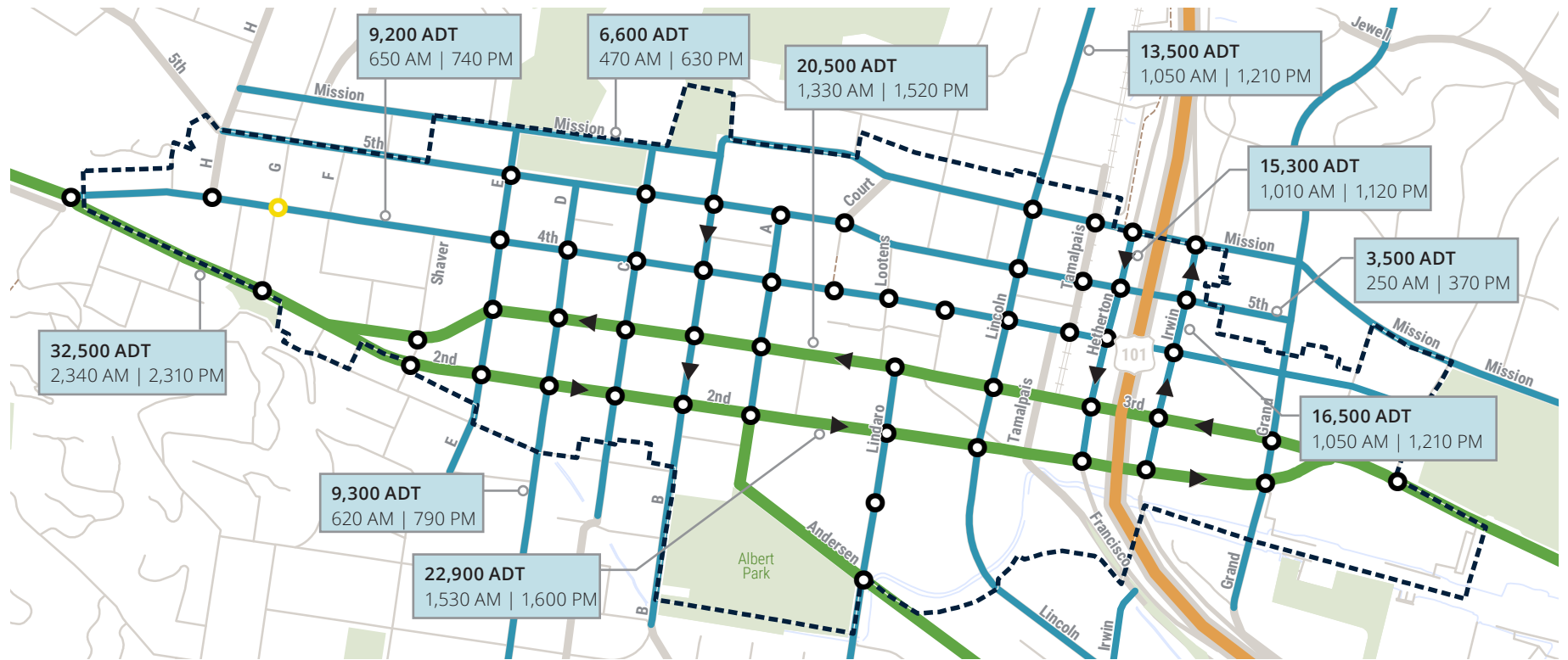
Regional access to Downtown is provided by Interstate 580 (I-580) from the East Bay and Highway 101 (US-101) from San Francisco and Marin. Both highways are owned, operated, and maintained by Caltrans. US-101 has four lanes in each direction and carries approximately 202,000 vehicles per day. I-580 has two lanes in each direction and carries about 77,000 vehicles per day.

Downtown has a grid network of lettered north-south streets and numbered east-west streets. Downtown blocks are typically 330 feet by 330 feet with roadway widths ranging from about 40 to 52 feet. Generally, roadways have a posted speed limit of 25 mph to 35 mph.

The City of San Rafael classifies local roadways by their intended function into highways, major arterials, minor arterials, and local streets, as shown in Figure 2.15. Major arterials also serve as "Congestion Management Agency (CMA)" arterials and are primary routes in and out of Downtown. These include the Second and Third Street one-way couplet and Andersen Drive. Minor arterials handle local traffic and include several one-way streets such as B, Hetherton and Irwin Streets. US-101 bisects Downtown in the north-south direction, with highway access from Hetherton and Irwin Streets. High traffic volumes are seen on both these streets as well as on Second and Third Streets, particularly during commute hours, affecting pedestrian and bicycle connectivity.







**Figure 2.15 Street hierarchy and traffic counts**

Source: Fehr & Peers, May 2019

- Plan Area boundary
- Traffic signal
- Highway
- Minor arterial
- Major arterial
- Rectangular rapid flash beacon
- One-way street

Scale 1" = 800'



**Figure 2.16 Downtown street character**

From left to right: Second Street (heading east, between Irwin Street and Grand Avenue), Fourth Street between C and D Streets, and Tamalpais Avenue.

### Bicycle network

Downtown San Rafael has a limited bicycle network, as shown in Figure 2.17, with only 21 percent of the 14 miles of Downtown roadways having dedicated space for the use of bicyclists. Downtown bicycle facilities include a Class I path along a few blocks of Hetherton Street and Class III shared routes on Fourth Street and Grand Avenue. Downtown has approximately 282 bicycle parking spaces. Bicycle lockers are provided near the SMART train station and under US-101 north of Third Street.

San Rafael had the eighth highest frequency of bicycle collisions of 104 comparably sized California cities, and according to the 2018 Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan, one in ten collisions in San Rafael involved a bicyclist.

### Pedestrian network

Downtown has a walkable street grid, and some streets, particularly Fourth Street and Fifth Avenue from Lincoln Avenue to the West End, are pedestrian-friendly streets. Marked crosswalks facilitate pedestrian crossings at most intersections, but the area around the Transit Center has more collisions. Streets with higher traffic volumes and vehicle speeds present a less comfortable pedestrian environment. The 2018 Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan identified gaps in pedestrian infrastructure, shown in Figure 2.18.

Downtown has regular events such as the San Rafael Thursday Farmer’s Market, held from May through September on Fourth Street by closing it to vehicular traffic between Cijos and B Streets during this time.



Figure 2.17 Bicycle network

- Existing Class I Multi-Use Path
- Existing Class II Bicycle Lane
- Existing Class III Bicycle Route
- - - Proposed Class I Multi-Use Path
- Proposed Class I-II Bicycle Path/Lane
- Proposed Class II Bicycle Lane
- Proposed Class II-III Bicycle Lane/Route
- Proposed Class III Bicycle Route

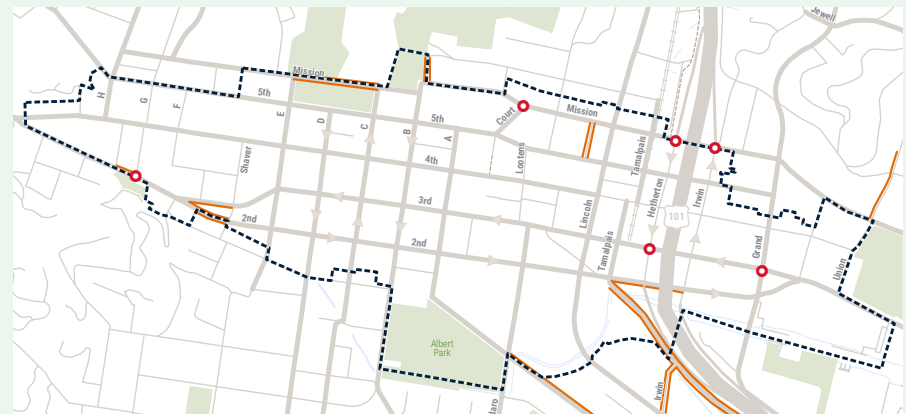


Figure 2.18 Pedestrian facilities

- - - Plan Area boundary
- Sidewalk gap
- Difficult crossing

### Transit network

The Downtown San Rafael Transit Center is the regional transit hub for Marin County. Sonoma-Marín Area Rail Transit (SMART) provides passenger rail service with one of its ten stations located in Downtown. Since SMART started operations in 2017, Downtown has accounted for about 700 daily weekday passenger boardings. The SMART extension to the Larkspur Ferry will add 800 daily riders. The extension has also necessitated the relocation of the Transit Center, for which several design concepts are being considered.

Regional bus service includes 26 fixed routes run by Golden Gate Transit (GGT) and Golden Gate Ferry (GGF). Marin Transit operates local buses, with over 3.2 million passenger trips in 2017, on 29 bus and shuttle routes.

### Parking supply and demand

According to the Downtown Parking and Wayfinding Study (2017), Downtown has approximately 6,700 parking spaces (refer to Figure 2.21). Approximately 200 free park-and-ride spaces are provided by Caltrans in four lots under US-101 near the Transit Center.

Peak parking demand in Downtown is between 11:00 AM and 3:00 PM on both weekdays and weekends, during which total parking occupancy of approximately 66 percent on weekdays and 46 percent on weekends, indicating adequate supply. The five most heavily used public off-street parking facilities, exceeded 85 percent peak-period occupancy on weekdays, indicating that they are well utilized.

**Figure 2.21 Downtown parking supply (2017)**

Source: Downtown Parking and Wayfinding Study (2017)

- 6,709 total parking spaces
- 1,627 on-street spaces (including areas on edges of Downtown outside Plan Area)
- 1,297 public parking spaces
- 3,785 private parking spaces



**Figure 2.19 Transit network**

- Project Area Boundary
- Marin Transit
- Golden Gate Transit
- Sonoma-Marín Area Rail Transit



**Figure 2.20 San Rafael Transit Center (above) and 2019 trip usage statistics (below)**

- 500+ buses served on 17 bus bays
- 9,000 weekday boardings
- 50% of weekday trips have origins or destinations within Downtown
- 25% of trips are bus-to-bus/ bus-to-rail transfers

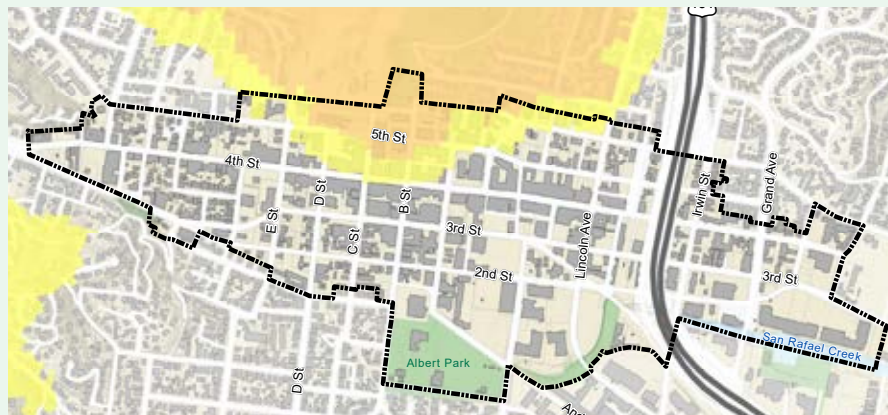
# 2.5 Natural Hazards and Climate Change

**Parts of Downtown are vulnerable to natural hazards such as wildfire and climate change, in particular sea-level rise. This will impact future growth and utility infrastructure upgrades.**

Bound by hills and the San Francisco Bay, parts of Downtown are susceptible to climate change and face hazards from wildfire, flooding and sea-level rise. Parts of the Plan Area fall within the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) and contain land within the "Moderate" and "High" Fire Hazard Severity Zones (FHSZ) set by CalFIRE. The Plan Area lies within San Rafael's Local Responsibility Area (LRA), indicating a high enough fire risk to require local

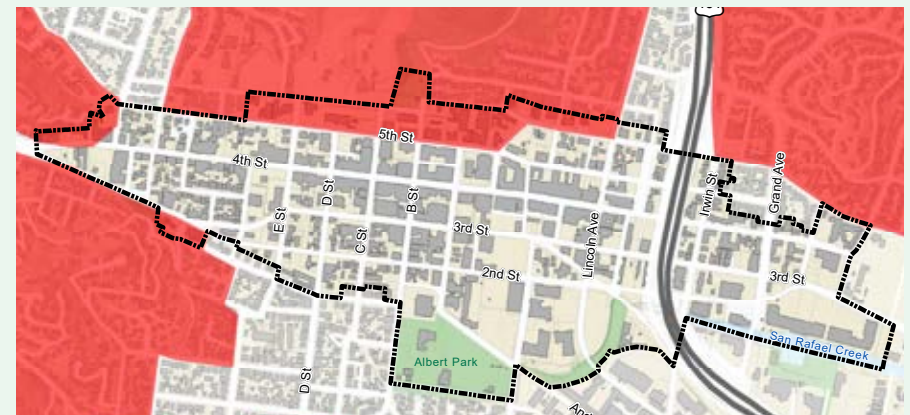
governments to be financially responsible. The south-eastern portion of the Plan Area is within the FEMA 100-Year Flood Hazard Zone, and some areas will be impacted by projected sea-level rise, shown in Figure 2.24.

Table 2C highlights potential impacts for Downtown. For more information, refer to Appendix II: Downtown Area Profile Report.



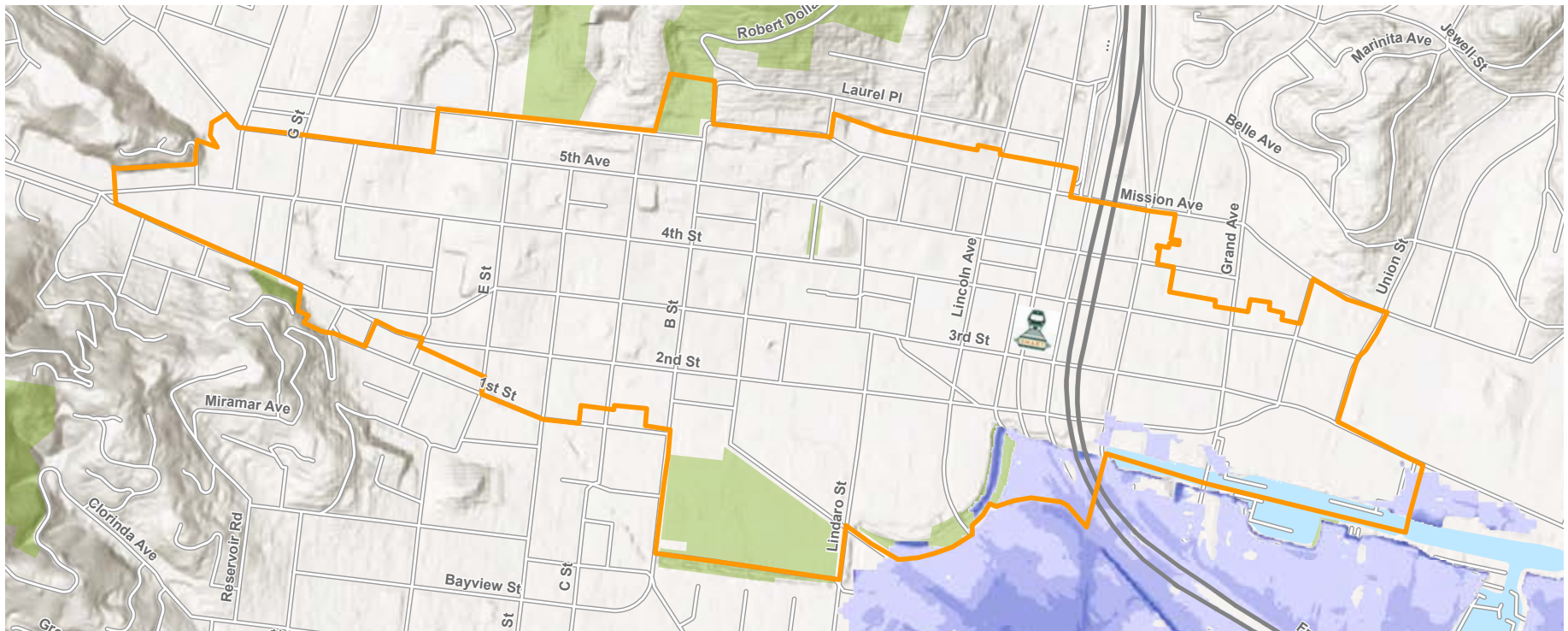
**Figure 2.22 Fire hazard zones within Downtown**  
 Source: ESRI, 2017; CAL FIRE, 2018; City of San Rafael, 2019; PlaceWorks 2019.

- High fire hazard severity zone
- Moderate fire hazard severity zone



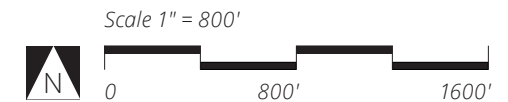
**Figure 2.23 Wildland Urban Interface (WUI)**  
 Source: ESRI, 2017; US Forest Service, 2006; City of San Rafael, 2019; PlaceWorks 2019.

- Wildland Urban Interface



**Figure 2.24** Estimated flooding in Downtown by 2050 from sea-level rise and a 100-year storm surge

Source: City of San Rafael, 2019; CosMos, 2016; County of Marin, 2009; ESRI, 2017; PlaceWorks 2019.



**Table 2C. Potential impacts from natural hazards and climate change**

For more information, refer to Appendix II: Downtown Area Profile Report.

- **Wildfire.** Northern parts of the Plan Area lie within the Moderate and High Fire Hazard Severity Zones. Northern and western portions are within the Wildland Urban Interface.
- **Flood hazard.** The south-eastern portion of the Plan Area is within the FEMA 100-Year Flood Hazard Zone, from E Street to the eastern Plan Area boundary along the San

Rafael Canal; and from Fourth Street to the southern Plan Area boundary.

- **Sea-level rise and flooding.** By 2050, Downtown will face little inundation from sea-level rise alone. However, coupled with a 100-year storm, 2050 sea-level rise will cause flooding in a small south-eastern portion of the Plan Area. By 2100,

flooding and ponding will be deeper and extend further into Downtown.

- **Geology.** The south-eastern portion of the Plan Area lies within a very high liquefaction zone, and the northern and western portions are located within a moderate landslide susceptibility zone.

## 2.6 Downtown's Challenges and Opportunities

The analysis of existing conditions and community outreach revealed several challenges to new development in Downtown San Rafael, summarized below. Downtown also presents unique opportunities for accommodating new development and uses, and enjoys several advantages in terms of location, access, and historic character that differentiate it from other communities.

### Challenge 1

#### Development constraints limit infill opportunities and inhibit housing diversity

- Many Downtown parcels are too small to be redeveloped efficiently, and many existing buildings are challenging to repurpose for modern housing and commercial needs.
- A high water table and flooding issues in some areas limits the viability of below-grade construction for parking.
- Downtown has insufficient supply and variety of housing, and thereby lacks a diverse resident population which affects its economic vitality.

### Challenge 2

#### Inadequate active transportation facilities and barriers to connectivity

- Downtown's bicycle infrastructure is inadequate and not well-integrated into the city-wide network.
- Downtown has regional arterials as one-way couplets that are frequently congested, creating traffic bottlenecks and barriers to safe pedestrian and bicycle movement.
- The quality of pedestrian facilities in Downtown such as sidewalks, seating, lighting, and wayfinding signage is of inconsistent quality.

### Challenge 3

#### Unclear historic status of many older Downtown properties

- An incomplete survey of Downtown's historic resources creates uncertainty for potential developers and investors.
- Similar to many historic downtowns, San Rafael faces the challenge of balancing historic preservation and economic growth.
- There is inadequate direction on the adaptive use and rehabilitation of older structures that may not meet historic preservation criteria.

### Challenge 4

#### Potential impact of climate change and sea-level rise in parts of Downtown

- Parts of Downtown are currently impacted by seasonal flooding during heavy rains, and by tidal surges. The extent and intensity of flooding is projected to increase by 2050, impacted by sea-level rise.
- Low-lying areas within Downtown will need to consider adaptation and resiliency to climate change, in particular the properties along San Rafael Canal and the Montecito Commercial Area.

## Challenge 5

### Impact of evolving retail trends on Downtown

- Increasingly, brick-and-mortar retail stores are being challenged by the steady rise of online shopping.
- To thrive economically, Downtown San Rafael needs to augment and diversify the range of its uses and attractions beyond shopping and dining.

## Challenge 6

### Rising homelessness and displacement

- The Bay Area is facing a housing crisis. Downtown, as the County-wide center for social services, has a large number of unsheltered residents. There is an urgent need for permanent supportive housing, as well as measures to avoid displacement of lower-income residents.
- Downtown has to navigate how to attract new market-rate development while also providing affordable and special needs housing, as well as social and mental health services.

## Opportunity



### Central location and an established regional center with diverse jobs and a strong economic base

- Good access and connectivity within the region.
- An important civic role as the Marin County seat.
- An established employment hub, with major employers such as Kaiser and BioMarin, and a large daytime workforce.
- A recognized destination for culture and recreation, with several local events attracting visitors from all over the Bay Area.

## Opportunity



### Authentic walkable, historic downtown with a unique cultural legacy, mild climate and access to nature

- An established walkable, mixed-use environment well-positioned to meet the growing national demand for "urban living".
- A recognized California Cultural District with an authentic "main street"; enhanced by historic landmarks, cultural institutions, and a rich history related to music and the farm-to-table movement.
- A spectacular natural setting, mild climate, and easy access to a variety of open space and recreation opportunities.

## Opportunity



### Major transportation hub, with potential for mixed-use development

- Downtown's San Rafael Transit Center is Marin County's most important transportation hub. The SMART rail line has further enhanced Downtown access for potential workers and residents.
- Proximity to transit and amenities can support new mixed-use development and housing to boost Downtown's economy.
- Good connectivity could be an opportunity to provide affordable housing with lower parking requirements.







# Design Principles + Guiding Policies

CHAPTER

3

*In this chapter*

3.1 Design Principles and Guiding Policies

34

## 3.1 Design Principles and Guiding Policies

The eight design principles identified here and accompanying policies will guide future development in Downtown San Rafael. The intent is to address existing challenges and leverage development opportunities to realize the community's vision for Downtown's future.

### Design Principles

The eight design principles respond to the existing challenges and opportunities identified in Chapter Two: Existing Conditions. The design principles aim to translate the community vision derived through sustained input from the San Rafael community, key stakeholders and City staff. They are intended to help create a Downtown that is memorable, pedestrian-oriented and well-connected, that enhances Downtown's unique built heritage, stimulates investment; and reinforces City goals.

### Guiding policies and expected outcomes

The design principles are supported by policies to guide decision-making when evaluating actions and strategies for future development. These are intentionally succinct to be meaningful and easy to implement. Each set of guiding policies is accompanied by a list of "expected outcomes" that help to illustrate the future vision and enable the City to monitor the Plan's performance over time.

### Principle

**1** Strengthen Downtown's identity and sense of arrival by focusing development at key nodes and gateways.



### Principle

**5** Enable mixed-use development in Downtown to increase housing, strengthen local businesses, and diversify the economy.

Principle

**2** Coordinate placemaking improvements to make Downtown interesting, safe, and inviting for everyone.

Principle

**3** Provide a safe, well-connected transportation network for all modes, supported by a progressive parking strategy.

Principle

**4** Establish a network of attractive and welcoming streets and civic spaces.



Principle

**6** Reinforce Downtown's eclectic character with historic preservation and new context-sensitive development.

Principle

**7** Develop growth and adaptation strategies to increase Downtown's resilience to climate change.

Principle

**8** Promote housing access at all income levels and establish strategies to prevent homelessness, gentrification, and displacement.

## Principle

## 1

# Strengthen Downtown's identity and sense of arrival by focusing development at key nodes and gateways.

**Figure 3.1** *The core of Downtown, centered around Fourth Street, is a regional destination for jobs, retail, culture, and recreation.*

*Image source: City of San Rafael*

**Focused development at Downtown "gateways" such as the Transit Center and at other important nodes will catalyze growth and redevelopment, create a stronger sense of arrival, and reinforce Downtown's identity.**

Downtown San Rafael has an established role within the region as a center for employment, culture and recreation. Existing Downtown assets and its strong economy make it an attractive destination for many potential employers, residents and visitors. This is likely to continue, and is reflected in the range of pipeline development projects, and the planned relocation of the Transit Center.

The Precise Plan is an opportunity to build on this momentum, and focus investment and new development at key Downtown locations that would strengthen its overall identity and the unique characteristics of its existing neighborhoods. This will create a Downtown experience that is distinct from other centers in the region.

A critical development opportunity is a new gateway node at the SMART Station and San Rafael Transit Center area. Market trends support new mixed-use development at this walkable, transit-served location, within easy reach of many community attractions, employment and recreation options.

A balance of residential and commercial uses, along with a new civic space, will create an active, safe, "24-hour" node that can direct the foot traffic and energy from the SMART station and Transit Center to the businesses and attractions in the heart of Downtown. A Transit Plaza as the new civic space will serve the high number of visitors in the area, and provide a valuable new amenity for Downtown users.



### Guiding policies

The following policies are intended to provide guidance to decision-makers in implementing the Plan vision.

**1A.** Consider Downtown to be composed of sub-areas, each with distinct attributes, and identify key nodes within each for focused investment and prioritized development.

**1B.** Set development standards to ensure that new development in Downtown is harmonious with the existing fabric, and enhances neighborhood character through architecture, landscape and streetscape design.

**1C.** Establish a sense of arrival into Downtown through “gateway features” at all entrances including landmark buildings, streetscape improvements, public art, etc.

**1D.** Prioritize a new gateway node at the SMART Station and Transit Center area, anchored by new mixed-use development with a new Transit Plaza to serve Downtown residents and visitors.

### Expected outcomes

The following expected outcomes are intended to help monitor and evaluate the Plan’s implementation.

- Downtown has distinct neighborhoods or sub-areas and the identity of each is articulated through the built form, mix of uses, streetscapes, public art, signage, etc., as well as events and activities celebrating local culture and history.
- Within each sub-area, focused development at nodes creates centers of neighborhood activity, blending old and new.
- New development in Downtown is harmonious with the existing development, and enhances neighborhood character.
- Downtown has a clear sense of arrival, and its gateways are emphasized by new buildings, public realm improvements, signage, and public art.
- A new mixed-use node develops at the SMART Station and Transit Center area, providing new housing and uses, and anchored by a new well-designed and active civic space.



**Figure 3.2** Downtown neighborhoods are varied in built character, activities, and role.

## Principle

## 2

Coordinate placemaking improvements to make Downtown interesting, safe, and inviting for everyone.

**Figure 3.3** *Downtown Petaluma offers an example of the successful revitalization of a historic downtown that offers a unique visitor experience.*

*Image source: Downtown Petaluma Association*

**Downtown will become a destination of choice for both the City and the region, providing an experience that is memorable and authentic.**

Placemaking can be used as an economic development tool and provide a multi-faceted approach to improve and maintain places within Downtown, capitalizing on its existing assets.

A coordinated Downtown placemaking strategy will ensure that the planning and implementation of design improvements across Downtown is done in a cohesive and efficient manner, and with sufficient thought to future upkeep and maintenance. It will strengthen identity and wayfinding, and provide a framework for implementation.

The City can play a leadership role in guiding Downtown's transformation by managing key placemaking efforts, attracting new investment,

exploring funding options, and establishing innovative partnerships with private entities for implementation and management.

A form-based zoning code for Downtown tied to the long-term vision will ensure greater clarity and predictability and attract new investment. It will garner community support for placemaking efforts, and enable the City to prioritize strategic catalyst projects.

Downtown needs to create a welcoming "first impression" to maintain its long-term vitality. Critical to this is the maintenance and upkeep of its physical spaces, as well as a sensitive and thoughtful approach to resolve issues such as homelessness to provide a safe, inclusive Downtown experience.



## Guiding policies

The following policies are intended to provide guidance to decision-makers in implementing the Plan vision.

- 2A.** Develop a Downtown Placemaking Strategy to coordinate revitalization efforts to strengthen the "Downtown brand".
- 2B.** Initiate catalyst projects at key nodes, use quick-build, low-cost techniques and explore innovative short-term uses for vacant and underutilized sites to spur investment and build community support for improvements.
- 2C.** Create greater awareness of community assets and landmarks, and build upon the Downtown Parking and Wayfinding Strategy to orient and direct visitors.
- 2D.** Publicize Downtown improvement efforts, involving local stakeholders such as Business Improvement Districts, Neighborhood Associations and other groups.
- 2E.** Maintain existing and explore new opportunities for public-private partnerships to fund, construct and maintain planned Downtown improvements.
- 2F.** Continue existing efforts and explore new "best practice" strategies to address homelessness in a holistic manner. Support public education programs, short-term measures to assist those in need, and long-term solutions, including additional permanent supportive housing.

## Expected outcomes

The following expected outcomes are intended to help monitor and evaluate the Plan's implementation.

- Downtown transformations are coordinated and managed by a Placemaking Strategy that structures the planning, design and maintenance of improvements.
- Downtown is perceived to be a safe, vibrant, "24-hour" destination, and sees an increase in the number of its residents and visitors; benefiting Downtown businesses.
- Cohesive signage, public art, lighting, and street furniture improvements help in wayfinding and orientation, and there is increased awareness of Downtown's history, institutions and neighborhood assets.
- The City takes a leadership role in Downtown revitalization with catalyst projects, guided by the Plan vision and form-based standards.
- Tactical urbanism and temporary uses are used to truth-test designs and activate underutilized sites.
- The City implements comprehensive strategies to support its unsheltered population, thus enabling its civic spaces to be better used by everyone.



**Figure 3.4** *Downtown Healdsburg* is a popular North California destination that uses consistent signage and street furniture as part of its placemaking efforts.  
Image source: [www.sonoma.com](http://www.sonoma.com)

## Principle

## 3

Provide a safe, well-connected transportation network for all modes, supported by a progressive parking strategy.

**Figure 3.5** Protected bicycle lanes in a busy downtown setting can greatly promote bicycle usage, accommodating additional users without creating congestion and parking issues.

Image source: [www.metaefficient.com](http://www.metaefficient.com)

**Downtown will have a transportation network that improves multimodal connectivity and safety, is designed for the future of mobility, and is forward-thinking in accommodating parking needs.**

Downtown's transportation network will promote safety for all transportation modes, with a focus on improving facilities for pedestrians and cyclists, particularly at key intersections prone to accidents.

In order to develop a network that is truly multimodal - in other words, accommodate a diverse set of transportation needs on existing streets - the network needs to consider prioritizing certain streets for specific travel modes, while allowing other modes to also share the right-of-way. This will create connected priority networks for auto, bicycle and pedestrian traffic that will allow for safer, more efficient circulation and access.

Technology can play a major role in making Downtown safer and easier to navigate for all users. For example, user-activated pedestrian crossing signals will promote safety, and traffic

signal progression can lead to smoother traffic flow while lowering travel speeds. Digital wayfinding and parking signage can allow Downtown users to reach their destinations faster, and be used to clearly communicate information such as parking availability, street closures, special events, etc.

In planning for the future, street design needs to be flexible, allowing them to adapt to emerging trends and technology such as ride-hailing, micromobility such as scooters, and autonomous vehicles. Sustainability and green infrastructure should also be key considerations when considering upgrades.

Streets are social places, and it is important for them to feel genuinely accessible and usable by everyone. Universal Design features should be incorporated whenever possible in street furniture, signage, and the pedestrian realm.





## Guiding policies

The following policies are intended to provide guidance in evaluating strategies and actions for implementing the Plan vision.

- 3A.** Create a layered circulation network with priority streets that serve all travel modes with greater efficiency and safety.
- 3B.** Provide a high degree of connectivity within Downtown, giving users the choice of multiple routes to reach their destinations.
- 3C.** Enhance bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure to improve connectivity within Downtown and to other parts of San Rafael.
- 3D.** Improve curbside management to meet evolving needs for parking, delivery, ridesharing, and new modes of travel.
- 3E.** Optimize the use of Downtown's existing parking supply and promote a "park once and walk" strategy.
- 3F.** Examine and improve the functioning of the existing Downtown Parking District to better serve Downtown needs.
- 3G.** Recognize the role of streets as civic spaces that help shape urban environments.
- 3H.** Consider environmental, social, and economic issues in the design of streets.

## Expected outcomes

The following expected outcomes are intended to help monitor and evaluate the Plan's implementation.

- Downtown has a clear hierarchy of vehicular, pedestrian and bicycle-priority streets, reflected in more efficient circulation and reduced traffic collisions.
- The modal share of pedestrians and bicyclists increases across all Downtown streets, including users of all ages.
- Design improvements allow flexible use of the same space for different functions such as parking, servicing, etc. at different times.
- Streets are adaptable to new technology and new travel modes, and incorporate green infrastructure when feasible.
- Downtown's existing parking supply and facilities are used more efficiently, and its Parking District is enhanced.
- Streets are used as civic spaces, and as venues for community gatherings, events, and activities.
- Streetscape improvements increase access and comfort for users of all ages and abilities, and incorporate Universal Design features when feasible.



**Figure 3.6 (Above)** *Pedestrian-oriented street design* plays a critical role in increased foot traffic that directly benefits the local economy.

**Figure 3.7 (Below)** *Low-cost pilot projects* are an effective strategy to test out design concepts and to gain community support without incurring significant capital costs. In many cases, low-cost techniques such as paint, movable bollards, or even sturdy planters as shown in this example can be effective in creating a separated bikeway.

## Principle

## 4

Establish a network of attractive and welcoming streets and civic spaces.

**A well-designed and inclusive public realm that connects key Downtown destinations will encourage walking and bicycling, enhance community interaction and provide opportunities for adapting to climate change.**

The public realm serves as a backdrop for community life. In most downtowns, the public realm - including streets, plazas, parks, alleys and pedestrian passages - is the largest contiguous civic space, and should work as a network of "outdoor rooms" where people interact. A well-designed and inclusive public realm is one which all residents and visitors can visit and enjoy freely and comfortably, that feels safe at all times, and one that encourages day-to-day, spontaneous interaction. It can promote an active lifestyle, improve public health, and create safer, more close-knit communities.

Downtown San Rafael has the opportunity to create an exemplary public realm network, since its streets and civic spaces are human-scaled and walkable, and Downtown is an established center for shopping and recreation. San Rafael's mild climate supports outdoor activities and recreation, and it is regionally recognized for its association with music and the arts, as well as the "farm-to-table" movement. With improved connectivity and a consistent high quality of pedestrian facilities, Downtown can greatly enhance its role as a favored destination for the City and the region.

Downtown's main civic space, Courthouse Square, and its "main street", Fourth Street, can become the focus of pedestrian and bicycle improvements and additional programming. The Precise Plan is an opportunity to strengthen existing and create new civic spaces

at key locations, develop new programming, and set in place public-private partnerships for their maintenance and upkeep. It is also an opportunity to better integrate existing natural assets such as San Rafael Canal and Mahon and Irwin Creeks into the public realm network.



**Figure 3.8** *The Italian Street Painting Festival on Fourth Street is part of Downtown's cultural legacy.*

## Guiding policies

The following policies are intended to provide guidance to decision-makers in implementing the Plan vision.

- 4A.** Improve existing civic spaces such as Courthouse Square, Boyd Park, and Albert Park through design improvements and programming.
- 4B.** Create new civic spaces as feasible, focusing on Fourth Street, and use underutilized and vacant City-owned parcels to create short-term civic spaces.
- 4C.** Incentivize private developers to provide and maintain new publicly accessible spaces.
- 4D.** Improve access to the San Rafael Canal waterfront and Downtown creeks.
- 4E.** Employ "best practices" design and community surveillance strategies to ensure that civic spaces are well-maintained, safe, and accessible for people of all ages and abilities.
- 4F.** Support existing Downtown activities and events and introduce new ones to attract residents and visitors.
- 4G.** Include public art and signage in civic spaces and streetscapes to strengthen identity, improve wayfinding, and highlight community landmarks. Develop incentives for public art as part of private development.

## Expected outcomes

The following expected outcomes are intended to help monitor and evaluate the Plan's implementation.

- Downtown has a cohesive network of well-designed streets, plazas and pocket parks, with pedestrian facilities such as seating, lighting, amenities and wayfinding features.
- Downtown has new civic spaces such as a plaza at the SMART station, a pocket park, as well as enhanced access to Downtown creeks and San Rafael Canal.
- The Downtown Form-Based Code guides the provision of civic spaces in new Downtown developments.
- Downtown's civic spaces are active and well-used by residents, workers, and visitors; and have a well-crafted program of events, activities, and new uses.
- Improved facilities attract pedestrians from adjacent neighborhoods, the Lindero office district, and the Montecito Commercial area to the heart of Downtown.
- Increased pedestrian activity and foot traffic benefits Downtown businesses, and Fourth Street is further enhanced as a "main street" for shopping, socializing and recreation.
- The public realm is designed to be inclusive and welcoming for all ages and abilities.



**Figure 3.9 (Above) Well-designed civic spaces** encourage outdoor activities and a healthier lifestyle for the community, as in Pearl Street, Boulder, CO. Image source: [www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com)

**Figure 3.10 (Below) Streets can be civic spaces** and be used for community events such as farmer's markets, as in the case of Fourth Street in San Rafael.

## Goal

## 5

Enable mixed-use development in Downtown to increase housing, strengthen local businesses, and diversify the economy.

**Figure 3.11** *Street life and urban form*

*Fundamental to a successful downtown is creating an attractive place where people want to be.*

**Downtown will have a development program that capitalizes on its existing assets and meets community goals, and helps its evolution from primarily a commercial district to a thriving mixed-use center.**

Downtown San Rafael's location and ease of regional access, walkable scale and strong economic base positions it well to support a diversified development program that can sustain economic growth for the next 20 years, provide a high quality of life for its residents, and meet City and community goals.

For long-term economic resilience, Downtown needs to transform from a commercial destination to a mixed-use center. Adding more housing will strengthen and diversify its economic base, in addition to improving vitality and safety. Greater variety in retail and office uses, as well as flexibility in design will add resilience in weathering economic downturns and adapting to changing market preferences, particularly in the retail sector.

Adding new uses should be balanced with protecting local businesses and cherished community establishments for Downtown to remain authentic and true to its roots. Similarly, new housing should include both market-rate and affordable types to serve diverse needs and promote equity.

The Precise Plan is accompanied by a new form-based zoning code for Downtown that will enable mixed-use development and attract investment. It provides clear guidance about the desired built environment in different parts of Downtown, encourages innovation, allows design flexibility, and helps to streamline the permitting and approval process. This in turn will increase certainty for developers, and build community support for new projects.



## Guiding policies

The following policies are intended to provide guidance to decision-makers in implementing the Plan vision.

- 5A.** Create a true mixed-use Downtown that is "alive after five", with a balanced mix of housing, employment, retail, civic, and community uses.
- 5B.** Employ the Downtown Form-Based Code to clarify expectations for new development, and streamline the approval and entitlement process.
- 5C.** Continue to attract a diverse set of employers and broaden the range of uses and activities in Downtown, to promote economic resiliency.
- 5D.** Encourage innovation in building design and uses, such as "flex" ground floor spaces to adapt to new retail and office market trends.
- 5E.** Explore strategies such as lot consolidation and Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) where appropriate to make redevelopment economically feasible.
- 5F.** Retain existing and attract new small and locally-owned businesses that reinforce Downtown as a unique place.

## Expected outcomes

The following expected outcomes are intended to help monitor and evaluate the Plan's implementation.

- Downtown enhances its reputation as a regional mixed-use destination of choice for housing, employment, shopping and entertainment.
- The entitlement and development process for Downtown projects is simple, transparent, timely, and cost-effective.
- The City plays a leadership role in guiding Downtown development, through strategic projects and improvements.
- Downtown attracts investment from a variety of sectors, creating a diversified economy that is more recession-proof.
- New development in Downtown is innovative and flexible in its design, proving more adaptable to changing market preferences.
- Downtown retains its authentic character through active steps to prevent the loss of local businesses and institutions.



**Figure 3.12 (Above)** A mixed-use downtown is economically more resilient and promotes social equity.

**Figure 3.13 (Below)** Local businesses provide authentic character and identity to Downtown San Rafael, and should be protected from getting priced out by new development.

## Principle

## 6

Reinforce Downtown's eclectic character with historic preservation and new context-sensitive development.

**Downtown will strengthen its sense of place by celebrating its historic and cultural resources, and ensuring that new development complements and enhances Downtown's built heritage.**

Historic buildings help establish a deeper connection with the historic and cultural legacy of a place. Downtown San Rafael's built heritage includes a number of landmark buildings, several of them recognized in the National Register of Historic Places. Apart from individual buildings, there are several parts of Downtown where the built fabric has not been altered significantly, and these areas lend authenticity to Downtown's historic character.

Beyond the preservation of historic and cultural landmarks, the Plan encourages the rehabilitation and adaptive use of older and historic buildings in Downtown, both to continue their role as San Rafael's living heritage and also because reuse is often more sustainable than new construction.

As part of the Precise Plan process, the survey of historic properties in Downtown has been updated to clarify the historic status of buildings in Downtown, and to ensure that important assets are appropriately preserved.

New development in Downtown should be sensitive to the form and scale of the existing fabric, while further enhancing Downtown's eclectic and varied built character. The new Form-Based Code for Downtown provides guidance for new development to meet this objective.



**Figure 3.14** *Renovation and adaptive use of historic buildings is sustainable and preserves a sense of history.*

## Guiding policies

The following policies are intended to provide guidance in evaluating strategies and actions for implementing the Plan vision.

- 6A.** Protect historic and cultural landmarks and celebrate them in the design of the built form and public realm.
- 6B.** Use appropriate historic preservation tools to safeguard the built character of historic resources while accommodating sensitive modifications and additions as needed.
- 6C.** Maintain and regularly update the inventory of notable historic and cultural resources in Downtown.
- 6D.** Employ the Form-Based Code to guide the physical form of new development on sites adjacent to Downtown's historic resources.
- 6E.** Utilize preservation and adaptive use strategies, and incentivize private developers to reinvest in existing buildings and redevelop sites with historic or cultural resources.
- 6F.** Plan activities and events focused on raising awareness about Downtown's history and cultural heritage.

## Expected outcomes

The following expected outcomes are intended to help monitor and evaluate the Plan's implementation.

- Existing historic and cultural resources in Downtown are highlighted as landmarks and points of interest.
- Redevelopment in Downtown includes renovation and adaptive use of historic structures where appropriate.
- Downtown maintains the integrity of the historic and cultural context, beyond the preservation of individual structures.
- New development is sensitive to the existing context, with appropriate modifications in building massing.
- Historic structures are maintained and enhanced through both public and private sector efforts.
- Education programs and activities such as walking tours create greater awareness of San Rafael's built heritage.



**Figure 3.15** (Above) Existing historic and cultural resources in Downtown, such as the Boyd Gatehouse should be maintained and celebrated.

**Figure 3.16** (Below) Downtown cultural icons such as the Mission San Rafael Arcángel are important connections to the City's past.

## Principle

## 7

Develop growth and adaptation strategies to increase Downtown's resilience to climate change.

### Downtown will develop strategies to adapt and be resilient to the reality of climate change, in particular sea-level rise and wildfire.

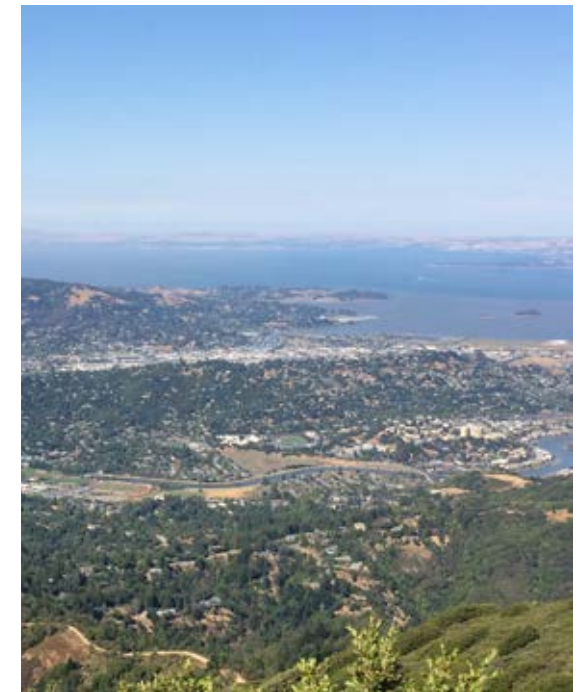
Low-lying areas of Downtown, such as along San Rafael Canal and Irwin Creek, experience regular flooding during inclement weather, particularly when heavy rainfall coincides with high and king tides. This scenario is likely to worsen as sea levels rise and storms become more frequent because of climate change. The Montecito Commercial area, in particular, will face sea-level rise ranging from 10 to 60 inches by 2050<sup>1</sup>. Other parts of Downtown including the SMART station area, highways, schools and residential areas will be susceptible to storm surges, tidal flooding, and rising ground water levels.

In 2019, the City adopted the San Rafael Climate Action Plan 2030 (CCAP 2030) that addresses climate change and sea-level rise. The General Plan 2040 includes policies and programs to plan ahead for potential increases in flooding and sea-level rise. The General Plan 2040 also includes an adaptation report, which suggests adaptation strategies for specific areas of the City, including Downtown.

San Rafael's location also makes it is vulnerable to wildfire, the intensity and frequency of which is anticipated to increase due to climate change. In 2019, the City adopted a Wildfire Prevention and Protection Action Plan with a comprehensive set of 37 objectives and actions to reduce wildfire risk that would apply city-wide, instead of only within the Wildland Urban

Interface, and corresponding changes to the municipal code.

A comprehensive set of adaptation strategies should be compiled for future Downtown development, that draws from the recommendations of the numerous plans, studies and similar resources at the City, County and State level. This will streamline implementation and enable San Rafael and its Downtown to continue to thrive in the coming decades.



**Figure 3.17** *San Rafael's natural context makes it vulnerable to both wildfire and sea-level rise.*

1. Source: Marin Bay Waterfront Adaptation and Vulnerability Evaluation (BayWAVE)



## Guiding policies

The following policies are intended to provide guidance in evaluating strategies and actions for implementing the Plan vision.

- 7A.** Develop a comprehensive set of adaptation strategies for Downtown curated from city-wide and region-wide resources<sup>2</sup>.
- 7B.** Evaluate both near and long-term flood control measures in Downtown, ranging from tidal gates and levees to dredging San Rafael Canal, creek restoration, and shoreline modifications; as well as engineering solutions to reduce stormwater run-off and retention.
- 7C.** Prioritize natural systems and multipurpose solutions such as urban wetlands that can provide flood protection, create habitat, and add a new public amenity.
- 7D.** Continue to implement the Wildfire Prevention and Protection Action Plan and ensure compliance and regular monitoring.
- 7E.** Update building codes to require structural adaptations to withstand flood inundation and wildfire protection, and support innovative construction technology for remodels and new construction.

2. Including (but not limited to) the San Rafael General Plan 2040, San Rafael CCAP 2030, Marin County Climate Action Plan (2015), San Rafael Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (2017), Resilient by Design's "Elevate San Rafael" (2018).

## Expected outcomes

The following expected outcomes are intended to help monitor and evaluate the Plan's implementation.

- Downtown adapts holistically to climate change, relying on a long-term plan with interim "best practices" solutions.
- Natural solutions such as creek restoration and urban wetlands control local flooding and provide open space and wildlife habitat.
- Improvements and widening of San Rafael Canal, Mahon Creek and Irwin Creek create opportunities for urban trails and waterfront promenades connecting the Montecito Commercial area to Downtown.
- Engineering flood control solutions such as pervious streetscape materials and subterranean retention cisterns are employed where feasible in Downtown.
- New development incorporates design adaptations to sea-level rise, particularly in the Montecito Commercial area.
- Systematic implementation of the Wildfire Prevention and Protection Action Plan helps to mitigate damage from wildfires.
- Education programs and activities such as nature walks create greater awareness and stewardship of Downtown's natural assets.



**Figure 3.18 (Above) Tanner Springs Park** in downtown Portland provides a natural ecosystem in the heart of the Pearl District.

Image source: [www.onlyinyourstate.com](http://www.onlyinyourstate.com)

**Figure 3.19 (Below) Education programs build community support** for adaptation strategies, such as in this walking tour by the Resilient By Design initiative in 2018.

Image source: [www.resilientshore.org](http://www.resilientshore.org)

Principle

8

Promote housing access at all income levels and establish strategies to prevent homelessness, gentrification, and displacement.

**Downtown will gain a stronger sense of community by promoting greater access to housing at all income levels that will allow a diverse population to put down roots for years to come.**

San Rafael, like much of the region, is facing a housing affordability crisis, with related issues such as homelessness, gentrification, and social inequity. Among the ways to address these issues is by expanding the supply and variety of housing, creating incentives to deliver more affordable housing, and developing strategies to prevent displacement and gentrification.

Downtown is a prime location for adding housing at all income levels. Its walkable environment and access to amenities and transit support reduced parking requirements for new housing and mixed-use projects, making them economically feasible. A diversity of housing types including Missing Middle types, and a balance between rental and for-sale units will enable residents to continue living in the same neighborhood, moving from one housing type to another or from renting to owning as their needs change over time. It will also support "aging in place" for older residents,

an important consideration as demographic patterns change across the country. Increased housing production can help meet City goals related to affordable housing, and streamlined regulations and development standards crafted for Downtown's unique conditions will encourage innovative, "affordable-by-design" solutions such as micro-units and shared living options. Anti-displacement strategies will safeguard existing residents from getting priced out of Downtown.

Downtown is a regional hub for a variety of social services, and a suitable location to test housing solutions with support services for its unsheltered population, as part of a comprehensive County-led approach to address homelessness. A range of short and long-term strategies, such as "Housing First"<sup>3</sup>, and community ambassadors, can be considered to end chronic homelessness.

3. More information at <https://endhomelessness.org/resource/housing-first/>



**Figure 3.20 Diverse housing options** including Missing Middle housing allow a variety of families and household types to live in the same neighborhood. It enables innovative living arrangements and supports aging-in-place.

## Guiding policies

The following policies are intended to provide guidance in evaluating strategies and actions for implementing the Plan vision.

**8A.** Update the City's below-market rate (BMR) policies to encourage more development and site-by-site affordability requirements, and find ways to increase the stock of permanently affordable units.

**8B.** Balance rental and ownership housing, and encourage a variety in housing sizes and types to cater to diverse population groups.

**8C.** Incentivize private developers to produce market-rate, "affordable-by-design" housing units, by exploring strategies such as reduced parking, minimum unit sizes, and impact fee requirements; "unbundling" parking costs, etc.

**8D.** Employ the Downtown Form-Based Code to stimulate housing production.

**8E.** Encourage Missing Middle housing types (see Figure 3.20) where appropriate.

**8F.** Continue current tenant protection laws and develop strategies for anti-displacement crafted for Downtown's unique conditions.

**8G.** Work with the County of Marin and community partners to end homelessness, including additional extremely low income housing with supportive services.

## Expected outcomes

The following expected outcomes are intended to help monitor and evaluate the Plan's implementation.

- Downtown has a healthy ratio of market-rate and below-market rate units, as well as rental and for-sale units.
- New housing is innovative and in a variety of configurations to suit a range of family types, and includes workforce housing, shared living options, "micro-units", etc.
- The entitlement and development process for Downtown is streamlined and predictable, spurring new residential and mixed-use projects, including Missing Middle housing types.
- Downtown has effective strategies to avoid gentrification and displacement of established communities.
- The City partners with the County and local organizations to proactively and compassionately address homelessness in Downtown, and continues to coordinate supportive and social services.
- There is an increase in Downtown's resident population, incorporating a variety of household and family types; as well as an increase in the number of long-term residents.



**Figure 3.21** (Above) A side-by-side duplex in Phoenix provides two units in a house-form building.

**Figure 3.22** (Below) Mixed-use buildings in Berkeley provide apartment units over ground floor retail.





# Design Vision

CHAPTER

# 4

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# 4.1 Downtown Vision

**The vision for Downtown San Rafael is of a walkable, mixed-use center for shopping, dining and entertainment, a well-connected employment hub, and a neighborhood that offers a range of housing choices in close proximity to amenities and transit.**

## A vision for an evolving Downtown

The Precise Plan envisions Downtown San Rafael as a vibrant, mixed-use destination with a strong sense of place and history, and one that provides varied and rich experiences for visitors and residents alike. It is a blend of old and new, of contemporary and historic buildings, with a clear hierarchy in its built form and civic spaces, reflecting the role and intensity of uses in different parts of Downtown. It provides a setting that invites economic investment, new employment opportunities, and securing a positive fiscal impact for the City while preserving its sense of place and "home town" character.

Downtown has a distinct identity, reflected in its eclectic neighborhoods, and reinforced by a well-designed public realm that invites community gathering. Downtown neighborhoods provide a range of housing options supported by amenities and active transportation options that enhance livability and encourage people to put down roots for generations to come.

This chapter translates this community-supported vision for Downtown into design direction that will create the desired physical environment as Downtown evolves over the next 20 years.

## Development strategy

Downtown is physically constrained: it is largely built out, has few vacant parcels, and many parcels are too small to be efficiently redeveloped to meet current market needs. At present, it is economically challenging to develop in Downtown due to high land and construction costs, and an entitlement process that can be lengthy and uncertain.

At the same time, Downtown has many attributes that enhance its development potential. It offers a mixed-use, walkable setting with access to a wide variety of retail, recreation, and open space amenities. This aligns well with the consistent and escalating demand for "downtown living". Its history is well-preserved in its built form and street grid, giving it a distinct identity.

The Precise Plan addresses existing development challenges by taking a form-based approach to set clear development standards that reduce uncertainty for investors and provide more predictable built outcomes to allay community fears about incompatible new development. The form-based standards reflect market conditions and existing site constraints, and thus are grounded in reality, enabling potential investors and developers to spend less time and money on

understanding what is allowed and is desirable, and instead focusing on innovative design and timely implementation. The Precise Plan's development strategy also relies on coordinated design investments by the City in collaboration with regional agencies and through public-private partnerships. These include a number of projects in the development pipeline as well as key opportunity sites that can deliver the Downtown vision.

### Potential development yield

The potential development yield for Downtown has been derived from the testing of vacant and underutilized sites identified at the Design Charrette, using metrics such as land-to-improvement value ratio, and existing use and square footage relative to what is allowed by zoning. The infill testing used a range of building types compatible with Downtown's existing built context and being

constructed in comparable locations. The yield calculated from the infill testing thus reflects actual site conditions and development possibilities. The program numbers have been vetted by City staff and refined in consultation with the team economist for project viability.

As shown in Table 4A, the potential development program in the Precise Plan area within the Plan horizon of 20 years (through 2040) includes 2,200 new residential units housing a population of 3,740, and 2,020 new jobs. Downtown is also divided into four sub-areas, and Table 4B breaks up the overall program for each of these.

This potential development program can be considered as a development "cap" that may build out differently than what is anticipated and described in this chapter. Further, the program totals for each sub-area are not fixed, and may be re-allocated within sub-areas as needed.

Development type	New development by 2040	
Residential	2,200,000 sq ft	2,200 units   3,740 population
Non-Residential	698,000 sq ft	2,020 jobs

Downtown Sub-Area	Residential	Non-Residential
Downtown Gateway	830 units   1,410 population (830,000 sq ft)	640 jobs (210,000 sq ft)
Downtown Core	620 units   1,050 population (620,000 sq ft)	1,040 jobs (373,000 sq ft)
West End Village	360 units   610 population (360,000 sq ft)	200 jobs (70,000 sq ft)
Montecito Commercial	390 units   670 population (390,000 sq ft)	140 jobs (45,000 sq ft)
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,200 units   3,740 population</b>	<b>2,020 jobs</b>

<p><b>Assumptions</b></p> <p>Average residential unit size = 1,000 sq ft (gross area)</p> <p>2,200 units correspond to 2,100 households (assuming a 5% vacancy rate)</p> <p>Population = 1.7 persons per household</p> <p>Jobs = 1 job per 350 sq ft of built-up area (gross area), with exceptions for approved projects</p>	<p><b>Pipeline projects</b></p> <p>The numbers shown in Table 4A are inclusive of the following projects that are under construction or approved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small infill projects on Shaver Street, Fifth Avenue and G Street in the West End Village</li> <li>• Third and Brooks (67 approved units)</li> <li>• 815 B Street (41 units under construction)</li> <li>• 999 Third Street (BioMarin; 207,000 sq ft)</li> <li>• 755 Lindaro Corporate Center (72,000 sq ft)</li> <li>• AC Marriott (140 rooms)</li> <li>• Public Safety Center (44,000 sq ft)</li> <li>• 800 Mission Avenue (77 approved assisted living units)</li> <li>• 703 Third Street (120 units)</li> </ul> <p>The numbers for the Montecito Commercial sub-area do not consider the potential redevelopment of Montecito Plaza, since that redevelopment is unlikely to occur within the Plan's lifespan.</p>
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# Illustrative of the Downtown Vision

**The Downtown vision describes the desired physical form and character of anticipated future development.**

The rendering to the right (Figure 4.1) illustrates one of many possible built outcomes of the Precise Plan vision. In this illustrative, potential new development is highlighted in shades of red and orange, reflecting future infill projects as well as those currently entitled or under construction. The green dotted corridors delineate priority streets for bicycle and pedestrian improvements. The smaller maps below (Figure 4.2) compare figure-ground studies of existing conditions and those likely to emerge by 2040. Please note that this is an illustration, and the Precise Plan does not mandate exact locations for future development.

Some of the key ideas illustrated include:

- Compact, mixed-use development on infill sites including a variety of building types;
- Focused development at the Downtown gateways from the east, west and the SMART station to create a sense of arrival;
- New development is compatible in scale and form with the existing built fabric;
- Development on larger sites (typically achieved through lot consolidation) is composed of well-scaled buildings, not large, monolithic structures, to create appropriate height and form transitions to the existing built fabric; and
- A cohesive network of bicycle and pedestrian-priority streets link key destinations and open spaces, enhancing the public realm.



**Figure 4.1** (Above) An illustrative rendering of the Downtown vision showing infill and pipeline projects

- Plan Area boundary
- Existing development
- Pipeline projects (entitled/ under construction)
- Potential infill opportunities\*
- Existing civic spaces
- Proposed civic space
- Pedestrian and bicycle priority streets

\* Potential infill projects shown here are conceptual and for illustrative purposes only





Figure 4.2 (Left) A figure-ground comparison of existing conditions and potential future development



Built form: 2019



Built form: 2040

## 4.2 A Form-Based Approach for Downtown Development

**The Precise Plan uses a form-based approach to establish built form standards for new development that reinforce Downtown's character and identity.**

### Form-based standards

The Precise Plan vision is implemented through a Downtown Form-Based Code (Downtown Code) found in Chapter Nine of the Precise Plan. Rather than relying on conventional zoning metrics such as density allocations, the form-based approach offers greater predictability in built outcomes by paying greater attention to Downtown's actual site conditions when setting development standards. For instance, the process included analyzing a range of building types for Downtown lots of different sizes, to determine development standards that would yield the desired built form and also fit building types being delivered in current market conditions.

The Downtown Code describes physical character in terms of "house-form" and "block-form" buildings. These terms are not direct references to the building's uses, but instead are a reflection of the building's form and its relationship with the adjacent street or civic space. House-form buildings are typically detached, have greater front and side setbacks, and look like houses, as the name suggests. They indicate a lower intensity of use and a more residential character. Block-form buildings are typically attached, with small or no setbacks, creating a continuous "street wall", and reflect a higher intensity of activity and a greater mix of uses. Downtown San Rafael

has a combination of both types, but the proportion of each in different parts of Downtown will help establish a hierarchy of built form and intensity of use. This granular approach also enables smoother transitions in scale and form between areas of different built character.

The Downtown Code also considers the interplay between built form and the adjacent public realm in creating walkable environments. In this, it emphasizes the role of building frontages - the interface between private building facades and the adjacent sidewalk or civic space; and the concept of "like facing like" - compatible built form framing both sides of a street or civic space to create more cohesive environments. Figure 4.3 discusses the role of built form and public realm in shaping community character.

The form-based approach was informed by an economic feasibility analysis and discussions with City staff.

**Figure 4.3** *Shaping community character through the design of the built form and public realm*

## Community character, built form, and the public realm

In any urban area, buildings play an important role in shaping the character and quality of its streets and civic spaces. Design elements such as built form ("house-form" or "block-form"), height, massing, facade articulation, and frontages play a pivotal role in shaping not just the visual character of a place, but also the pedestrian experience on the adjacent streets and civic spaces.

For placemaking to be effective, the design of the built form and public realm must be coordinated to generate active, well-used spaces and memorable streetscapes. The form-based approach used for the Precise Plan adopts such a strategy, defining standards for the critical design elements discussed above, to shape the public realm and create "outdoor rooms" for the community to enjoy.

The illustration to the right highlights how key design elements work together to create the kind of places that people want to be in. Well-designed facades, architectural elements, and a varied roofline add interest. Active ground floor uses encourage pedestrian activity. The private frontage - shown here as a forecourt with outdoor seating - creates a visual extension of the public realm.

The photographs below show examples of residential and retail frontage types that create a more active relationship between the private and public realm.



- Active ground floor uses
- Building transition (no blank side wall)
- Activities engaging the street
- Varied roofline



*Residential dooryard frontage*



*Retail terrace frontage*

## A Zoning Map for Downtown

The Zoning Map (Figure 4.5) establishes zoning regulations for the Plan Area. The Zoning Map is based on the Transect, described in Figure 4.4 on the facing page, and uses the "T4" and "T5" transect zones to calibrate the envisioned built environment for different parts of Downtown, summarized in Table 4C. It defines built form characteristics such as massing, heights, placement, and frontage standards for each zone. Both the T4 and T5 Downtown zones have two types of built environments: "Neighborhood" and "Main Street", which is reflected in the placement, orientation, and frontages of the built form. Both are mixed-use environments, but "Neighborhood" environments are more residential in character and "Main Street" environments are centers of activity and are typically more commercial. Main Street areas typically are more block-form in character, and Neighborhood zones are more house-form. The zone names indicate allowed maximum heights (base and with bonus); and "open" zones indicate specific areas within the zone that allow slight variations to allow greater flexibility in uses while maintaining the same form and character. For detailed development standards, refer to Chapter Nine: Downtown Form-Based Code. Please note that the Zoning Map (Figure 4.5) is repeated for clarity in Chapter Nine as Figure 2.2.040.A. Both maps show the same information.

### Floor Area Ratio (FAR)

The General Plan 2040 sets a maximum permitted FAR ranging from 3.0 to 6.0 for Downtown, exclusive of density bonuses. The Precise Plan uses height limits rather than FAR or density to determine allowable building intensity. The standards set in Chapter Nine: Downtown Form-Based Code, and summarized in Table 4C are coordinated to ensure that new development will not exceed General Plan limits.

Table 4C. Summary of built environment standards for Downtown Refer to Chapter Nine: Downtown Form-Based Code for zone standards			
Zone	Open Zone Allowed	Maximum Overall Height	Built Environment
<b>T4 Neighborhood</b>			<b>Building Form</b>
T4N 30/40	T4N 30/40 Open	30' (base), 40' (with bonus)	Primarily house-form, detached
T4N 40/50	None	40' (base), 50' (with bonus)	<b>Building Placement</b> Small front and side setbacks <b>Frontages</b> Residential and shopfronts
<b>T4 Main Street</b>			<b>Building Form</b>
T4MS 40/50	T4MS 40/50 Open	40' (base), 50' (with bonus)	Primarily block-form, attached
T4MS 40/60	T4MS 40/60 Open	40' (base), 60' (with bonus)	<b>Building Placement</b> Small to no front setbacks and no side setbacks
T4MS 50/70	T4MS 50/70 Open	50' (base), 70' (with bonus)	<b>Frontages</b> Predominantly shopfronts
T4MS 60/80	None	60' (base), 80' (with bonus)	
<b>T5 Neighborhood</b>			<b>Building Form</b>
T5N 40/60	T5N 40/60 Open	40' (base), 60' (with bonus)	Primarily block-form, mainly attached
T5N 50/70	T5N 50/70 Open	50' (base), 70' (with bonus)	<b>Building Placement</b> Small to no front and side setbacks <b>Frontages</b> Residential and shopfronts
<b>T5 Main Street</b>			<b>Building Form</b>
T5MS 70/90	None	70' (base), 90' (with bonus)	Primarily block-form, attached <b>Building Placement</b> Small to no front setbacks and no side setbacks <b>Frontages</b> Predominantly shopfronts
Notes:			
1. Downtown zones exclude street rights-of-way			
2. Civic space may occur in any of the zones above. Figure 4.5 shows the location of required new civic space			
3. Open zones are applied in specific locations (shown in Figure 4.5) to allow greater flexibility in uses while maintaining the zone's form and character			

Figure 4.4 *The Natural-to-Urban Transect*

### The Natural-to-Urban Transect: The framework for form-based planning and coding

The Natural-to-Urban Transect is an organizing principle used in form-based coding that establishes a hierarchy of places from the most natural to the most urban. The designation of each transect along this hierarchy is determined first by the character and form, intensity of development, and type of place; and secondly by the mix of uses within the area. This hierarchy becomes the framework for the plan and code, replacing use as the organizing principle (as used in conventional zoning). Transect zones are used to reinforce existing or to create new walkable mixed-use urban environments.

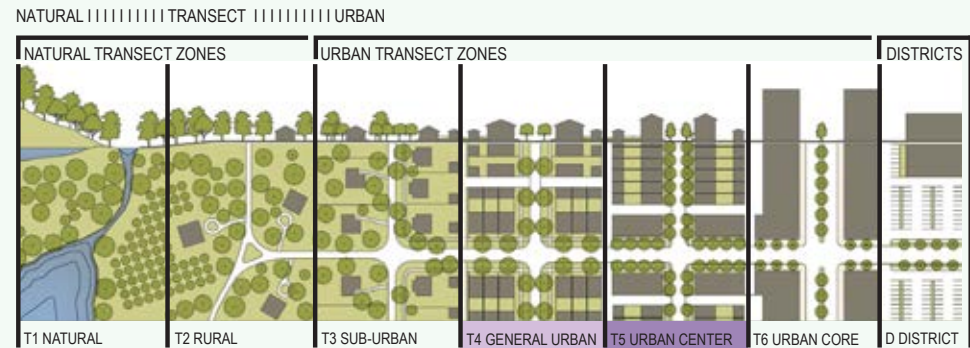
*“The Natural-to-Urban Transect is a means for considering and organizing the human habitat in a continuum of intensity that ranges from the most rural condition to the most urban. It provides a standardized method for differentiating between the intentions for urban form in various areas using gradual transitions rather than harsh distinctions. The zones are primarily classified by the physical intensity of the built form, the relationship between nature and the built environment, and the complexity of uses within the zone.”*

~ Form-Based Codes Institute

The model transect for American towns is divided into six transects: Natural (T1), Rural (T2), Sub-Urban (T3), General Urban (T4), Urban Center (T5), and Urban Core (T6), together with a District (D), often referred to as a Special District, a designation for areas with specialized purposes (e.g., heavy industrial, transportation, entertainment, universities, etc.).

Each transect is given a number, progressing from more rural environments (T1, T2) to more urban environments (T5, T6). Within each transect zone, there can be Main Street (MS) and Neighborhood (N) environments, reflecting the range from more residential, predominantly "house-form" (N) to more non-residential, predominantly "block-form" (MS) environments. "Open" zones reflect additional flexibility in uses within the same physical environment.

For more information, please visit [www.formbasedcodes.org](http://www.formbasedcodes.org)



T4 Neighborhood



T5 Neighborhood



T4 Main Street

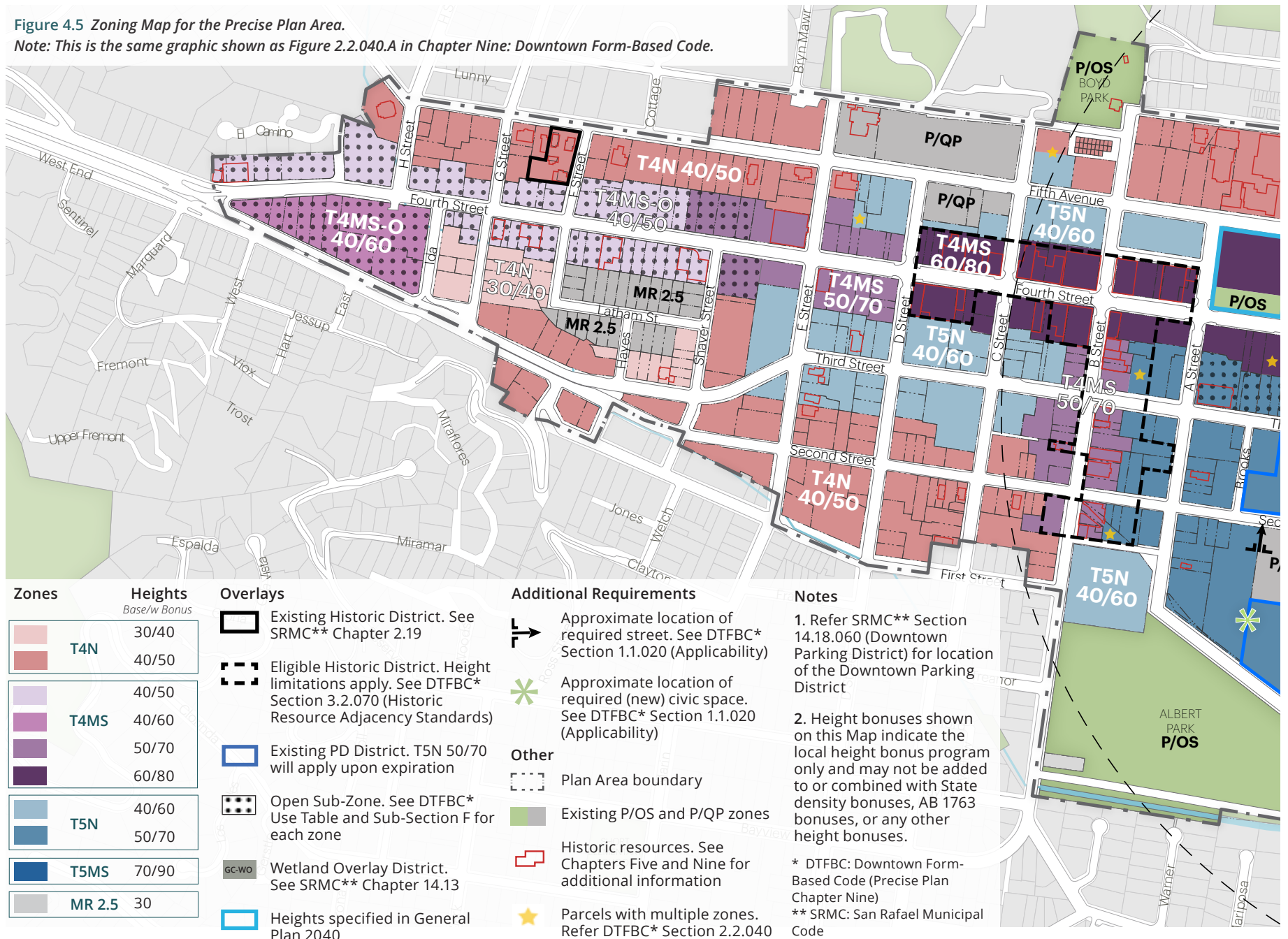


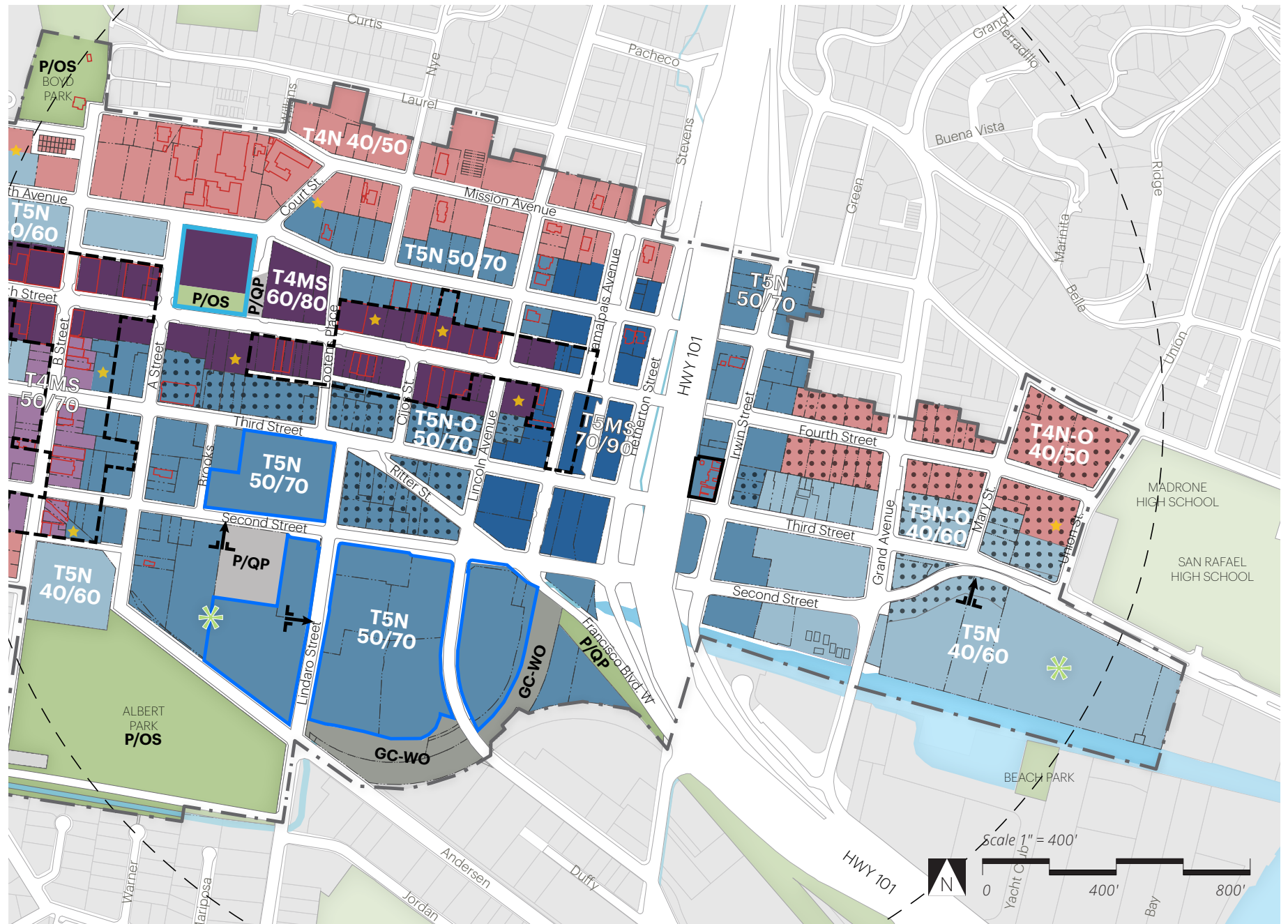
T5 Main Street

Note that in the diagram above, the Neighborhood and Main Street zones for T4 and T5 transect zones have similar built environments, but MS zones have more intense uses, reflected in ground level frontages, uses and building heights.

**Figure 4.5 Zoning Map for the Precise Plan Area.**

Note: This is the same graphic shown as Figure 2.2.040.A in Chapter Nine: Downtown Form-Based Code.





## 4.3 Building Height and Transitions



**Figure 4.6** Existing building heights in Downtown vary, with a few cases of awkward transitions.



**Figure 4.7** Most recent projects have applied for height bonuses and additional height as development concessions.

**The Precise Plan updates allowed building heights in Downtown to reflect current market conditions and construction technology, to establish a visual hierarchy and sensitive transitions.**

### Building heights and height bonus

Observed building heights in most of Downtown are lower than the maximum heights allowed by right under current zoning. Recently completed and entitled development projects reflect a trend of using the City's height bonus, to apply for a height increase as an allowed concession.

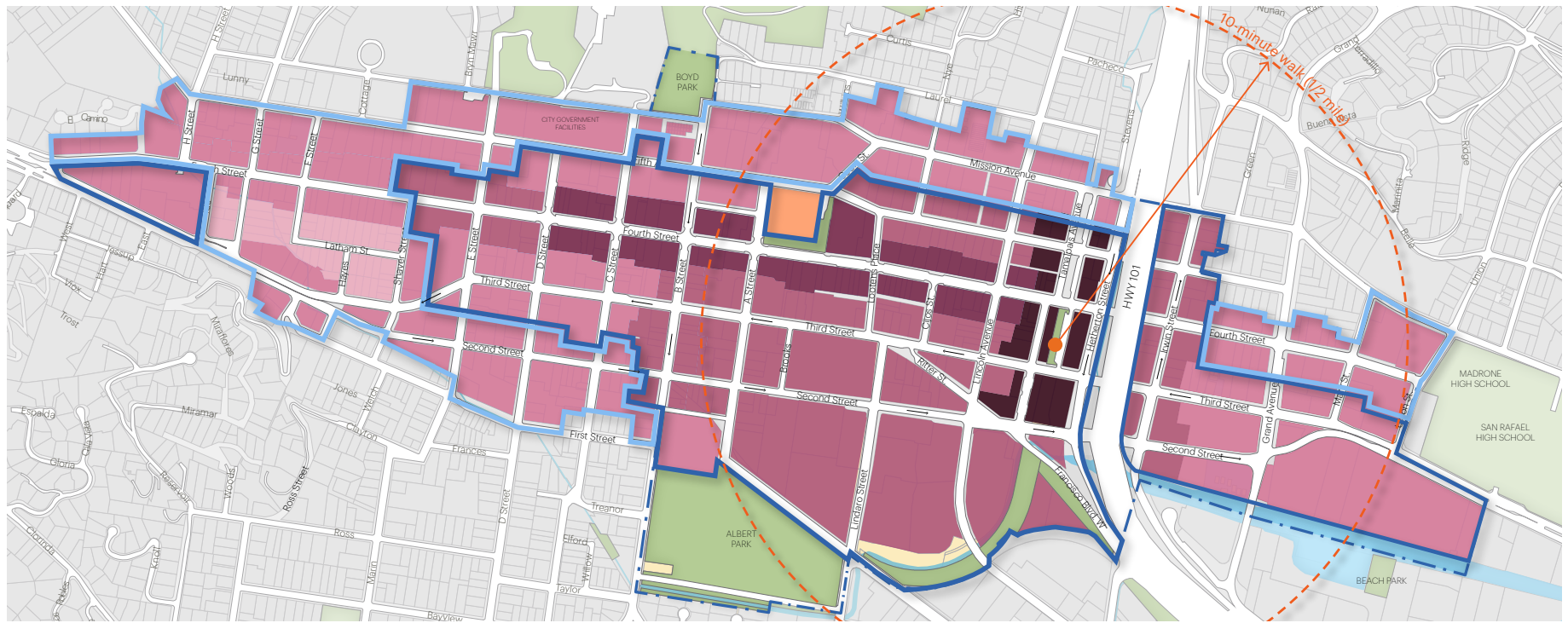
The Precise Plan and the Downtown Form-Based Code clarify allowed heights in Downtown as a "base condition" and the "maximum height envelope" should a height bonus be applied. In allocating heights across Downtown zones, the Plan analyzed heights of recently built projects, current development trends (such as retail floor heights), and latest construction technologies. Other considerations included stepbacks to allow solar access for public spaces, and building articulation standards to avoid a "canyon" effect in areas where taller buildings are anticipated. For taller buildings applying a height bonus, solar access studies are required (with exemptions for projects exceeding the City's inclusionary housing requirement). Downtown heights are also aligned with the recommendations in the "Good Design" Guidelines for Downtown (2017) to limit building heights within the historic core and increase heights near transit in the Downtown Station Area Plan (2012). Figure 4.8 and Table 4D illustrate the maximum base and bonus

heights allowed for new development in different parts of Downtown, reflected also in the zone names in Figure 4.5. The proposed heights shown in Figure 4.8 have been set to create appropriate height transitions, and do not vary significantly from heights currently allowed. A two-tiered height bonus provision is linked directly to the City's inclusionary housing policy to incentivize affordable housing in Downtown. Maximum allowed building heights are defined using feet (not number of stories) as a standard. In addition, the Downtown Code specifies maximum building top floor plate heights and maximum overall building heights to encourage a variety of roof forms, parapet walls and similar architectural features.

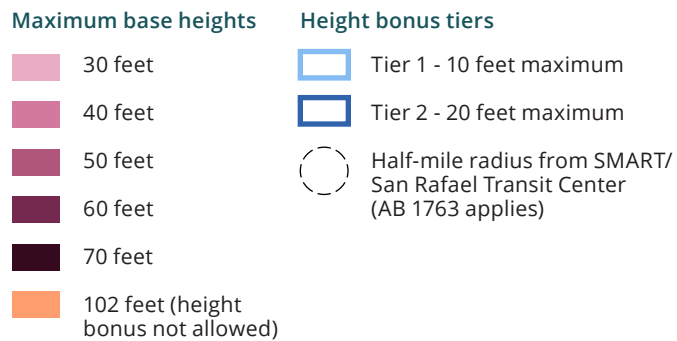
Heights in Downtown are also likely to be influenced by recently passed State Assembly Bills AB 1763 (2020) and AB 2345 (2021) that allow significantly higher density bonuses for projects with 100 percent affordable units, as well as other concessions and entitlement benefits, particularly for projects located within one-half mile of transit (which would include Downtown's SMART Rail Station and the San Rafael Transit Center).

Refer to Section 14.16.030 of the San Rafael Municipal Code for information about the City's affordable housing program and Section 14.16.190 for information about the City's height bonus program.





**Figure 4.8 Proposed base and bonus heights in Downtown**



- Note:**
1. A project using an AB 1763 height bonus is not eligible for any other height bonus.
  2. The height limits shown on this map are subject to additional standards related to historic resources. Refer to Chapter Five: Historic Resources, and Chapter Nine: Downtown Form-Based Code for additional information.
  3. Solar access studies are required for projects with base heights exceeding 60' that are applying for a 20' height bonus, with exemptions as noted in Table 4D. Refer to Sub-Section E of Division 2.3 (Zone Standards) for relevant zones in Chapter Nine: Downtown Form-Based Code.

Table 4D. Height bonus tiers for Downtown		
Tier	Bonus	Criteria for bonuses
Tier 1	10 feet maximum	A. Meet City's inclusionary housing requirement (10% affordable) B. For non-residential projects, provision of community benefits
Tier 2	20 feet maximum	A. Exceed City's inclusionary housing requirement (more than 10% of units affordable)* B. For non-residential projects, provision of community benefits
AB 1763 Bonus	33 feet maximum	Projects within 1/2 mile of SMART/ San Rafael Transit Center with 100% of all residential units as affordable. May not be combined with any other height bonus.
Community benefits may include public parking, child care, community facilities, plazas, additional civic open space, and similar amenities. (* ) Projects exceeding inclusionary requirement are also exempt from solar access study requirements otherwise applying to buildings over 60 feet tall		
Refer to Section 14.16.030 of the San Rafael Municipal Code for more information about the City's affordable housing program, and associated Resolutions 14890 and 14891. Refer to Section 14.16.190 of the San Rafael Municipal Code for information about the City's height bonus program.		

## 4.4 Public Realm and Connectivity

**A well-designed and connected public realm that includes streets, parks, and plazas will improve walkability and vitality in Downtown. Natural systems can be considered for creating new civic space as well as alleviating flooding and adapting to climate change and future sea-level rise.**

The societal benefits of a walkable environment allowing an active lifestyle are well-established, leading to better public health, safety, and a sense of community. Equally beneficial is providing access to open space and nature, particularly in dense urban conditions. The quality of a place's public realm, described as its streets and civic spaces, plays a prominent role in determining how "walkable" that place will be. The term "civic space" as used in this section includes public parks and plazas as well as publicly accessible open spaces on privately-owned parcels. Civic spaces can take a variety of forms to respond to different environments, and design criteria vary accordingly. Figure 4.9 shows a few types that are appropriate for Downtown.

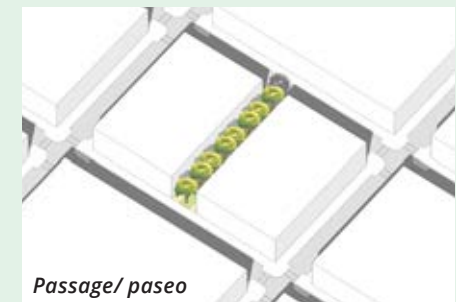
### Public realm framework

A fundamental element of the Downtown vision is a well-designed, cohesive public realm that functions as a connective tissue, integrating Downtown's neighborhoods and creating a strong sense of place. The design direction for Downtown's public realm is illustrated in Figure 4.10, and the framework reflects three key goals:

- **Parks and plazas** are distributed throughout Downtown, providing spaces for community gathering;
- **Streets and passages** enhance pedestrian and bicycle connectivity and link key destinations; and
- **Natural systems** such as creeks and wetlands mitigate flooding and provide resilience to climate change.

**Figure 4.9 Civic space types appropriate for Downtown's context.**

*Chapter Nine: Downtown Form-Based Code provides standards for civic spaces required as part of new development.*



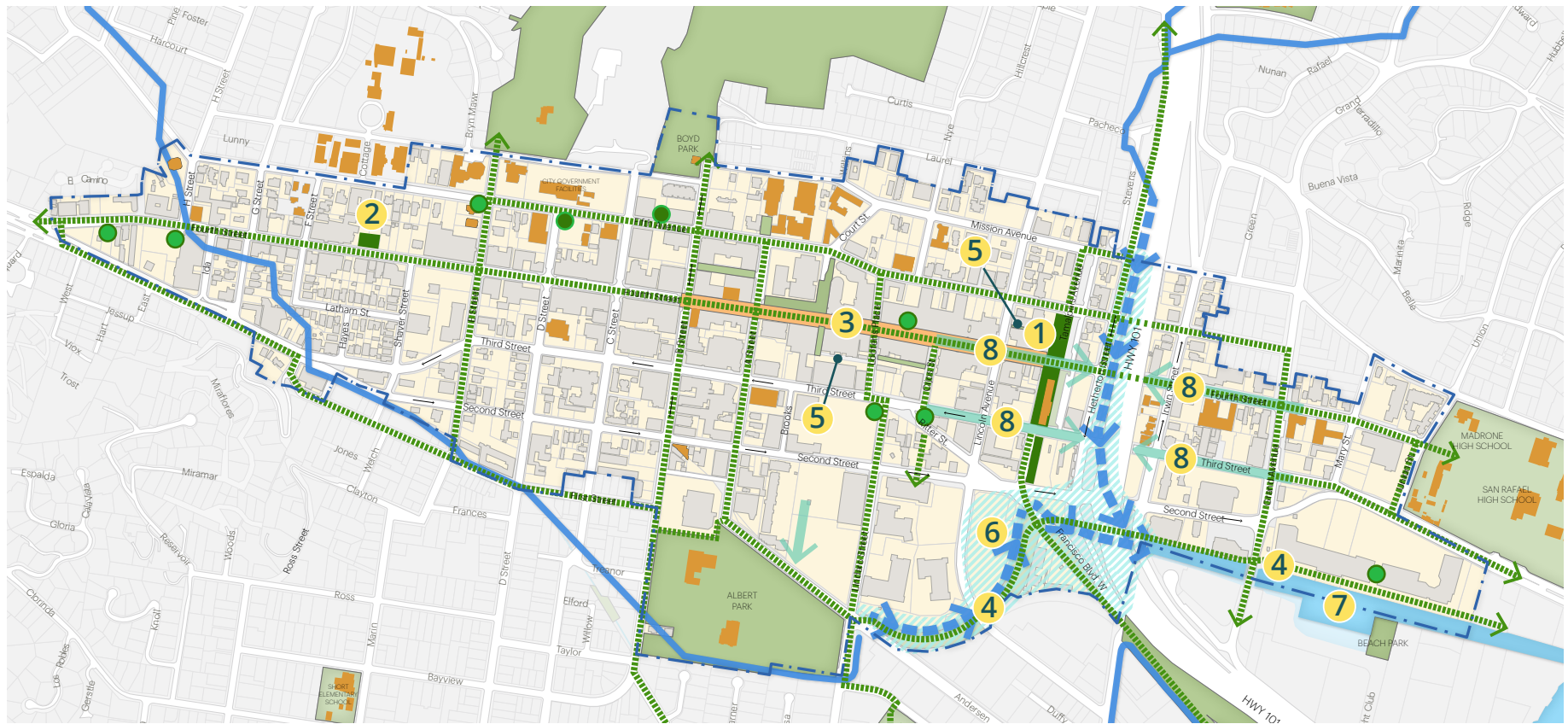


















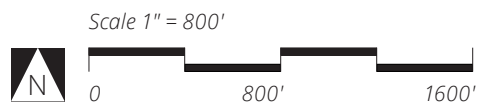


Figure 4.10 Framework for Downtown's public realm design

- |   |   |   |  |   |  |
|---|---|---|--|---|--|
|  | Existing civic space  |  | Potential streets for green infrastructure   |  | 1 SMART Transit Plaza  |
|  | Community destinations  |  | Creek enhancements   |  | 2 Pocket plaza in West End Village   |
|  | Proposed civic space  |  | Recommended locations for potential privately owned, publicly accessible civic spaces. Note that these are not required by the Plan. |  | 3 Fourth Street improvements and potential future Shared Street                  |
|  | Proposed wetland system for flood mitigation                          |  | Recommended locations for civic spaces on publicly owned parcels. Note that these are not required by the Plan.                      |  | 4 Montecito promenade  |
|  | Priority streets for active transportation                            |   |  |  | 5 Alley improvements (Walter Lane, between Lauren's Place and Commercial Street) |
|  | Recommended extent of potential future Shared Street on Fourth Street |   |  |  | 6 Urban wetland  |
|   |   |   |  |  | 7 San Rafael Canal Waterfront  |
|   |   |   |  |  | 8 Green infrastructure   |



## Parks and plazas

The public realm framework identifies the locations of existing civic spaces such as the Courthouse Square, and potential new civic spaces to create a cohesive network, including the following:

**1. SMART Transit Plaza.** The SMART station is a unique opportunity to design a new public plaza for station access and for community events. Also recommended in the Downtown Station Area Plan, the proposed Transit Plaza in the Precise Plan extends along Tamalpais Avenue from Fourth Street to Fifth Avenue, creating an attractive new civic space at a key location, and incorporating a key new north-south bicycle route. Framed by new mixed-use buildings with active ground floor uses, the plaza can be an attractive venue for outdoor dining and events such as seasonal markets, exhibitions, festivals, etc. Depending on decisions regarding the future location of the Transit Center, the Transit Plaza could be extended north to Mission Avenue and south to Second Street. Impacts on traffic and on future development potential of affected parcels would need to be studied as part of this effort.

**2. Pocket park in West End Village.** An underutilized site on Fourth Street on the north side of the block, mid-block between Shaver and F Streets, can be a redevelopment opportunity to provide a small, neighborhood-serving pocket park at a key location.

**Publicly accessible private civic spaces.** The Plan encourages the provision of publicly accessible civic spaces on private parcels as part of redevelopment, particularly for larger projects. Some potential locations of such spaces are shown in Figure 4.10 and an example is illustrated below in Figure 4.11. The Downtown Code also requires that parcels above a certain size provide civic space when redeveloped and sets standards for those.

## Streets and passages

A network of prioritized pedestrian and bicycle routes will connect existing and potential civic spaces and popular destinations within Downtown, as shown in Figure 4.10. This "active transportation" network will be integrated into the city-wide network, and improve walkability and access to Downtown. Critical improvements will include:

### Figure 4.11 Public-private partnership to create new civic spaces in Downtown

This graphic illustrates the potential of creating a new pocket plaza in the Downtown Core on the north side of Fourth Street, mid-block between Lootens and Cijos Streets. At this location, a newer building addition obscures an older municipal building with an attractive forecourt. Should this parcel be redeveloped and the front addition removed, the forecourt could function as a pocket plaza, with the older building showcasing local history. Please note that this is only an illustration of a design concept and not a civic space required by the Precise Plan.





Figure 4.12 *Design elements of the public realm*

## A pedestrian-oriented public realm

The public realm is a combination of interrelated elements - streets, sidewalks, parks, plazas, and even private open spaces that allow public access. In most downtowns, the streets and sidewalks are often the largest contiguous civic space, experienced by almost every visitor. They can play a critical role in enhancing vitality by

providing a safe, comfortable and interesting pedestrian experience; especially when framed by visually appealing building facades and frontages, public art and signage. Each component of the public realm, highlighted in the graphic above, serves an important design function.

- Building frontage
- Space for entrances, window shopping
- Space for walking
- Space for street furniture and trees
- Trees and urban greenery
- Public art
- Street lighting



**Figure 4.13** *Examples of civic space types suitable for Downtown*

*(Top) Paley Park, New York, a popular pocket plaza. [Image source: [www.pps.org](http://www.pps.org)]*

*(Middle) An alley in Vancouver, Canada is transformed through public art and wayfinding into a well-used pedestrian passage.*

*(Right) Pearl Street Mall, a Shared Street in Boulder, CO. [Image source: [www.cnn.com](http://www.cnn.com)]*

**3. Fourth Street improvements.** The role of Fourth Street as Downtown's "main street" can be further enhanced through traffic calming and public realm improvements. The Plan envisions Fourth Street as a multimodal corridor, accommodating all travel modes but prioritizing the safety of pedestrians and bicyclists.

A recommended long-term improvement is the transformation of a part of Fourth Street, ideally from Tamalpais Avenue to B Street, into a Shared Street that would accommodate all modes through a shared, low-speed environment. Flush curbs, pavers and other design improvements could enable it to function more flexibly as both a street and a plaza. This could also be an opportunity to integrate green infrastructure for utilities, stormwater and flood control.

Shared Street environments have proven successful in boosting the economic performance of many downtowns, and transforming Fourth Street to a Shared Street could be an important placemaking element in elevating Downtown's shopping and entertainment experience. Prior to investing substantial investment and effort, studies should be carried out to understand the strategies that would work best for Downtown.

Cost-effective, near-term improvements can include temporary closures for events, widening of sidewalks using bollards and parklets for outdoor dining, restricting traffic at certain times, etc. This would also be a good opportunity to study how Downtown users would respond to some of these changes, as the country emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic and life gets



back to normal. In the near-term, the Plan recommends treating Fourth Street as a "convertible" street, allowing for temporary closures.

**4. Montecito Promenade.** To establish better access to San Rafael Canal and improve connectivity between the Canal district, the Montecito Commercial area, and Downtown, a waterfront promenade is proposed along San Rafael Canal, connecting to Downtown near Albert Park and to the Tamalpais north-south greenway.

**5. Alleys and pedestrian passages.** Downtown's existing pedestrian passages and alley improvements such as Julia Street and Lauren's Place should be enhanced and maintained. Other potential alleys to be considered for improvements include Walter Lane and connecting Lauren's Place and Commercial Street.

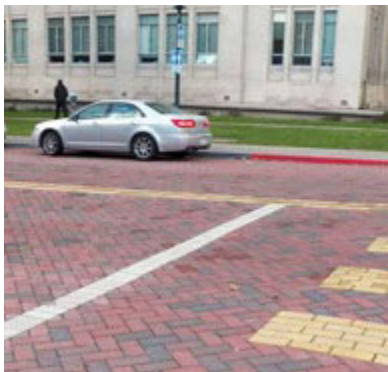
## Natural systems

Parts of Downtown are susceptible to flooding during heavy rains, in particular when rains coincide with high and king tides. This will be further exacerbated by climate change and future sea-level rise, and larger areas within Downtown may be impacted. A natural system for stormwater catchment and release can offset some of these impacts, and can include:

**6. Urban wetland.** Several properties located south of Second Street along San Rafael Canal are constrained in access and subject to high flood risk. The City could consider working with the property owners to acquire a site in this location to create an urban wetland or similar feature to control local flooding, provide new habitat, and potentially form part of an adaptation strategy for



**Figure 4.14** An illustration (above) of an urban wetland on constrained parcels in Downtown and (left) an example of an urban stormwater park - Qunli Urban Stormwater Park in Harbin, China. Completed in 2009, the 80-acre wetland is on a low-lying site surrounded by roads and dense development. The wetland acts as a "green sponge" to control stormwater runoff, create a new ecosystem, and provide a new urban park. [Image source: Turenscape and [www.landezine.com](http://www.landezine.com)]



**Figure 4.15 Examples of urban stormwater management systems**  
 (Top) Usaquen Urban Wetland in Bogota, Colombia [Image source: CESN/Obraestudio, [www.inhabitat.com](http://www.inhabitat.com)] are other examples of urban wetlands.  
 (Middle) Permeable pavers manage stormwater infiltration on a street in Berkeley, CA [Image source: [fha.dot.gov](http://fha.dot.gov)]  
 (Right) Tanner Springs Park in Portland, Oregon incorporates water treatment systems as part of the landscaping [Image source: Atelier Dreiseitl, [www.cms-collaborative.com](http://www.cms-collaborative.com)]

sea-level rise. An illustration of this strategy is shown in Figure 4.14. The parcel shown south of Second Street and east of Lincoln Avenue is difficult to redevelop because of its odd shape, poor vehicular access, low visibility and vulnerability to flooding today, and to future sea-level rise.

When this parcel is combined with the area underneath the highway ramps, it can provide adequate space to widen and connect San Rafael Canal, Mahon and Irwin Creeks to create a new wetland and natural open space. By this action, the risk of flooding could be reduced for the surrounding area, and the value of adjacent parcels could increase as a consequence. Dredging and similar improvements to increase the capacity of Mahon and Irwin Creeks would further improve the functioning of such a natural system.



**7. San Rafael Canal Waterfront.** The northern edge of San Rafael Canal along Montecito Plaza is an opportunity to provide public access to the waterfront. This can be integrated with adaptation features for sea-level rise, and can serve to protect the Montecito area in the future.

**8. Green Infrastructure.** To increase the stormwater retention capacity of Downtown streets, permeable pavers can be considered for future infrastructure upgrades. In suitable locations, underground cisterns can be integrated for storage and gradual release of stormwater runoff.



### Table 4E. Strategies for creating civic spaces in infill conditions

Creating new civic spaces in infill conditions is challenging due to high land and development costs and lack of vacant parcels. The following policies are recommended for creating civic spaces in Downtown.

■ **Privately owned publicly used space**

Incentivize private developers to dedicate land for civic spaces, or allow public use of private civic space, in exchange for suitable development incentives, particularly for large developments and when lots are consolidated.

■ **Design standards and guidelines**

Establish civic space standards for the location, design, degree of access and allowed uses. Chapter Nine: Downtown Form-Based Code provides standards for required civic spaces in new developments that can be a guide for the redevelopment of existing civic spaces.

■ **Rethinking streets, alleys and passages**

Repurpose underused right-of-way space for widening sidewalks, adding bicycle facilities, providing trees, green infrastructure, and similar improvements. In locations with high pedestrian traffic, consider improving alleys, service lanes, etc. to create pedestrian

passages. Maintain existing alleys that have been improved.

■ **Parklets**

Consider the conversion of on-street parking spaces in appropriate locations to parklets to provide additional space for outdoor dining and similar uses to support local businesses.

■ **Temporary use of underutilized sites**

Create short to medium-term pocket parks and pocket plazas in underutilized spaces such as vacant lots, unused setback area, or parts of underutilized surface parking lots. Employ cost-effective improvements and set a fixed "lifespan" for the project, and evaluate future uses at the expiration of the fixed lifespan.

■ **Maintenance and upkeep**

Identify suitable mechanisms to create and maintain civic spaces, such as creating a Community Facilities District or other Special Assessment Districts.



- Plaza with solar access
- Outdoor seating
- Space for people walking
- Space for bicyclists
- Active ground floor uses
- Trees providing shade
- Urban greenery



Figure 4.16 Design elements for civic spaces (above) and examples of well-designed civic spaces: a private forecourt creates semi-public space (right, above) and a well-located plaza provides community space (right, bottom)

# 4.5 Downtown Sub-Areas

The Plan vision organizes Downtown into four sub-areas to recognize existing differences in character and function, and to reinforce the identity of each in the future Downtown.

Downtown San Rafael is a collage of neighborhoods that differ in physical form and culture. In recognizing this, the development approach places a sharper focus on the special features and needs of each sub-area, and defines a future vision based on three overarching principles:

- Determine the degree of change required to enable growth and new development while protecting community character;

- Reinforce the existing character and unique attributes of each sub-area and its distinct role within Downtown; and
- Establish a hierarchy of form and intensity of use to improve wayfinding and strengthen a sense of place.







Figure 4.18 shows the extents of the four Downtown sub-areas. In the pages that follow, the vision for Downtown is presented through the lens of each neighborhood.

**Figure 4.17 Future vision for Downtown sub-areas**

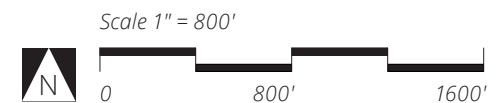
<p><b>Downtown Gateway</b></p> <p><i>A vibrant, mixed-use node with new housing, employment and civic space.</i></p>		<p><b>West End Village</b></p> <p><i>A compact, low-rise neighborhood with a variety of housing, eclectic shops and local businesses.</i></p>	
<p><b>Downtown Core</b></p> <p><i>The retail, cultural and entertainment heart of Downtown anchored by Fourth Street.</i></p>		<p><b>Montecito Commercial</b></p> <p><i>A neighborhood with a unique waterfront identity, with new housing supported by amenities and transit.</i></p>	



Figure 4.18 Four sub-areas within Downtown

- |   |                      |   |  |
|---|----------------------|---|--|
|  | Downtown Gateway     |  | Potential infill opportunity sites*      |
|  | Downtown Core        |  | Buildings entitled or under construction |
|  | West End Village     |   |  |
|  | Montecito Commercial |   |  |

\* Potential infill projects shown here are conceptual and for illustrative purposes only



# Downtown Gateway

**The Downtown Gateway augments Downtown's role as a regional transportation hub with new mixed-use development supported by amenities and civic space.**

## Existing conditions

The Downtown Gateway sub-area is a place where most visitors get their first impression of Downtown, whether arriving by transit or highway. The sub-area includes the SMART station and San Rafael Transit Center, and spans US-101, as shown in Figure 4.19. While it has an important regional role as a mobility hub, the area currently lacks a sense of arrival. The SMART station lacks sufficient civic space to accommodate transit riders, and pedestrian and bicycle connectivity to adjacent areas is not as safe and convenient as it should be. This area is also an entry point for auto traffic, but the built form and streetscape does not currently provide a gateway experience. Second, Third, Irwin and Hetherton Streets are regional arterials with high traffic volumes and are frequently congested. The extension of the SMART rail line to Larkspur will require the relocation of the Transit Center. As of 2020, three sites within Downtown were being evaluated, all within a couple of blocks of the SMART station (see page 79, 81 for details). The final location is anticipated to be selected in 2021.

The sub-area has potential infill opportunity sites on Tamalpais Avenue along the train tracks between Fourth Street and Mission Avenue, and several underutilized parcels south of Second Street. There are also

opportunities to intensify the parcels to the east of the highway, and create better pedestrian and bicycle connections to the Montecito Commercial area and the Canal district.

## Design intent

The Precise Plan envisions the Downtown Gateway as a vibrant, active node and transportation hub, and an inviting entrance to Downtown accentuated with new mixed-use development, amenities, streetscape improvements, and community space. This is a valuable opportunity to provide new housing and employment at a transit-rich location, with excellent access to all the amenities that Downtown has to offer.

Enhanced pedestrian and bicycle access to the SMART station and Downtown destinations will benefit local businesses and draw more visitors and residents to the area without adding to traffic and parking concerns.

The Precise Plan also recommends using this valuable development opportunity to create a new civic space at the SMART station. A new Transit Plaza at this location will carry forward the Downtown Station Area Plan vision, augment and support the uses and activities in Downtown's Courthouse Square, and strengthen Fourth Street as a pedestrian spine.



**Figure 4.19 Downtown Gateway within the Plan Area**  
Locations of the photos of existing conditions shown on this page are indicated on the map.





**Figure 4.20 Lindaro office district** south of Second Street is a well-designed office campus but lacks adequate connectivity to Downtown.

**Built character and uses**

The Downtown Gateway is one of the nodes where substantial new development is anticipated. In addition to projects currently underway and in the development pipeline, the SMART station and proposed relocation of the San Rafael Transit Center will promote new transit-supported residential and mixed-use infill. At the time of drafting the Precise Plan, several sites near the SMART station were being studied for the relocation of this important regional function. Because of the prime location of each of the parcels being assessed, the final location selected may influence the overall development potential of this node. As shown in Figure 4.21, there are several large potential infill sites near the SMART station, along Tamalpais Avenue and Hetherton Street, and along Second and Third Streets, that are the focus of new moderate and high-intensity development. In addition, a variety of smaller sites are scattered throughout the sub-area that can support incremental infill.

Since many parcels in Downtown are smaller in size or have narrow widths, lot consolidation can create parcel

sizes that are more financially feasible to develop. An illustrative example of lot consolidation is shown on Second and Lindaro Streets. By removing the under-utilized Ritter Street, the parcel can be viably redeveloped with a mix of large, medium, and smaller footprint buildings, integrating a public passage connecting to the Lindaro office district.

**Development program**

The development yield projected for the Downtown Gateway is 830 new housing units (approximately 25 percent of which are in the development pipeline) and approximately 210,000 square feet of non-residential uses, that translates into 640 new jobs.

**Built form**

The built fabric in this sub-area is predominantly block-form, with attached buildings and small to no front and side setbacks. The lower intensity areas along Mission Avenue have a more house-form character, with detached buildings and small front and side setbacks. Frontages include residential and commercial types. To promote good urban form and for new development, particularly

<b>Table 4F. Downtown Gateway: projected program and built environment summary</b>			
Refer to Chapter Nine: Downtown Form-Based Code for development standards			
<b>Development Type</b>	<b>Program (additional/new)</b>	<b>Feature</b>	<b>Recommendations for new development</b>
Residential	830,000 sq ft <sup>1</sup> (830 units) <sup>2</sup>	Building types	Mainly block-form with some house-form
Non-Residential	210,000 sq ft <sup>1</sup> (640 jobs) <sup>2</sup>	Building heights	Maximum 40 feet (base) to 90 feet (with bonus)
		Frontage types <sup>3</sup>	Shopfront, gallery, forecourt, terrace, porch, dooryard, stoop
		Building uses <sup>4</sup>	Vertical mixed-use with ground floor retail
		Parking	Surface, podium, subterranean


<sup>1</sup> The program numbers are inclusive of pipeline projects and have been derived from the testing of infill lots with building types that conform to the Plan vision and proposed Downtown Form-Based Code, in consultation with City staff.  
<sup>2</sup> Assumptions include 1,000 sq ft (gross area) per housing unit, and 1 job per 350 sq ft (gross area), with exceptions as needed for approved projects.  
<sup>3</sup> Please refer to Chapter Nine for descriptions of frontage types.  
<sup>4</sup> Ground floor retail is desired but not required. Active ground floors are encouraged.



### Illustrative vision for the Downtown Gateway

The illustrative plan and perspective show one of many potential built outcomes for the Downtown Gateway sub-area.



- Small-lot infill development fills missing gaps in the built fabric and provides additional housing close to transit.
- The SMART station plaza extended north to Fifth Avenue, creating a new Transit Plaza and gateway to Downtown. Walter Lane connects to the Transit Plaza as an improved alley. Fourth Street prioritizes pedestrian connections to the Transit Plaza.
- Enhanced bicycle facilities along Tamalpais Avenue improve connectivity to the city-wide north-south bicycle greenway.
- Parcels along Ritter Street consolidated to enable a larger mixed-use project, and provide a direct pedestrian connection from Downtown to the offices south of Second Street.
- Potential location for a parking structure.
- Potential urban wetland south of Second Street to alleviate Downtown flooding, along with restored Mahon and Irwin creeks.

 San Rafael Transit Center relocation: several site options currently under review (see page 81).



View from US-101 looking north-west

**Figure 4.21** Illustrative plan (above) and perspective (right) for the Downtown Gateway showing one possible build-out by 2040

-  Potential infill opportunity sites\*
-  Buildings entitled or under construction

\* Potential infill projects shown here are conceptual and for illustrative purposes only



**Figure 4.22 Highway underpass improvements**

*(Above) The area beneath US-101 is currently perceived as unsafe, and is used as a parking facility by Caltrans. This area can be designed in a number of ways (as shown in the example below) to better serve pedestrians and bicyclists, as well as make improvements to Irwin Creek.*

larger and taller buildings, to fit well into the existing context, the Downtown Code sets detailed building massing and articulation standards.

### Building heights

Building heights for new development range from 40 to 90 feet (maximum base heights to maximum bonus heights). Higher intensity development is proposed for the infill sites near the SMART station along Hetherton and Irwin Streets, and moderate intensity development is proposed in most of the other opportunity sites. The parcels along Mission Avenue will have lower heights. For taller buildings, height stepbacks are required to reduce the overall bulky appearance of buildings. Table 4F provides a summary of the proposed built environment, and development standards are discussed in Chapter Nine: Downtown Form-Based Code.

### Public realm

#### Streets and active transportation

- The Downtown Gateway is envisioned as a regional transportation and mobility hub, accommodating a variety of travel modes with seamless transfers.
- The SMART station at the heart of the Downtown Gateway is a major transit entrance to the city. Over time, the increased frequency of the trains and the resultant impact on vehicular circulation on Second and Third Streets may need to be considered. The General Plan 2040 addresses the possibility of elevating the SMART tracks through Downtown and building a raised boarding platform.
- The relocation of the San Rafael Transit Center is a major Downtown project, and the site selection will need to consider possible traffic impacts on existing streets.

- Hetherton and Irwin Streets continue to be major routes for vehicular traffic, and new developments proposed near the SMART station orient their service and parking needs along those streets.
  - Fourth Street is a multimodal corridor and has enhanced pedestrian and bicycle connectivity between Downtown and the Montecito Commercial area east of US-101. The portion of Fourth Street from Tamalpais Avenue to Hetherton Street can be reconfigured to improve auto movement around the SMART station and also accommodate protected bicycle movement.
  - Tamalpais Avenue has improved circulation and drop-off activities near the SMART station area, and also accommodates a separated Class I north-south bicycle facility along the train tracks, connecting to the existing bicycle facilities on Puerto Suello Hill to the north and Mahon Creek path on the south.
  - To create a more welcoming and safe environment for pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit users, the portions of Fifth Avenue, Fourth Street, Third Street and Second Street that pass underneath US-101 are improved, with better lighting, wider sidewalks, street furniture, landscaping, and signage.
  - With the continued implementation of the Third Street Rehabilitation Study recommendations, pedestrian and bicycle crossings are improved at key intersections with Second and Third Streets.
- For details on street design and modal prioritization, see Chapter Six: Transportation and Parking.
- #### Civic space
- The area around the SMART station south of Fourth Street is improved to better serve station users.
  - A new Transit Plaza is proposed between Fourth Street and Fifth Avenue by reconfiguring Tamalpais Avenue.

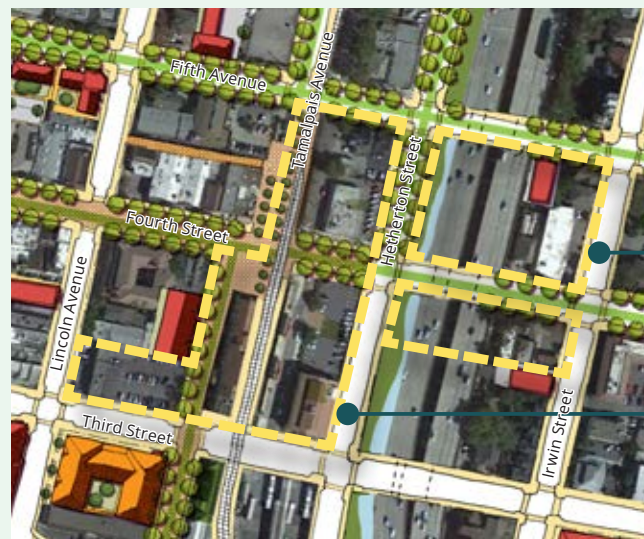


## San Rafael Transit Center

The present-day San Rafael Transit Center operates as the regional transit hub for Marin County, connecting rail, bus, shuttle and taxi services. It has 17 bays handling over 500 buses, and in 2019, was operating at capacity with over 9,000 daily weekday boardings.

The Transit Center needs to be relocated because of the SMART rail extension to Larkspur, and a multi-year process to develop a new Transit Center has been underway since early 2018. As of 2020, station design concepts were being considered on three potential sites, as shown in Figure 4.23. All lie within two blocks of the SMART station to create efficient transfers. The selection of the relocation site, not yet made as of 2020, is an important decision and can influence infill opportunities in Downtown. The sites being considered need to be evaluated carefully to ensure the smooth operation for the large number of buses serving regional and local routes, while not adding to traffic congestion in a part of Downtown that already has high traffic volumes, particularly during commute hours.

Another important consideration is the impact on the development potential of the parcels being evaluated. Two of the three potential sites are on parcels that could support mixed-use development at a greater level of intensity than in other parts of Downtown. Figure 4.24 illustrates an example of potential mixed-use development at this node, should the Transit Center relocation site to be chosen is the one north and south of Fourth Street between Hetherton and Irwin Streets, beneath US-101. Please note that this illustration is shown here simply to highlight infill possibilities, and is not a recommendation for any particular site.



**Figure 4.23 Relocation sites under consideration**

Three options are under consideration for relocating the Transit Center, all within two blocks of the SMART station.

- North and south of Fourth Street between Hetherton and Irwin
- On Tamalpais Avenue between Third Street and Fifth Avenue; and
- On Tamalpais Avenue between Third and Fourth Streets (combined area shown in dashed outline)



**Figure 4.24 Potential infill opportunity sites**

Two of the three relocation sites are in a prime Downtown location. This illustration shows an example of potential mixed-use infill at this location, should neither of these sites be selected.



**Figure 4.25** *Irwin Creek runs underneath US-101 and can be part of a Downtown-wide flood control strategy*

The new civic space accommodates pedestrians and bicycles while limiting vehicular access to service and emergency vehicles. Framed by new mixed-use development with active ground floors, the new plaza provides space for transit users as well as community events such as a Farmer’s Market, small kiosks, etc. Walter Lane could be improved as a pedestrian passage connecting to the new plaza, and the Transit Plaza could be extended to Mission Avenue and Second Street, contingent on the future Transit Center location.

- An urban wetland is suggested south of Second Street and east of Lincoln Avenue, as described in Section 4.4: Public Realm and Connectivity. Along with restoring San Rafael Canal and Irwin and Mahon Creeks, this can form part of a city-wide sea-level rise adaptation strategy to alleviate flooding and increase access to open space.

**Historic resources**

- The updated historic resources survey makes an area along Fourth Street eligible for consideration as a historic district under CEQA. The Whistlestop building

has the potential to be a recognized as a community icon and adapted to new uses, but any determination needs further analysis and discussion with property owners and stakeholders. For additional details, please refer to Chapter Five: Historic Resources.

**Additional recommendations**

- Create a focused wayfinding strategy to help visitors make efficient transfers between modes.
- Use building form, public art, signage, streetscape elements, etc. to create a unique arrival experience.
- Explore the transformation of a part of Fourth Street to a shared street, connecting the new Transit Plaza to Courthouse Square.
- Promote greater affordable housing through height bonuses and reduced parking requirements in new mixed-use projects near the SMART station.
- Pursue public-private partnerships to increase parking supply and encourage public parking in private garages.

“Enable new transit-oriented development characterized by increased activity, a mix of uses, and a strong sense of place.”

Goal Six, Downtown Station Area Plan (2012)

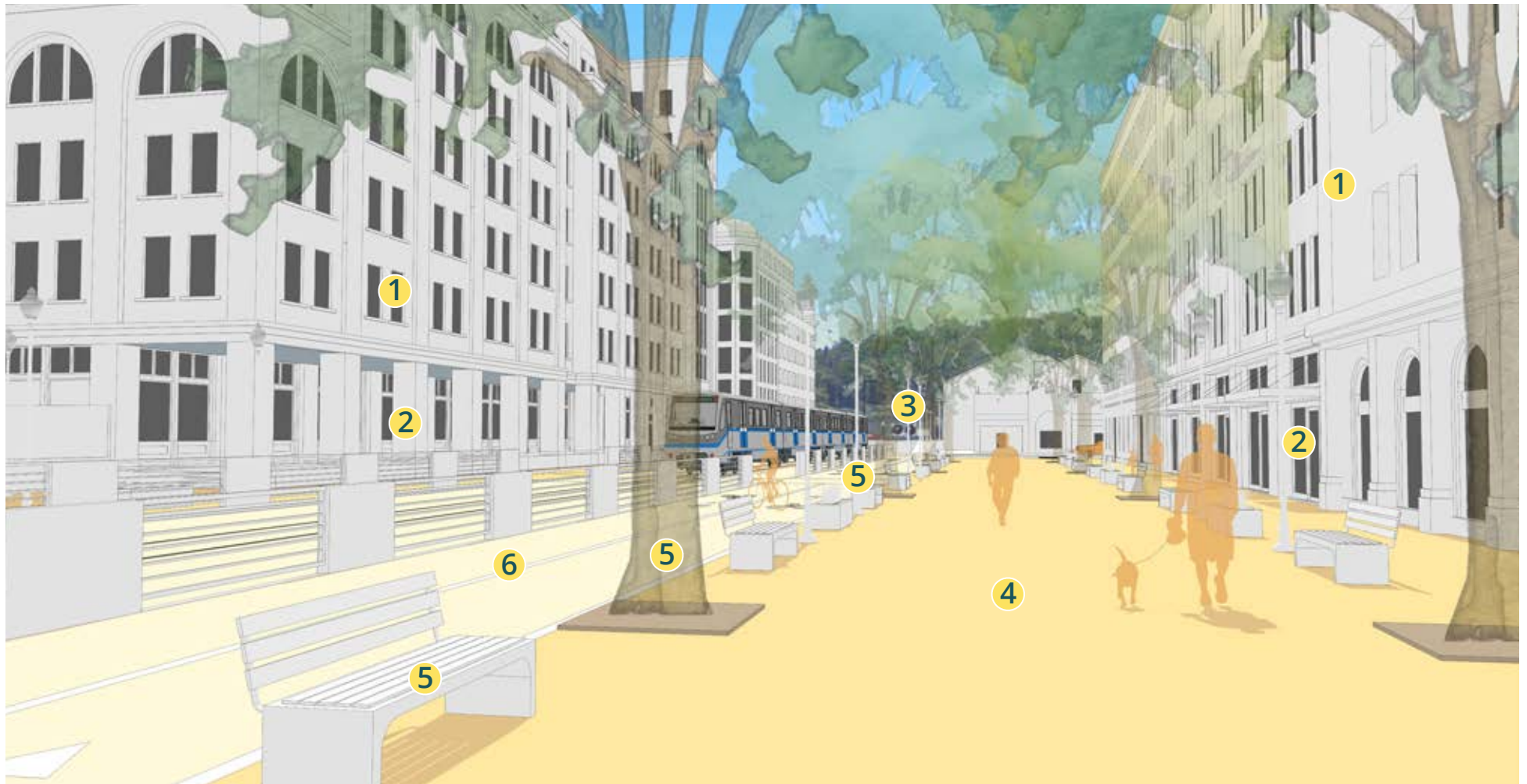


*Image source: www.pps.org*

**Figure 4.26** *Inspiration for the proposed Transit Plaza can be derived from the Del Mar station in Pasadena (right) in which the station plaza anchors a successful mixed-use development project; and from the 8-mile Indianapolis Culture Trail (above) that connects all of the city’s major cultural destinations.*



*Image source: www.mparchitects.com*



**Figure 4.27 Illustrative rendering of the new Transit Plaza**

(Above) A new Transit Plaza on Tamalpais Avenue between Fourth Street and Fifth Avenue provides a new civic space at the entrance to Downtown. Framed by new mixed-use development with active ground floor uses, the plaza can support a variety of functions. The photo (left) indicates existing conditions at the same location. Based on decisions on the Transit Center location, the Transit Plaza could extend from Mission Avenue to Second Street.

- 1** New mixed-use development provides housing and employment close to transit and amenities.
- 2** Active ground floor uses add vitality and safety to the plaza
- 3** The SMART station creates a new transit gateway to Downtown
- 4** The new plaza creates space for a range of activities and amenities
- 5** Trees, lighting, seating and bicycle facilities enhance the Transit Plaza
- 6** A Class I bicycle facility enhances north-south connectivity

# Downtown Core

**The Downtown Core is envisioned as the retail, dining, cultural, and entertainment center of San Rafael, offering a diverse set of uses and an authentic, memorable "downtown experience".**

## Existing conditions

Centered around Fourth Street, Downtown's established "main street", the Downtown Core sub-area is the retail and entertainment heart of San Rafael. Residents and visitors have easy access to specialty stores, offices, restaurants, art galleries, museums, and cultural institutions such as the Falkirk Center and Rafael Theatre. Fourth Street is also a popular city-wide and regional destination for outdoor events, festivals, and celebrations, and Courthouse Square is one of Downtown's largest civic spaces. Improved alleys and small plazas such as Lauren's Place create interest. Much of Fourth Street in the Downtown Core has retained its historic character, and the human scale of the buildings and mix of uses make this an attractive destination.

The scale of the built environment changes moving south towards the Second and Third Street corridor. Typically, this area has larger buildings and a greater concentration of offices, with several development projects underway. Second and Third Streets function as regional arterials, and effectively create a barrier for pedestrian and bicycle movement in the north-south direction.

Downtown's largest open spaces flank the Downtown Core - Boyd Park north of Mission Avenue and Albert Park

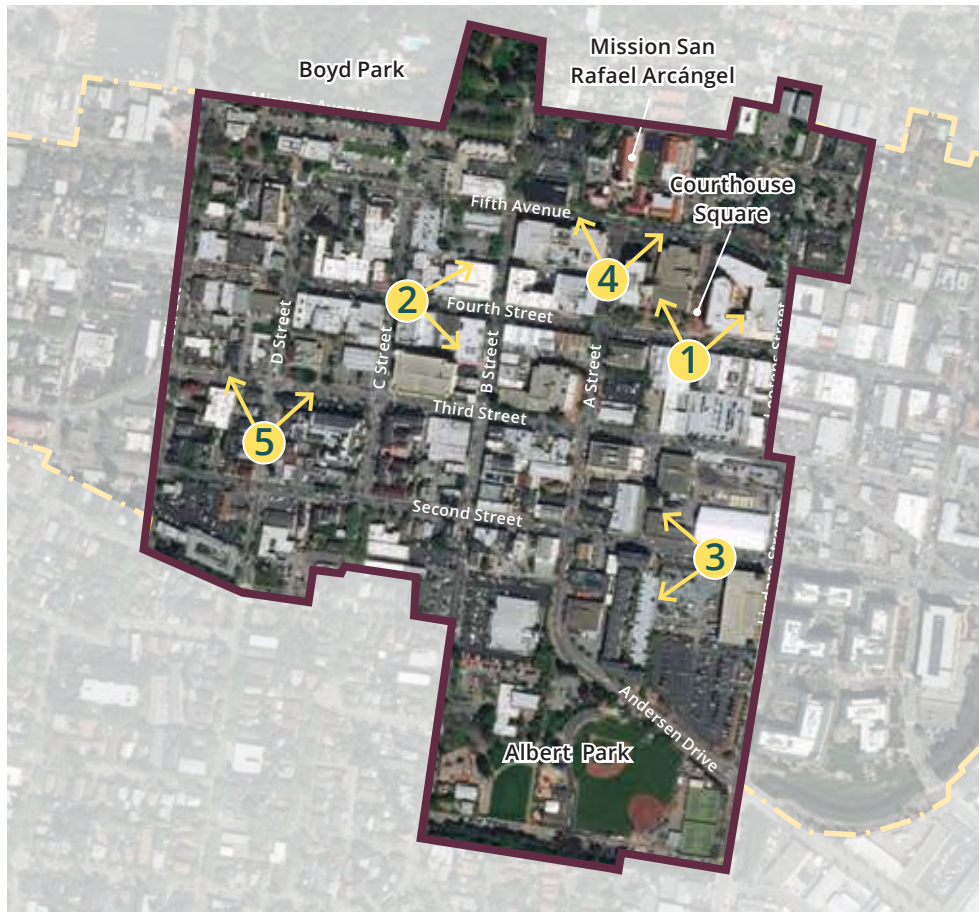
south of Second Street. But linkages between the two through Downtown are not well-defined at present.

## Future vision

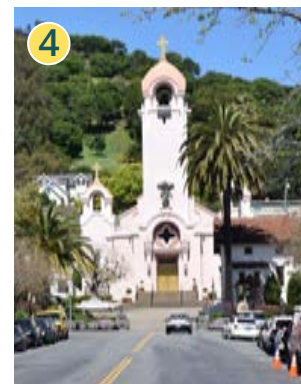
The Downtown Core has tremendous potential to further strengthen its identity as a major center for San Rafael and the region, and in addition also serve the everyday needs of new and existing residents in Downtown and surrounding neighborhoods. The sub-area has the capacity to introduce new housing in close proximity to amenities and transit that will enliven the area, support Downtown businesses and improve safety.

The Precise Plan envisions Fourth Street to continue to be an active and growing regional retail and cultural center, supported by new mixed-use development, and public realm and streetscape improvements to improve its role as a multimodal corridor. It retains its unique mix of shops and historic fabric, with sensitive additions to accommodate new uses while maintaining the quality of its streetscapes and views.

To improve circulation and connectivity, particularly in the north-south direction, existing streets were assessed and their roles modified as needed. Pedestrian amenities, traffic calming, trees, lighting, and signage improvements



**Figure 4.28 Downtown Core within the Plan Area**  
Locations of the photos of existing conditions shown on this page are indicated on the map.





**Figure 4.29** Fourth Street has several examples of historic buildings being adapted for newer uses.

*Tam Commons, shown above, is a new brewpub in a distinctive former bank building.*

*Image source: www.marinij.com*

can greatly enhance wayfinding and integrate different parts of the Downtown Core.

### Built character and uses

The Downtown Core will continue to see new residential and mixed-use infill development on some larger sites as well as smaller parcels across Downtown. Some intensification of uses along Fourth Street is proposed, guided by recommendations to preserve its historic character. In general, new development is of moderate intensity along Fifth Avenue, Fourth Street, Third Street and Second Street, and of lower intensity in the residential areas on the periphery. Major opportunity sites for larger mixed-use projects include those on Fourth Street between D and E Streets, at Fifth Avenue and C Street, on Third and Lootens Streets, and the Safeway grocery site at First and B Streets, as illustrated in Figure 4.30.

### Development program

The development yield projected includes 620 new housing units and approximately 373,000 square feet of non-residential uses, that translates into 1,040 new jobs.

### Built form

Buildings along Fifth Avenue, Fourth Street, Second Street and Third Street are more block-form in character, with attached buildings set to the back of the sidewalk. Buildings in the periphery are mainly house-form and thus more residential in character, with detached buildings and small front and side setbacks. Typical frontages include a mix of residential and shopfront types.

Fourth Street is reinforced as Downtown's "main street", and new buildings contribute to its historic character. Ground floor uses activate the street and fill in gaps.

### Building heights

Building heights for new development range from 40 to 80 feet (ranging from maximum base heights to maximum heights with bonuses). Key infill pipeline projects constitute the taller buildings in this sub-area, while lower heights are seen on smaller parcels on the periphery.

Table 4G provides a summary of the proposed built environment, and development standards are discussed in Chapter Nine: Downtown Form-Based Code.

**Table 4G. Downtown Core: projected program and built environment summary**

Refer to Chapter Nine: Downtown Form-Based Code for development standards

Development Type	Program (additional/new)	Feature	Recommendation
Residential	620,000 sq ft <sup>1</sup> (620 units) <sup>2</sup>	Building types	House-form and block-form
Non-Residential	373,000 sq ft <sup>1</sup> (1,040 jobs) <sup>2</sup>	Building heights	Maximum 40 feet (base) to 80 feet (with bonus)
		Frontage types <sup>3</sup>	Shopfront, gallery, forecourt, terrace, porch, stoop, dooryard
		Building uses <sup>4</sup>	Vertical mixed-use with ground floor retail
		Parking	Podium, surface

<sup>1</sup> The program numbers are inclusive of pipeline projects and have been derived from the testing of infill lots with building types that conform to the Plan vision and proposed Downtown Form-Based Code, in consultation with City staff.

<sup>2</sup> Assumptions include 1,000 sq ft (gross area) per housing unit, and 1 job per 350 sq ft (gross area), with exceptions as needed for approved projects.

<sup>3</sup> Please refer to Chapter Nine for descriptions of frontage types.

<sup>4</sup> Ground floor retail is desired but not required. Active ground floors are encouraged.



### Illustrative vision for the Downtown Core

The illustrative plan and perspective show one of many potential built outcomes for the Downtown Core.

- Small-lot infill development integrates a variety of building types suited to Downtown's context.
- Fourth Street improvements enhance it as a multimodal corridor, with a focus on pedestrian-friendly design. In this illustrative, Fourth Street from B Street to Tamalpais Avenue is shown reconstructed as a traffic-calmed Shared Street.
- Pedestrian safety improvements on A and B Streets promote north-south connectivity across Downtown.
- Ongoing improvements to Third Street improve pedestrian safety and comfort.
- Pipeline projects and additional proposed development on opportunity sites throughout the Downtown Core provide new employment opportunities and housing options.
- New main library and refurbished community center; potential to revitalize Albert and Boyd parks through public-private partnerships.



Figure 4.30 Illustrative plan (above) and perspective (right) for the Downtown Core

■ Potential infill opportunity sites\*    
 ■ Buildings entitled or under construction

\* Potential infill projects shown here are conceptual and for illustrative purposes only



**Figure 4.31 Shared street**

*An example of a flush or curbless shared street from Asheville, NC that can be an inspiration for Fourth Street between B Street and the SMART station. The street allows slow-moving traffic including cars, bicycles and service vehicles, but pedestrian uses are clearly prioritized. Paving materials demarcate spaces for different uses. Image source: [www.nacto.org](http://www.nacto.org)*

## Public realm

### Streets and active transportation

- Fourth Street functions as Downtown's "main street" through the Downtown Core, accommodating autos, bicycles, transit and pedestrians in a low-speed, "shared use" environment. Street parking is retained to support existing and new retail uses, and pedestrian crossings improved at key intersections. In the long term, improvements include widening of sidewalks and creating space for street trees. The existing shared lane or "sharrow" condition on Fourth Street is accentuated with a striped median for traffic calming.
- To improve north-south connectivity, A, B, and Lindaro Streets are treated as pedestrian priority streets, and A and E as bicycle priority streets. B Street could be promoted as a primary "walking street" connecting Boyd Park and Albert Park. Bicycle network enhancements include Class III bicycle facilities on E and Fourth, and a Class II bicycle facility on A Street.
- C and D Streets function as emergency response routes. B Street is converted from one-way to two-way operation to improve circulation.
- Pedestrian safety is enhanced on Second and Third Streets through traffic calming and other improvements recommended in the Third Street Rehabilitation Study.

For details on street design and modal prioritization, refer to Chapter Six: Transportation and Parking.

### Civic space

- The portion of Fourth Street abutting Courthouse Square in the Downtown Core is improved with new paving, lighting and signage to enable it to function as an extension of the plaza. In the long term, the City could consider converting Fourth Street from B Street to the SMART station into a shared street, promoting

more flexible use of the existing right-of-way, with the allowance for additional street closures, outdoor dining, community events, etc. In the short term, existing sidewalks can be extended in key locations to encourage a wider variety of uses.

- The existing open space in front of 1000 Fourth Street is improved with features such as a pavilion for shade and events, as well as wide steps for seating and linking better with the adjacent Courthouse Square.
- Wherever possible, existing sidewalks should be improved to provide consistent width and adequate space for pedestrians to walk, window-shop, and linger.
- The Plan recommends improvements to Albert Park and Boyd Park, and special trees and signage on B Street to strengthen the linkages between the two, and to highlight views of Mission San Rafael Arcángel.
- Improvements to alleys and paseos in Downtown enhance safety and pedestrian movement.

### Historic resources

- Existing historic resources and landmarks are protected, and areas along Fourth and B Streets are eligible for consideration as a historic district under CEQA. For details, please refer to Chapter Five: Historic Resources.

### Additional recommendations

- Emphasize the history and identity of the Downtown Core through a placemaking and wayfinding strategy including interpretive signage, coordinated streetscape design, street furniture, public art, etc., as well as events and activities such as guided tours.
- Develop a new main library adjacent to the San Rafael Community Center, and refurbish the historic Carnegie Library west of City Hall for a new use.





**Figure 4.32 Illustrative rendering of Fourth Street improvements**

*Well-designed new buildings and public realm improvements elevate Fourth Street as a regional destination, with new uses and activities. The photo (left) indicates existing conditions at the same location.*

- 1** Streetscape improvements create new gathering spaces and existing civic spaces are enhanced
- 2** Wide sidewalks invite people to stroll and experience Downtown
- 3** Space for new activities and seating enliven "street life"
- 4** Street trees provide shade and identity
- 5** New mixed-use development provides housing, retail and services for residents and visitors
- 6** Street parking accommodates the needs of shoppers

# West End Village

**The West End Village is envisioned as an iconic Downtown neighborhood that reflects its history and eclectic character with a variety of housing choices, small shops, parks and plazas.**

## Existing conditions

The West End Village forms the western gateway to the Plan Area, and has an eclectic feel with a mix of historic homes and newer mixed-use development. One of its unique features is Latham Street, a block of well-preserved homes with a consistent architectural style. It also has the Victorian Village on Fifth Avenue, one of San Rafael's existing historic districts, with a collection of houses expressing Victorian architecture. Fourth Street is its commercial spine, at a lower level of intensity of uses and building scale than the adjacent Downtown Core.

Within the neighborhood, there are several vacant and underutilized parcels including a few surface parking lots that can be prime redevelopment opportunities. The neighborhood has a more residential feel than the adjacent Downtown Core, but lacks the small parks and playgrounds typically seen in a residential neighborhood. The quality of streetscapes is inconsistent, with sidewalk widths, ground floor uses and setbacks varying considerably from one block to another.

The neighborhood character along Second and Third Streets changes dramatically, with fast moving traffic, a patchwork of uses and activities, and a public realm lacking even sidewalks in several locations. West End

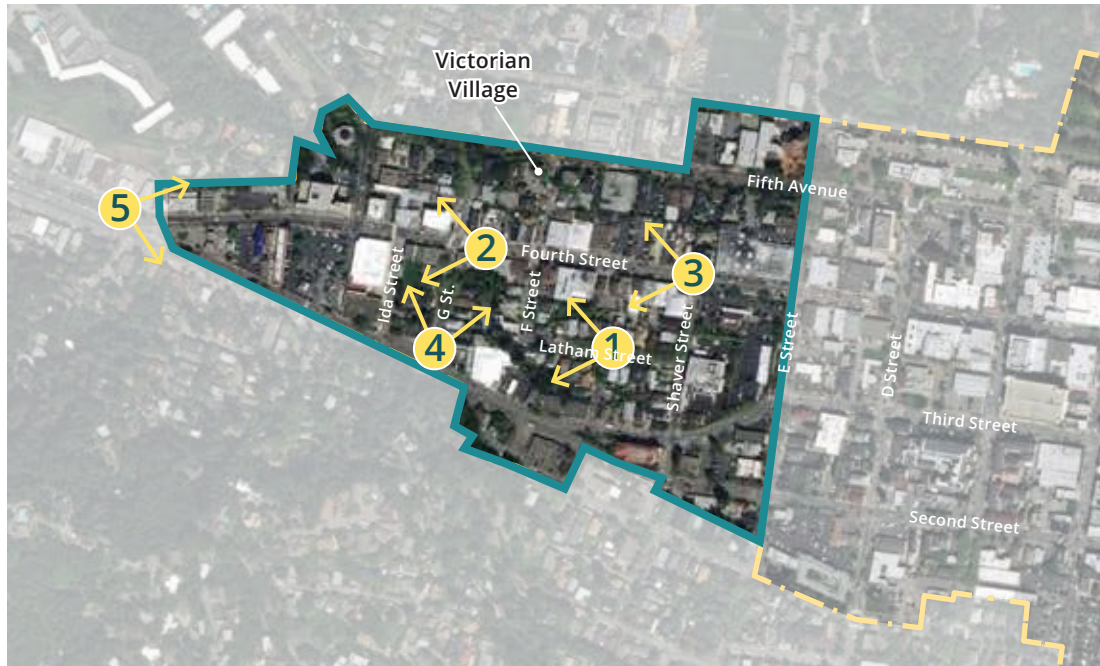
Village is not well served by transit, and availability of parking is an important near-term consideration.

## Future vision

The Precise Plan envisions West End Village retaining its residential character, with new development filling in the missing gaps in the neighborhood fabric. A variety of housing types including Missing Middle types respond to the existing form and scale of the neighborhood while expanding housing choice.

Improvements to existing streetscapes add a sense of coherence and spatial containment, and small-scale parks and plazas provide outdoor gathering spaces for the community. Fourth Street continues to function as its main spine, and retains the unique mix of shops that reflect its residential character.

Along Second and Third Streets, traffic calming and public realm improvements to sidewalks, lighting, trees and street furniture makes them more hospitable to pedestrians. The intersection of Fourth and Second Streets could be treated as a formal gateway to Downtown, and designed to create a sense of arrival. New development at this node should be carefully designed to fit in with the gateway character.



**Figure 4.33 West End Village within the Plan Area**  
 Locations of the photos of existing conditions shown below are indicated on the map.

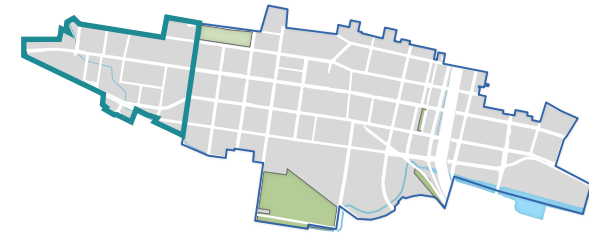




Figure 4.34 Existing built character

**Built character and uses**

West End Village has new lower-intensity residential and mixed-use development, with some moderate intensity development along Fourth Street. Neighborhood intensification is mainly in the form of incremental infill on vacant and underutilized sites. The West America Bank parcel at E and Fourth Streets is a potential site for a larger residential or mixed-use project. Figure 4.35 illustrates some key design moves for this sub-area.

**Development program**

The development yield projected for this neighborhood is 360 new housing units and approximately 70,000 square feet of non-residential uses, indicating 200 new jobs.

**Built form**

Buildings in the area are mainly house-form in character, with detached buildings and small front and side setbacks. Buildings along Fourth, Second and Third Streets are more block-form, with attached buildings and small to no front setbacks, and typically no side setbacks, to create a unifying street wall.

The character of Fourth Street as a neighborhood "main street" is enhanced through sensitive infill to create consistent building frontages along the street. New mixed-use buildings have a variety of ground floor uses that activate the street. Typical frontages include a mix of residential and shopfront types.

**Building heights**

Lower intensity development is proposed for most parts of the neighborhood to preserve its residential character, with buildings predominantly 40 feet tall. The Latham Street block continues to retain its zoning of MR 2.5 as per the General Plan. Moderate intensity development is proposed along Fourth Street, and the western end where a "gateway" is anticipated. Heights in these areas range mostly up to 50 feet (with height bonuses), to up to 70 feet at the corner of Fourth and E Streets.

Table 4H provides a summary of the proposed built environment, and development standards are discussed in Chapter Nine: Downtown Form-Based Code.

**Table 4H. West End Village: projected program and built environment summary**

Refer to Chapter Nine: Downtown Form-Based Code for development standards

Development Type	Program (additional/new)	Feature	Recommendation
Residential	360,000 sq ft <sup>1</sup> (360 units) <sup>2</sup>	Building types	House-form and block-form
Non-Residential	70,000 sq ft <sup>1</sup> (200 jobs) <sup>2</sup>	Building heights	Maximum 30 feet (base) to 70 feet (with bonus)
		Frontage types	Shopfront, gallery, terrace, forecourt, porch, stoop, dooryard
		Building uses	Residential; vertical and horizontal mixed-use with ground floor retail
		Parking	Podium, surface

<sup>1</sup> The program numbers are inclusive of pipeline projects and have been derived from the testing of infill lots with building types that conform to the Plan vision and proposed Downtown Form-Based Code, in consultation with City staff.

<sup>2</sup> Assumptions include 1,000 sq ft (gross area) per housing unit, and 1 job per 350 sq ft (gross area), with exceptions as needed for approved projects.

<sup>3</sup> Please refer to Chapter Nine for descriptions of frontage types.

<sup>4</sup> Ground floor retail is desired but not required. Active ground floors are encouraged.



### Illustrative vision for West End Village

The illustrative plan and perspective show one of many potential built outcomes for West End Village.

*New development at the western edge of Downtown helps create a gateway experience. For large-scale new development, the City could provide incentives to encourage private parking facilities to be publicly accessible.*

*A new neighborhood-scale pocket park is created as a community benefit from redevelopment, and the new civic space helps to activate the Fourth Street corridor.*

*Pedestrian and bicycle improvements prioritized on Second and Fourth Streets help connect this area to the Downtown Core and Downtown Gateway nodes.*

*New residential development includes a variety of housing types that reinforce the unique identity of the West End Village, responding to the existing form and scale of the neighborhood while providing additional housing choice.*



**Figure 4.35** Illustrative plan (above) and perspective (right) for West End Village showing one possible build-out by 2040

■ Potential infill opportunity sites\*

\* Potential infill projects shown here are conceptual and for illustrative purposes only



**Figure 4.36** *Protecting local businesses and cherished institutions helps to enhance neighborhood character*

## Public realm

### Streets and active transportation

- Fourth Street is the neighborhood's central spine, and continues to accommodate all travel modes while retaining street parking to support retail uses.
- Improvements to make cycling safer include modifications to the existing Fourth Street roadway to create a Class II bicycle facility in a phased manner by initially removing the left turn lane at intersections and installing a one-way bicycle lane on one side of the street, while keeping parking on both sides of the street. In the long term, as travel behavior changes and parking demands reduce, the one-way bicycle lane can be expanded to a two-way Class II bicycle facility, or to a Class I multi-use path if preferred.
- Pedestrian safety is enhanced through traffic calming improvements to Second and Third Streets, and through a realignment of the intersection of Second Street, Fourth Street and Marquard Avenue.

For details on street design and modal prioritization, see Chapter Six: Transportation and Parking.

### Civic space

- Potential infill opportunity sites should consider providing neighborhood-scale civic spaces such as a small plaza or pocket park, as shown in Figure 4.37. Private developers can be offered suitable development incentives to provide such spaces in new development that are publicly accessible. For large sites, civic space requirements apply, specified in the Downtown Code.
- Wherever possible, existing sidewalks should be improved to provide consistent width and adequate space for pedestrians to walk and socialize, and for improved accessibility. Street furniture should

be selected for comfort, durability and ease of maintenance.

### Historic resources

- Existing historic resources are protected, including the Victorian Village historic district. Details about historic resources and recommendations are discussed in Chapter Five: Historic Resources.

### Additional recommendations

- The intersection of Fourth and Second Streets should be designed as a Downtown gateway, with signage, high-quality public art, and landmark buildings, to create a strong visual focus when approaching from the west. At this node, it will be important to require that new development address the street frontages on both Fourth Street and Second Street.
- Similar to the rest of Downtown, to retain the neighborhood character of the West End Village, anti-displacement strategies should be adopted to protect local businesses and institutions that shape its identity.
- The history of the neighborhood and its assets, including its historic buildings and landmarks, should be recognized through interpretive signage, public art and information materials.
- The neighborhood's identity can be enhanced through a wayfinding strategy, reflected in the design of streetscape elements such as lighting, seating, paving materials, and signage. Public art that is relevant to the location or to the site's history should be prioritized.
- Explore opportunities for shared use of private parking facilities in new development for public parking.



Existing conditions

**Figure 4.37** *Illustrative rendering of future development in West End Village*

*Neighborhood-scale mixed-use development add new amenities such as stores and cafés, streetscape improvements, and new open spaces. The photo (left) indicates existing conditions at the same location.*

- 1** Building entrances activate the sidewalk
- 2** Publicly accessible pocket park
- 3** New neighborhood-scale mixed-use buildings provide housing options
- 4** Active ground floors with shops and cafés
- 5** Street trees provide shade and character
- 6** Bicycle facilities promote active transportation
- 7** Wide sidewalks with adequate space for pedestrians and outdoor seating

# Montecito Commercial

**The Montecito Commercial sub-area has the potential to develop as a neighborhood with a variety of housing types supported by neighborhood-serving amenities, well-connected to Downtown and to San Rafael Canal through new promenades and bicycle infrastructure.**

## Existing conditions

The Montecito Commercial sub-area is located west of US-101, between the San Rafael Canal and San Rafael High School. The blocks adjacent to Irwin Street have mainly retail uses and services, with some housing. The character is more residential along Fourth Street near the High School. The eastern blocks contain auto-oriented uses on larger parcels, including a Whole Foods grocery and Montecito Plaza, a large shopping center along Third Street. Montecito Plaza has a large parking lot facing Third Street, with its buildings set back almost 250 feet from the street. The shopping center is oriented away from San Rafael Canal, with poor access to the waterfront in the form of a narrow public path that is mainly used for service functions. Poorly lit and lined with blank facades, it feels unwelcoming and unsafe, particularly at night.

The Montecito Commercial sub-area has a high number of pedestrians and cyclists, including residents from the Canal neighborhood accessing the Montecito Plaza, the Transit Center or Downtown, and over 1,400 students at San Rafael and Madrone High Schools. The new bicycle and pedestrian bridge at Grand Avenue has improved connectivity, however, additional bicycle and pedestrian

infrastructure is needed to provide better connectivity to Downtown and surrounding neighborhoods.

## Future vision

Over time, the Montecito Commercial sub-area transforms into a vibrant residential neighborhood, well-connected to Downtown and the Canal neighborhood and with a strong relationship to the waterfront. Better connectivity can be achieved by providing new pedestrian and bicycle facilities connecting existing assets. While no large-scale redevelopment projects are anticipated in the near term, the area continues to improve through incremental infill of available sites, with small-scale, mixed-use buildings.

In the long term, as the area transforms, Montecito Plaza could be redeveloped into a mixed-use node providing new housing and community-serving retail and services, oriented to San Rafael Canal and incorporating adaptation strategies to future sea-level rise. As one of the largest parcels within the Plan Area, this is a valuable future development opportunity that could lend new identity and define a new eastern gateway to Downtown. This transformation is not anticipated within the lifespan of the Precise Plan, but is nonetheless encouraged.





**Figure 4.38 Montecito Commercial within the Plan Area**  
Locations of the photos of existing conditions shown below are indicated on the map.

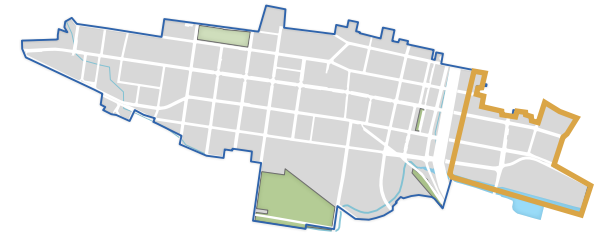




Figure 4.39 Montecito Plaza

### Built character and uses

Montecito Commercial is a compact, mixed-use neighborhood with a mix of lower and moderate intensity development. Fourth Street improvements extend its retail activity eastwards, and a future mixed-use node can develop at Fourth Street and Grand Avenue, in close proximity to the San Rafael High School. In the near term, change will be in the form of incremental infill on vacant and underutilized sites, as illustrated in Figure 4.40. The potential long-term redevelopment of Montecito Plaza can offer significant opportunities, shown in Figure 4.42.

### Development program

The development yield projected for this neighborhood is 390 new housing units and approximately 45,000 square feet of non-residential uses, that translates into 140 new jobs. These numbers do not assume the transformation of Montecito Plaza, since the redevelopment of that site is unlikely to happen within the timeline of the Plan.

### Built form

Buildings in the area are small to medium in size, and predominantly block-form in character, with some

house-form buildings, particularly along Fourth Street. Fourth Street retains its character as a lower intensity mixed-use street, and the visual axis to San Rafael High School is maintained. Typical frontages include a mix of residential and shopfront types.

### Building heights

Building heights in the sub-area are between 40 to 70 feet (ranging from maximum base heights to maximum heights with bonuses). Moderate intensity development is envisioned along Irwin Street due to its proximity to Downtown, and this will be enhanced further if the site chosen for the Transit Center relocation is the one between Hetherton and Irwin, along Fourth Street. Moderate intensity development is also proposed along Second and Third Streets. Montecito Plaza, if redeveloped in the future, could support larger, mixed-use buildings.

Table 4I provides a summary of the proposed built environment, and development standards are discussed in Chapter Nine: Downtown Form-Based Code.

**Table 4I. Montecito Commercial: projected program and built environment summary**

Refer to Chapter Nine: Downtown Form-Based Code for development standards

Development Type	Program (additional/new)	Feature	Recommendation
Residential	390,000 sq ft <sup>1</sup> (390 units) <sup>2</sup>	Building types	Mainly block-form with some house-form
Non-Residential	45,000 sq ft <sup>1</sup> (140 jobs) <sup>2</sup>	Building heights	Maximum 40 feet (base) to 70 feet (with bonus)
		Frontage types	Shopfront, gallery, porch, stoop, dooryard, forecourt, terrace
		Building uses	Residential, mixed-use with ground floor retail
		Parking	Surface, podium

<sup>1</sup> The program numbers are inclusive of pipeline projects and have been derived from the testing of infill lots with building types that conform to the Plan vision and proposed Downtown Form-Based Code, in consultation with City staff.

<sup>2</sup> Assumptions include 1,000 sq ft (gross area) per housing unit, and 1 job per 350 sq ft (gross area), with exceptions as needed for approved projects.

<sup>3</sup> Please refer to Chapter Nine for descriptions of frontage types.

<sup>4</sup> Ground floor retail is desired but not required. Active ground floors are encouraged.




### Illustrative vision for Montecito Commercial

The illustrative plan in Figure 4.40 shows one of many potential built outcomes for the Montecito Commercial sub-area.

- *Smaller-scale infill with Missing Middle housing types (multifamily units in house-form buildings) on vacant parcels and smaller opportunity sites; transitioning in scale to the existing smaller single-family homes on Fifth Avenue and Mission Avenue.*
- *New block-form and house-form mixed-use buildings with active ground floor uses provide housing and employment options within walking distance of Downtown and the Transit Center. A new node is encouraged at Fourth Street and Grand Avenue.*
- *San Rafael Canal improvements create an attractive waterfront, and new development is oriented towards it.*
- *An improved waterfront promenade provides public access and is designed to be resilient to sea-level rise. This could be part of a pedestrian-bicycle route connecting Grand Avenue to Fourth Street and Downtown, to Albert Park, and south across the bridge to the Canal neighborhood and the Tamalpais Greenway.*

**Figure 4.40** Illustrative plan (above) and perspective (right) for the Montecito Commercial sub-area showing one possible build-out by 2040

 Potential infill opportunity sites\*

\* Potential infill projects shown here are conceptual and for illustrative purposes only



## Public realm

### Streets and active transportation

- Grand Avenue is proposed as a bicycle priority corridor, with a Class IV bicycle facility (protected bicycle lane) from Fourth Street to the Canal neighborhood.
- Fourth Street is an enhanced multimodal corridor, a Class III Bicycle Boulevard supporting pedestrian, bicycle and transit use. Between Irwin Street and Grand Avenue, a one-way bicycle lane can be created within the existing roadway in the short term, with a "sharrow" in the opposite direction, with the long-term objective of a two-way buffered bicycle path on one side of the street, similar to the concept proposed for Fourth Street in the West End Village.
- Third Street east of Grand Avenue is a Class I bicycle facility with a separated bicycle path connecting to the waterfront and Pickleweed Park.
- Enhanced Downtown connections underneath US-101 for Fourth, Third and Second Streets include improvements such as better lighting, wider sidewalks,

and public art. The intersection of Fourth and Grand Avenue can be a new node for the neighborhood.

For details on street design and modal prioritization, refer to Chapter Six: Transportation and Parking.

### Civic space

- A pedestrian promenade is proposed along San Rafael Canal connecting to the Grand Avenue bridge, and to Downtown towards Albert Park. It connects to the north-south multi-use path towards Anderson Drive and Mahon Creek. In the near term, the promenade can be widened through cantilevered walkways, as recommended in the Canalfront Conceptual Plan. In the long term, as redevelopment occurs along the waterfront, property owners can be encouraged to provide easements to complete missing gaps and provide additional width.
- If Montecito Plaza gets redeveloped in the future, the Plan recommends requiring a publicly accessible civic space such as a plaza providing waterfront access, with pedestrian-bicycle passages for public access. In

#### Figure 4.41 Examples of waterfront activation and urban flood control

Clockwise from right: River Walk in San Antonio, TX is a popular waterfront destination. The 2.5 mile stretch in downtown is the most visited part of a city-wide flood control system.

Cheonggyecheon in Seoul, South Korea, has transformed an underground channel into a thriving urban park that provides recreation along with flood control and habitat creation.

Currently under construction, HafenCity near Hamburg has dense, transit-oriented, flood resilient development with elevated buildings and passageways.





**Figure 4.42** Illustrative perspective (above) and plan (right) showing potential redevelopment of Montecito Plaza. Please note that this is conceptual and not expected to occur in the life of the Precise Plan.

In this concept, the street network is extended to subdivide the Montecito Plaza parcel into a series of mixed-use blocks. The realignment of Second Street creates a more pedestrian-friendly and safe intersection at Third and Union Street, which is heavily used by pedestrians and San Rafael High School students. A new civic space frames views of the canal and connects to the waterfront, opening up opportunities for canal improvements and water-related recreation.

- 1 Gateway element on Third Street
- 2 Activated waterfront along San Rafael Canal
- 3 New mixed-use development with housing options and amenities
- 4 New neighborhood-scale incremental infill
- 5 Active transportation corridors link to the Canal neighborhood and to Downtown

the near term, improvements for Montecito Plaza can include landscaping, temporary outdoor activities, etc.

### Historic resources

- Details about historic resources and recommendations are discussed in Chapter Five: Historic Resources.

### Additional recommendations

- Parts of the Montecito Commercial area will be impacted by sea-level rise as a result of climate change. Future development in this area should be guided

by the recommendations of the City's Sea-Level Rise Adaptation Study that is currently underway.

- Improvements to the San Rafael Canal should be supported by new uses and activities along the waterfront as well as water-based recreation to stimulate the neighborhood and Downtown's economy.
- Third Street forms an eastern entrance to Downtown. Currently not memorable, this node should be treated as a Downtown gateway, with well-designed buildings and public realm and landscaping features including signage and public art.

