



# SAN CARLOS

## DOWNTOWN SPECIFIC PLAN



**DOWNTOWN  
TOGETHER**

ADOPTED NOVEMBER 24, 2025 | ORDINANCE NO. 1633



**CITY  
GOOD  
LIVING**  
SAN CARLOS  
100 YEARS  
1925-2025

# SAN CARLOS DOWNTOWN SPECIFIC PLAN

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This Specific Plan represents the result of three years of collaboration and civic engagement. Through workshops, surveys, public meetings, and study sessions, community members voiced a clear and heartfelt vision for the future of Downtown. The outpouring of ideas and feedback illustrates the community's belief in Downtown as San Carlos' central gathering place and focal point for civic life.

*In loving memory of Jean Dehner.*

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

San Carlos has exciting new opportunities to rethink its public spaces. This project transforms the Downtown into a lively, welcoming environment with vibrant urban plazas and tree-lined streets—meeting the community's growing desire for outdoor gathering, walkability, and meaningful connection.

## PLANNING CONTEXT AND PROJECT INITIATION

In 2021, the San Carlos City Council introduced the idea of creating a new plan for Downtown San Carlos. It had been 12 years since a vision statement and accompanying policies for the Downtown were established in the 2009 General Plan. In addition, the 2020 pandemic gave rise to new expectations for Downtown, including its management and operations. Around the same time, other efforts were at play, including creation of a brand-new Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan and a new Climate Mitigation and Adaptation Plan. Together, with the temporary closure of the 700 block of Laurel Street to pedestrian-only access, new ideas and a robust discussion about Laurel Street began to emerge. Thus, it became the ideal time to address the future of Laurel Street and its surroundings. For these reasons, the San Carlos City Council established the following goal in its 2021 Strategic Plan:

*"The City of San Carlos will work with residents, property owners, business*

*owners, committees, commissions, the Chamber of Commerce, and all other interested members of the community to develop a plan to understand and ensure that the Downtown meets the needs of the community and businesses now and into the future."*

Subsequently, the Downtown Specific Plan project began in spring 2022. Just over a year later, in the summer of 2023, preparation of a Downtown Streetscape Master Plan was added to the scope of work to address the calls from City leadership to fast-forward transformation of the Downtown streets.

## UNDERSTANDING COMMUNITY ASPIRATIONS IN A TIME OF CHANGE

Through an inclusive planning process, the City engaged residents, business owners, and stakeholders to uncover a shared vision for the future of Downtown. Community members voiced a strong desire for a more walkable, vibrant, and people-centered public realm—one that supports local businesses, fosters social connection, and reflects the unique character of San Carlos. These insights provided the foundation for the Downtown Specific Plan and Streetscape Master Plan, ensuring that the community's values and aspirations are at the heart of Downtown's transformation.

## **ANTICIPATING GROWTH AND EMBRACING INNOVATION**

Downtown is poised to evolve in the face of technological and societal change, including the rise of autonomous vehicles, new mobility options, and shifting preferences in how people live, work, and gather. In addition, San Carlos' Housing Element reflects a strategic focus on concentrating residential growth in walkable, transit-accessible areas such as the Downtown. The Downtown Specific Plan provides a flexible framework that supports growth, mobility, innovation, and adaptability over time, ensuring that Downtown remains resilient and relevant in the decades ahead.

## **LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR THE FUTURE**

In response to both community input and broader trends, the Downtown Specific Plan introduces a series of bold yet practical policy shifts—ranging from reimagined street uses and public spaces to refinements to Downtown's zoning and design standards. These policy foundations will guide City decision-making and investment over the next 20 years, enabling San Carlos to thoughtfully manage change while staying true to the spirit of its community.

# DOCUMENT ORGANIZATION

The San Carlos Downtown Specific Plan (DTSP, referred to as Plan) is organized to serve a broad audience, including prospective developers, City staff, elected officials, and community members. The structure of the Plan is designed to guide both long-term visioning and near-term decision-making, with each chapter building upon the previous to provide a comprehensive and user-friendly framework for Downtown development and improvements.

## **Chapter 1: Introduction and Plan Context**

This chapter presents the purpose and objectives of the Specific Plan, its authority and scope, its relationship to other regulatory documents, as well as its location (referred to as the Plan Area), demographics, and the civic engagement process.

## **Chapter 2: Vision, Principles, and Framework for Urban Design and Policy**

This chapter presents the vision, guiding principles, and a framework for urban design and policy for private development and public space improvements within the Plan Area.

## **Chapter 3: Land Use and Urban Design**

This chapter establishes a framework for the land uses and the physical form of Downtown San Carlos. This includes a land use map, land use designations, as well as a zoning map and zoning designations and corresponding land use regulations and development standards.

## **Chapter 4: Prosperity and Economic Development**

This chapter outlines strategies to support a thriving Downtown economy. It focuses on strengthening local businesses, attracting new investment, fostering a diverse mix of commercial uses, and enhancing San Carlos' position as a regional destination. Policies aim to create a supportive environment for innovation, entrepreneurship, and inclusive economic growth.

## **Chapter 5: Mobility and Connectivity**

This chapter presents a multi-modal transportation approach that prioritizes safety, connectivity, and accessibility for all modes of travel. The main emphasis is on improvements to walking, bicycling, and transit infrastructure to achieve a balanced and multi-modal street network.

## **Chapter 6: Parking and Transportation Demand Management (TDM)**

This chapter addresses Downtown parking management while promoting more sustainable travel behavior. It introduces strategies to optimize existing parking resources, reduce parking demand through TDM programs, and make possible a mode shift where there is more equity for transit users, pedestrians, and bicyclists—all while maintaining access for residents, visitors, and businesses. Policies and standards are established to address parking management, on-street parking and loading, off-street parking and loading, and bicycle parking.

## **Chapter 7: Public Realm**

This chapter outlines a strategy that prioritizes a strong, well-designed public realm to create a socially vibrant and economically thriving Downtown with multi-functional streets, generous sidewalks, inviting plazas, and accessible green spaces. Together, these elements support community interaction, enhance walkability, and contribute to the overall appeal and success of Downtown San Carlos.

## **Chapter 8: Public Art**

This chapter outlines a vision for integrating public art into the fabric of Downtown. It encourages collaboration with artists, local organizations, and the community to create engaging, site-specific works that reflect San Carlos's identity, activate public spaces, and contribute to a vibrant cultural landscape.

## **Chapter 9: Sustainability and Resiliency**

This chapter establishes goals and policies to advance environmental sustainability and climate resilience. It promotes green infrastructure, energy efficiency, water conservation, and climate adaptation strategies that reduce environmental impacts while preparing the Downtown for future challenges.

## **Chapter 10: Infrastructure and Utilities**

This chapter provides a high-level summary of infrastructure improvements serving the Plan Area, including wet utilities and solid waste disposal.

## **Chapter 11: Administration and Implementation**

This chapter describes the regulatory framework that will be utilized to implement the San Carlos Downtown Specific Plan and recommends development phasing, financing, and implementation responsibilities.

# HOW TO USE THE DOCUMENT



## IF YOU ARE A COMMUNITY MEMBER

If you're a member of our community seeking deeper insight into this Plan and its objectives, consider starting with Chapter 1. This section provides valuable context about Downtown San Carlos. Moving forward, Chapter 2 delves into the vision and guiding principles for the next 20 years. Additionally, Chapter 2 outlines the framework aligning with the vision, and informing the policies, actions, and development standards which are discussed in the following chapters.



## IF YOU ARE A PROPERTY OWNER OR DEVELOPER

For property owners or developers interested in building within the Plan Area, it would be essential to acquaint themselves with the planning framework detailed in Chapter 2. Development applications and project designs shall be consistent with the development standards outlined in Chapter 3. Additionally, ensure compliance with standards and requirements for circulation and parking (Chapter 5 and 6), infrastructure improvements (Chapter 10), and streetscape and public realm design (Appendix A: San Carlos Downtown Streetscape Master Plan).



## **IF YOU ARE A BUSINESS OWNER/ OPERATOR**

For existing or prospective business owners/operators interested in establishing a business in Downtown San Carlos, it would be beneficial to learn about the vision and guiding principles set forth in Chapter 2. In addition, Chapter 4 provides policies and actions pertaining to economic development and prosperity. A menu of land use options and regulations are provided in Chapter 3. Additionally, streetscape and public realm design for future Downtown streetscape construction are provided in Appendix A: San Carlos Downtown Streetscape Master Plan and standards for outdoor dining or retail are provided in Chapter 7.



## **IF YOU WORK FOR THE CITY/ARE A CITY OFFICIAL**

If you work for the City of San Carlos or are a City official, you will be responsible for guiding future development in the Plan Area to be consistent with the regulatory framework as well as supporting the vision, goals, and policies outlined in this document. Chapter 11 provides specific tasks and responsibilities for implementing the Plan.





# 01

## INTRODUCTION

## **1.1 PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVE OF THE SPECIFIC PLAN**

The San Carlos Downtown Specific Plan sets forth regulations for the future development, revitalization, and enhancement of Downtown San Carlos. It is intended to guide the long-term physical and economic evolution of the city's Downtown core. Its primary objective is to provide a cohesive vision and framework for land use and urban design, prosperity and economic development, mobility and transportation, parking and Transportation Demand Management (TDM), public realm, public art, sustainability and resiliency, and infrastructure that reflects the community's aspirations and responds to changing needs.

The Plan establishes clear goals, policies, and strategies to support a vibrant, pedestrian-friendly, inclusive, and economically-resilient Downtown. It aims to shape a lively Downtown core that reflects the unique character of San Carlos while supporting residential, commercial, and mixed-use opportunities that cater to the evolving needs of the community. It serves as a tool to shape new development, public realm improvements, and policy decisions in a way that enhances quality of life, preserves local character, and supports environmental sustainability. Designed to be both visionary and actionable, the Specific Plan aims to align public and private investment with a unified vision for Downtown San Carlos.

## **1.2 SPECIFIC PLAN AUTHORITY & SCOPE**

California Government Code Section 65450 allows the City of San Carlos to adopt a specific plan to establish detailed goals, policies, and implementation items for the Downtown. The Downtown Specific Plan shall, consistent with Government Code Section 65451, contain land use and zoning maps, delineate essential facilities such as multi-modal transportation and circulation networks, infrastructure – including water, drainage, sewer – and other essential facilities to support future growth and change in the Downtown over the next 20 years. In addition, standards for new development and implementation actions and financing strategies to support future planning programs and capital improvements are required by state law.

## 1.3 RELATIONSHIP TO GENERAL PLAN

A comprehensive update to the San Carlos General Plan was adopted by the City Council in 2009 and amended most recently in May 2025 to reset the General Plan buildout projections to the year 2045. The San Carlos General Plan provides a framework to guide future land use and development decisions in the city. The policies, goals and objectives of the San Carlos Downtown Specific Plan are required to be consistent with the overall vision of the General Plan, which is still true today as it was in 2008:

*"San Carlos is a safe, beautiful, vibrant and livable community with tree-lined streets, open space, public art, high-quality architecture and state-of-the-art infrastructure. We enjoy a balance of residential, schools, retail, commercial and industrial uses and services that enhance our quality of life, support the fiscal health of the City and sustain a robust local economy. Downtown San Carlos is the heart of the community – a place to experience and savor the joys of daily life while enjoying a mix of stores and services.*

*Housing in San Carlos meets the needs of a diverse community. People who work in San Carlos can afford to live here. San Carlans are also able to work for employers located within the community. The City pursues creative solutions to economic development objectives and encourages innovative environmentally sustainable industries and businesses to locate and remain in San Carlos.*

*San Carlos is committed to sustainability. Sustainability promotes the use of resources in the present in a manner that does not compromise the choices and quality of life of future generations.*

*Mobility is part of the San Carlos way of life. It is precious to us, and we value our collective ability to freely and efficiently move about the city and region. The airport remains a unique part of our transportation system. Sidewalks, paths and bikeways connect residential neighborhoods to all commercial areas, schools, parks and open space. Destinations and places in San Carlos are accessible using all forms of transportation.*

*Quality educational opportunities, at all levels, are available to the entire community. Our outstanding educational system, providing both formal and informal learning opportunities, enhances our quality of life.*

*Public service, charitable giving, volunteerism and citizen participation are integrated into public, non-profit and educational services offered.*

*Community care services are inclusive for seniors and citizens with mental and physical disabilities.*

*San Carlans enjoy a wide variety of private and public community venues, including parks, trails, community centers, arts, museums, cultural centers and clubs, faith-based places of worship and congregation, recreational facilities, sports and other civic and cultural events. We enjoy access to affordable and high-quality health services. The City's government contributes to our distinctive community identity and sense of civic pride."*

*- City Council endorsed Vision Statement, February 11, 2008*

## 1.4 RELATIONSHIP TO CITYWIDE ZONING

The standards for development contained in the Downtown Specific Plan (Plan) draw from the City of San Carlos' Municipal Code, Title 18, Zoning. No changes to land use or zoning designations were made, except for one site at APN 050-072-380, consisting of approximately 1.1 acres and located at 1250 San Carlos Avenue. The land use and zoning change for this site allows greater development intensity, replacing the designation from Mixed-Use, Downtown Core, 100 (MU-DC-100) to Mixed-Use, Downtown, 120 (MU-D-120). All other changes to zoning regulations are refinements in nature, addressing the entitlement process, responding to State law, or minor adjustments to design and architectural features.

## 1.5 PREPARATION PROCESS

### INITIATION

In 2021, the San Carlos City Council set a strategic goal directing City staff to collaborate with the community and key stakeholders to develop a Specific Plan for the Downtown area. By spring 2022, a consultant team had been retained, a Citizens Advisory Committee was appointed by the Council, and the first public outreach meeting was held.

Over the next three years, City staff and consultants engaged residents, business owners, and other stakeholders in meaningful discussions about the future of Downtown San Carlos—exploring how it could better serve the community, local businesses, the workforce, and visitors. Topics ranged from urban design and land use to economic development and market trends.

The planning process also included the evaluation and refinement of several street redesign scenarios, with a focus on improving safety and supporting community programming.

On April 28, 2025, the City Council adopted the Downtown Streetscape Master Plan, which the Downtown Specific Plan references and supports through corresponding policies.

### REVIEW AND APPROVAL

On November 24, 2025, the Planning and Transportation Commission recommended that the City Council adopt the Downtown Specific Plan (Resolution No. 2025-14).

Subsequently, on November 24, 2025, the City Council formally adopted the Downtown Specific Plan (Ordinance No. 1633).

## 1.6 CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT (CEQA) COMPLIANCE

An Addendum to the 2045 General Plan Reset Final Environmental Impact Report (EIR) (State Clearinghouse # 2024060037) was prepared by the City of San Carlos. The General Plan Reset EIR was certified and the mitigation measures within it were adopted by the City of San Carlos on Tuesday, May 27, 2025.

## 1.7 RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PLANS

As part of the analysis of the regulatory context, the following were reviewed to inform development of the Plan:

**San Carlos Objective Development Standards (ODS):** The ODS establish clear, measurable criteria for building form, site design, and architectural quality. Developed to streamline project review and ensure design consistency, these standards support high-quality, context-sensitive development while aligning with state housing laws. The ODS informed the Plan by elevating the design character for new office, mixed-use and multi-family developments.

**San Carlos General Plan:** The San Carlos General Plan acts as a comprehensive guide for the city's long-term development and growth. It outlines a broad framework for land use, housing, transportation, and environmental policies, shaping the community's future. This General Plan is instrumental, as it lays the foundation in shaping the community's vision for its Downtown.

**San Carlos Housing Element 2023-2031:** The 6th Cycle, 2023-2031, Housing Element is a key component that outlines strategies and policies to meet current and future housing needs of the community. It plays a crucial role in shaping the Plan in relation to housing development, affordability, and diversity.

**Climate Mitigation and Adaptation Plan (CMAP):** San Carlos' CMAP provides a roadmap for reducing greenhouse gas emissions while preparing the community for climate-related risks such as extreme heat, flooding, and sea level rise. For the Plan, the CMAP is especially important as it shapes strategies for sustainable growth in the city's core—integrating energy efficiency, resilient infrastructure, and expanded low-carbon mobility choices. By aligning Downtown planning with CMAP goals, San Carlos can ensure new development not only enhances the vitality of the city center but also advances long-term resilience and climate action commitments.

**East side Innovation District Vision Plan:** The East Side Innovation District Vision Plan aims to transform this area into a multi-modal neighborhood, integrating a mix of commercial uses including existing businesses and new science and technology enterprises. The plan emphasizes connectivity, community amenities, and a resilient and inclusive future. This plan is important in guiding key connections to the Downtown area to create synergy between San Carlos' east side and the Downtown.

**San Carlos Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan:** This plan, adopted in 2020, lays out a comprehensive strategy for enhancing bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure in San Carlos. It aims to improve safety, connectivity, and accessibility for all non-motorized modes of transport, promoting a healthier and more sustainable urban environment. The plan details critical strategies for the Downtown area that affect the integration of bicycle facilities into key Downtown streets.

**San Carlos Zoning Map and Ordinance:** San Carlos has a detailed zoning map that guides development and future land uses in the city. San

Carlos' Zoning Ordinance is key for future city development, defining essential standards such as land use, density, building heights, step-backs and setbacks, and shaping the direction of the Plan in line with the city's vision for future buildout. The zoning districts within the Downtown include MU-D-120, MU-DC-100, MU-N-50, MU-N-40, MU-SB-100, MU-SB-120, PK (Park), and Planned Developments 1, 14, 15, 19, 24, and 26.

**Northeast Area Specific Plan:** The Northeast Area Specific Plan envisions the transformation of underutilized industrial and commercial lands north of Downtown into a vibrant, mixed-use neighborhood with approximately 2,000 new homes, employment opportunities, and community amenities. A key connector from the northeast area to Downtown is the F Street underpass, which provides a critical connection to El Camino Real and strengthens links between the Northeast Area and the Downtown. By creating a walkable, transit-supportive district, the plan not only accommodates significant housing growth but also expands the community of residents, workers, and visitors who will rely on and contribute to the vitality of Downtown San Carlos.

**Relevant policies from these plans and regulations that informed the Downtown Specific Plan are summarized below.**

#### SAN CARLOS OBJECTIVE DESIGN STANDARDS (ODS)

**Land Use and Character:** The ODS supports a vibrant, mixed-use Downtown through clear standards for density, height, transitions, and active ground floor uses. Minimum and maximum densities in mixed-use districts (e.g., MU-DC-100: 75–100 units/net) reinforce the intent for

compact, walkable development. Building placement and form standards (e.g., build-to lines, height transitions adjacent to RS zones) as well as standards for landscaping and open space ensure sensitivity to existing residential neighborhoods while accommodating growth.

**Mobility and Connectivity:** The ODS enhances pedestrian and multimodal connections through pedestrian-first standards, including widened walkways, curb cut restrictions on Laurel Street, and clear connections to transit and adjacent areas. Parking standards prioritize rear or underground placement, with minimum setbacks of forty (40) feet from the street, supporting a continuous and safe pedestrian realm.

**Urban Design and Placemaking:** The ODS establishes a high-quality public realm and architectural character through upper story stepback to preserve human-scale design. Similarly, massing breaks, base/middle/top articulation, and roof variety requirements contribute to visual interest and architectural integrity.

**Mixed-Use Development:** ODS promotes integration of uses including minimum and maximum commercial FARs and active frontage standards to ensure economic activity and accessibility. Standards for residential-only development clarify how projects shall still align with objectives of the mixed-use districts.

**Ground Floor Activation:** Vital for a vibrant Downtown, the ODS supports active frontage along public streets, with transparent glazing, and distinctive entries. Prohibited curb cuts on Laurel Street ensure uninterrupted pedestrian pathways and minimize vehicle-pedestrian conflicts.

**Public Realm Design:** Design elements create welcoming and functional shared spaces with corner entries, pedestrian-scale facades, and public-facing amenities (e.g., seating, plazas, awnings) supporting interaction and placemaking.

#### 2045 SAN CARLOS GENERAL PLAN

**Land Use and Character (Policies LU-2.1 to LU-2.7):** These policies aim to preserve the unique character of Downtown San Carlos, maintaining its scale, walkable environment, and economic vitality by encouraging a mix of uses, including active ground-floor retail and upper-floor residential. Policies LU-2.2 and LU-2.3 emphasize maintaining the area's unique character, especially along Laurel Street.

**Parking and Transportation (Policies LU-2.16 to LU-2.20):** The General Plan encourages strategies to enhance accessibility including parking management, improving bicycle and pedestrian access, and creating pedestrian linkages between parking areas and streets.

**Urban Design and Connectivity (Policies LU-7.1, LU-7.3):** There is a focus on integrating high-quality architectural design and enhancing the physical connections between neighborhoods and the Downtown, including walkable streets and public spaces.

**Public Gathering Spaces (Policies LU-2.13, LU-2.15):** These policies prioritize maintaining Downtown and Burton Park as central community gathering spaces and encourage the development of additional parks and public areas nearby.

**Mixed-Use and Vibrancy (Policy LU-2.6):** This policy supports active uses such as retail, restaurants, etc. along Laurel Street, with residential on upper stories to maintain vibrancy at the ground level.

#### [SAN CARLOS BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN MASTER PLAN \(ADOPTED 2020\)](#)

**Pedestrian Safety and Accessibility:** The plan emphasizes improvements for pedestrian safety, including enhancing visibility at crosswalks and intersections, installing pedestrian-scale lighting, and addressing areas with incomplete sidewalk networks. These measures are particularly important for Downtown streets like Laurel Street and San Carlos Avenue.

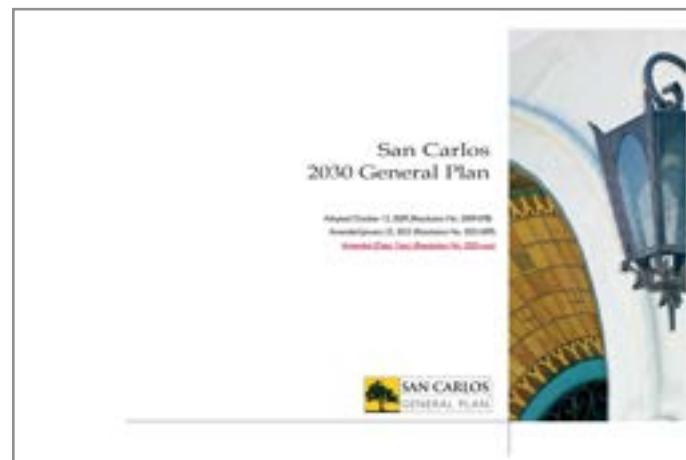
**Bikeway Network Expansion:** The plan proposes the expansion of low-stress bikeways throughout San Carlos, including Downtown. This includes adding Class IV separated bikeways and buffered lanes to improve safety and comfort for cyclists. Key corridors recommended for improvement include El Camino Real, Brittan, Arroyo to Commercial and San Carlos Avenue.

**Wayfinding Program:** Recommendations include implementing a comprehensive wayfinding program for bicyclists and a pedestrian-friendly Downtown, directing visitors to key destinations such as parks, transit stations, and commercial areas.

#### [SAN CARLOS HOUSING ELEMENT](#)

**High-Quality, Higher-Density Housing (Goal HOU-2):** The Housing Element promotes well-designed, higher-density multi-family housing near transit, especially in Downtown and along San Carlos Avenue and El Camino Real. It supports mixed-use developments and high-quality design standards to enhance the area's character.

**Complete Streets and Connectivity (Policy HOU-2.2):** Emphasis is placed on pedestrian and bicycle-friendly environments, consistent with the Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan, to ensure Downtown remains accessible and connected. The policy encourages developments that support the City's Complete Streets Policy.



**San Carlos 2030 General Plan**

**Affordable Housing Incentives (Actions HOU-2.2, HOU-3.2):** The Housing Element suggests incentivizing affordable housing Downtown through density bonuses, relaxed development standards, and flexibility for small lot developments. These strategies align with goals to increase affordability and support diverse housing options.

**Transportation and Parking (Action HOU-4.2):** The Housing Element addresses parking management, and recognizes the removal of parking minimums near transit and Downtown, to encourage more housing options and support a pedestrian-oriented urban core.



**City of San Carlos Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan**

## 1.8 LOCATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS

### A. REGIONAL CONTEXT

Downtown San Carlos holds a significant position in the regional economic ecosystem, encompassing key drivers such as life science campuses, technology campuses, premier education and research clusters, and neighboring Downtowns on the peninsula. Its strategic location between US 101 and Interstate 280 provides direct north-south connectivity across the Bay Area. The Caltrain system enhances its accessibility, offering convenient rail service throughout the peninsula. Additionally, the San Mateo and Dumbarton bridges facilitate east-west travel, linking San Carlos to the East Bay.

### B. LOCAL (CITY) CONTEXT

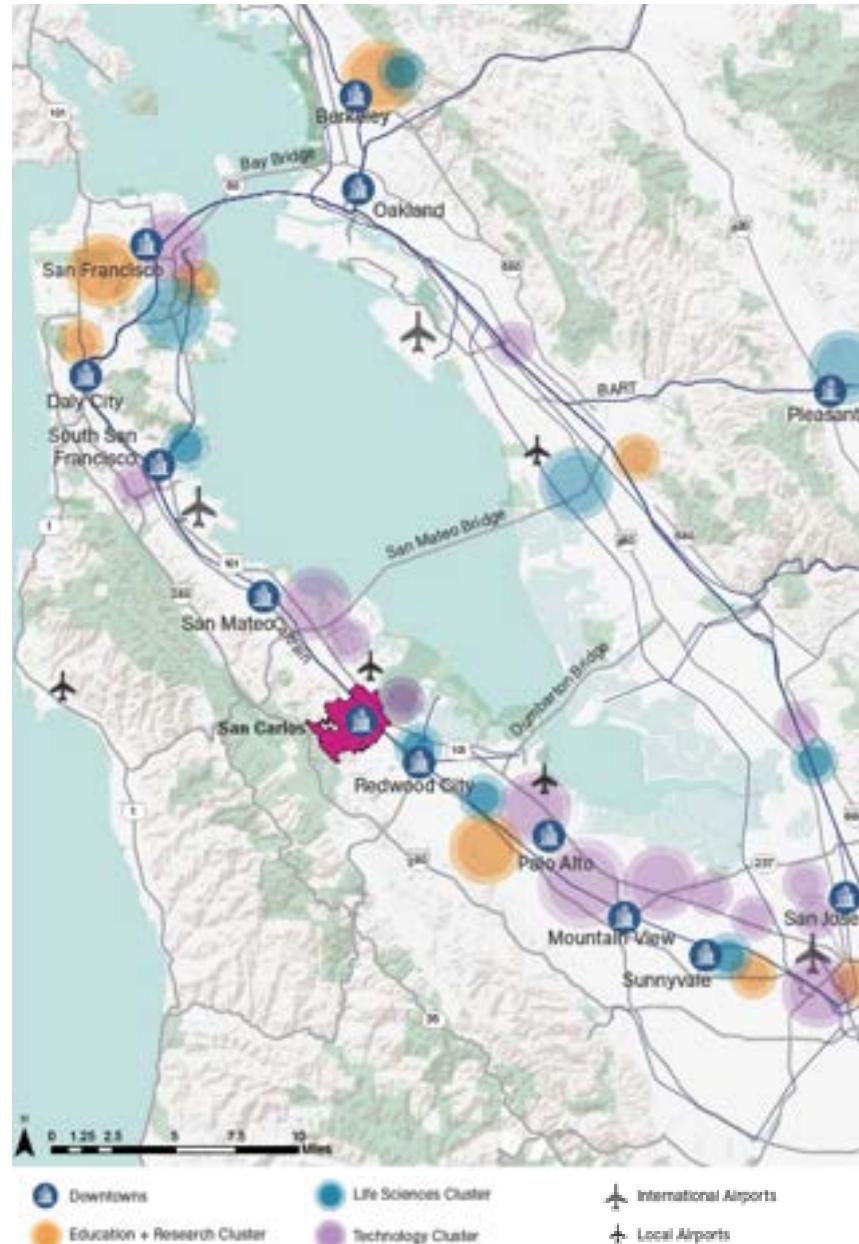
The city of San Carlos sits between Belmont to the north and Redwood City to the south, framed by the foothills and open space of Edgewood County Park to the west and the San Francisco Baylands to the east. Downtown San Carlos lies at the heart of the community along El Camino Real and

the Caltrain corridor, providing the community's primary civic, commercial, and cultural hub. The city's location, midway between San Francisco and San José and adjacent to San Carlos Airport, positions it as both a regional gateway and a livable environment, balancing access to jobs, transit, and recreation.

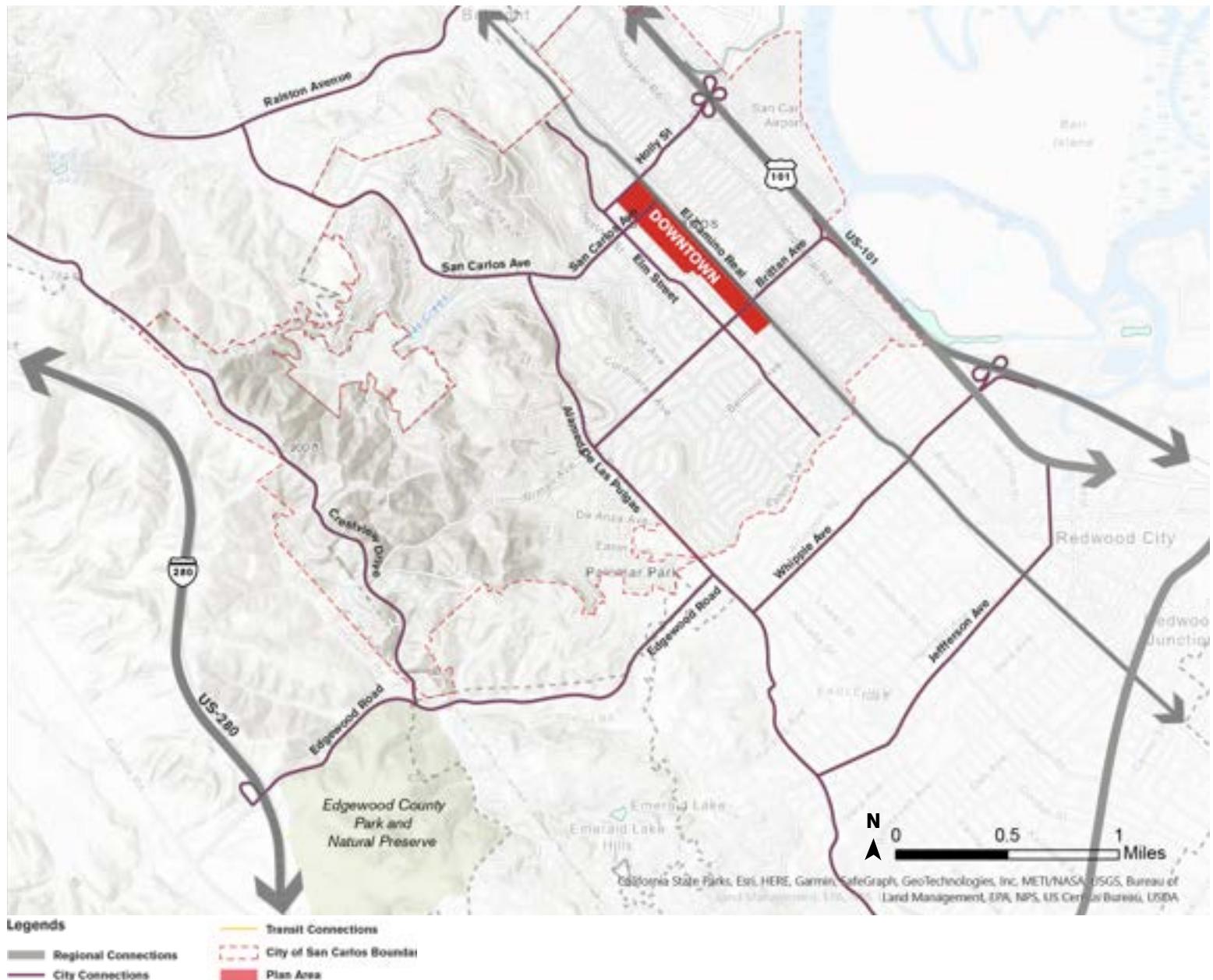
## C. THE PLAN AREA

Downtown San Carlos, within the regional economic ecosystem, holds pivotal importance locally, offering a charming main street atmosphere for the San Carlos community and neighboring visitors alike. The Plan Area is comprised of approximately 67.5 s. This study area runs along the El Camino Real and Laurel Street corridors and is framed by Holly Street at the north end and Greenwood Avenue on the south end, with El Camino Real to the east and Walnut Street to the west. These boundaries capture the heart of the city's Downtown, retail, and transit-oriented center. Laurel Street serves as the bustling spine and epicenter of activity, while the nearby US-101 interchanges at Holly Street and Brittan Avenue, along with the Caltrain Station at El Camino Real and San Carlos Avenue, ensure seamless accessibility and connectivity to and from Downtown.

El Camino Real, flanking the eastern perimeter of Downtown, presents significant potential for enhancement, poised to serve as a prominent gateway to Downtown and create distinct entry points along this vital regional corridor. The close proximity and connection to the Civic Center further enrich Downtown's appeal, providing an opportunity to expand its identity by integrating social and civic activities.



**Figure 1.1 - Regional Significance of San Carlos**



**Figure 1.2 - Local (City-level) Context.**

This Specific Plan aims to enhance and celebrate the strong cultural identity of Downtown San Carlos. Leveraging its strategic physical location, the Plan envisions a vibrant Downtown that serves as a model for dining, shopping, and social experiences. By fostering a thriving, dynamic community, Downtown San Carlos can set a new standard for Downtown development that other communities in the Bay Area and across the nation can emulate.

## D. DEMOGRAPHICS

As per the 2023 Housing Element, San Carlos is home to a diverse and affluent population of approximately 30,754 residents. The median age of 41 reflects a balanced mix of working professionals, retirees and families, creating a dynamic yet mature atmosphere. The city's economic strength is evident in its median household income of \$204,570 as of 2022.

The racial composition of the city is predominantly White (63.2%), followed by Asian (18.2%), and individuals identifying as Two or More Races (6.86%). This diversity is further enriched by a foreign-born population of 22.5%, contributing to the multicultural fabric of the city.

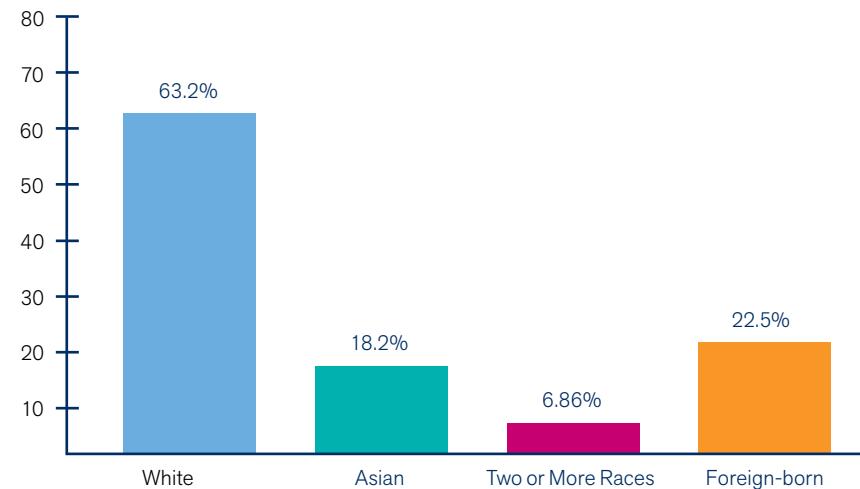
Housing in San Carlos is characterized by high property values, with the median home value around \$1.9 million in 2020. This reflects the high desirability of San Carlos as a place to live and work, reinforced by access to local recreational amenities.

# 1.9 PLAN AREA CONTEXT

## A. BRIEF HISTORY

The first known human inhabitants of the San Carlos area were the Ohlone, also historically referred to as the Costanoans. Within this region, historians identify two subgroups: the Salson, who lived north of Belmont Creek, and the Lhamshin, whose territory encompassed much of what is now San Carlos. The Ohlone were a deeply connected community, relying on local rivers, creeks, and coastal resources for food, and maintaining rich cultural and spiritual traditions.

Spanish colonization of the San Francisco Bay Area, beginning in 1769,



**Figure 1.3 D - Demographic Composition of San Carlos**

profoundly disrupted the lives of the Ohlone. Many were forcibly relocated to Spanish missions, including Mission San Francisco de Asís, where they were subjected to labor, religious conversion, and European diseases. These pressures led to dramatic declines in population and the erosion of traditional Ohlone social and cultural structures.

Colonization accelerated in 1776 with the formal establishment of Mission San Francisco de Asís. By the 1790s, the mission and other nearby settlements were supported by small farms extending as far south as San

Mateo. To encourage settlement, the Spanish government granted large tracts of land to retired soldiers and influential men. One notable example is Don José Darío Argüello, commandante of the Presidio of San Francisco and later governor of Alta California, who received a 35,000-acre land grant that included what would later become Atherton, Belmont, Menlo Park, Redwood City, San Carlos, and part of San Mateo. These land grants further displaced the Ohlone from their ancestral territories and contributed to the lasting marginalization of the community.



**Figure 1.4 - Downtown Specific Plan Area. Source: City of San Carlos.**

Early attempts to develop San Carlos began in the late 1800s. These early efforts were generally not successful until 1917, when the Mercantile Trust Company hired Frederick Seguier Drake, a prominent real estate and business promoter to oversee the development of the city. Drake expanded infrastructure, established a chamber of commerce, encouraged the development of housing, and gave the city the motto “The City of Good Living.”

Downtown San Carlos has been the historic and cultural heart of the city since its early days as a planned subdivision in the late 1800s, when the San Carlos Land Company and later the San Carlos Park Syndicate laid out the original street grid prior to the construction of El Camino Real. Historic maps show the early subdivision pattern centered on the railroad, which quickly gave rise to a small-town business district and gathering place for commerce and community life.

Over time, Laurel Street and its surrounding blocks developed into a thriving commercial corridor, defined by small locally-owned shops, restaurants, and professional services that created the city's enduring “small-town” identity. Today, Downtown continues that tradition while also serving as an employment hub. Some of the city's largest employers (such as PG&E, Home Depot, Natera, and Check Point Software) have offices here, adding a daytime workforce and economic vitality to the Downtown.

Just two blocks away from the Downtown core, City Hall and the Civic Center anchor public life, while SamTrans has long been headquartered at 1250 San Carlos Avenue, serving as a major institutional presence. In 2026, SamTrans will relocate to a new site in Millbrae, creating opportunities for the city to reimagine this centrally-located property in the years ahead.

Downtown has also remained a cultural hub for community celebrations and public life. At the time this Plan was adopted in 2025, San Carlos was

celebrating its Centennial, marking 100 years since incorporation and reaffirming Downtown's role as the symbolic and social center of the community.

## **B. PLAN AREA IN ACRES**

The Plan Area consists of approximately 67.5 acres, which includes all land within the plan boundary as defined in the City's Geographic Information System (GIS)—this total encompasses public rights-of-way such as streets, sidewalks, and other infrastructure. Of this, approximately 51.7 acres represent the actual parcel age, referring to the combined area of all privately and publicly owned parcels located within the Plan Area boundary.

## **C. EXISTING RESIDENCES AND MAJOR LAND USES**

The Plan Area currently includes approximately 557 residential units, contributing to the district's mixed-use character and providing a built-in population to support other uses including 262,067 square feet of office space, 356,340 square feet of general commercial space, 154,891 square feet of restaurant uses, and 13,993 square feet of hotel space.

## **D. EXISTING BUSINESSES**

Downtown San Carlos hosts a diverse mix of approximately 275 businesses, spanning food and beverage, specialty retail, personal services, and general commercial uses. While the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the closure of 60 businesses and placed pressure on others, many businesses, especially casual dining restaurants and specialty retailers, have since shown strong signs of recovery or have moved into spaces vacated during the pandemic. However, not all sectors have rebounded equally, and some non-food &

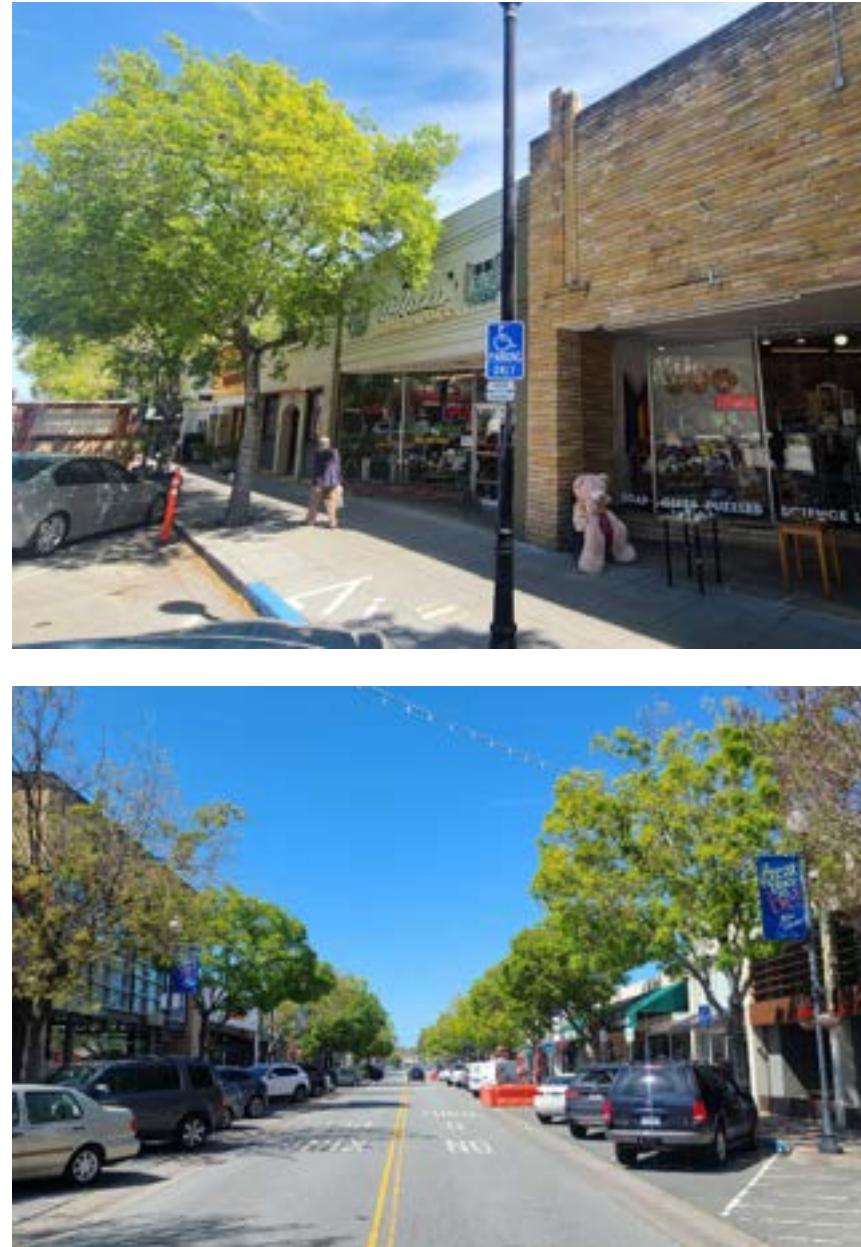


**Figure 1.5 - Views of Laurel Street, Top(L) – archival photo from 1954, top (R)- post 700 block closure from 2024, bottom – rendering of proposed design from the San Carlos Downtown Streetscape Master Plan.**

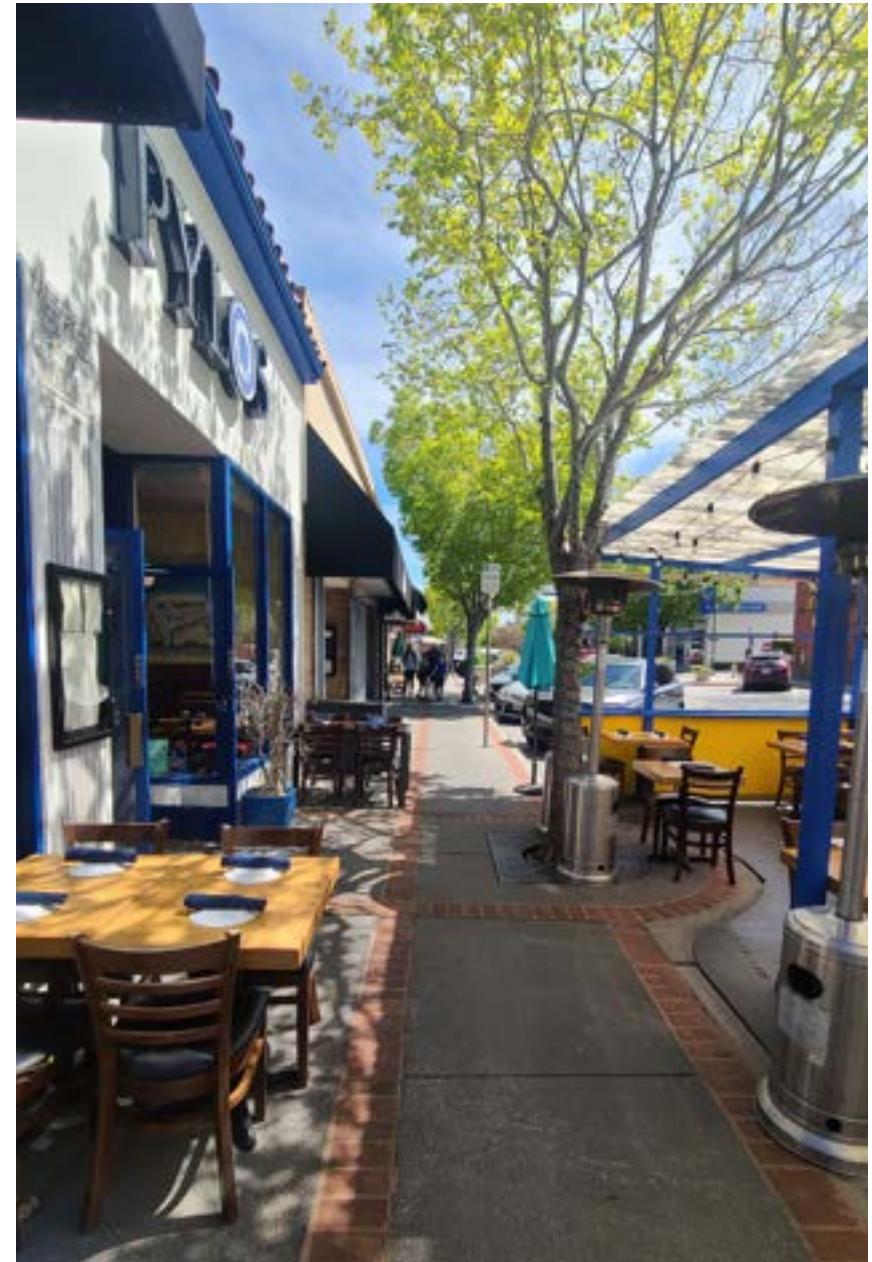
beverage businesses continue to face challenges related to foot traffic, access, and visibility. As the district evolves, maintaining a balanced and resilient retail ecosystem will be essential to sustaining Downtown's long-term economic vitality and community character.

## E. EXISTING PARKING SPACES

The existing parking supply in the San Carlos Downtown Specific Plan Area is a mix of on-street, public off-street, and private off-street spaces, accommodating residents, employees, visitors, and transit riders. According to the 2013 Downtown Parking Study, at the time of the parking survey, the northern portion of Downtown contained 2,217 parking spaces of which 672 are on-street, 376 are public off-street, and 1,169 are private off-street. However, the COVID-19 pandemic prompted the repurposing of 110 on-street spaces (91 of which were on Laurel Street) for outdoor dining parklets, and a section of Laurel Street was closed to vehicular traffic, making an additional 62 spaces inaccessible. Most on-street spaces are time-restricted, predominantly with two-hour limits, while unrestricted spaces are found just outside the Plan Area. Today, public off-street parking includes the Wheeler Parking Garage (256), SamTrans Parking Garage (259), and Caltrain Station lot (248), collectively offering approximately 760 spaces. A Downtown Employee Parking Permit Program designates 126 spaces on the second floor of the Wheeler Parking Garage and 76 spaces on top of the SamTrans Parking Garage for workers, though many remain underutilized. Private lots, which account for nearly 40% of the total supply, typically serve adjacent businesses and are often underused. Despite localized high demand—particularly on Laurel Street and in the Clark Plaza—overall parking occupancy was manageable pre-pandemic, suggesting that while certain hotspots face pressure, Downtown parking capacity as a whole remains adequate.



**Figure 1.6 - Downtown San Carlos Streetscape (Top & Bottom)**



**Figure 1.7 - Laurel Street 600 Block Sidewalk**

# 1.10 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Downtown Specific Plan, launched by the City of San Carlos in early 2022, has been an inclusive and collaborative effort to shape a vibrant and livable Downtown. Informed by a series of workshops and online surveys, the City worked closely with the community, and the City Council appointed an 18-member Downtown Advisory Committee (DTAC) to develop a shared vision and guiding principles and provide input into the street and public space designs for the Downtown Streetscape Master Plan and the Downtown Specific Plan policies. The DTAC members represented business operators, property owners, older adults, community members with special needs, the City's Economic Development Advisory Commission, Parks, Recreation and Culture Commission, Youth Advisory Council, the San Mateo County Chamber of Commerce, and the community at-large. The Downtown Streetscape Master Plan and Downtown Specific Plan processes, occurring between June 2022 and November 2025, were grounded in ongoing community engagement that gathered diverse perspectives from residents, business owners, youth, and other stakeholders. This iterative process ensured the proposed streetscape improvements and planning strategies and policies truly reflect the aspirations and needs of the San Carlos community.

Early community feedback emphasized the need for a more pedestrian-friendly environment, leading to proposals for wider sidewalks, more urban greenery, and flexible public spaces to accommodate a diverse mix of events and activities. Through multiple rounds of engagement from surveys, workshops, and study sessions, the themes of comfort, safety, and public space activation, improved Downtown connectivity, and balanced economic opportunity consistently emerged. Stakeholders

helped refine ideas around integrating public amenities with support for local businesses, while concerns about parking and traffic flow were addressed through detailed analysis. As the project progressed, community feedback directly influenced adjustments to design, programming, and infrastructure, resulting in a thoughtful and inclusive roadmap for San Carlos's Downtown transformation.



**Photos 1-3: Ideation Workshop: Community Feedback on the Opportunities, Constraints and the Concept Alternatives**  
(Source: WRT)



## DTAC Meeting - Welcome and Orientation

June 2022

The first Downtown Advisory Committee (DTAC) meeting served as a welcome and orientation for members. The City and project team introduced the planning process, outlined the goals of the Downtown Specific Plan, and provided an overview of the committee's role in guiding the vision for the future of Downtown San Carlos.



## DTAC Meeting

July 2022

DTAC members picked up their binders, received instructions on accessing future materials, and set up their official City email accounts. The meeting concluded with an outdoor ice cream social and icebreaker, where members shared what they value about Downtown and their hopes for its future.



## Stakeholder Focus Groups Interviews

August 2022

The City hosted focus groups with key stakeholders to understand challenges and needs. Topics included infrastructure (RethinkWaste, Cal Water, Mid-Peninsula Water District), mobility (SV Bicycle Coalition, SamTrans, Caltrans, San Carlos Bikes, Healthy Cities Tutoring), seniors/children/special needs (Adult Community Center, Arbor Bay School, Art BIAS), and Downtown business and events (City Parks, Chamber of Commerce).





## Community Survey 1

August 2022

An interactive mapping survey gathered 470 comments on mobility, streetscape, gathering spaces, allowable uses, and other topics.



## Downtown Community Workshop #1

August 2022

About 150 community members joined the first virtual workshop to learn about the Downtown Specific Plan, review existing conditions, and share input through live polling and breakout discussions.



## DTAC Meeting

September 2022

Staff gave a presentation on existing conditions and market analysis overview. DTAC conducted an interactive exercise and staff gave a recap of the Downtown Community Workshop



## DTAC Meeting

January 2023

Presentation by consultant team on the draft concepts for the 700 Block Laurel Street, followed by DTAC discussion.



## Downtown Community Workshop #2

February 2023

The second workshop drew 70 participants to explore ideas for the 700 block of Laurel Street, new plazas and parks, and reimagined alleyways. Input was collected through live polling, Q&A, and discussion.



## Coffee and Comments Open House

March 2023

Over 70 community members joined an open house at the San Carlos Library to review three preliminary Downtown concepts, including improvements to Laurel Street, Harrington Park, alleyways, and a potential new plaza.



## Community Survey 2

March 2023

A follow-up online survey captured feedback on the same concepts discussed in February's workshop and March's open house, with results informing design ideas for Laurel Street, Harrington Park, alleyways, and a new plaza.



## Downtown Specific Plan – Status Update and Progress Report

April 17 and April 24, 2023

City staff presented progress on the Downtown's 20-year vision to the Planning & Transportation



Commission and City Council. Foundational concepts included Laurel Street closure, alley improvements, Harrington Park design, and a new plaza.

### **Downtown Business Stakeholder Meeting**

*May 2023*

Following the Council's decision to permanently close the 700 block of Laurel Street, City staff met with 23 representatives from Downtown businesses at Stamp Bar & Grill to discuss opportunities and next steps.



### **DTAC Meeting**

*June 2023*

Building on City Council's input from April 24, City staff shared project update, community feedback and work in progress, followed by DTAC comments and discussion.



### **Streetscape Master Plan Kick-Off Meeting**

*September 2023*

Building on City Council's April 24, 2023, direction to permanently close the 700 block of Laurel Street, the Streetscape Master Plan process began with a kick-off meeting to establish a foundation for the Plan. This meeting introduced the project team and stakeholders to the plan's scope, objectives, and early design considerations.



**Photo: Project Team Conducting PRCC Meeting** (Source: WRT)



## Interdepartmental Meeting

*November 2023*

These sessions gathered input from multiple City departments to ensure alignment and coordination across City services.



## DTAC Meeting

*November 2023*

The Downtown Advisory Committee (DTAC) reviewed the revised vision, guiding principles, and initial design alternatives. Discussions focused on mobility strategies, public space design, and streetscape improvements to reinforce Downtown San Carlos as the community's living room.



## Virtual & In-Person Ideation Workshop

*December 2023*

Hosted both online and in-person, this workshop invited community members to share ideas for enhancing the Downtown streetscape. Participants emphasized greenery, flexible gathering spaces, safe and accessible movement, and programming that supports both daily life and special events.



## Online Survey

*December 2023*

A citywide survey captured broader community input on streetscape priorities, pedestrian accessibility, and



design elements. Feedback informed the development of design concepts for key streets within the Plan Area.

## EDAC & PRCC Meetings

*January–February 2024*

The Economic Development Advisory Commission (EDAC) explored the potential business benefits of proposed improvements, while the Parks, Recreation, and Culture Commission (PRCC) addressed integration with park areas, cultural features, and logistics for large events like the Farmers' Market and Art & Wine Faire.



## Interdepartmental Meeting

*February 2024*

This session ensured continued coordination across departments as detailed design strategies for street cross-sections, alleys, and public spaces progressed.



## Youth Advisory Council (YAC) Meeting

*March 2024*

Engaging with the YAC brought forward youth perspectives on street activation, active transportation, safety, and recreational programming.



## DTAC Meeting

March 2024

This meeting further refined feedback on public space programming, street designs, and mobility strategies.



## Focus Group Meetings

February - May 2024

Targeted sessions with Art Bias, SamTrans, the Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition, and the Fire Department addressed technical issues related to transit operations, bicycle infrastructure, and emergency access.



## Planning and Transportation Commission (PTC) Meeting

May 2024

The PTC reviewed DTAC-endorsed street designs, focusing on alignment with long-term planning and transportation policy.



## City Council Meeting

June 2024

The City Council reviewed the plan's progress, shared feedback on street and public space design, and recommended refinements based on community and Council input.



**Photo: Youth Council during hands-on workshop session at YAC Meeting** (Source: WRT)



### **Online Survey**

*August 2024*

A second citywide survey gathered input on materials, planting, paving, and street furnishings to refine the streetscape character and experience.



### **Downtown Business Stakeholder Meeting**

*August 2024*

This meeting addressed concerns from local businesses, including outdoor dining, access, and parking, ensuring the plan supports vibrant economic activity.



### **All Commissions Meeting**

*September 2024*

A joint session with DTAC, EDAC, PRCC, YAC, and Downtown Subcommittee members ensured the Plan reflected broad, cross-departmental input and community priorities.



### **City Council Meeting**

*September 2024*

The City Council formally endorsed the final street designs through Resolution No. 2024-111, marking a key milestone in the plan's development.



### **Interdepartmental Meeting - Goals and Policies**

*March 2025*

City departments convened to align on the goals and policy framework for the Downtown San Carlos Specific Plan, ensuring consistency with citywide priorities and operational feasibility.



### **DTAC Meeting - Goals and Policies**

*March 2025*

The DTAC reviewed and provided feedback on draft goals and policies, emphasizing livability, walkability, and support for local businesses.



### **Planning and Transportation Commission (PTC) and Council Meetings**

*April 2025*

The Planning and Transportation Commission reviewed and City Council adopted the final Streetscape Master Plan on April 28, 2025.



### **DTAC Meeting – Parking**

*April 2025*

The committee focused on the on-street parking, wayfinding and parking management strategies, discussing the balance between flexible use of parking spaces, shared parking models, and business access needs.



## **DTAC Meeting - Specific Plan Policies and Standards**

*June 3, 2025*

The committee reviewed draft goals, policies, actions, and standards for the Downtown Specific Plan and provided feedback critical to implementing the vision of making Downtown San Carlos as a vibrant, pedestrian-friendly, safe, charming, futuristic, and accessible destination.



## **Interdepartmental Meeting - Specific Plan**

*June 6, 2025*

City departments met to review the goals, policies, standards, and actions and provide feedback to strengthen the recommendations in the Specific Plan.



## **PTC Study Session**

*June 16, 2025*

The Planning & Transportation Commission received a staff presentation and provided direction on the draft Downtown Specific Plan.



**Photo: Pilot Demonstration of Sidewalk Widths** (Source: WRT)



**Photo: Ideation Workshop** (Source: WRT)



## **City Council Study Session**

*June 23, 2025*

The City Council discussed the Downtown Specific Plan, offering feedback and guidance on proposed policies and design standards.



## **Downtown Business Stakeholder Meeting**

*August 7, 2025*

Staff went door-to-door inviting restaurant operators and retailers to a meeting at Stamp Bar & Grill. Fourteen representatives from the business community shared feedback on proposed outdoor dining and retail display requirements for the Downtown Specific Plan.



## **City Council Study Session**

*August 25, 2025*

The City Council discussed the Downtown Specific Plan, offering feedback and guidance on proposed policies and design standards.



## **Planning and Transportation Commission Hearing**

*November 03, 2025*

The Planning and Transportation Commission adopted Resolution No. 2025-14 recommending the City Council adopt the Downtown Specific Plan.



## **City Council Hearings**

*November 24, 2025 and January 26, 2026*

The City Council adopted Ordinance No. 1633 adopting the Downtown Specific Plan.



**Photo: DTAC Meeting** (Source: City of San Carlos)





# 02

## VISION, PRINCIPLES, AND FRAMEWORK FOR URBAN DESIGN AND POLICY

## 2.1 VISION STATEMENT

The San Carlos Downtown Specific Plan establishes a strong vision for San Carlos' Downtown providing the essential ingredients to fulfill its role as San Carlos' "living room". As the Vision Statement proclaims,

***"Downtown is the heart of San Carlos that provides a vibrant, pedestrian-friendly, safe, charming, futuristic, and accessible destination for the community and strongly expresses its unique culture and heritage. It is a place for celebration and gathering that offers diverse and authentic experiences through a draw of food, retail, services, art and music in a visually attractive environment for the growing community. Downtown is an inclusive place with easy access for all, opportunities for housing and businesses of all types, and inviting spaces for all users. Downtown San Carlos is a sustainable district, with landscape that supports ecological and community health & well-being."***

The Vision Statement was developed based on input from the DTAC, stakeholders, community members, and City decision makers through an extensive civic engagement process.



## A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO A SUCCESSFUL DOWNTOWN

Downtown San Carlos is more than just a geographical location. It is the City's commercial and cultural hub, characterized by a high concentration of businesses, jobs, cultural institutions, and social infrastructure. As the "beating heart" of San Carlos, the Downtown serves as both a neighborhood and a destination—a place where community identity, economic vitality, and shared experiences converge.

To honor the Downtown, the Specific Plan establishes a clear Urban Design Framework composed of four critical layers or Guiding Principles: Mobility & Connectivity, Character & Identity, and Downtown Vibrancy with an overarching focus on Equity & Resilience. This approach brings all the tools of making a successful Downtown to bear considering social, economic and experiential factors, and developing strategies that integrate these components seamlessly.

The framework recognizes that while individual needs matter, they must be translated into the needs of the entire community—both today and for future generations through 2045. The Plan is forward-looking, acknowledging that San Carlos is growing and that more people will be living near Downtown over the next 20 years. These future residents and workers will require safe streets, wider sidewalks, accessible bicycle lanes, reliable transit connections, and a full range of services to support daily life.

## 2.2 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Based on the Downtown vision statement, Guiding Principles for Placemaking & Identity, Mobility & Connectivity, Downtown Vibrancy, and Equity & Resilience help to frame the Downtown Specific Plan and Streetscape Master Plan goals, policies, actions and standards.

## 2.3 URBAN DESIGN FRAMEWORK

In order to achieve the intent behind the Guiding Principles, an urban design framework was developed with four layers – one for each of the Guiding Principles.

### EQUITY AND RESILIENCE

The Plan Area is envisioned as an equitable and resilient place; one that offers social, economic, housing, and recreational opportunities at varying levels of affordability for all users while preparing for the realities of a changing climate. A balanced mix of shopping, dining, personal services, community amenities, jobs, housing, and public spaces will ensure that Downtown continues to serve the diverse needs of the community, welcoming everyone.

Equitable access to Downtown will be reinforced through a full range of mobility choices, making it easy to arrive by foot, bicycle, transit, or car. Streetscape and public realm design will incorporate green infrastructure and urban greening strategies that address urban heat and flood risk while also enhancing comfort, shade, and visual character.

High standards for sustainable design will guide new development, encouraging buildings to use energy and water efficiently while reducing carbon emissions. Greening strategies and open spaces will be prioritized not only for their ecological function and water conservation benefits, but also for their role in connecting people to the natural environment and enhancing community well-being.

Together, these strategies will support the City's broader climate goals: minimizing auto trips to and from Downtown, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and expanding access to affordable electric vehicle charging—while reinforcing Downtown as a vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable heart of San Carlos.



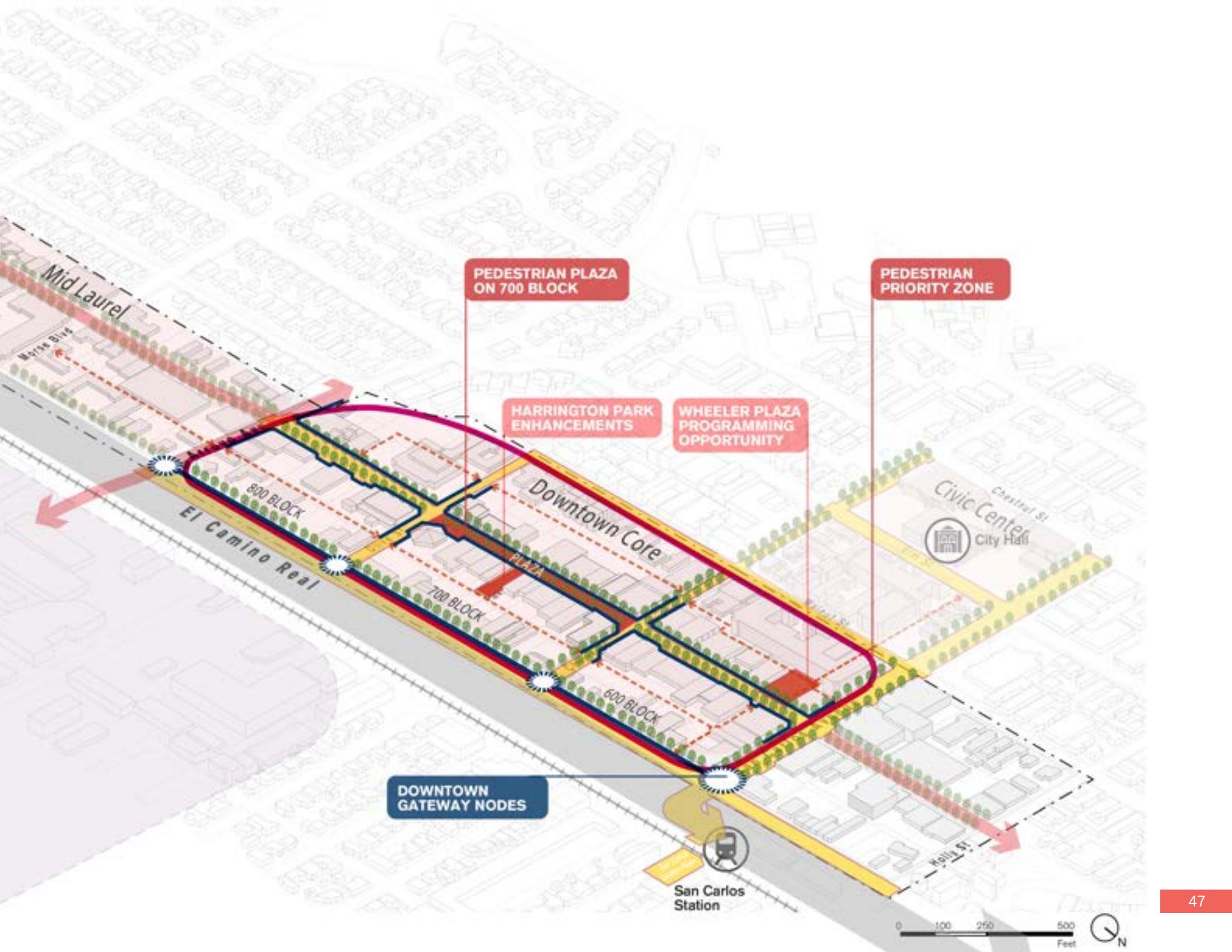
**FIGURE 2.1 - Vision and Guiding Principles**

## PLACEMAKING AND IDENTITY FRAMEWORK

The Placemaking and Identity framework identifies a Downtown core centering around the Pedestrian Priority Zone – the connection from the San Carlos Caltrain Station, up the 1100 and 1200 blocks of San Carlos Ave to Laurel Street and down the 600, 700 and 800 blocks with the center of the new Centennial Plaza midway on the closed 700 block of Laurel Street. Three other Downtown-area sub-districts are defined as the Civic Center, Mid-Laurel and SoLa (short for South Laurel). All of these districts offer opportunities for streetscape placemaking that can lend each a distinct identity. The 500 block of Laurel Street retains its existing configuration, with streetscape enhancements focused on improving the pedestrian experience through the addition of trees and wider, more walkable sidewalks. El Camino Real also has the potential to reinforce placemaking strategies for the Downtown by providing pedestrian-scaled frontage along the Downtown edge as well as protected bicycle lanes, and safer crossings, and marking important entry points into the Downtown core.

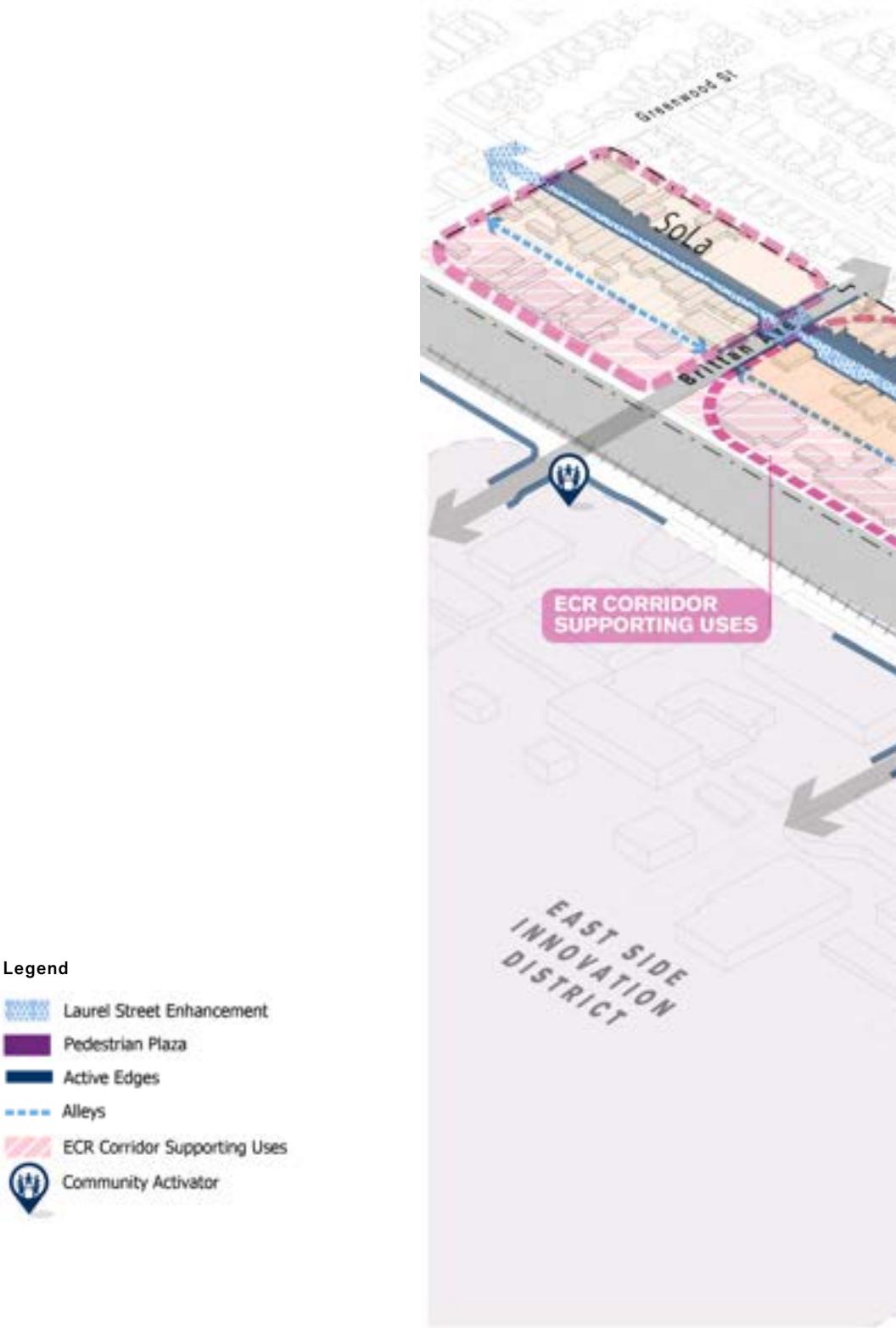


**FIGURE 2.2 - Placemaking and Identity Framework**

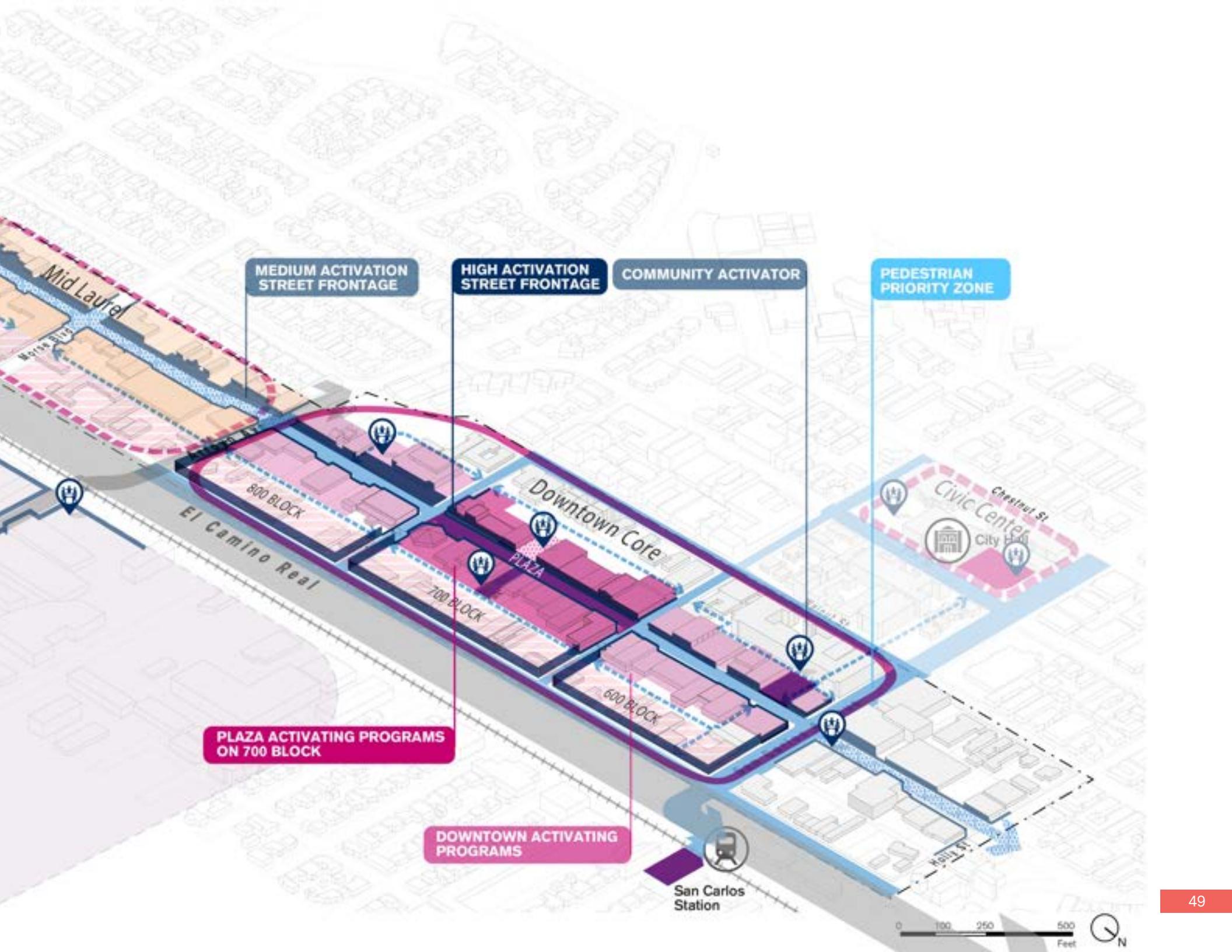


## DOWNTOWN VIBRANCY FRAMEWORK

The Downtown Vibrancy framework establishes priorities for activation with the Downtown core being the highest level of activation through programmable space as well as interaction with ground floor commercial uses. "Community Activator" spaces offer additional opportunity for events, pop-up businesses and other flexible programming.



**Figure 2.3 - Downtown Vibrancy Framework**

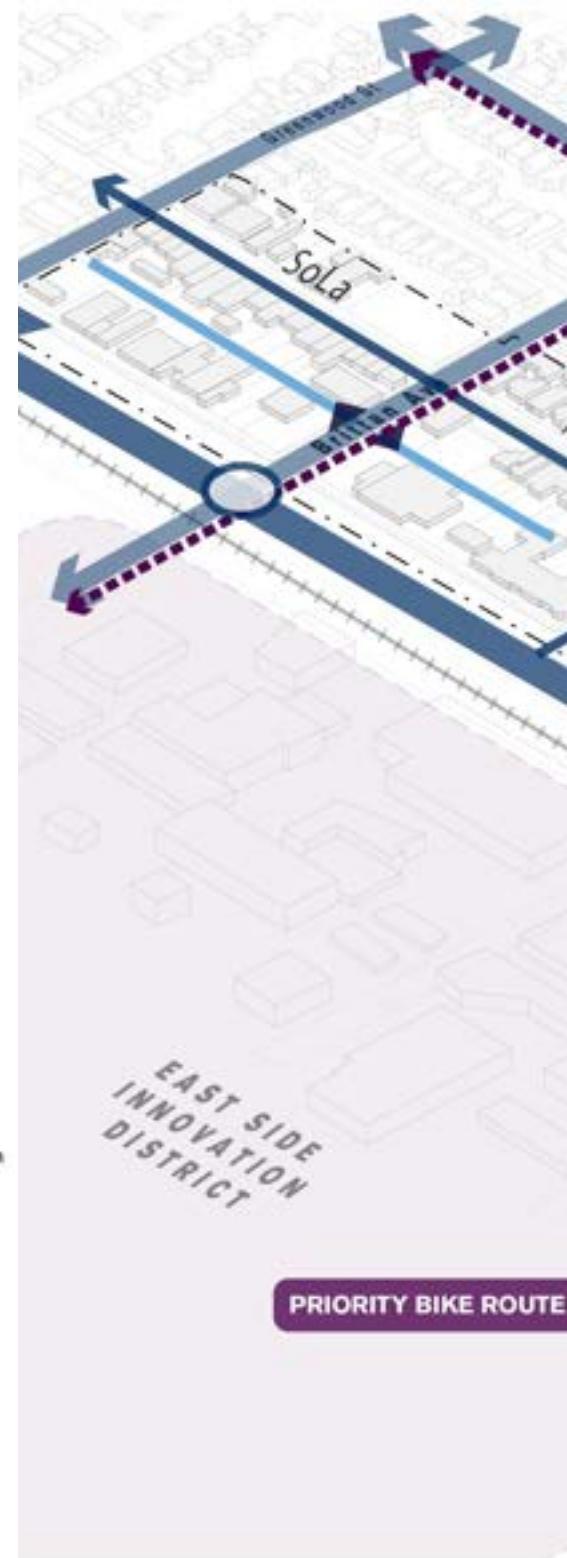


## MOBILITY & CONNECTIVITY FRAMEWORK

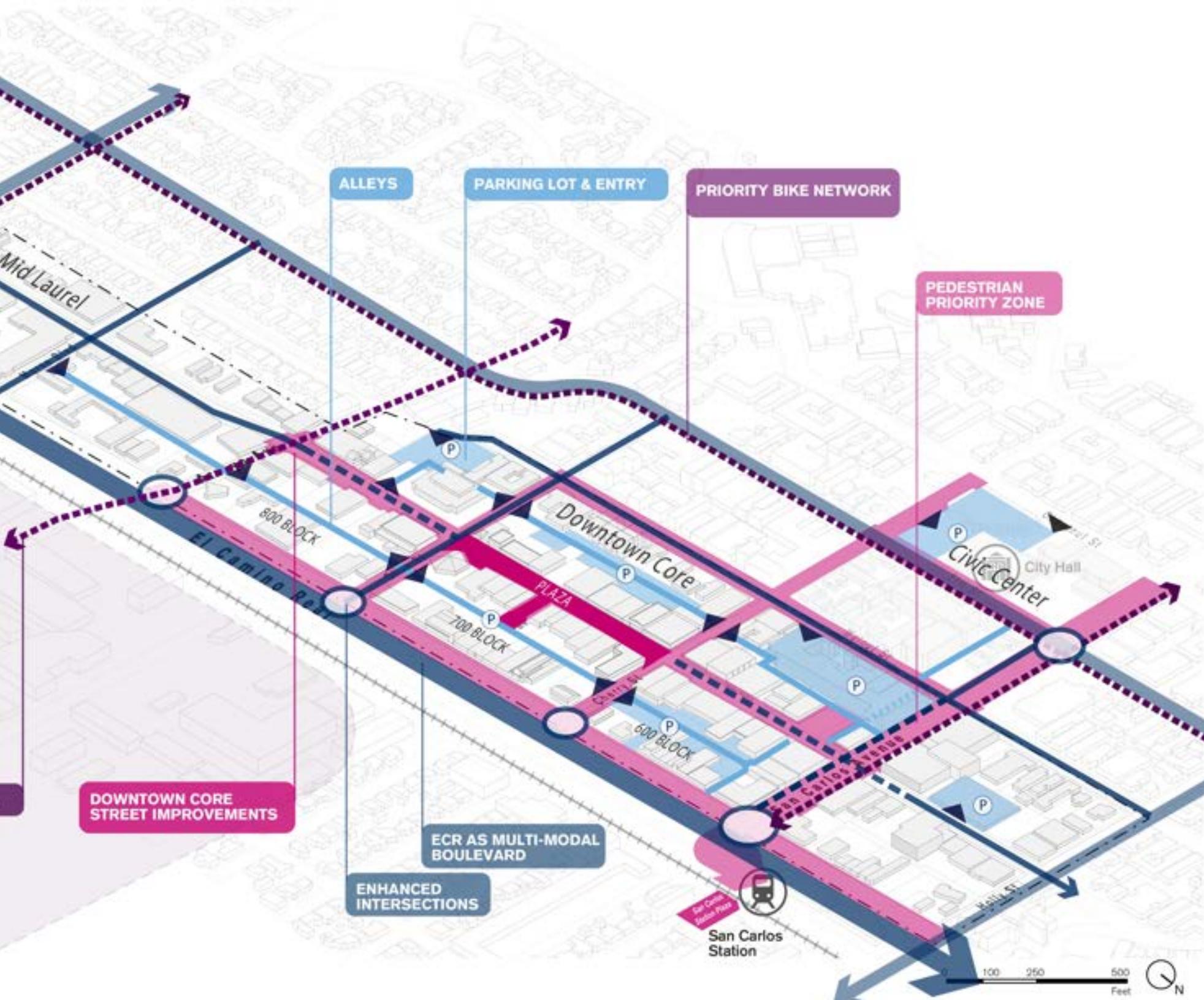
The Mobility & Connectivity framework shows a fully developed network of Downtown streets. Each has its place in a circulation hierarchy balancing all the various modes of mobility (pedestrian, bicycle, transit, vehicle, etc.).

Pedestrian circulation is prioritized along the 1100 and 1200 blocks of San Carlos Avenue and the 600, 700, and 800 blocks of Laurel Street; vehicular and bicycle access is accommodated on San Carlos Avenue and surrounding streets. For cars, the network prioritizes efficient access to parking facilities, circumventing the Downtown core to the greatest extent possible.

To accomplish all this (and as shown in Figure 2.4), each street and street type is rebalanced with its appropriate emphasis. This includes the Downtown pedestrian priority routes, priority bicycle routes, and strategies to allow San Carlos Avenue and El Camino Real to become more pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly, and overall, to allow vehicles to flow more efficiently around the Downtown core and to parking areas.



**Figure 2.4 - Mobility and Connectivity Framework**



## 2.4 GOALS AND POLICIES FRAMEWORK

The goals and policy framework will guide the evolution of Downtown San Carlos into a more vibrant, inclusive, and resilient district over the coming decades. Rooted in community values and informed by technical analysis, these policies are organized into key thematic areas that reflect the multifaceted nature of Downtown San Carlos.

Together, they provide a comprehensive blueprint for shaping land use, urban design, mobility, economic development, public space, sustainability, and infrastructure. Each policy area builds upon the vision established through the planning process and offers direction for decision-making, implementation, and investment.

This framework ensures that future growth and change contribute to a cohesive, livable, and economically-robust Downtown that meets the needs of both current and future San Carlos residents, workers, and visitors.

The following chapters discuss in detail the policy areas listed below:

- ◆ Land Use and Urban Design
- ◆ Prosperity and Economic Development
- ◆ Mobility and Connectivity
- ◆ Parking and Transportation Demand Management (TDM)
- ◆ Public Realm
- ◆ Public Art
- ◆ Sustainability and Resiliency
- ◆ Infrastructure and Utilities
- ◆ Administration and Implementation



**Photo: Laurel Street 700 Block, Street Mural** (Source: City of San Carlos)





# 03

## LAND USE AND URBAN DESIGN

## 3.1 OVERVIEW

This chapter provides direction on land use and the character of development within the Plan Area by establishing policies, actions, and standards that support the vision for a more inclusive Downtown, one that offers housing, jobs, placemaking, and community amenities. The Downtown Specific Plan seeks to cultivate a distinct identity shaped by its built form and unique experiences. It aims to foster a vibrant, safe, and attractive environment for residents and visitors alike, while supporting local businesses and promoting economic vitality. The Land Use and Urban Design chapter is closely integrated with the Public Realm, Mobility and Transportation, Parking and Transportation Demand Management, and Prosperity and Economic Development chapters, which function together as a cohesive system.

**Goal:**

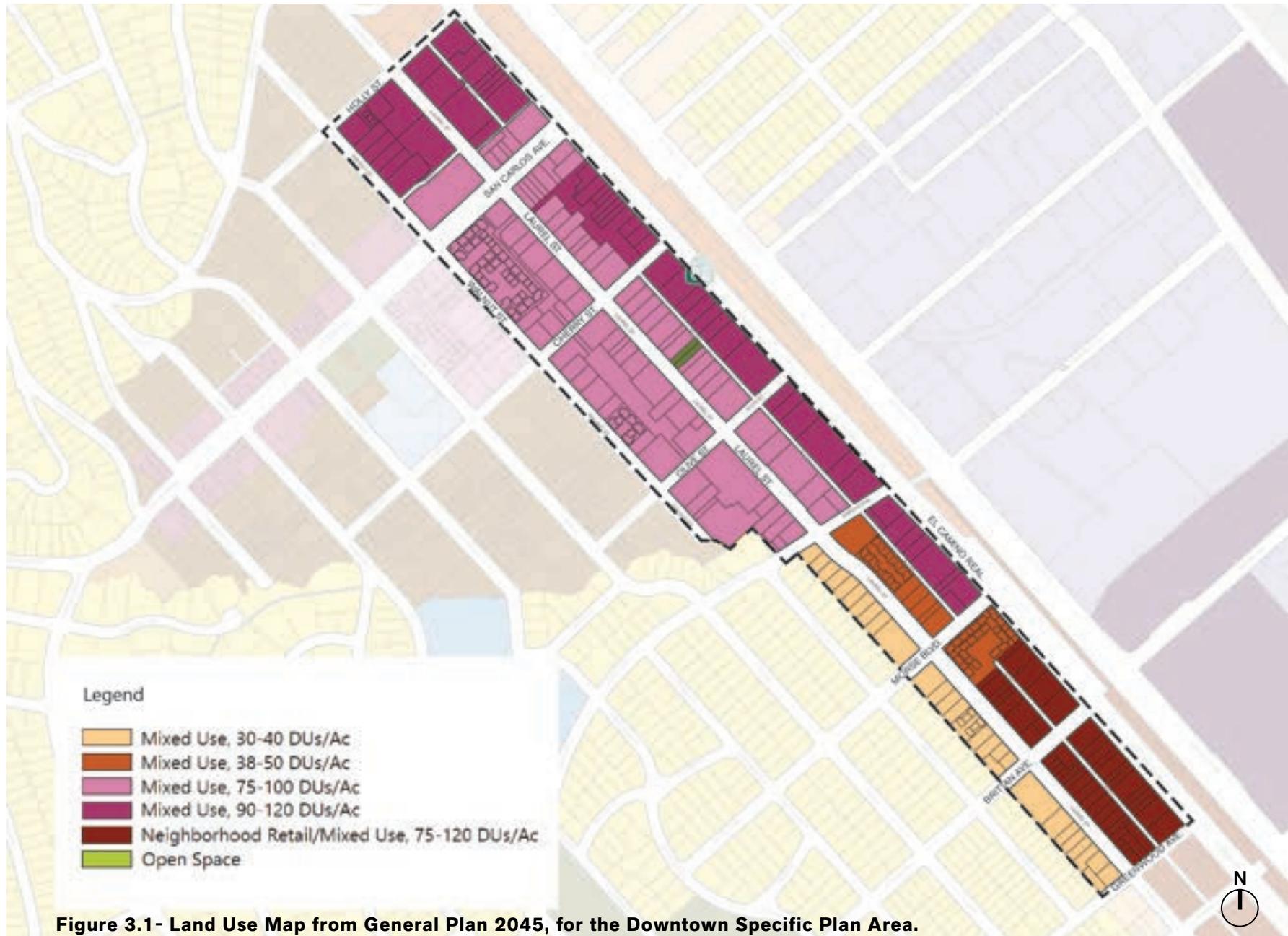
***San Carlos Downtown is a vital social place for the community, with a strong, distinct character and identity, rooted in its culture, history, and context. This identity is defined by thoughtful land use, the physical form of the built environment, and the overall experience of the Downtown area.***

## 3.2 LAND USE

The San Carlos General Plan establishes a strong foundation for the Downtown area by designating medium- to high-density land uses within the Downtown Specific Plan Area. Building upon this foundation, the Downtown Specific Plan provides refined direction for implementing the General Plan's land use vision. Chapter 2 of the Downtown Specific Plan introduced an Urban Design Framework for Equity and Resilience, Placemaking and Identity, Downtown Vibrancy, and Mobility and Connectivity, which integrates placemaking strategies and economic development with land use planning.

Land uses within the Specific Plan boundary remain consistent with the General Plan Land Use Map. The Downtown Specific Plan Area is comprised by a good portion of Plan Area 2, and a small portion of Plan Area 3; these Plan Areas are delineated in Figure 31: Planning Areas of the General Plan, Land Use Element. Notably, the Downtown Specific Plan Area is included in San Carlos' Priority Development Area (PDA), which promotes bringing "transit, jobs and housing together in Downtowns, along main streets and around rail stations." The San Carlos Caltrain Station is located within Plan Area 2, in close proximity to Downtown San Carlos, and is recognized as part of a Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) corridor, emphasizing higher-density housing, job growth, and enhanced multi-modal transportation options.

The Downtown core is generally defined as the 1100 and 1200 blocks of San Carlos Avenue and the 600, 700, and 800 blocks of Laurel Street. The Downtown core is primarily commercial, featuring a mix of restaurants,



**Figure 3.1- Land Use Map from General Plan 2045, for the Downtown Specific Plan Area.**

personal services, and small retail shops. The Specific Plan seeks to preserve and enhance the Downtown core's role as a vibrant hub for commerce and social interaction by encouraging high-activation ground floor uses and dynamic programming. These active uses include retail, restaurants, and other pedestrian-oriented businesses that contribute to a lively, walkable environment and that serve daily needs. While nearly all the parcels in the Plan Area (except Harrington Park) have a mixed-use zoning designation, El Camino Real and San Carlos Avenue accommodate the highest density residential development. The Plan Area's close proximity to Caltrain makes it an ideal location for a rich mix of uses in a compact, transit-accessible setting.

The Specific Plan also reimagines El Camino Real, particularly the blocks within the Downtown core, as the "front door" to Downtown. This vision supports high-activation uses and business incubation, supported by mixed-use designations with high-density residential that fosters a walkable, pedestrian-friendly atmosphere and transforms El Camino Real from an auto-centric corridor to a multi-modal grand boulevard. South of Arroyo Avenue, neighborhood retail mixed-use zoning designations encourage small-format retail and continued main street activation. South of Arroyo Avenue and west of Laurel Street consist of low-density residential neighborhoods.

Preserving ground-floor commercial space is essential to maintaining vibrant, walkable, and economically resilient neighborhoods. These spaces support local businesses, provide everyday goods and services, and create active street environments that enhance public safety and community identity. Ground-floor commercial uses generate foot traffic,

foster social interaction, and contribute to the overall vitality of mixed-use districts. Protecting these spaces ensures long-term opportunities for small businesses, sustains local employment, and preserves the character and functionality of commercial corridors that residents and visitors rely on. Maintaining accessible, flexible, and appropriately scaled ground-floor commercial space is critical to economic sustainability and the resiliency of downtown.

## 3.3 FUTURE DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL

The future development potential within the Plan Area to the year 2045 was developed by evaluating each parcel against a defined set of criteria, including:

**Ownership Patterns:** Parcels with shared ownership, particularly adjacent ones, were considered more likely to redevelop, with City-owned parcels and alleys excluded from this assumption.

**Utilization Levels:** Parcels utilizing less than twenty five percent (25%) of their total area or allowable Floor Area Ratio (FAR) were identified as underutilized and therefore more likely to be redeveloped.

**Housing Element Designation:** Parcels identified as housing opportunity sites in the 2023–2031 Housing Element were prioritized for redevelopment potential.

**Planned or Approved Projects:** Sites with existing development approvals or projects already underway were excluded from further redevelopment consideration.

**Historic Significance:** Parcels with notable historic value were considered less likely to redevelop, consistent with General Plan policies that support adaptive reuse and preservation of historic character.

This analysis formed the basis of the build-out projections, summarized in Table 3.1. Over the 2025–2045 planning horizon, the area is projected to

accommodate significant net new development approximately:

- 168,672 sq. ft. of new office space; and
- 92,721 sq. ft. of general commercial; and
- 60,445 sq. ft. of restaurant uses; and
- 103,951 sq. ft. of hotel space; and
- 1,565 new residential units.

The build-out analysis anticipates approximately 1,565 new residential units over the planning horizon (i.e. to 2045), aligning with two Housing Element cycles—the 6th cycle (2023–2031) and 7th cycle (2032–2040)—plus an additional five years of projected development through 2045.

A total of 557 existing residential units were accounted for at the writing of this Plan. It is assumed that 82 of the existing residential units will be replaced with new development. As a result, only 475 existing units are counted toward the total build-out figure (557 total existing units minus 82 redeveloped units).

The total existing office square footage excludes 152,656 sq. ft. occupied by the SamTrans building, based on the assumption that these parcels will be redeveloped into a mixed-use project, potentially incorporating a smaller office component integrated with residential uses.

**TABLE 3.1**  
**SUMMARY OF BUILD-OUT PROJECTIONS DURING THE PLAN HORIZON**  
**(2025-2045)**

LAND USE	TOTAL EXISTING AREA (sq. ft.)	TOTAL NO. OF EXISTING RES. UNITS (CUMULATIVE OF PARCELS NOT LIKELY TO REDEVELOP)	NET NEW AREA IN 20 YEARS (sq. ft.)	TOTAL AREA IN 20 YEARS (sq. ft.)	NOTES & ASSUMPTIONS	2045 PROJECTIONS
Office	262,067	N/A	163,702	425,769	Total existing office square footage excludes 152,656 sq. Ft/ of SamTrans building, assuming impending redevelopment of those parcels into a mixed-use development, which could include a small office integrated with residential.	212,885 sq. ft.
General Commercial	356,340	N/A	92,721	449,061	Existing res. Units number includes built units, under construction units, and approved units.	224,531 sq. ft.
Restaurant	154,891	N/A	60,445	215,336	The build-out analysis projects about the same number of residential units (757) over two cycles of Housing Element Update - 6th cycle (2023-31) + 7th cycle (2032-2040) + development over additional 5 years (through 2045)	107,668 sq. ft.
Hotel	13,993	N/A	103,951	117,944	The build-out analysis assumes that 82 existing units will be redeveloped with new ones. Therefore no. of existing units included in the overall total units is 557-82=475.	58,972 sq. ft.
Residential (# of units)	557	475	1,565	2,040		2,040 (# of Units)

## 3.4 ZONING DISTRICTS WITHIN THE SPECIFIC PLAN AREA

The Plan Area includes the seven Zoning Districts derived and consistent with Chapter 18.05.010 Purpose of Mixed-Use Districts, Title 18 Zoning, San Carlos Municipal Code.

### **MU-DC-100 Mixed-Use Downtown Core:**

This district is intended to maintain the pedestrian-oriented environment in the heart of San Carlos's Downtown, with a focus on ground-level active storefronts and pedestrian- and transit-oriented development that encourages pedestrian activity and supports multi-modal transportation. Physical form is regulated to reflect the urban character of the Downtown core. Allowable uses include retail, commercial, and office uses, as well as residential development of up to one hundred (100) units per net.

### **MU-D-120 Mixed-Use Downtown:**

This district is intended to maintain the pedestrian-oriented environment around the Downtown core and connect surrounding districts. Physical form is regulated to provide shopfront buildings that frame the street and support pedestrian- and transit-oriented development that encourages pedestrian activity and supports multi-modal transportation. Allowable uses include retail, commercial, and office uses, as well as residential development of up to one hundred twenty (120) units per net.

### **MU-SB-100 Mixed-Use South Boulevard:**

This district is intended to facilitate the transformation of the southeastern portion of Laurel Street into a mixed-use corridor. The physical form varies to transition from MU-N-40 west of Laurel Street to MU-SB-120 on El Camino Real. This district allows a mix of residential development of up to one hundred (100) units per net and retail and commercial uses.

### **MU-SB-120 Mixed-Use South Boulevard:**

This district is intended to facilitate the transformation of the southern portion of El Camino Real into a multi-modal, mixed-use corridor. The physical form varies to reflect the urban character of the El Camino Real corridor. This district allows a mix of residential development of up to one hundred twenty (120) units per net and retail and commercial uses, as well as hotels and other commercial uses oriented towards a regional market.

### **MU-N-40 Neighborhood Mixed-Use:**

This district is intended to provide an appropriate transition from mixed-use areas into residential neighborhoods. This district allows a mix of residential and commercial development appropriately scaled to ensure a residential physical form to relate to adjacent single-family residential neighborhoods. Allowable uses include retail, commercial, and office uses, as well as residential development of up to forty (40) units per net.

### **MU-N-50 Neighborhood Mixed-Use:**

This district is intended to provide an appropriate transition from mixed-use areas into residential neighborhoods. This district allows a mix of residential and commercial development appropriately scaled to ensure

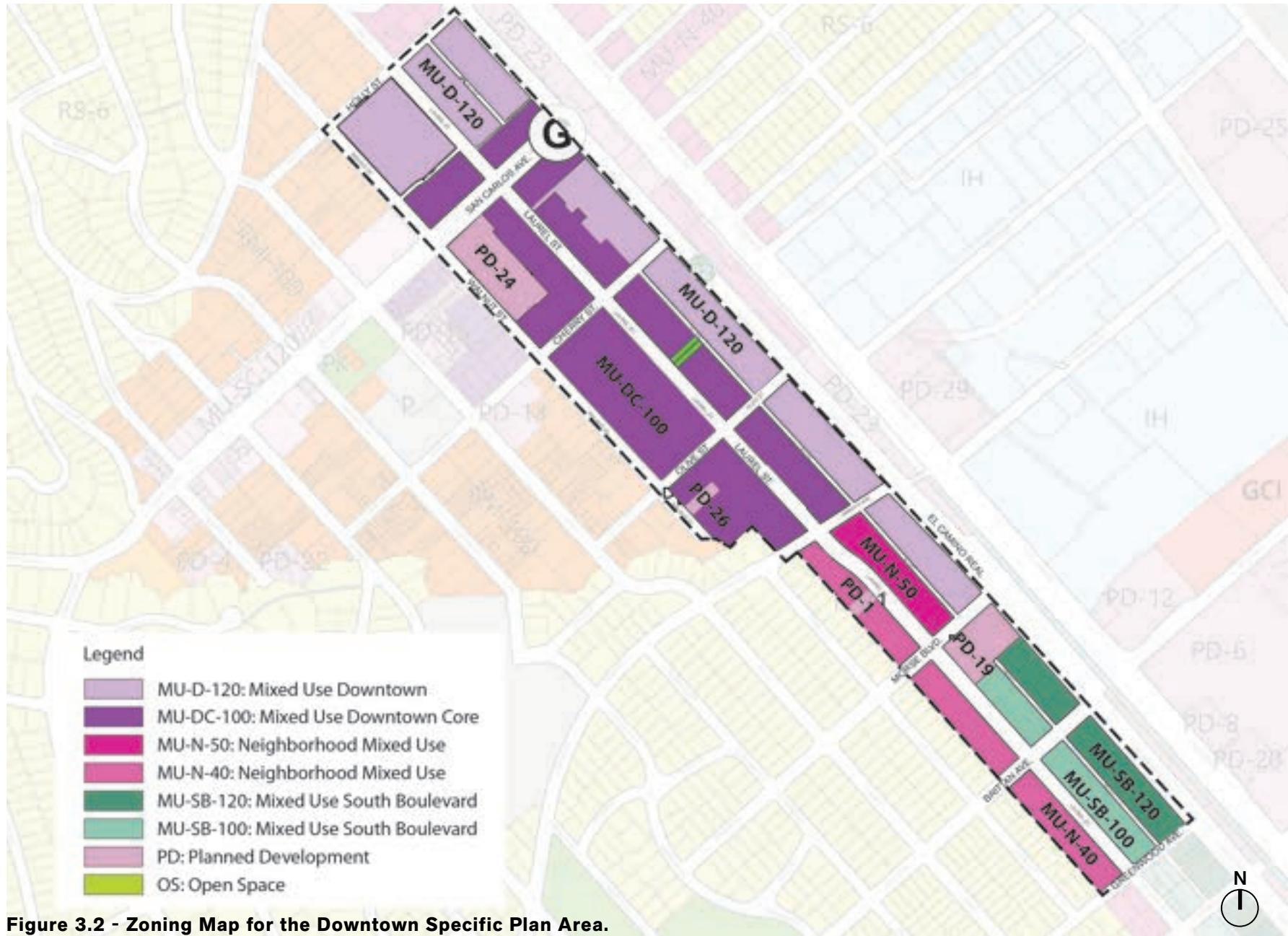
a residential physical form to relate to adjacent single-family residential neighborhoods. Allowable uses include retail, commercial, and office uses, as well as residential development of up to fifty (50) units per net.

**Planned Development (PD):**

A PD District enables coordinated development across one or more properties with standards tailored to site conditions. It offers flexibility in regulations (e.g., setbacks, building height, FAR, and open space), supports General and Specific Plan policies, promotes efficient public services, encourages creative and amenity-rich design, and ensures public health and safety. PD Districts are also used for adopting and administering specific plans under the Government Code.

**Park (PK):**

This classification is intended to maintain areas for active and passive public parks, including outdoor and indoor recreation such as playing fields, playgrounds, community centers, and other appropriate recreational uses.



**Figure 3.2 - Zoning Map for the Downtown Specific Plan Area.**

## 3.5 DEVELOPMENT POLICIES AND ACTIONS

**LU-1:** Establish the Plan Area as a pedestrian-oriented, vibrant mixed-use district and a community and cultural hub.

**LU-2:** Develop a unified identity for the Plan Area that also honors its historic significance.

**LU-3:** Create a distinct identity for each sub-area within the Plan Area: The Downtown Core, Mid-Laurel, and South Laurel (SoLa), by prioritizing appropriate land uses, development character and intensity, and public realm design.

**LU-4:** Maximize development potential within the Plan Area, encouraging a mix of uses that create vitality and vibrancy by offering diverse employment opportunities, support various businesses, provide community amenities and social gathering spaces, and encourage new residential development that can add to the customer base and support activation throughout the day and night.

**LU-5:** Coordinate with SamTrans to align the redevelopment of its headquarters parcel with a mix of land uses including housing, services, public space, and other community-serving amenities.

**LU-6:** Encourage a mix of uses that promote convenience, economic vitality, fiscal stability, safety and a high quality of life.

**Action LU-6A:** *To ensure the Downtown remains vibrant with a mix of businesses and offerings for the San Carlos community, conduct additional research and evaluation of the City's Formula Business Ordinance and consider removing constraints.*

**Action LU-6B:** *To ensure Downtown vibrancy, develop a program to monitor the mix of Downtown businesses on a regular basis, identify needs, and make adjustments to land use regulations as necessary.*

**Action LU-6C:** *Review the definition of Formula Businesses and Personal Services and amend as necessary.*

**LU-7:** Promote a population in the Plan Area to better support Downtown businesses.

**LU-8:** The Downtown core (1100 and 1200 blocks of San Carlos Avenue and the 600, 700, and 800 blocks of Laurel Street) shall seek to provide a mix of uses, including dining, retail, and everyday services and needs, to become a Downtown that supports the local residents, workforce and businesses.

**LU-9:** Enhance the identity and function of Laurel Street as the “heart of San Carlos”, prioritizing a unique experience on the 600, 700, and 800 blocks of Laurel Street and 1100 and 1200 blocks of San Carlos Avenue and transforming these areas into the “living room” of the community.

**LU-10:** Support land use and distinct design strategies for the 1100–1200 blocks of San Carlos Avenue that establish this segment of the Downtown core as a multi-modal gateway and welcoming entrance to Downtown.

**LU-11:** Promote and support a mix of uses that draw visitors and the local community into the Downtown as a place to do business, shop, dine, gather, and have easy access to everyday needs on the 600, 700, and 800 blocks of Laurel Street and the 1100 and 1200 blocks of San Carlos Avenue.

**LU-12:** Enhance the experience along El Camino Real through infill development with active ground-floor uses and high-quality architecture

and street greening, thereby establishing it as the front door to Downtown and as an active transportation-friendly gateway at key intersections such as San Carlos Avenue and El Camino Real, Arroyo Avenue and El Camino Real, and Brittan Avenue and El Camino Real.

**LU-13:** Ensure zoning regulations are adaptive by making adjustments as necessary in response to new challenges, opportunities, policy directives, and state law, while preserving long-term consistency with the Downtown vision.

**Action LU-13:** Pursuant to Senate Bill 79, effective July 1, 2026 and signed by the Governor on (Oct 10, 2025) San Carlos will initiate amendments to its zoning ordinance to make development standards consistent with the provisions of the bill.

**LU-14:** Prioritize ground-floor activation (through food and beverage, retail and other activating uses) along the 600, 700, and 800 blocks of Laurel Street and the 1100 and 1200 blocks of San Carlos Avenue and at key intersections of El Camino Real with Arroyo Avenue and Brittan Avenue.

**LU-15:** Ensure that all mixed-use buildings with retail and service commercial uses on the ground floor follow consistent design principles such as scale, transparency, and frontage rhythm to support a unified and engaging public realm experience, without requiring identical visual designs.

**LU-16:** Encourage high-performing retail spaces on the ground floor that support successful retail activity and the economic stability of the Downtown area.

**LU-17:** Ground-floor public spaces along the 600, 700, and 800 blocks of Laurel Street and 1100 and 1200 blocks of San Carlos Avenue are encouraged to incorporate outdoor dining and retail displays, including but not limited to bistro seating, awnings, and umbrellas to create visible, inviting,

human-scaled and comfortable spaces that activate the Downtown core.

**LU-18:** Establish development standards that improve the visual quality of development, creating a unified, distinctive, and attractive character along Downtown streets within the Plan Area.

**LU-19:** Promote and encourage secondary business entrances along the alleyways; secondary entrances should be clean, maintained, organized, landscaped, well-lit, and with enclosed trash receptacles to create a welcoming presence acknowledging the need for safe pedestrian circulation, wayfinding and ease of access.

**LU-20:** Taller buildings introduce complex fire life safety requirements including higher fire-flows, smoke control, emergency elevator access, fire command centers, and standpipe systems per California Fire Code §907-912. All developments 4+ stories must be reviewed for enhanced life safety systems.

**LU-21:** Encourage vibrant, pedestrian-oriented streets by incentivizing ground-floor retail, commercial services, and other active uses in designated areas. This policy is intended to support economic vitality, enhance the public realm, and create walkable mixed-use districts.

**Action LU-21:** Consider the creation of regulatory incentives, such as a Ground Floor Activation Overlay Zone (GFAOZ) to incentivize ground-floor retail, commercial services, and other active uses in designated areas, especially along El Camino Real. The overlay is intended to support economic vitality, enhance the public realm, and create walkable mixed-use districts.

## 3.6 LAND USE REGULATIONS

Table 3.2 prescribes the land use regulations for the mixed-use and park districts within the Downtown Specific Plan Area. The regulations for each district are established by letter designations as follows:

“P” designates permitted uses.

“M” designates use classifications that are permitted after review and approval of a minor use permit by the Zoning Administrator.

“C” designates use classifications that are permitted after review and approval of a conditional use permit by the Planning and Transportation Commission.

“(#)” Numbers in parentheses refer to specific limitations listed at the end of the table.

“-” Designates uses that are not permitted.

Use classifications listed in the table below are defined in Chapter 18.40, Use Classifications of the San Carlos Municipal Code. In cases where a specific land use or activity is not defined, the Director shall assign the land use or activity to a classification that is substantially similar in character. Use classifications and sub classifications not listed in the table or not found to be substantially similar to the uses below are prohibited.

Table 3.2

**LAND USE REGULATIONS FOR THE DISTRICTS WITHIN THE DOWNTOWN SPECIFIC PLAN AREA. ADDITIONAL REGULATIONS REFER TO SAN CARLOS MUNICIPAL CODE SECTIONS CONTAINED IN TITLE 18, ZONING.**

USE CLASSIFICATIONS	MU-DC-100	MU-D-120	MU-SB-100	MU-SB-120	MU-N-40	MU-N-50	PK	ADDITIONAL REGULATIONS
Residential Uses								
Residential Housing Types	See subclassifications below							
Multi-Unit Residential	P(1)	P(17)	P	P(17)	P	P	-	
Accessory Dwelling Unit	P	P	P	P	P	P	-	Only if it includes a proposed or existing dwelling
Junior Accessory Dwelling Unit	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Elderly and Long-Term Care	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Family Child Care	See subclassifications below							
Small	P	P	P	P	P	P	-	
Large	P	P	P	P	P	P	-	See SCMC Section 18.23.090, Day care centers and large family child care homes
Residential Care Facilities	See subclassifications below							
General	-	M(1)	-	-	-	-	-	See SCMC Section 18.23.200, Residential care facilities
Limited	P	P	P	P	P	P	-	
Senior	-	M(1)	-	-	-	-	-	See SCMC Section 18.23.200, Residential care facilities
Single Room Occupancy	C(1)	C(1)	C(1)	C	C	C	-	See SCMC Section 18.23.220, Single room occupancy hotels
Transitional Housing	P	P	P	P	P	P	-	See SCMC Section 18.23.250, Transitional and supportive housing

Table 3.2

**LAND USE REGULATIONS FOR THE DISTRICTS WITHIN THE DOWNTOWN SPECIFIC PLAN AREA. ADDITIONAL REGULATIONS REFER TO SAN CARLOS MUNICIPAL CODE SECTIONS CONTAINED IN TITLE 18, ZONING.**

USE CLASSIFICATIONS	MU-DC-100	MU-D-120	MU-SB-100	MU-SB-120	MU-N-40	MU-N-50	PK	ADDITIONAL REGULATIONS
Supportive Housing	P	P	P	P	P	P	-	See SCMC Section 18.23.250, Transitional and supportive housing
Public and Semi-Public Uses								
Colleges and Trade Schools, Public or Private	-	-	P	P	-	-	-	
Community Assembly, Less Than 3,500 Square Feet	P	P	P	P	M	M	C	See SCMC Section 18.23.080, Community assembly facilities
Community Assembly, 3,500 Square Feet or More	-	C	M	M	-	-	C	
Community Garden	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	
Cultural Institutions	C	P	M	M	M	M	C	
Day Care Centers	-	P	P	P	P	P	-	See SCMC Section 18.23.090, Day care
Emergency Shelter	-	-	P	P	-	-	-	See SCMC Section 18.23.110, Emergency shelters
Government Offices	C	P	P	P	P	P	-	
Hospitals and Clinics	-	P	P	P	-	-	-	
Instructional Services	P (16)	P	P	P	P	P	-	See SCMC Section 18.23.260, Formula business uses
Park and Recreation Facilities, Public	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	
Public Safety Facilities	-	C	C	C	C	C	-	
Schools, Public or Private	-	-	C	C	C	C	-	
Social Service Facilities	-	-	C	C	C	C	-	
Cemeteries								

Table 3.2

**LAND USE REGULATIONS FOR THE DISTRICTS WITHIN THE DOWNTOWN SPECIFIC PLAN AREA. ADDITIONAL REGULATIONS REFER TO SAN CARLOS MUNICIPAL CODE SECTIONS CONTAINED IN TITLE 18, ZONING.**

USE CLASSIFICATIONS	MU-DC-100	MU-D-120	MU-SB-100	MU-SB-120	MU-N-40	MU-N-50	PK	ADDITIONAL REGULATIONS
Commercial Uses								
Animal Care, Sales and Services	See subclassifications below							
Grooming and Pet Stores	C	P	P	P	P(2)	P(2)	-	See SCMC Section 18.23.260, Formula business uses
Veterinary Services	-	C(2)	C(2)	C(2)	C(2)	C(2)	-	
Artists' Studios	M	P	P	P	P(2)	P(2)	-	
Automobile/Vehicle Sales and Services	See subclassifications below							
Automobile Rentals	-	-	C(4)	C(4)	-	-	-	See SCMC Section 18.23.050, Automobile/vehicle sales and services,
Automobile/Vehicle Sales and Leasing	-	P(3, 4)	P(3,4)	P(3, 4)	-	-	-	
Automobile/Vehicle Washing	-	-	C(3)	C(3)	-	-	-	
Service Station	-	-	C(3)	C(3)	-	-	-	
Banks and Financial Institutions	P(5)	P	P	P	M(6)	M(6)	-	See SCMC Section 18.23.260, Formula business uses
Business Services	-	P(6)	P(6)	P(6)	P(6)	P(6)	-	
Commercial Entertainment and Recreation See subclassifications below								
Cinema/Theaters	C(13)	C(13)	C(13)	C(13)	-	-	-	See SCMC Section 18.23.260, Formula business uses
Small-Scale	-	C(13)	C(13)	C(13)	-	-	-	
Large-Scale	-	C(13)	-	-	-	-	-	

Table 3.2

**LAND USE REGULATIONS FOR THE DISTRICTS WITHIN THE DOWNTOWN SPECIFIC PLAN AREA. ADDITIONAL REGULATIONS REFER TO SAN CARLOS MUNICIPAL CODE SECTIONS CONTAINED IN TITLE 18, ZONING.**

USE CLASSIFICATIONS	MU-DC-100	MU-D-120	MU-SB-100	MU-SB-120	MU-N-40	MU-N-50	PK	ADDITIONAL REGULATIONS
Eating and Drinking Establishments	See subclassifications below							
Bars/Night Clubs/Lounges	C(13)	C(13)	C(13)	C(13)	-	-	-	See Chapter 7, Outdoor Dining Standards, and SCMC Section 18.23.260, Formula business uses
Full Service	P(13)	P(13)	P(13)	P(13)	C(7, 13)	C(7, 13)	-	
Convenience	P(14)	P(14)	P(14)	P(14)	C(7)	C(7)	-	See SCMC Section 18.23.260, Formula business uses
Food Preparation	P	P	P	P	P	P	-	See SCMC Section 18.23.260, Formula business uses
Funeral Parlors and Mortuaries	-	C	C	C	-	-	-	
Lodging	See subclassifications below							
Bed and Breakfast	P	P	P	P	P	P	-	See SCMC Sections 18.23.070, Bed and breakfast lodging, and 18.23.260, Formula business uses
Hotels and Motels	P(8, 13)	P(13)	P(13)	P(13)	M(13)	M(13)	-	See SCMC Section 18.23.260, Formula business uses
Nurseries and Garden Centers	P(6, 15)	P(7, 16)	P(6, 15)	P(6, 15)	P(6, 15)	P(6, 15)	-	See SCMC Section 18.23.260, Formula business uses
Offices	See subclassifications below							
Business and Professional	P(9)	P	P	P	P	P	-	See SCMC Section 18.23.260, Formula business uses
Medical and Dental	P(9)	P	P	P	P(6)	P(6)	-	See SCMC Section 18.23.260, Formula business uses
Walk-In Clientele	P	P	P	P	P	P	-	See SCMC Section 18.23.260, Formula business uses

Table 3.2

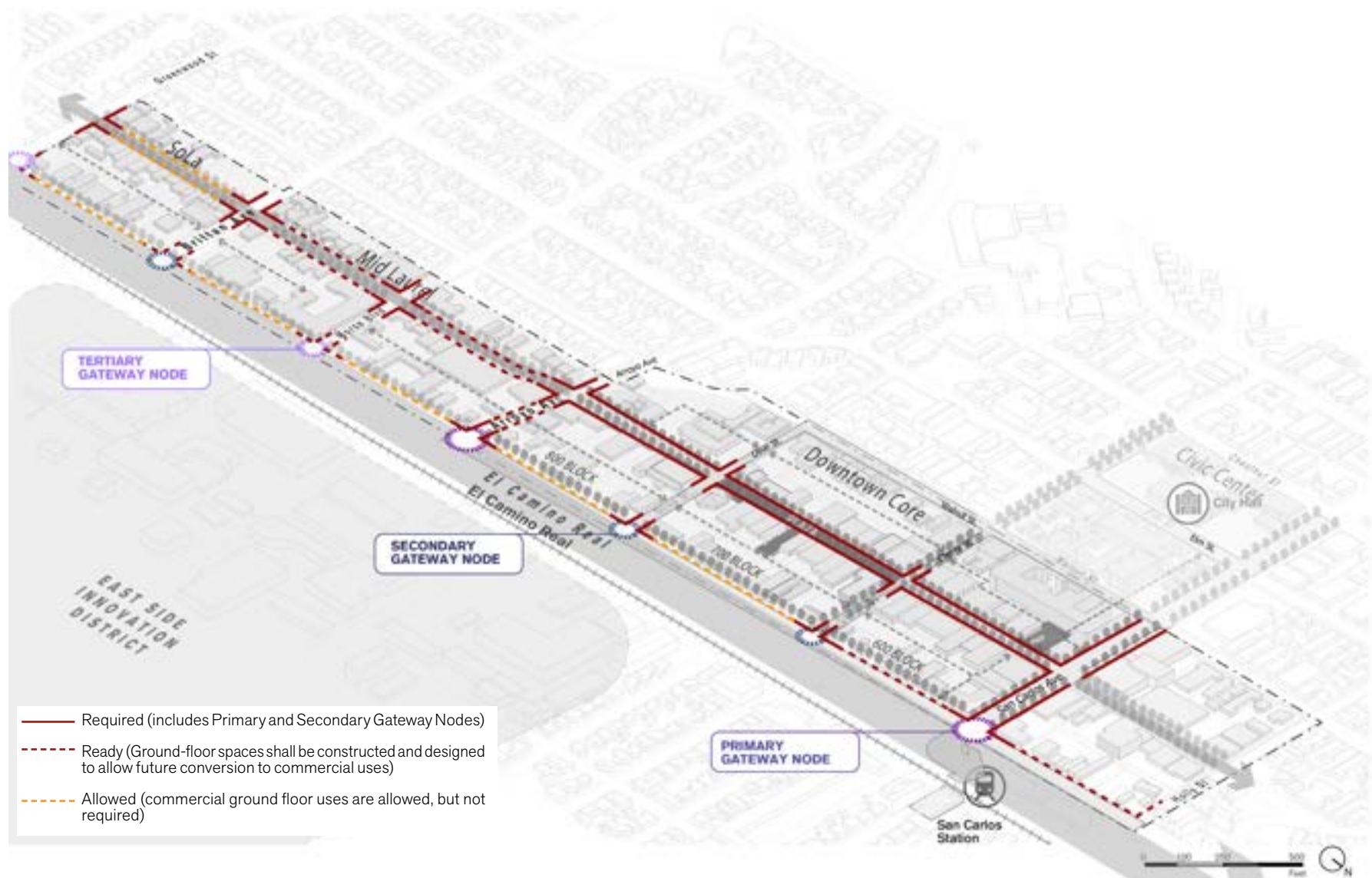
**LAND USE REGULATIONS FOR THE DISTRICTS WITHIN THE DOWNTOWN SPECIFIC PLAN AREA. ADDITIONAL REGULATIONS REFER TO SAN CARLOS MUNICIPAL CODE SECTIONS CONTAINED IN TITLE 18, ZONING.**

USE CLASSIFICATIONS	MU-DC-100	MU-D-120	MU-SB-100	MU-SB-120	MU-N-40	MU-N-50	PK	ADDITIONAL REGULATIONS
Personal Services								
General Personal Services	P(10)	P	P	P	P	P	-	See SCMC Sections 18.23.170, Personal services, and 18.23.260, Formula business uses
Tattoo or Body Modification Parlor	-	-	M	M	-	-	-	
Retail Sales	See subclassifications below							
Cannabis Dispensary	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Convenience Markets	P(14)	P(14)	P	P	P(14)	P	-	See SCMC Section 18.23.260, Formula business uses
Food and Beverage Sales	P(14)	P(14)	P	P	P(12)	P(12)	-	See SCMC Section 18.23.260, Formula business uses
General Retail	P	P	P	P	P	P	-	See SCMC Section 18.23.260, Formula business uses
Price Point Retail	-	-	M	M	-	-	-	
Second-Hand Store	-	-	P	P	P	P	-	
Retail Establishments Selling Ammunition or Firearms	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Industrial Uses								
Recycling Facility, Reverse Vending Machine	-	-	P	P	P	-	-	See SCMC Section 18.23.190, Recycling facilities
Transportation, Communication, and Utilities Uses								
Communication Facilities	See subclassifications below							
Antenna and Transmission Towers	See Chapter 18.24, Wireless Telecommunications Facilities							

Table 3.2

**LAND USE REGULATIONS FOR THE DISTRICTS WITHIN THE DOWNTOWN SPECIFIC PLAN AREA. ADDITIONAL REGULATIONS REFER TO SAN CARLOS MUNICIPAL CODE SECTIONS CONTAINED IN TITLE 18, ZONING.**

USE CLASSIFICATIONS	MU-DC-100	MU-D-120	MU-SB-100	MU-SB-120	MU-N-40	MU-N-50	PK	ADDITIONAL REGULATIONS
Facilities within Buildings	-	P	P	P	P	P	-	
Transportation Passenger Terminals	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Utilities, Minor	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	
Other Applicable Types								
Accessory Uses and Structures	See SCMC Section 18.23.030, Accessory uses, and SCMC Section 18.15.020, Accessory buildings and structures						See Chapter 18.24, Wireless Telecommunications Facilities	
Home Occupations	P	P	P	P	P	P	-	See SCMC Section 18.23.120, Home occupations
Drive-In and Drive-Through Facilities	Prohibited in MU districts; see SCMC Section 18.23.100, Drive-in and drive-through facilities						Prohibited in MU districts; see Section 18.23.100, Drive-in and drive-through facilities	
Nonconforming Use	See SCMC Section 18.19, Nonconforming Uses, Structures, and Lots							
Temporary Use	See SCMC Section 18.31, Temporary Use Permits							



**Figure 3.3- Blocks, intersections, corners, and gateway nodes designated for ground floor commercial, retail, office, restaurant, and service use**

## SPECIFIC LIMITATIONS:

- 1) Not allowed on the ground floor along Laurel Street and San Carlos Avenue frontages.
- 2) Provided that such use shall be completely enclosed in a building of soundproof construction.
- 3) For properties without frontage along El Camino Real, only retail sales consistent with the definition of "general retail" and five thousand (5,000) square feet or less.
- 4) Must be within a fully enclosed structure.
- 5) Limited to establishments with a gross floor area of two thousand five hundred (2,500) square feet or less. Limited to the ground floor of a building located on an interior lot a minimum of five hundred (500) feet from any other financial institution.
- 6) Limited to establishments with a gross floor area of five thousand (5,000) square feet or less.
- 7) Permitted after review and approval of a minor use permit by the Zoning Administrator if less than twelve (12) chairs.
- 8) Limited to upper stories unless at least fifty percent (50%) of ground floor street frontage is occupied by food service use.
- 9) Limited to upper stories.
- 10) Permitted if existing. Additions to existing facilities and establishment of new facilities are subject to San Carlos Municipal Code Section

18.23.170, Personal services.

- 11) Limited to neighborhood groceries with less than one thousand five hundred (1,500) square feet of sales area when located along East San Carlos Avenue.
- 12) The sale of alcoholic beverages is prohibited.
- 13) Not permitted on sites where the shopfront of such non-residential use faces onto R zoning districts.
- 14) Minor use permit required for sites adjacent to R districts.
- 15) Uses that require a commercial cannabis business permit are not permitted.
- 16) Instructional Services shall be required to submit a Pick-Up and Drop-Off Plan, subject to review and approval by the Planning Director. The Planning Director may refer items directly to the Zoning Administrator when in his/her/their opinion the public interest would be better served by having the Zoning Administrator conduct review and approval of Instructional Services.
- 17) Residential uses on the ground floor are restricted within the blocks, intersections, corners, and gateway nodes designated for ground floor commercial, retail, office, restaurant, and service use, as shown in Figure 3.3.. A corner shall consist of the first 30 feet extending from the intersection of two rights-of-way. See also 3.7. F. Ground Floor Activation.

## 3.7 PRIVATE PROPERTY DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS

Development standards help achieve the land use and urban design framework. This section includes development standards that are applicable to all parcels within the Specific Plan Area. The Downtown Specific Plan Area shall also comply with the development standards in the City's Zoning Ordinance (Title 18 of the Municipal Code) unless otherwise specified herein. If there is any conflict between Title 18 of the Municipal Code and the Downtown Specific Plan, then the Downtown Specific Plan shall prevail.

Nothing in this chapter is intended to contradict or supersede state housing law. If any standard herein is determined to be preempted or otherwise in conflict with state law, the applicable state law shall prevail.

### A. LOT, DENSITY, AND FLOOR AREA RATIO (FAR) STANDARDS

Additional regulations are denoted in a right-hand column. Individual letters refer to subsections that directly follow the table. The numbers in each illustration in this section refer to corresponding regulations in the “#” column in the associated Table 3.3.

#### INCREASED FAR FOR MIXED-USE BUILDINGS

The maximum allowable FAR may be increased by up to ten percent (10%) for buildings that contain a mix of residential and non-residential uses through the provision of one (1) or more of the following elements beyond what is otherwise required, subject to conditional use permit approval:

- 1) Provision of off-site improvements. This may include off-site amenities and/or infrastructure (other than standard requirements and improvements) such as right-of-way or streetscape improvements or funding for parks, public safety facilities, libraries, senior centers, community meeting rooms, childcare, recreation, or other community benefits. The Director may require a fiscal and economic impact report, or equivalent, as part of the conditional use permit application.

Table 3.3

**LOT, DENSITY, AND FLOOR AREA RATIO(FAR) STANDARDS FOR MU DISTRICTS WITHIN THE SPECIFIC PLAN AREA**

DISTRICT	MU-DC-100	MU-D-120	MU-SB-100	MU-SB-120	MU-N-40	MU-N-50	PK	ADDITIONAL REGULATIONS					
Maximum Density (units/net )	100	120	100	120	40	50	NA						
Minimum Density (units/net )	75	90	75	90	30	38	NA						
Minimum Lot Size (sq. ft.)	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000	NA						
Minimum Lot Width (ft.)	50	50	50	50	50	50	NA						
Maximum Floor Area Ratio (FAR) Maximum Floor Area (FAR) for Commercial-Only Development	2.5(A)	3.0(A)	3.0(A)	3.0(A)	3.00(A)	2.5(A)	NA						
Minimum and Maximum Commercial Floor Area in Mixed-Use Development: When commercial floor area is provided within a mixed-use development, the commercial space shall be subject to the minimum and maximum commercial FAR as specified.		0.1 minimum - 0.7 maximum											
Residential Only Development	NA (no maximum FAR)						NA						
Residential Floor Area in Mixed-Use Development	NA (no maximum FAR)						NA						

## B. BUILDING PLACEMENT STANDARDS

Where MU district is adjacent to RS district, the following standards shall apply:

### 1) Rear Transitions, MU districts

For the MU zoning district, the maximum height at the rear setback line shall be twenty-eight (28) feet maximum to match the RS district height maximum. Above twenty-eight (28) feet, a stepback of at least six (6) feet shall be provided from the story below. If the building is five (5) stories or more, the upper stories shall step back from the fourth story by at least another six (6) feet.

### 2) Side Setbacks, MU districts

The maximum height at the side setback line adjacent to a RS district shall be twenty-eight (28) feet maximum to match the RS district height maximum. Above twenty-eight (28) feet, a step back of at least six (6) feet shall be provided from the story below. If the building is five (5) stories or more, the upper stories shall step back from the fourth story by at least another six (6) feet.

### 3) Landscape Buffers

A minimum ten (10) foot wide landscape buffer area shall be provided along all rear boundaries adjacent to an RS district (Type 2 - Refer to SCMC Section 18.18.050 Landscaping Tables 18.18.050-B (1) and Table 18.18.050-B (2) for buffer types). Trees and shrubs shall be planted continuously in the landscape buffer along the site's property line to create privacy screening

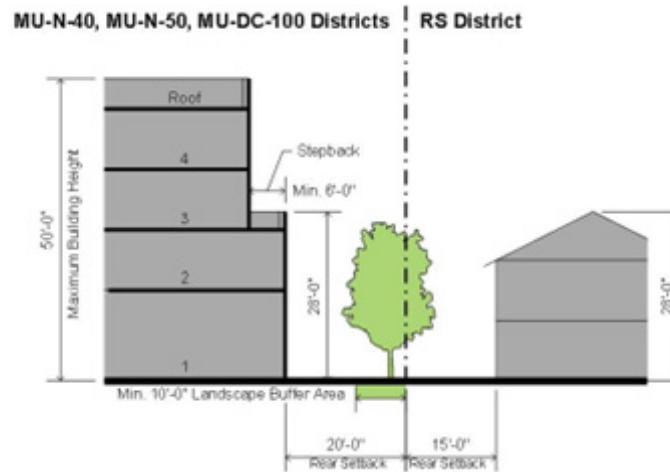


Figure 3.4 - Rear Transitional Standards – MU Districts.

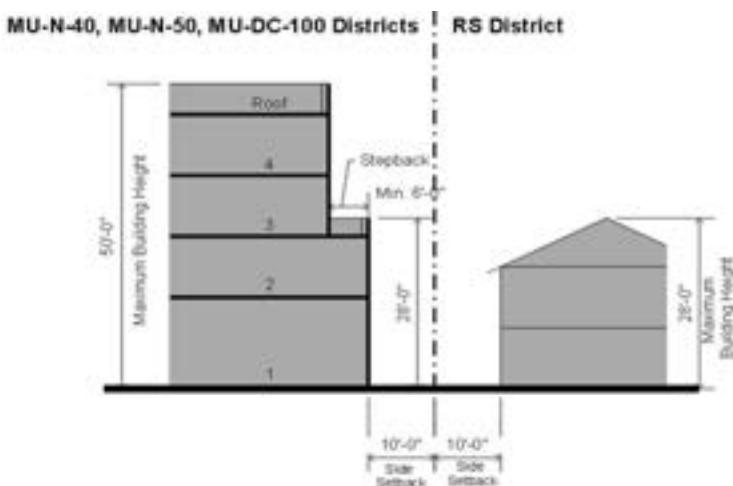


Figure 3.5 - Side Transitional Standards – MU Districts.

Table 3.4

**BUILDING PLACEMENT STANDARDS FOR MU DISTRICTS WITHIN THE SPECIFIC PLAN AREA**

DISTRICT	MU-DC-100	MU-D-120	MU-SB-100	MU-SB-120	MU-N-40	MU-N-50	PK	ADDITIONAL REGULATIONS	#
Street Frontage Setbacks, Commercial and Mixed-Use Development (ft.)									
Laurel Street (600, 700, and 800 blocks only)	Property line; except that the ground floor shall be set back a minimum of 4.5 ft.						0 ft.	(C)	1
Laurel Street	Property line or 15 ft. from curb (the greater) for all MU districts						0 ft.	(C)	
El Camino Real	Property line or 20 ft. from curb (the greater) for all MU districts along El Camino Real No encroachment including steps or ramps shall be permitted within the 20 ft. setback zone.						0 ft.	(C)	1
San Carlos Avenue	Property line or 15 ft. from curb (the greater)	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	0 ft.	(C)	1
Brittan Avenue and Arroyo Avenue	5 ft. min 15 ft. max*	5 ft. min 15 ft. max*	5 ft. min 15 ft. max*	5 ft. min 15 ft. max*	5 ft. min 15 ft. max*	5 ft. min 15 ft. max*	0 ft.		
Elm Street	0 min, 10 ft. max	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	0 ft.		1
All Other Streets	5 ft. min 15 ft. max*	5 ft. min 15 ft. max*	5 ft. min 15 ft. max*	5 ft. min 15 ft. max*	5 ft. min 15 ft. max*	5 ft. min 15 ft. max*	0 ft.		1
Interior Side (ft.)	0 ft. min; 10 ft. min adjacent to RS district for all MU districts						0 ft.	(B)	2
Rear (ft.)	0 ft. min; 20 ft. min adjacent to RS district for all MU districts						0 ft.	(B)	3
Corner Build-Area	20 ft.; Ground floor building facades shall be in accordance with the required setbacks within 20 ft. of every corner. Ground floor publicly accessible plazas may be at the street corner instead, provided buildings are built to the edge of the publicly accessible plaza.								4

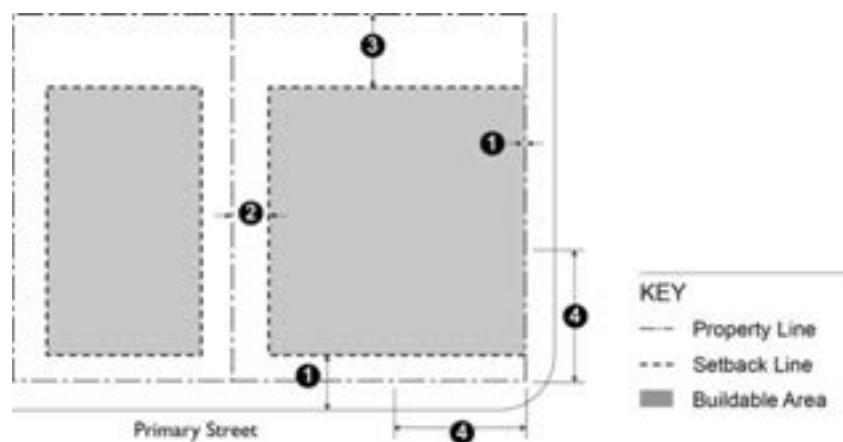
between properties. Selected species shall be of a fast-growing, evergreen variety and capable of attaining a minimum height of twenty-five (25) feet at maturity. Trees shall be planted at a minimum interval of twenty to thirty (20-30) feet on center (with a five (5) foot gap between canopies) depending on the species and mature canopy width or growth habitat. Continuous shrubbery planting is required between the trees and shall be a minimum six (6) feet in height when planted. Species selection and placement shall be approved by the City Arborist. A minimum of fifteen (15) gallon planting stock shall be utilized, unless otherwise approved by the City Arborist.

- a) Type 2 Buffers: Shall be ten (10) feet wide. For every one hundred (100) feet in rear property line length a minimum of five (5) trees and six (6) shrubs shall be planted.
- b) For other landscaping buffer requirements, refer to Section 18.18.050 Areas to be landscaped.
- c) All new proposed tree species shall adhere to the City's most recent preferred tree list or as specified by the City Arborist.

Where conflict between this section and landscaping requirements of SCMC Section 18.18.050 occurs, the provisions of this Chapter shall apply.

## C. BUILD-TO LINE

Buildings shall be constructed at the required setback for at least eighty percent (80%) of their linear street frontage. The remaining twenty percent (20%) of linear street frontage shall be further set back by at least two (2) feet, including building massing breaks, recessed entrances, service or



**Figure 3.6 - Building Placement Key - MU Districts**

utility areas, and/or vehicle access areas. The area between the building and property line shall be paved in the MU-DC-100 zoning district, so that it functions as a wider public sidewalk. Any area between the building face and the property line/back of public sidewalk shall be paved with the same material as the sidewalk.

## 1. Street Frontage Improvements

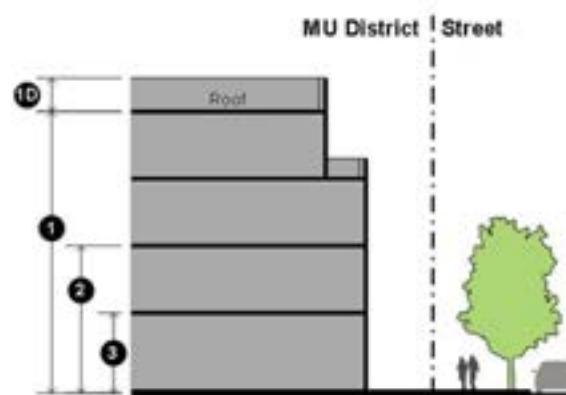
Landscaping and/or planters along ground-floor residential unit frontages, where permitted (see Table 3.2, Land Use Regulations) and along facades without windows and openings may be established to reduce the visual impact of blank walls, provided the landscaping and/or planters do not reduce the sidewalk pedestrian clearance width below the pedestrian zone requirement. Features including entry courtyards, plazas, building entries, outdoor eating, and display areas located between the property line and the building count towards the eighty percent (80%) build-to line requirement provided the buildings are built to the edge of these features.

## D. HEIGHT LIMITATIONS AND EXCEPTIONS

- 1) Vertical Projections. A parapet wall, cornice or sloping roof may project up to five (5) feet above the height limit (see SCMC Section 18.15.060 for vertical projection allowances).
- 2) Towers. If the project site is greater than fifteen thousand (15,000) square feet, a tower or other projecting architectural elements may extend up to ten (10) feet above the top of the roof; provided, that the square

footage of the element(s) does not total more than ten percent (10%) of the building footprint. The area above the uppermost permitted floor of the element(s) shall not be habitable.

- a) The composition of the tower element shall be balanced, where the width of the tower has a proportional relationship to the height of the tower.
- b) The tower element shall be proportional to rest of the building.
- c) The roof shall be sloped and include architectural detailing, such as a cornice or eave.



**Figure 3.7 - Building Heights Key - MU Districts.**

Table 3.5

**BUILDING HEIGHT STANDARDS FOR MU DISTRICTS WITHIN THE SPECIFIC PLAN AREA**

DISTRICT	MU-DC-100	MU-D-120	MU-SB-100	MU-SB-120	MU-N-40	MU-N-50	PK	ADDITIONAL REGULATIONS	#
Building Height Maximum (ft.)	50	75	60	75	50	50	30	(D); See SCMC Section 18.15.060, Height and height exceptions	1
Building Maximum Adjacent to RS District	28 ft. along the rear and side setback lines (see 2., Rear and Side Transitions MU Districts) Above 28 ft., the building shall step back by at least 6 ft. If the building is five (5) or more stories, the fifth story and above shall step back from the fourth story by at least another 6 ft.						-		
Building Minimum (ft.)	n/a	25; Applicable only along Laurel Street and El Camino Real frontages		NA			-		2
Maximum Stories	4	6	5	6	4	4	4		
Ground Floor Uses (ft.)	14 min and 16 max	14 min and 16 max	12 min	12 min	12 min	-			3

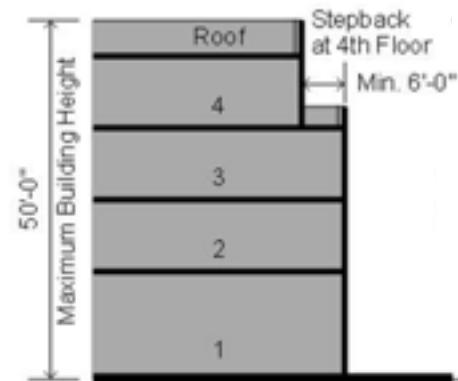
## E. UPPER STORY STEPBACKS

Upper story stepbacks help mitigate building height by providing visual and spatial relief more consistent with the context of San Carlos. As illustrated in Figure 3.8, the stepbacks shall be allowed to be used as balconies or shared outdoor space. All required upper story stepbacks shall occur for at least seventy percent (70%) of the facade length.

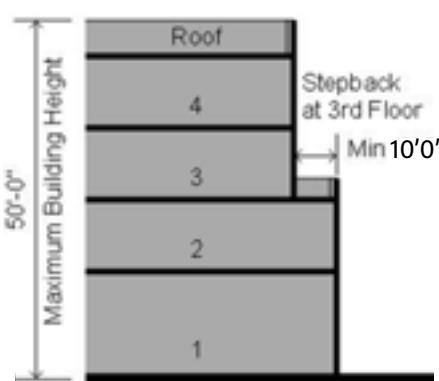
- Laurel Street. The third and fourth stories of all street-facing facades along the 600, 700, and 800 blocks of Laurel Street shall be set back a minimum of ten (10) feet from the second story below.
- Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Stories. The fourth, fifth, and sixth stories of all street-facing facades shall be stepped back a minimum of six (6) feet from the third story below.
- On the 1100 and 1200 blocks of San Carlos Avenue, all four (4) stories may align; no upper story stepback is required.
- El Camino Real. All six (6) stories may align; no upper story stepback is required.

## F. GROUND FLOOR ACTIVATION

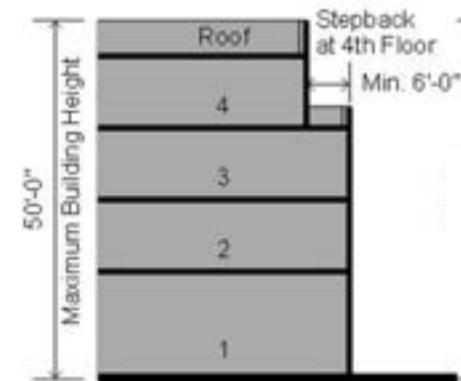
- Ground floor uses in a mixed-use building shall occupy at least sixty-five percent (65%) of the public street frontage including any side street frontage (Refer Figure 3.9). Commercial ground floor uses shall have a depth of at least twelve feet (12 ft.) without walls or partitions, providing unobstructed views into the commercial space. Distinct awning, canopy, or entry treatments shall be provided for commercial uses to distinguish from residential uses. Different treatments shall include, but are not limited to, doorway materials and recesses, signage, and paving in front of commercial entries.
- New development in mixed-use zoning districts shall comply with the window and transparency requirements of Chapter 3: 3.6 Windows and Ground Floor Transparency and shall incorporate at least one (1) of the Public/Semi Public and Commercial uses, as set forth in Table 3.2, Land Use Regulations, within the ground floor along public street frontages.



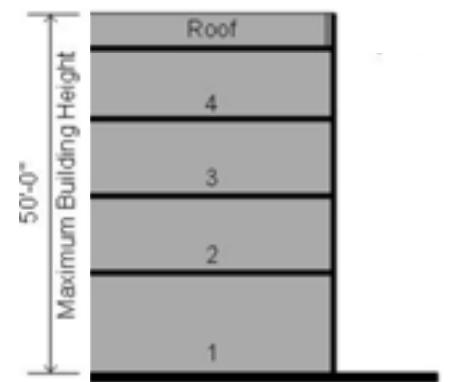
**MU-N-40**  
**LAUREL STREET**  
**900,1000 AND 1100 BLOCKS**



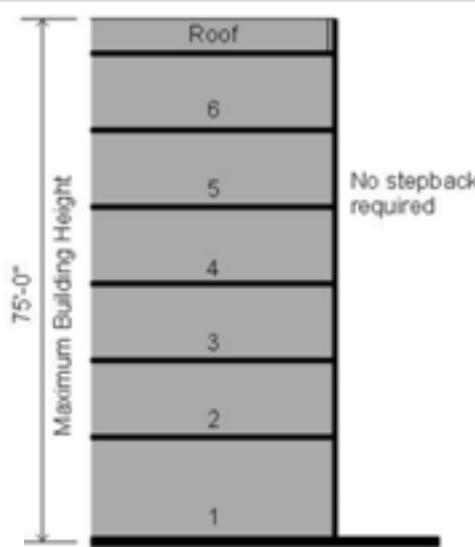
**MU-DC-100**  
**LAUREL STREET**  
**600,700 AND 800 BLOCKS**



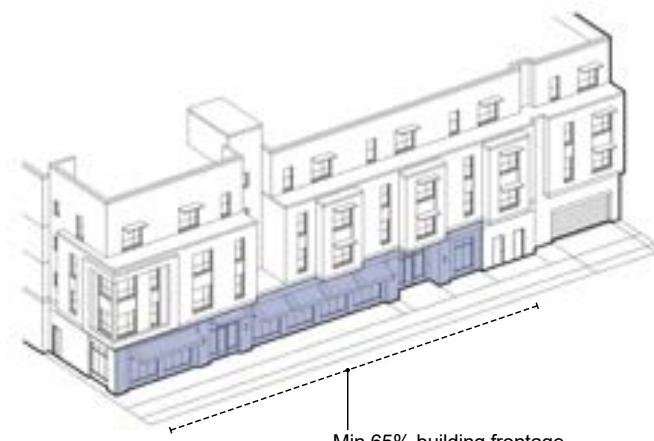
**MU-N-50**  
**LAUREL STREET**  
**900 BLOCK**



**MU-DC-100**  
**1100 AND 1200 BLOCKS**  
**SAN CARLOS AVENUE**



**MU-SB-120**  
**EL CAMINO REAL**



**FIGURE 3.8 - Upper Story Setbacks - MU Districts.**

**FIGURE 3.9 - Ground Floor Active Uses - MU Districts**

## G. BUILDING PROJECTIONS AND MAXIMUM LENGTH OF BLANK WALL

For MU-DC-100, On 600, 700 and 800 blocks of Laurel Street, the building projections such as bay windows, etc. shall be four and a half (4.5) feet from the building facade. Building projections shall maintain a minimum fourteen (14) feet clearance above sidewalk grade. This four and a half (4.5) feet may vary based on the current facade line and property line. Awnings, overhangs, and canopies shall maintain a minimum eight (8) feet clearance above the sidewalk.

No building projection, awning, overhang, or canopy shall be ground supported, e.g. with posts or other structural elements within the public right-of-way.

For the depth of the projections, the following regulations shall apply:

- on 600 and 800 blocks of Laurel and 1100 and 1200 blocks of San Carlos Avenue, the maximum projection shall be eight (8) feet;
- on 700 Block of Laurel the maximum projection shall be nine (9) feet;
- on El Camino Real, the projection shall be a maximum of five (5) feet.

Blank walls along the building's street-facing facades shall not exceed ten (10) feet in length along the ground floor and twenty-five (25) feet in length along the upper stories. If a blank wall area includes vertical interior spaces such as elevator towers or trash chutes, a change in building material, color, or texture, or a change in facade plane depth shall be provided if those vertical interior spaces would otherwise cause the blank wall to exceed the length limits.

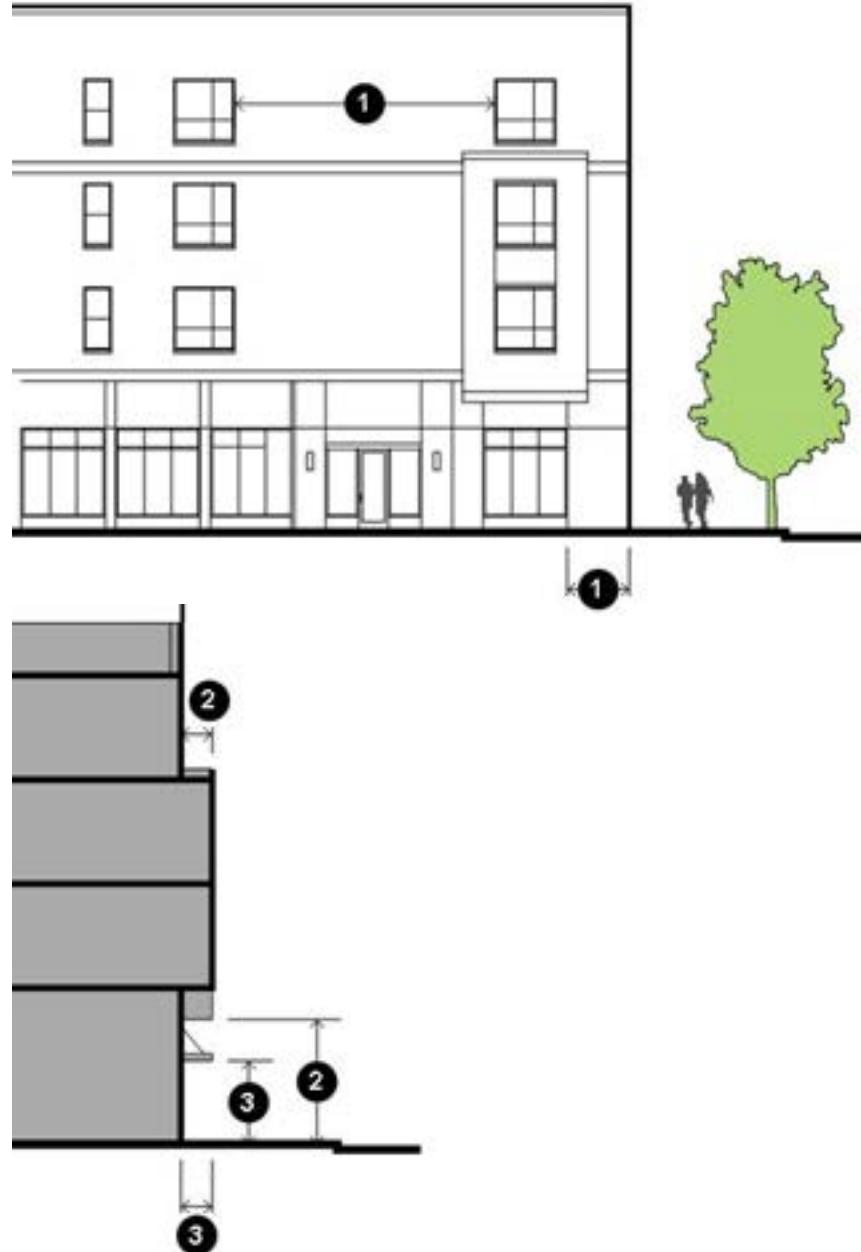


Figure 3.10 - Projections And Blank Walls - MU Districts

Table 3.6

**BUILDING FORM STANDARDS FOR MU DISTRICTS WITHIN THE SPECIFIC PLAN AREA**

DISTRICT	MU-DC-100	MU-D-120	MU-SB-100	MU-SB-120	MU-N-40	MU-N-50	ADDITIONAL REGULATIONS	#
Maximum Length of Blank Wall (ft.)	Ground floor: 10 Upper stories: 25	Ground floor: 10 Upper stories: 25	Ground floor: 10 Upper stories: 25	Ground floor: 10 Upper stories: 25	Ground floor: 10 Upper stories: 25	Ground floor: 10 Upper stories: 25	(G)	1
Maximum Building Projections (ft.)	On 600, 700 and 800 blocks of Laurel Street:  4.5 feet* from the building facade, 14 feet above sidewalk grade.  * 4.5 feet may vary based on the current facade line and property line.	Building projections such as bay windows etc. shall be within the property line, 14 feet above sidewalk grade.					(G)	2
Awnings and Overhangs Projections (ft.)		Not required, but if awnings or overhangs are provided, the following regulations shall apply:  Minimum 8 feet above sidewalk grade and the maximum projection shall be measured from the building face: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>on 600 and 800 blocks of Laurel Street and 1100 and 1200 blocks of San Carlos Avenue, the maximum projection shall be 8 feet.</li> <li>on 700 Block of Laurel the projection shall be a maximum of 10 feet.</li> <li>on El Camino Real, the projection shall be a maximum of 5 feet.</li> </ul>					(G)	3

Table 3.7

**PARKING AND LOADING LOCATION STANDARDS FOR MU DISTRICTS WITHIN THE SPECIFIC PLAN AREA**

DISTRICT	MU-DC-100	MU-D-120	MU-SB-100	MU-SB-120	MU-N-40	MU-N-50	ADDITIONAL REGULATIONS	#
Setback from Street Property Line	40 ft.; buildings shall be placed as close to the street as possible, with parking underground, behind a building, or on the rear of the site.						(H)	1
Setback from Buildings	8 ft: 5 ft walkway plus 3 ft landscaping; applicable only to above-ground parking							2
Access Location	Along the 1100 and 1200 blocks of San Carlos, and the 600, 700, and 800 blocks of Laurel Street, access to parking and loading shall be restricted to the alley. For all other locations, access shall be from the alley where provided, or a side street if infeasible.							3
Curb Cuts	Prohibited on the 1100 and 1200 blocks of San Carlos Avenue and the 600, 700, and 800 blocks of Laurel Street	Curb cuts shall be minimized and shall be placed in areas least likely to impede pedestrian circulation.						
Loading/Service Area	Side or rear of lot must be screened from public ROW.							4
Parking Podium	Maximum height of a parking podium visible from the street is 5 feet above finished grade.							5

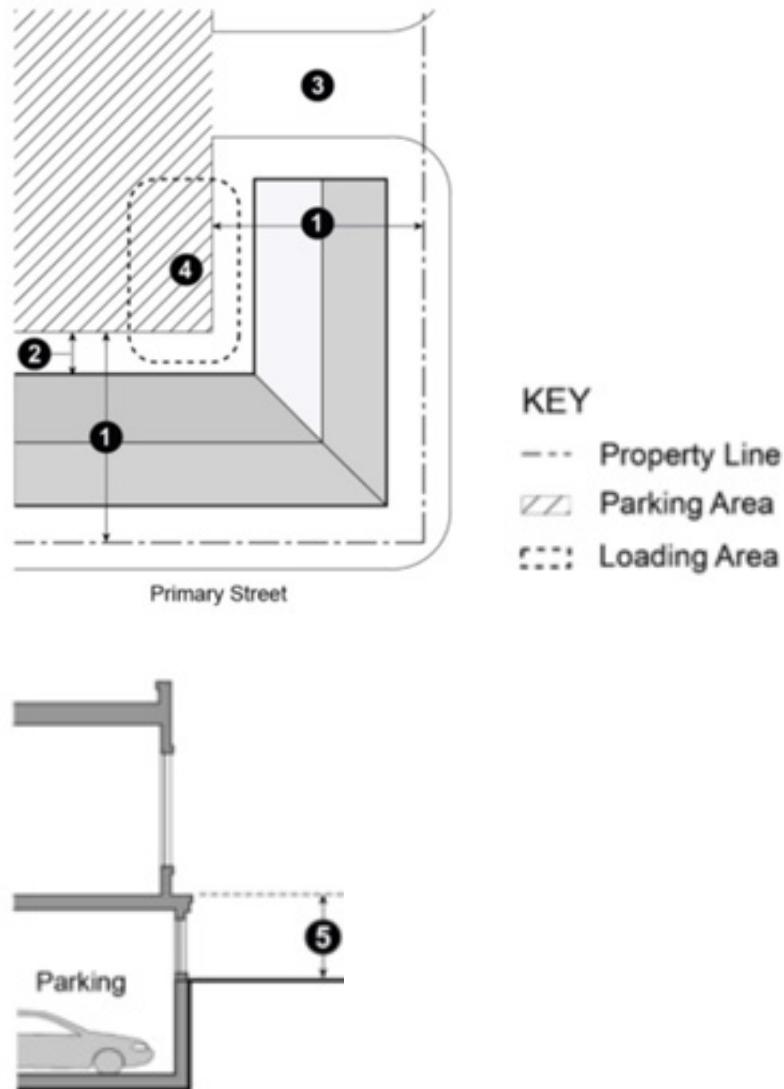
## H. PARKING AND LOADING LOCATION

Parking shall be located forty (40) feet from the street-facing property line, subject to the following requirements.

- 1) Underground and Partially Submerged Parking. Parking completely or partially underground may match the setbacks of the main structure. The maximum height of a parking podium visible from a street is five (5) feet from finished grade.
- 2) Surface Parking. Above-ground surface parking is allowed within forty (40) feet from a street-facing property line only when the following occur:
  - a) Buildings are built to setback standards and as close to the public sidewalk as feasible; and the parking area is at least eight (8) feet from the public right-of-way, screened from adjacent properties with a minimum four (4) foot tall wall, hedges or landscaping, or a trellis; or a maximum of three and half (3.5) feet along public-rights-of-way with a minimum of a six (6) foot tall wall, hedges or landscaping, or trellis along side and rear property lines. Fences shall meet the requirements pursuant to SCMC 18.15.040.
  - b) The site is constrained such that underground, partially submerged, or surface parking located more than forty (40) feet from the street frontage is not feasible due to site-specific circumstances.

## I. ON-SITE PEDESTRIAN WALKWAY DESIGN

On-site pedestrian walkways shall have a minimum clear unobstructed width of five (5) feet, shall be hard-surfaced, and paved with concrete, stone, tile, brick, or comparable material.



**Figure 3.11 - Parking and Loading Areas in MU Districts**

Where a required pedestrian walkway or sidewalk crosses driveways, parking areas, or loading areas, it shall be clearly identifiable through the use of a raised crosswalk, a different paving material, or similar method to prevent conflict between pedestrians and vehicles. Where a required walkway is parallel and adjacent to an auto travel lane, it must be raised or separated from the auto travel lane by a raised curb at least four (4) inches high, bollards, or another physical barrier or detectable warning strip.

## **1. Pedestrian Access**

On-site pedestrian circulation and access must be provided according to the following standards:

- Internal Connections. A system of pedestrian walkways shall connect all buildings on a site to each other, to on-site automobile and bicycle parking areas, and to any on-site open space areas or pedestrian amenities.
- To Circulation Network. Connections between on-site walkways and the public sidewalk and other existing or planned pedestrian routes, such as safe routes to school, shall be provided. An on-site walkway shall connect the primary building entry or entries to a public sidewalk on each street frontage.
- To Neighbors. Direct and convenient access shall be provided from commercial and mixed-use projects to adjoining residential and commercial areas where feasible while still providing for safety and security.

## **J. COMMERCIAL LOADING AND/OR SERVICE AREAS**

Commercial loading or service spaces for private use shall not be located along the primary street frontage and shall be located at the rear of the structure. Loading and/or service areas may occur along the street when the subject property fronts only one street and where there is no onsite vehicle circulation and/or access point.

## **K. LANDSCAPING AND RESIDENTIAL OPEN SPACE**

Landscape and residential open space shall be provided as required as set forth by Landscaping and Open Space Standards in Table 3.8. Residential open space shall be usable space and may be common, private, or a combination thereof. Common open space areas consist of courtyards, plazas, terraces, lawns, patios, swimming pools, barbecue areas, playgrounds, or other usable outdoor areas. Private open areas consist of balconies, decks, patios, porches, or fenced yards. Private open areas, when provided, shall provide a minimum six (6) foot by six (6) foot clear area and be directly accessed from a residential unit. Landscaping consists of planting areas, stormwater management features, treed areas, gardens, and other vegetation areas not otherwise considered common or private open space.

- a) Usability: A surface shall be provided that allows convenient use for outdoor living and/or recreation. Such a surface may be any practicable

Table 3.8

**LANDSCAPING AND OPEN SPACES STANDARDS FOR MU DISTRICTS WITHIN THE SPECIFIC PLAN AREA**

<b>DISTRICT</b>	<b>MU-DC-100</b>	<b>MU-D-120</b>	<b>MU-SB-100</b>	<b>MU-SB-120</b>	<b>MU-N-40</b>	<b>MU-N-50</b>	<b>ADDITIONAL REGULATIONS</b>
Minimum Common and/or Private Open Space (% of site)	<p>10% min.; applicable only to mixed-use and non-residential development on lots greater than 15,000 square feet; and applicable to developments that are 100% residential regardless of lot size</p> <p>Landscaped portions of common open space may also be counted toward the minimum 10% of site landscaping requirement.</p>						
Minimum Usable Area for Common Open Space (sq. ft.)	200 square feet minimum, with a minimum width of 10 feet						
Minimum Usable Area for Private Open Space (sq. ft.)	36 square feet minimum, with minimum 6 foot depth						

combination of lawn, garden, flagstone, wood planking, concrete, or other serviceable, dust-free surfacing. The maximum slope shall not exceed ten percent (10%).

b) Accessibility: The private open space shall be accessible to only one (1) living unit by a doorway to a habitable room or hallway. The common open space shall be accessible to the living units on the lot. It shall be served by any stairway or other access way qualifying as an egress facility from a habitable room.

## L. STREET, ALLEY AND PLAZA PRESERVATION

Existing public right-of-way(s) shall be preserved. Public right-of-way shall not be eliminated or abandoned.

## M. STREET FRONTEAGE IMPROVEMENTS

New developments shall provide street frontage improvements in accordance with the following:

1) Between the Property Line and the Parking Zone, or Travel Lane, or Bus Lane, or Bicycle Lane.

**a) Sidewalks:** Sidewalks shall be provided if none already exist or if the existing sidewalks are in poor condition as determined by the Public Works Director. Sidewalks shall be designed consistent with the standards established in the Downtown Streetscape Master Plan

as following (all dimensions are building face to curb, and inclusive of dining zones where applicable and tree planting zones):

- El Camino Real: 20 feet (West Side)
- San Carlos Avenue: 20 feet
- Laurel Street (600 and 800 Block): 20 feet
- Cherry and Olvie Street: 14 feet
- Arroyo Avenue: 19 feet (North Side), 11 feet (South Side)
- Brittan Avenue: 6 feet

The sidewalks standards may be further refined in accordance with the City Council-approved street design during the implementation phase, as detailed in each street's Plans, Specifications, and Estimates (PS&E). If minimum sidewalk dimensions cannot be accommodated in the public right-of-way, a sidewalk easement shall be required.

**b) Street Furniture:** Trash receptacles, benches, bike racks, and other street furniture shall be consistent with the standards established in the Downtown Streetscape Master Plan. These elements may be further refined in accordance with the City Council-approved street design during the implementation phase, as detailed in each street's Plans, Specifications, and Estimates (PS&E). These elements shall be located outside of the required pedestrian zone.

**c) Street Lights:** Pedestrian-scaled street lights, including attachments from which banners may be hung, shall be located as set forth in the Downtown Streetscape Master Plan, or as set forth in accordance with the City Council-approved street design during the implementation

phase, as detailed in each street's Plans, Specifications, and Estimates (PS&E).

**d) Street Trees:** Street trees and grates shall be required as set forth in the Downtown Streetscape Master Plan, or in accordance with the City Council-approved street design during the implementation phase, as detailed in each street's Plans, Specifications, and Estimates (PS&E). When trees cannot be accommodated due to site constraints a minor deviation may be requested subject to the discretion of the City Arborist and Director.

## 2) Use of Frontage Area Adjacent to the Property Line.

Except where occupied by a building, entryways, or areas required for vehicle access, the portion of the site extending ten (10) feet inward from the front property line shall be designed to accommodate active outdoor uses along at least sixty-five percent (65%) of the site's street frontage. Unless otherwise specified below, acceptable uses in this area include, but are not limited to:

- a) Outdoor dining or retail display areas,
- b) Paved public space that functions as an extension of the public sidewalk (required in the MU-DC-100 Zoning District),
- c) Stormwater management planters,
- d) Landscaping,
- e) Public art installations, and/or
- f) Pedestrian amenities such as benches or other outdoor seating

# N. BUILDING ENTRANCES

## 1) Orientation

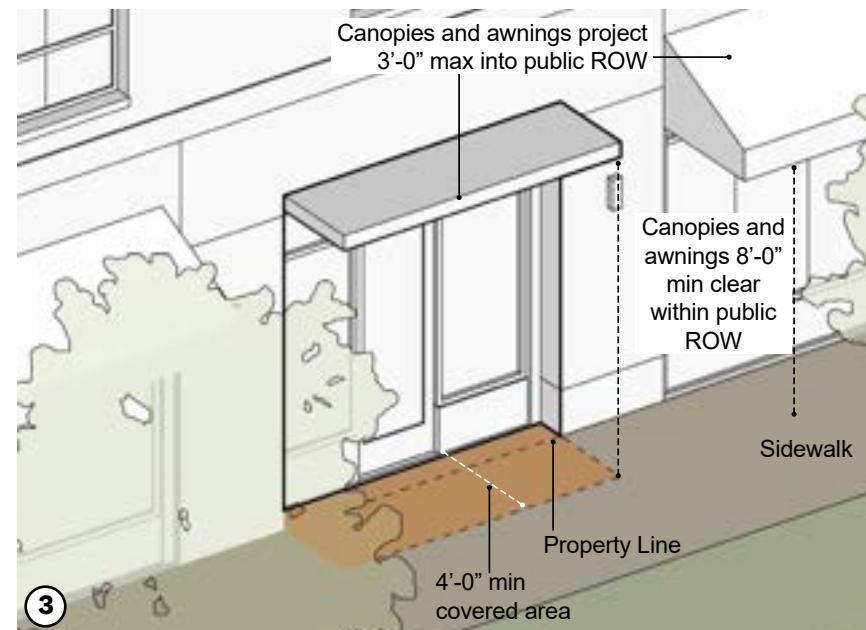
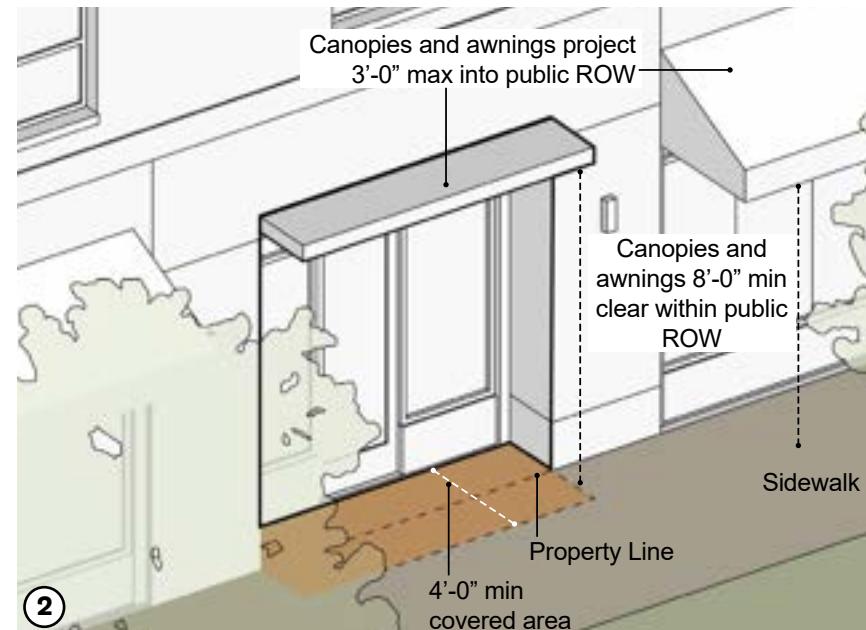
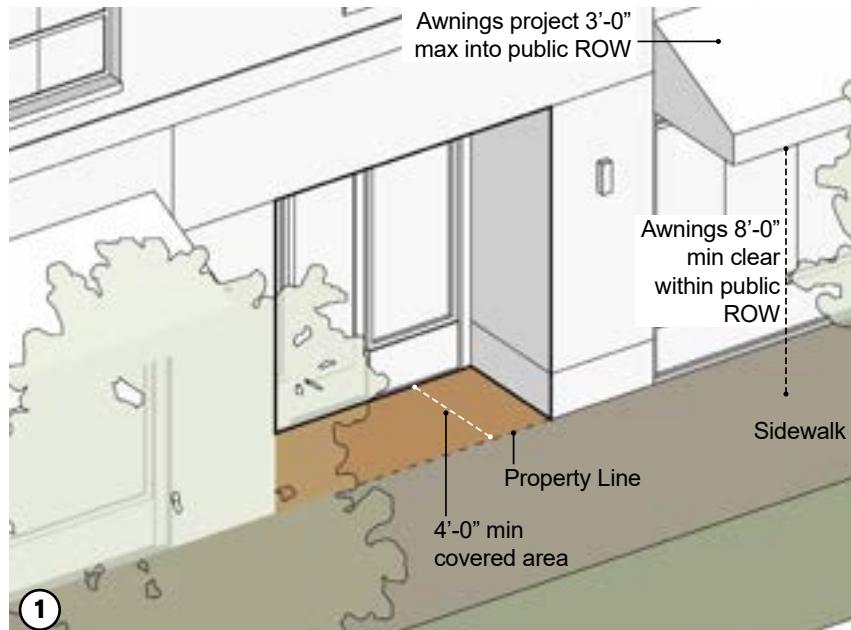
All ground-floor commercial and residential uses located along a public right-of-way shall orient their primary entrances toward the right-of-way to promote an active and pedestrian-friendly streetscape.

## 2) Main Building Entrances

If a building has a main entrance to a commercial space or shared residential lobby, the main entrance shall incorporate either a canopy, recess, or combination thereof. A covered area a minimum of four (4) feet deep shall be provided. Refer to canopy projection standards. Entry canopies, stoops, patios, and balconies shall be constructed of all-weather, durable materials. If an entrance requires an accessible ramp, the ramp shall be integrated into the building and landscape design to minimize the visual impact of the ramp. Clear access to the ramp shall be maintained.

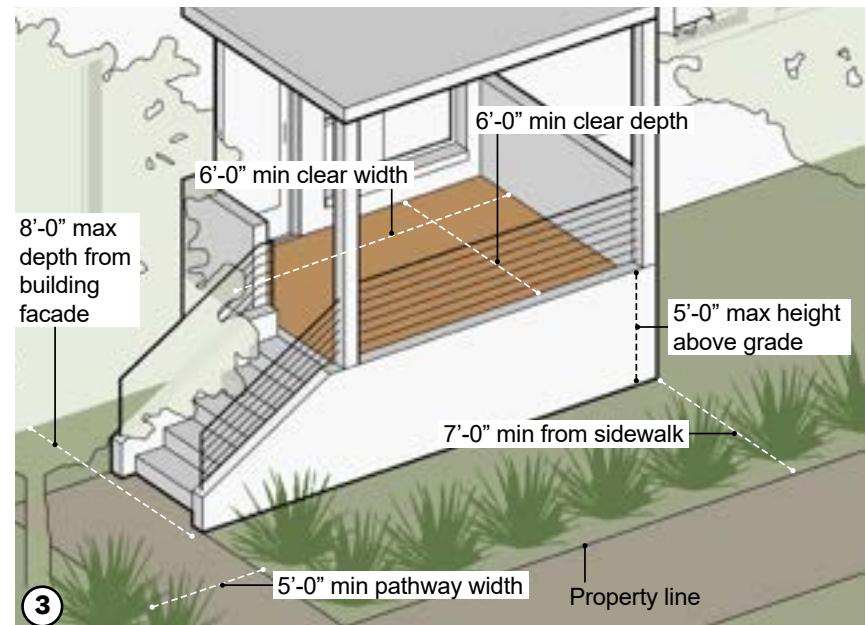
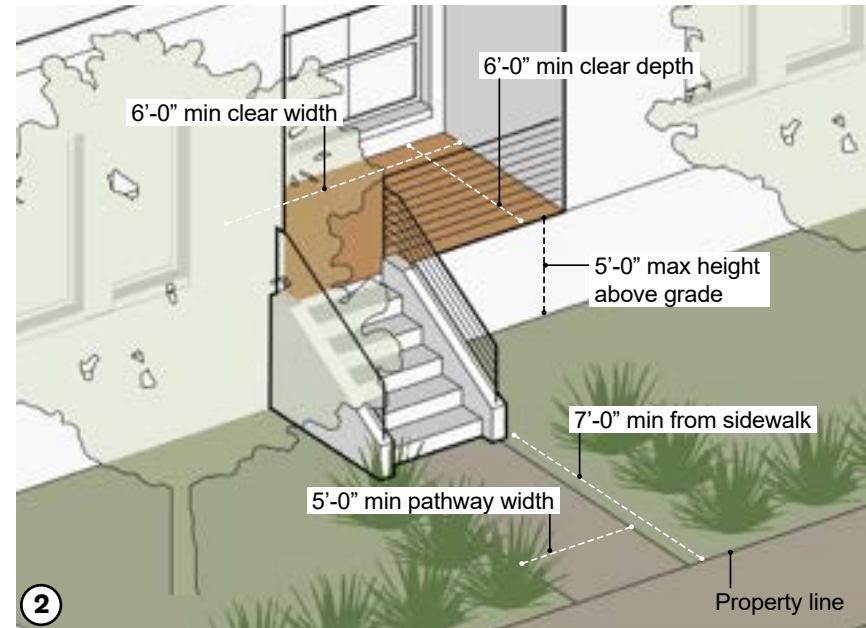
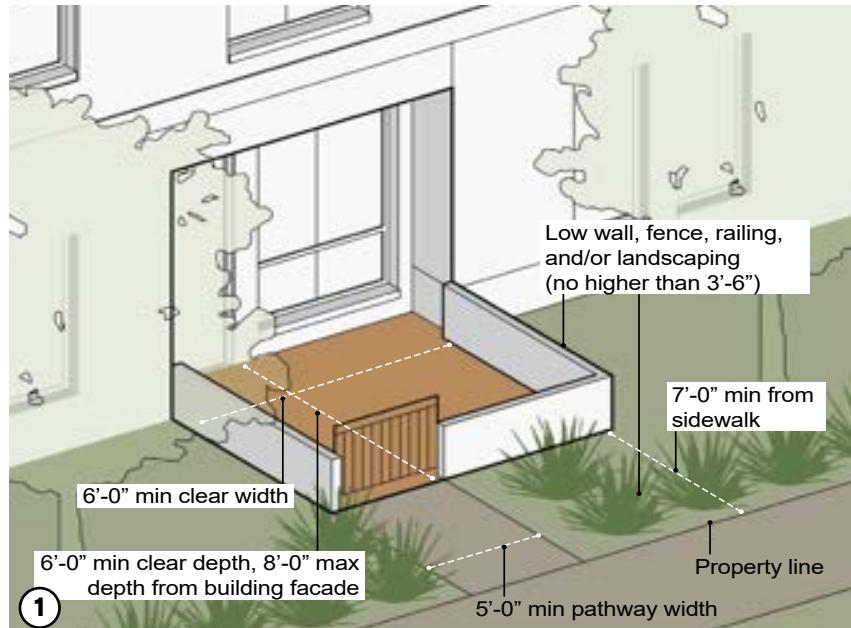
## 3) Ground Floor Dwelling Units

Exterior entrances to ground floor units shall be connected to the public sidewalk by a paved walkway with a minimum width of five (5) feet. An at-grade patio, a raised stoop, or a raised porch may serve as a ground floor unit entrance. Raised stoops or porches shall not exceed five (5) feet above grade. Patios, stoops, and porches shall provide a minimum six (6) foot by six (6) foot clear area. Ground floor patios shall be surrounded by a low wall, fence, railing, and/or landscaping no higher than forty two (42) inches to distinguish private outdoor space from the public sidewalk.



**Figure 3.12- Main Building Entrances - MU Districts**

- 1) Main Building Entrance: Recessed
- 2) Main Building Entrance: Partially Recessed
- 3) Main Building Entrance: Canopied



**Figure 3.13 - Residential Unit Entrance Applicable for 100% residential units within MU Districts**

- 1) Residential Unit Entrance: At-Grade Patio
- 2) Residential Unit Entrance: Recessed Porch or Stoop
- 3) Residential Unit Entrance: Porch or Stoop

area. Ground floor exterior unit entrances may be recessed or project no more than eight (8) feet from the building facade. Fences shall meet the requirements pursuant to SCMC 18.15.040.

#### **4) Corner Entrances**

Corner building entrances shall have a distinct architectural treatment to animate the intersection and facilitate pedestrian flow around the corner. Different treatments may include canopies, trellises, angled or rounded corners, arches, and/or other architectural elements. All building and dwelling units located in the interior of a site shall have entrances from the sidewalk that are designed as an extension of the public sidewalk and connect to a public sidewalk.

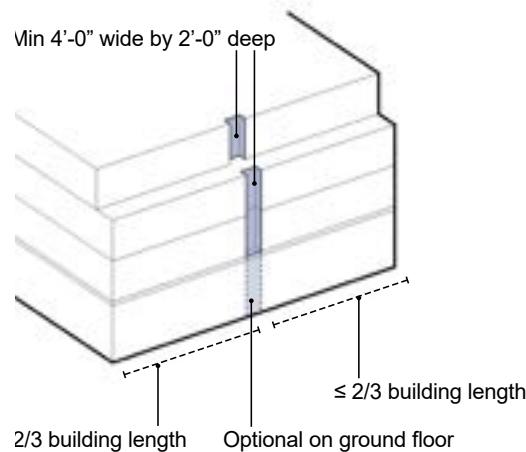
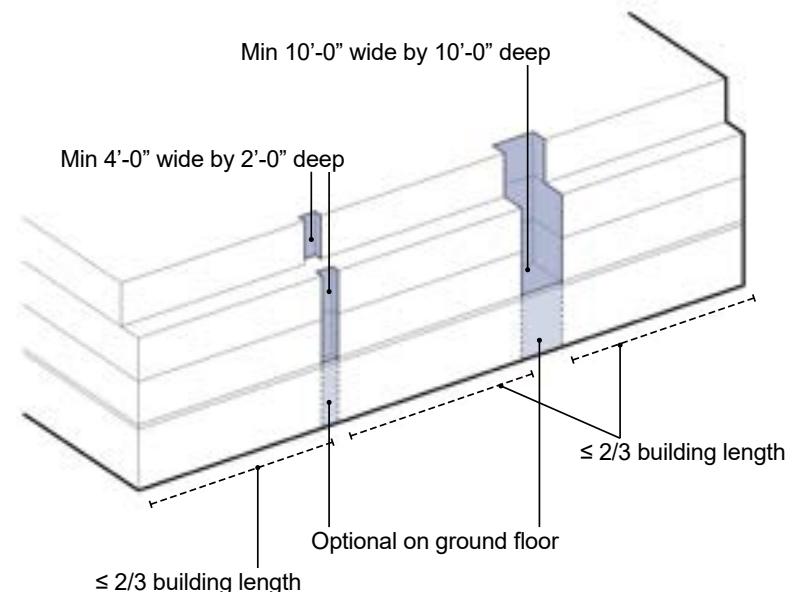
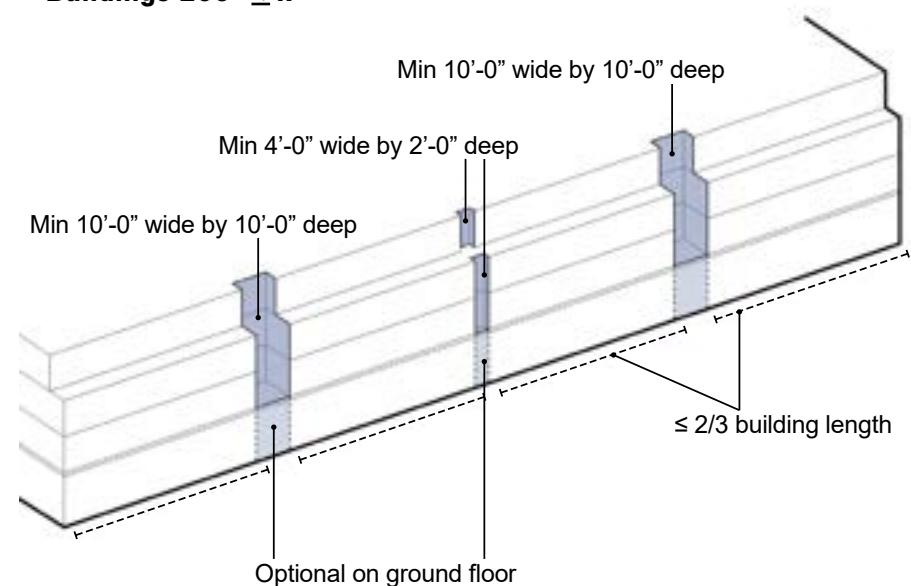
### **O. MASSING BREAKS**

Massing breaks provide visual relief for longer buildings by breaking down the building scale into smaller elements more compatible with San Carlos. Massing break standards apply to all front, side, and rear building facades. Exceptions include: buildings on lots seventy-five (75) feet wide or less require only one (1) minor massing break on side facades; internal courtyard facades not visible from public rights-of-way.

1) Buildings between fifty (50) feet and one hundred (100) feet in length shall include at least one (1) minor massing break, defined as a minimum of four (4) feet wide by two (2) feet deep extending the full height of the building above the ground floor and shall include a corresponding break in the roof line. The required minor massing break shall be positioned such that no more than two thirds of the total building length is without a

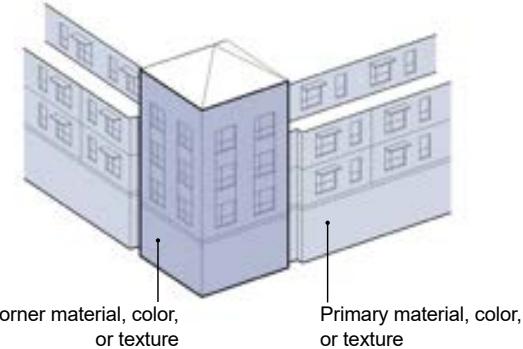
massing break. When a building has an upper story stepback, the minor massing break minimum dimensions shall also apply to the upper stories and shall include a corresponding break in the roof line

- 2) Buildings greater than one hundred (100) feet and up to two hundred (200) feet in length shall include at least one (1) minor massing break (defined above) and one (1) major massing break, defined as a minimum of ten (10) feet wide by ten (10) feet deep extending the full height of the building above the ground floor and shall include a break in the roof line. The required major and minor massing breaks shall be positioned such that no more than two thirds of the total building length is without a massing break. When a building has an upper story stepback, the minor massing break minimum dimensions apply to the upper stories and shall include a break in the roof line, and the major massing break may continue vertically to align with the walls below the stepback and shall include a break in the roof line.
- 3) Buildings greater than two hundred (200) feet in length must include at least one (1) minor massing break and two (2) major massing breaks (defined above). The required minor and major massing breaks shall be positioned such that no more than two thirds of the total building length is without a massing break. When a building has an upper story stepback, the minor massing break minimum dimensions shall also apply to the upper stories and shall include a corresponding break in the roof line. The major massing break may continue vertically to align with the walls below the stepback and shall include a corresponding break in the roof line.

**Buildings  $50' \leq X \leq 100'$** **Buildings  $101' \leq X \leq 200'$** **Buildings  $200' \leq x$** **Figure 3.14 - Massing Breaks - MU Districts**

(Reference 18.05.040-D: Massing Breaks - MU Districts)

## Material, Color, or Texture Variety

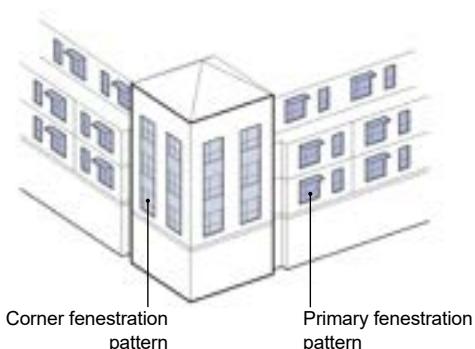


## P. CORNERS

Corner buildings shall emphasize the street corner through a combination of building massing and facade variation.

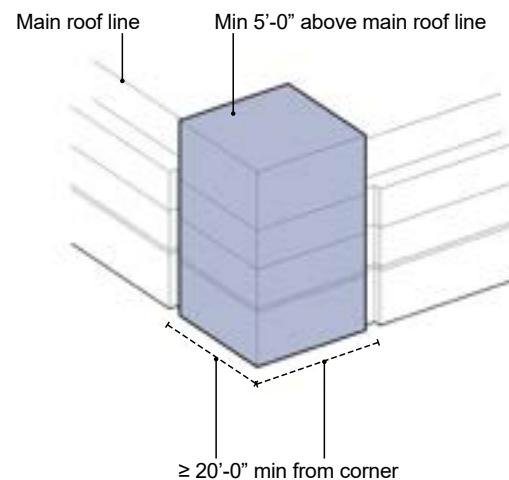
- 1) All corners shall be defined for at least twenty (20) feet along each of the two street-facing facades. The corner portion shall either have a minimum two (2) foot change in building plane from its adjacent facades, or a minimum two (2) foot by two (2) foot recessed reveal where it meets the adjacent facades.
- 2) Building corners shall be further differentiated from the rest of the street-facing facades by at least one (1) of the following: a change in roof form with at least a five (5) foot difference in roof height, a change in building material, color, or texture, or a variation in fenestration placement.
- 3) Alternatively, the corner can either be a common roof terrace above the ground floor or a common plaza at the ground floor.

## Fenestration Variety

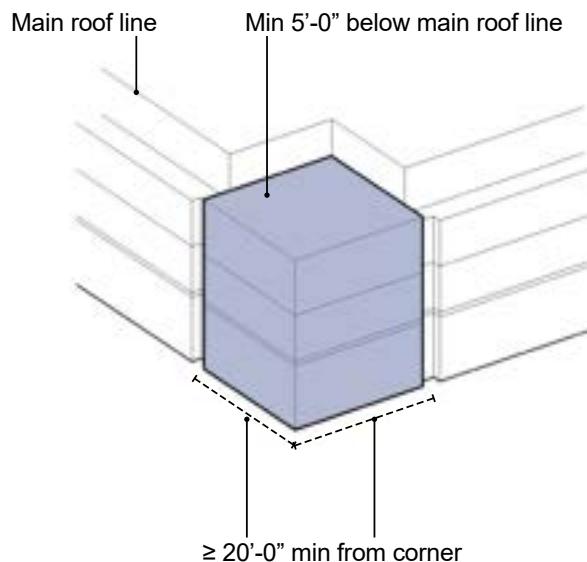


**Figure 3.15 - CORNERS - MU DISTRICTS**

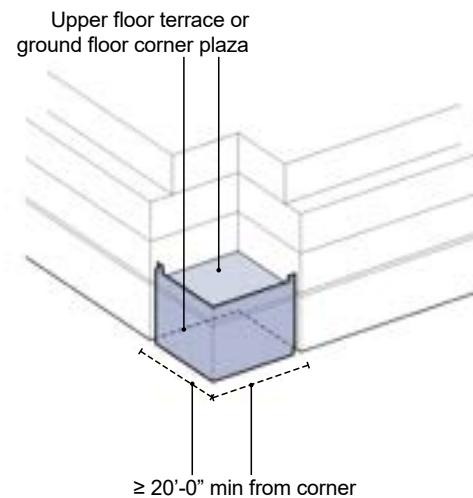
### Higher Roof



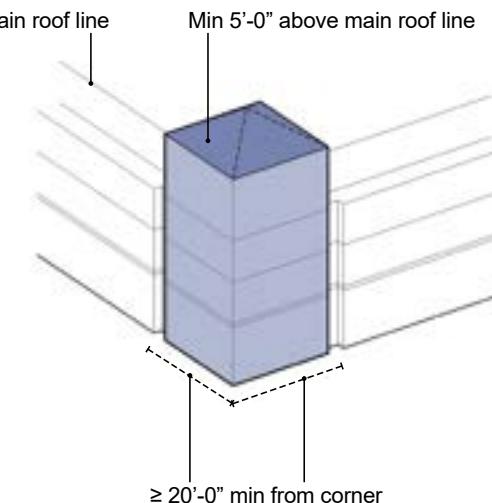
### Lower Roof



### Terrace or Palza



### Architectural Roof Feature

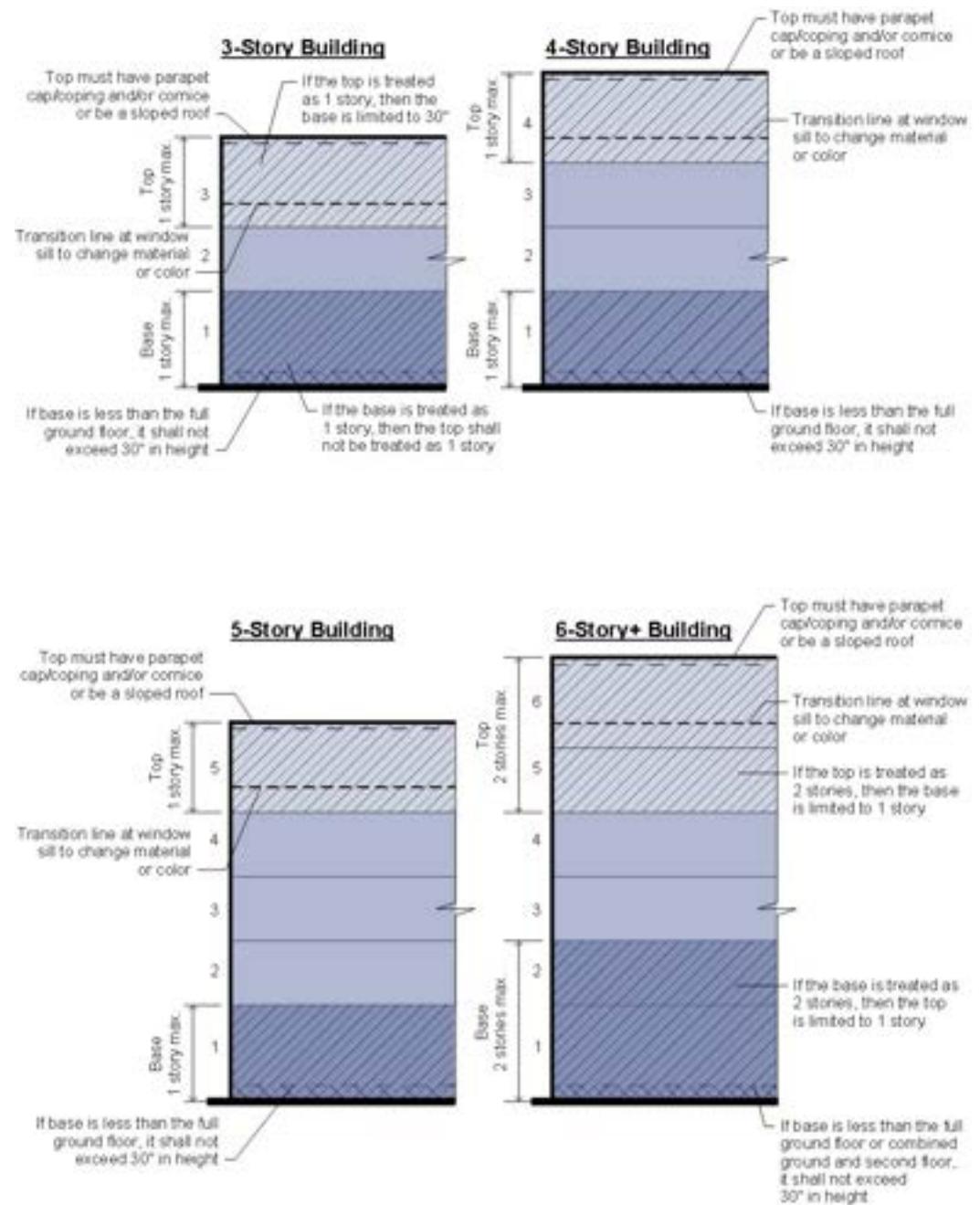


## Q. BASE, MIDDLE, AND TOP TREATMENT

All buildings three (3) stories and taller shall be composed of the following: a distinct base (in some cases this can be treated as the ground story or combined first two stories), a middle (the majority of the building facade area), and a top (parapet cap/coping, cornice, sloped roof, or in some cases this can be treated as the top story or combined top two stories). Each of these elements shall be distinguished from one another for at least seventy percent (70%) of its facade length by either a change in material, a change in color, and/or a facade plane change of at least two (2) feet. A ground floor or in some cases, a combined ground floor and second floor stepback of at least two (2) feet in addition to the required setback from floors above may be considered a base. Base, middle, and top treatment standards apply to all front, side, and rear building facades. Exceptions include: internal courtyard facades not visible from public rights-of-way.

- 1) A base for buildings of three (3) to five (5) stories must either be limited to 30 inches in height from grade and project maximum of six (6) inches from the building facade or be treated as the full height of the ground story. For a 3-story building, the base is limited to thirty (30) inches if the top is treated as the full height of the top story.
- 2) A base for buildings of six (6) stories or more must either be limited to 30 inches in height from grade and project maximum of six (6) inches from the building facade or be treated as the full height of the ground story, or be treated as the height of the ground story and second story combined. If the top of the building is treated as the combined height of the top two (2) stories, the base is limited to the full height of the ground story.

- 3) The middle portion of buildings of three (3) or four (4) stories shall be a minimum of two (2) stories in height.
- 4) The middle portion of buildings of five (5) to six (6) stories shall be a minimum of three (3) stories in height.
- 5) The middle portion of buildings of greater than six (6) stories shall be a minimum of the total amount of stories minus three (3). For example, an eight (8) story building must have a middle portion that is at least five (5) stories in height.
- 6) The top of all buildings must have a parapet cap/coping, a cornice, or be a sloped roof.
- 7) A top for buildings of three (3) to five (5) stories may be treated as the full height of the top story. For a three (3) -story building, the top is limited to a parapet cap/coping, a cornice, or a sloped roof if the base is treated as the full height of the ground story.
- 8) A top for buildings of six (6) stories or more may be treated as the full height of the top story. The top may also be treated as the full height of the top two (2) stories combined, only if the base is limited to the height of the ground story.



**Figure 3.16 - Base, Middle, And Top- MU Districts**

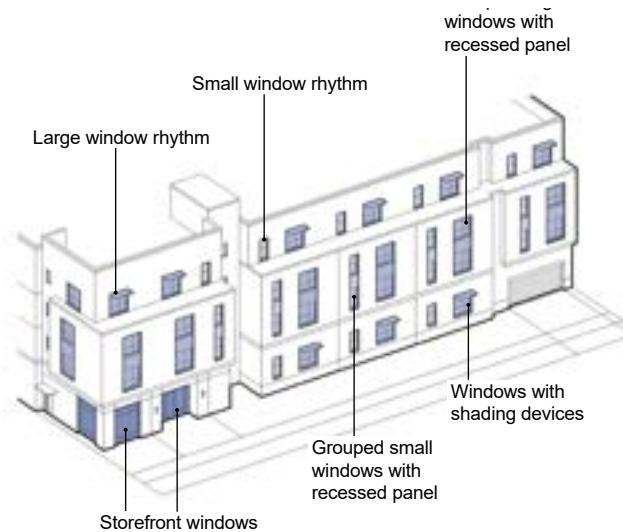
## R. FENESTRATION VARIETY

To achieve the fenestration variety standard, buildings shall include rhythms of at least two (2) types of openings for at least seventy percent (70%) of its facade length - the required seventy percent (70%) length does not have to be continuous. Various types of distinct openings include storefront windows and doors, residential entry doors, living room windows, bedroom windows, bathroom windows, common hallway windows, and stairway windows. Windows may be grouped vertically or horizontally or designed with shading devices or other architectural features to achieve pattern variety. Fenestration standards apply to all front, side, and rear building facades. Exceptions include: internal courtyard facades not visible from public rights-of-way.

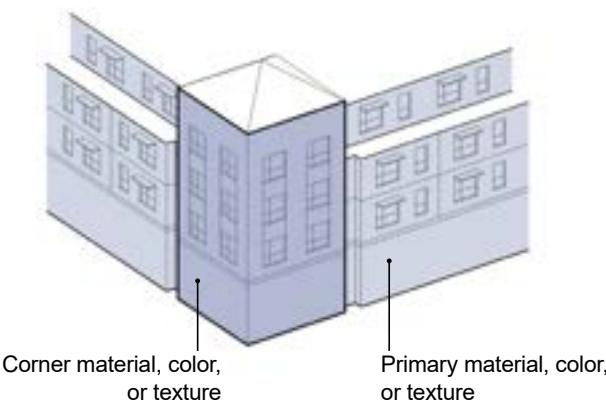
## S. MATERIALS, COLORS, AND TEXTURE VARIETY

To achieve this standard, buildings shall provide at least two (2) different materials, colors, or textures for at least seventy percent (70%) of its facade length. Material transitions along any facade shall only occur on the inside corner of a plane change. When material changes need to occur in the same plane, bands, trims, cornices, or other architectural elements shall project at least two (2) inches from the facade plane to create a corner for the material transition. Materials, colors, and texture variety standards apply to all front, side, and rear building facades. Exceptions include internal courtyard facades not visible from public rights-of-way.

### Fenestration Variety



### Material, Color, or Texture Variety



**Figure 3.17 - Fenestration and material, color, or texture variety**

## 1. Building Materials

Building materials standards apply to all front, side, and rear building facades. Exceptions include: internal courtyard facades not visible from public rights-of-way. Ground floor building walls shall have high-quality materials and texture for all non-glass areas. High-quality materials include: stone, marble, granite, brick (real or thin veneers of natural color), ceramic tile, wood, terracotta, precast concrete, glass-fiber reinforced concrete, cast-in-place concrete, board-formed concrete, cement plaster, stucco (light sand or smooth trowel finish), cement fiber or similar synthetic siding resembling wood siding, steel (porcelain enamel panels, steel windows, steel exterior doors, steel rails and fences, painted, stainless, or pre-weathered steel are acceptable when limited to a maximum of fifty percent (50%) of the building treatment), aluminum (windows, panels, storefront, curtain wall, doors, aluminum should be natural finish anodized, powder-coated, or Kynar, no bronze anodized), high-density fiber cement panels, durable foam coating/window trims with smooth stucco finish.

Prohibited materials include: unfinished or natural T1-11 siding, foam, spray stucco, vinyl. Entry canopies, stoops, patios, and balconies shall be constructed of all-weather, durable materials. The Planning Director shall maintain a list of approved facade and trim materials, with such a list accessible to the public.

## T. ROOF VARIETY

Roof variety standards apply to all building facades. Exceptions include internal courtyard facades not visible from public rights-of-way.

### Roof Variety

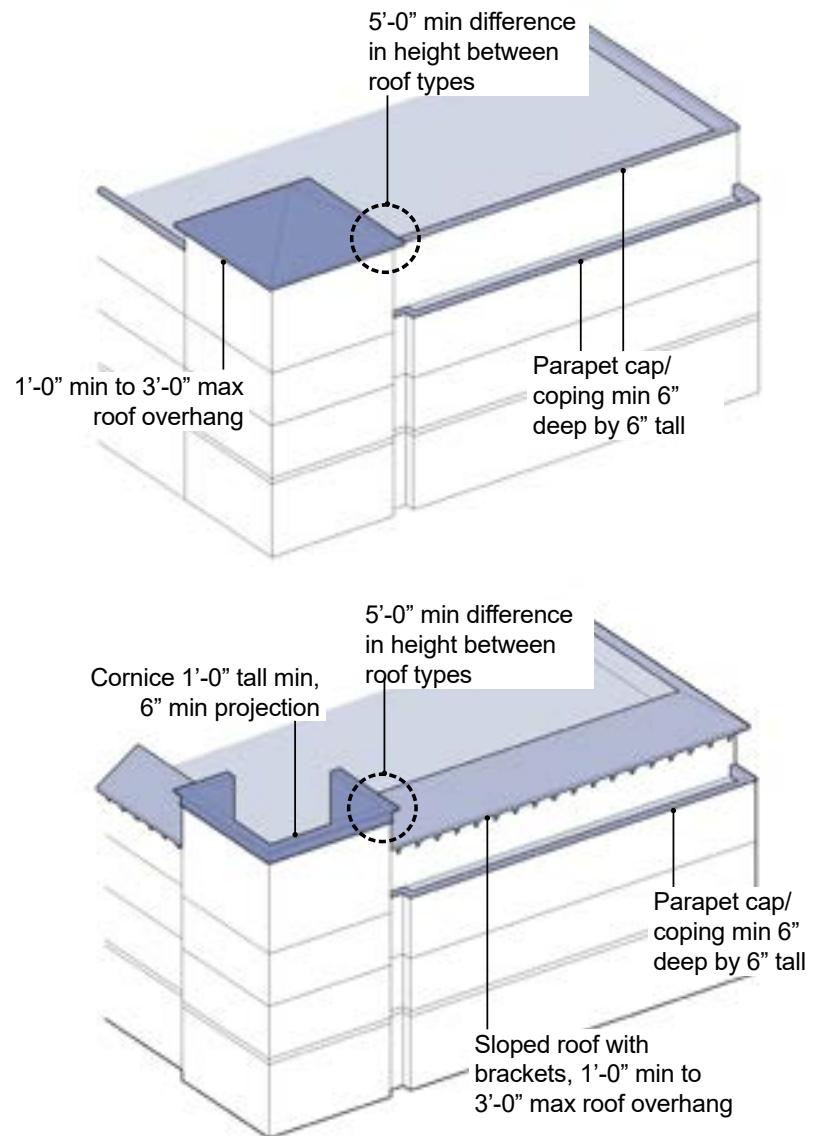


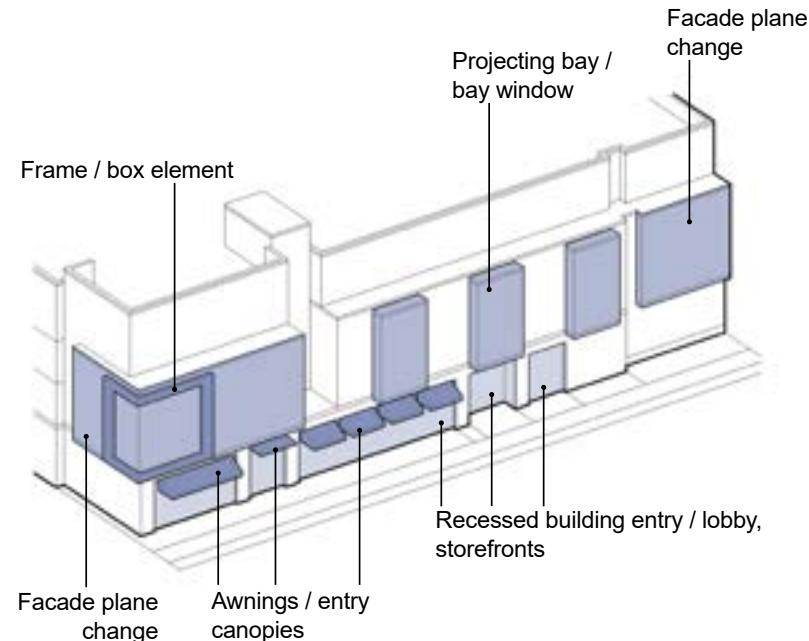
Figure 3.18 - Roof variety

- 1) Continuous roofs greater than seventy-five (75) feet shall be broken up using either varying parapet or roof heights, changes in plane along the facade, variation between flat and sloped roofs, overhangs with or without brackets, and/or a combination thereof. This standard does not apply to a top floor that is stepped back at least six (6) feet from the floors below.
- 2) Parapet caps/coping shall be at least six (6) inches deep and six (6) inches tall, and project at least three (3) inches from the building facade. Sloped roofs shall have overhangs extending a minimum of twelve (12) inches and a maximum of three (3) feet from the facade, including the eave and gutter profile.
- 3) Changes in roof height between parapets or differing roof types must be at least five (5) feet in height. Rooftop equipment shall be fully screened from public/street view pursuant to SCMC Section 18.15.090 using architectural elements including but not limited to parapets and screens. The screening elements shall be integrated into the overall building design.
- 4) Towers. If the project site is greater than fifteen thousand (15,000) square feet, a tower or other projecting architectural element(s) may extend up to ten (10) feet above the top of the roof; provided, that the square footage of the element(s) does not total more than ten percent (10%) of the building roof area. The area above the uppermost permitted floor of the element(s) shall not be habitable space.

## U. PROJECTING AND RECESSED ELEMENTS

This standard may be applied in lieu of both the fenestration variety standard and the materials, colors, and texture variety standard. This standard applies only to facades facing public rights-of-way, not to side, rear, or internal courtyard facades.

To achieve the projecting / recessed elements standard, buildings shall provide a rhythm of at least two (2) of the following elements for at least

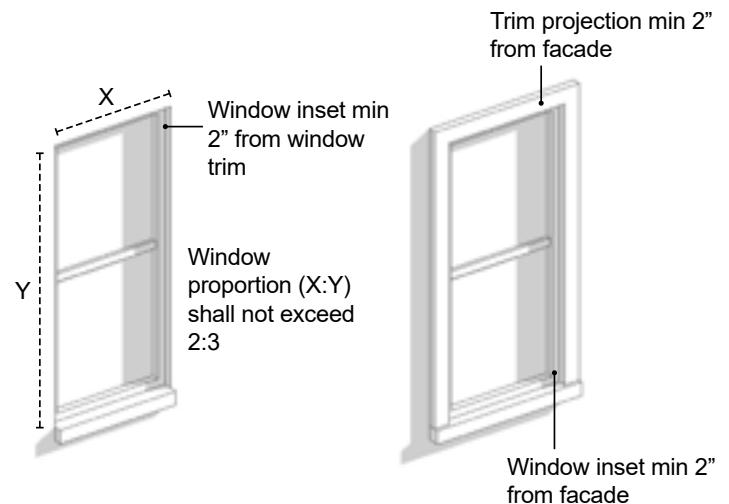


**Figure 3.19 - Projecting and recessed elements**

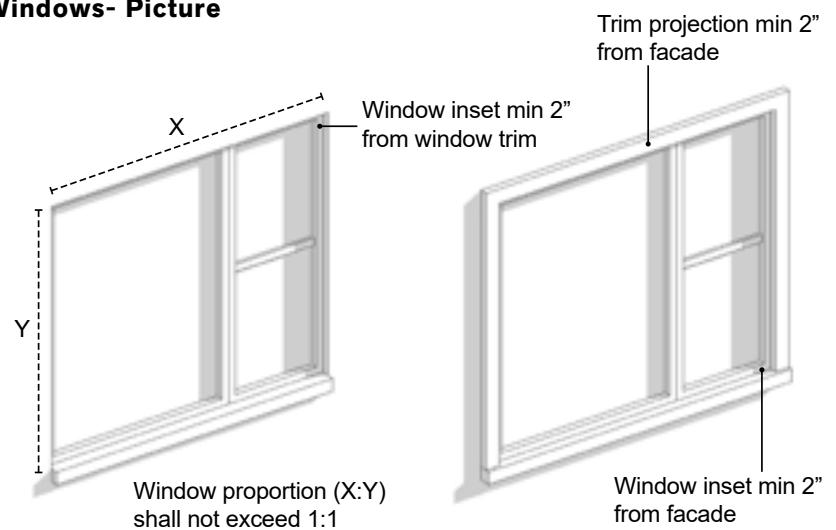
## Windows- Typical

seventy percent (70%) of its facade length: projecting bays / bay windows, recessed areas containing windows, projecting or recessed balconies, ground floor stoops or porches, projecting frame / box elements containing at least one (1) window, projecting window shading devices, and ground floor awnings or canopies.

- 1) Projecting bays shall be between eighteen (18) inches and three (3) feet deep, and between six (6) feet and twelve (12) feet wide.
- 2) Usable balconies shall be a minimum of six (6) feet deep by six (6) feet wide. Balconies shall avoid a tacked-on look by being recessed at least twelve (12) inches into the building facade. When private balconies are provided, they shall have a transparency of no less than twenty-five percent (25%). Permanent storage boxes, condensers for air-conditioning units, or other mechanical equipment shall not be located on balconies. Decorative Juliet balconies shall be a minimum of twelve (12) inches deep and three (3) feet wide.
- 3) Recessed areas of a building containing windows shall be at least one (1) foot deep. Recessed panels shall be at least four (4) inches deep.
- 4) Screening devices, shading devices, and projecting frame elements shall be a minimum of eighteen (18) inches deep. Lattices, louvers, and/or perforated metal screens shall be a minimum of four (4) inches deep or set at least four (4) inches from the facade.



## Windows- Picture



**Figure 3.20 - Window standards**

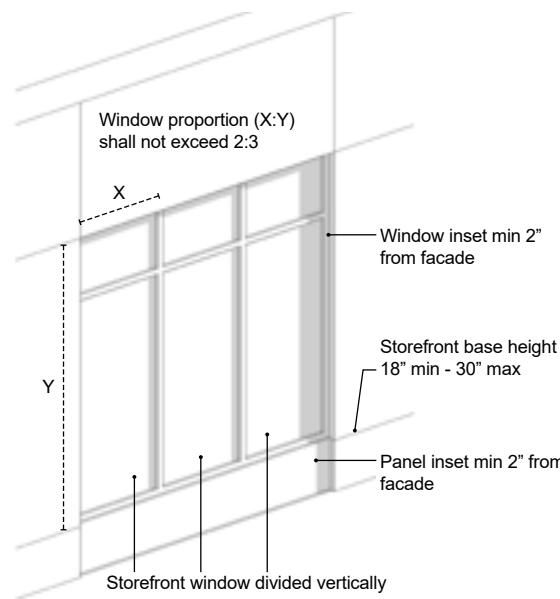
## V. WINDOWS AND GROUND FLOOR TRANSPARENCY

1) Windows without trim shall be recessed at least two (2) inches from the plane of the surrounding exterior wall to create a shadow line and visual interest. Windows with trim shall provide trim at least two (2) inches in depth with windows inset from the trim edge by at least two (2) inches. The window trim objective design standards do not apply to interior-

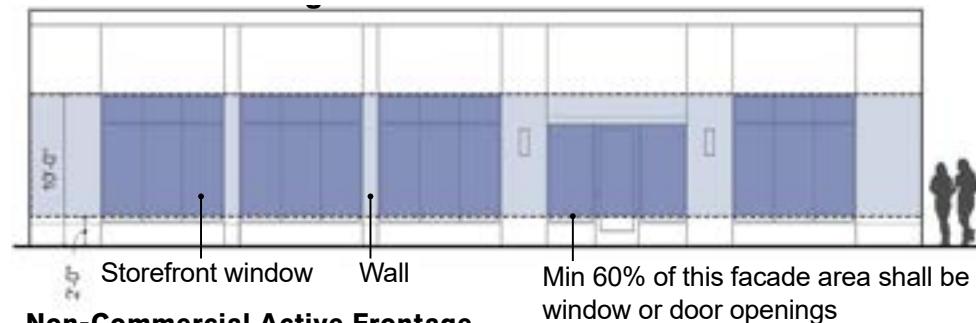
facing windows such as those along an internal building courtyard and windows that are not seen from or facing public rights-of-way.

2) For double-hung and horizontal sliding windows, at least one (1) sash shall achieve a two (2) inch recess. Snap-in vinyl mullions between double pane glass are prohibited. If a divided light appearance is desired, mullions shall be made of dimensional material projecting in front of the panes on both the inside and outside of the window.

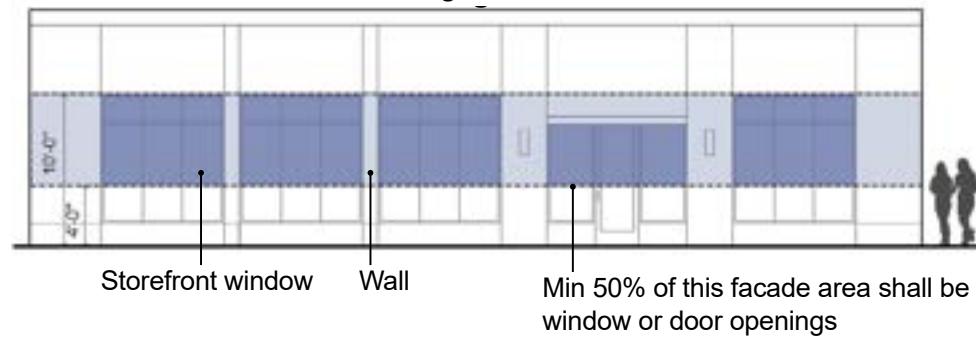
### Windows- Storefront



### Commercial Frontage



### Non-Commercial Active Frontage



**Figure 3.21 - Window standards for storefronts and ground floor transparency**

- 3) A minimum of 90% of upper story windows on street- or public open space-facing building facades shall be designed such that:
- 4) Windows are at least twelve (12) inches apart.
- 5) Proportions of typical windows shall be vertically oriented and shall not exceed a width (x) to height (y) ratio of two to three (2:3). Proportions of picture windows (typically provided for living rooms) shall not exceed a width to height ratio of one to one (1:1)
- 6) Proportions of storefront windows shall also be vertically oriented not to exceed a width to height ratio of two to three (2:3). Storefront windows with a width to height ratio greater than two to three (2:3) shall include vertical mullions such that each window panel is not greater than a two to three (2:3) width to height ratio.
- 7) Mirrored or reflective glass is not allowed on a street- or public open space-facing building facade at any level. Only transparent glass shall be used for windows or glazing at the ground floor.
- 8) Facade transparency is important to provide visual interest, visibility for businesses, and an active sidewalk environment. For mixed-use buildings with commercial ground floors, a minimum 60% of the ground floor facade area between two (2) feet and ten (10) feet above the sidewalk shall be glazed with transparent windows and doors. For mixed-use buildings with non-commercial ground floors, such as office, institution, residential units, or residential active uses as further defined in Section

18.05.030(H)(1), a minimum 50% of the ground floor facade area between four (4) feet and ten (10) feet above the sidewalk shall be glazed with transparent windows and doors. For corner buildings, this standard also applies to the secondary street facade for at least twenty-five (25) feet from the corner.

- 9) Minor deviation from the window requirement may be granted through the design review process to accommodate alternative window design complementary to the architectural style of the structure.

## **W. PRIVATE STORAGE SPACE**

Each unit shall have at least two hundred (200) cubic feet of enclosed, weather-proofed, and lockable private storage space with a minimum horizontal dimension of four (4) feet.

## **X. PAVING**

Differentiated paving materials shall be used for driveway aprons, entries, and for pedestrian walkways see standards set forth in the Downtown Streetscape Master Plan or in accordance with the City Council-approved street design during the implementation phase, as detailed in each street's Plans, Specifications, and Estimates (PS&E). This may include, but not be limited to, textures or colors, concrete pavers, brick, or stamped concrete.





# 04

## PROSPERITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

## 4.1 OVERVIEW

The San Carlos Downtown Specific Plan will bring significant economic benefits to the community. Through its placemaking initiatives, Downtown Streetscape Master Plan, and expanded cultural and arts programming, the City will cultivate a vibrant, attractive environment for both businesses and community members. These efforts will reinforce support for local independent shops and restaurants, helping them thrive.

A dynamic Downtown will also serve as a key asset in attracting and retaining talent for major employers. Increased foot traffic and patronage will drive higher restaurant and retail sales, strengthening sales tax revenues and supporting the City's long-term fiscal health. In short, the Plan will further San Carlos' identity as the "City of Good Living."

***Goal: Downtown San Carlos will be a dynamic economic hub that fosters entrepreneurship, enhances infrastructure, and promotes arts and culture to create a thriving, inclusive, and prosperous community. Through strategic placemaking, branding, and enriched by a mix of land uses, the Downtown core will support both retail and restaurant destinations, strengthen economic vitality, and provide for everyday needs through a welcoming and engaging public realm that supports residents, workers, visitors, and businesses alike.***

## 4.2 POLICIES AND ACTIONS

The Downtown Economic Prosperity Plan was developed with the Downtown Specific Plan to present strategies that can strengthen the local economy, support small businesses, attract investment, and ensure Downtown growth translates into shared community benefits. It can be reviewed in its entirety in Appendix C. It outlines specific policy actions the City can consider as part of the Downtown Specific Plan implementation to broaden economic opportunities within the community. These include:

**PED-1:** The Downtown core will be activated through zoning amendments, a mix of land uses, and placemaking strategies, fostering entrepreneurship, infrastructure improvements, arts and culture initiatives and promoting equity and inclusivity for all members of the community.

**Action PED-1A: Retail and Commercial Zoning Code Amendments.**

*In an ever-evolving retail environment, it is important that the City's zoning code and its development standards be aligned with retail tenant demand and space requirements. The Downtown Economic Prosperity Plan recommends specific changes to the zoning code, such as higher ground floor heights, to ensure new development can offer ground floor spaces to a wide variety of retail and commercial tenants. Implementing these changes could facilitate successful marketing of a new retail and commercial space.*

**PED-2:** Provide support, streamline communication, and take a proactive, business-friendly approach to help businesses start, operate, and grow—strengthening the economic vitality of Downtown San Carlos.

**Action PED-2: Business Liaison**

*Establish a Business Liaison program that provides a single, dedicated point of contact to assist prospective business owners. The liaison helps navigate the often-complex process of identifying, applying for, and obtaining required approvals and permits from City departments and external agencies (e.g., County Health Department, Alcoholic Beverage Control, etc.). This program would go beyond a pre-application meeting. Its core purpose would be to increase transparency and demonstrate a proactive, business-friendly approach, and position the City as a supportive partner in helping businesses launch and grow.*

*Through implementation of the Plan and its components, the City can set the stage for enhanced economic vitality and provide a set of clear plan documents, zoning and development standards, and economic development services that will collectively incentivize property owners and developers in the Downtown to successfully renovate and redevelop their properties.*

**PED-3:** The City shall position the Downtown Core as a distinctive and vibrant destination by implementing a coordinated branding and marketing strategy, and by supporting the planning and programming of community events, cultural activities, and public gatherings that enhance its identity

and attract residents, visitors, and businesses

**Action PED-3: Branding and Marketing.**

*The Parks and Recreation Department will work with the City's Economic Development and Communications Divisions, stakeholders and local organizations to create and oversee a branding and marketing strategy for the Downtown core, including coordinating community events, programming, business promotion, and activities.*

*By crafting a branding statement for Downtown San Carlos and formulating a marketing plan around it, the City can distinguish it as a unique and interesting destination and encourage consumers to visit. A Downtown marketing plan also will help draw visitors from outside the City.*

The City hosts a variety of events in and around the Downtown (Refer to Figure 5.1). These include the annual Hometown Days Parade and Festival held in May, an Art and Wine Faire and Goblin Walk in October, and Night of Holiday Lights on Laurel Street in December. In addition, a Farmers' Market takes place every Sunday year-round, and Community Movies and Music in the Park are held during the summer, and a family camp out held at Burton Park in August.

The Downtown Economic Prosperity Plan recommends supplementing these events with additional programming to reinforce Laurel Street as the community's gathering place. See the plan in Appendix C for further details

**PED-4:** Reinforce economic prosperity by providing an inviting, vibrant, safe, comfortable, and easy-to-navigate Downtown experience for all users.

**PED-5:** Explore the feasibility to develop a comprehensive Downtown wayfinding system to improve navigation and reinforce the Downtown brand.

**Action PED-5:** *Downtown Wayfinding*

*Explore the feasibility to prioritize city's wayfinding program for the Downtown, in particular for locating parking facilities.*

**PED-6:** Provide spaces for pop-ups to encourage small local business start-ups and to provide affordable food and beverage options for the community. Spaces, such as the new public plaza on the 600 block of Laurel Street, will include electrical outlets so that gas-powered generators can be prohibited. The City will develop mechanisms for reviewing and approving pop-up businesses taking into account considerations such as location, business type, and design quality.

**Action PED-6A:** *Pop-ups*

*Opportunities for pop-ups are encouraged in the new public plaza located on the 600 block of Laurel Street and throughout the Downtown core as feasible. These may range from market booths to more permanent pop-up businesses in designated areas (such as the plaza at the 600 block of Laurel Street).*

*The new plaza on the 600 block of Laurel Street includes one area along its southern edge. Here, a pop-up zone shall be designated for this express purpose – allowing for a variety of small local vendors to apply for permits to conduct their business. The design of these pop-ups shall be regulated and approved by the City and should be of a design quality and durability that meets the City's standards. Electrical power outlets shall be provided as*

*part of the new plaza on 600 block design to accommodate the pop-ups' needs.*

**Action PED-6B:** *Explore the formation of a Business Improvement District (BID) for Downtown San Carlos, engaging property and business owners to establish a governance and funding structure that supports operations, programming, and long-term vitality.*

**Action PED-6C:** *As needed, conduct retail zoning audits to ensure regulations support a diverse mix of businesses and evolving market needs.*

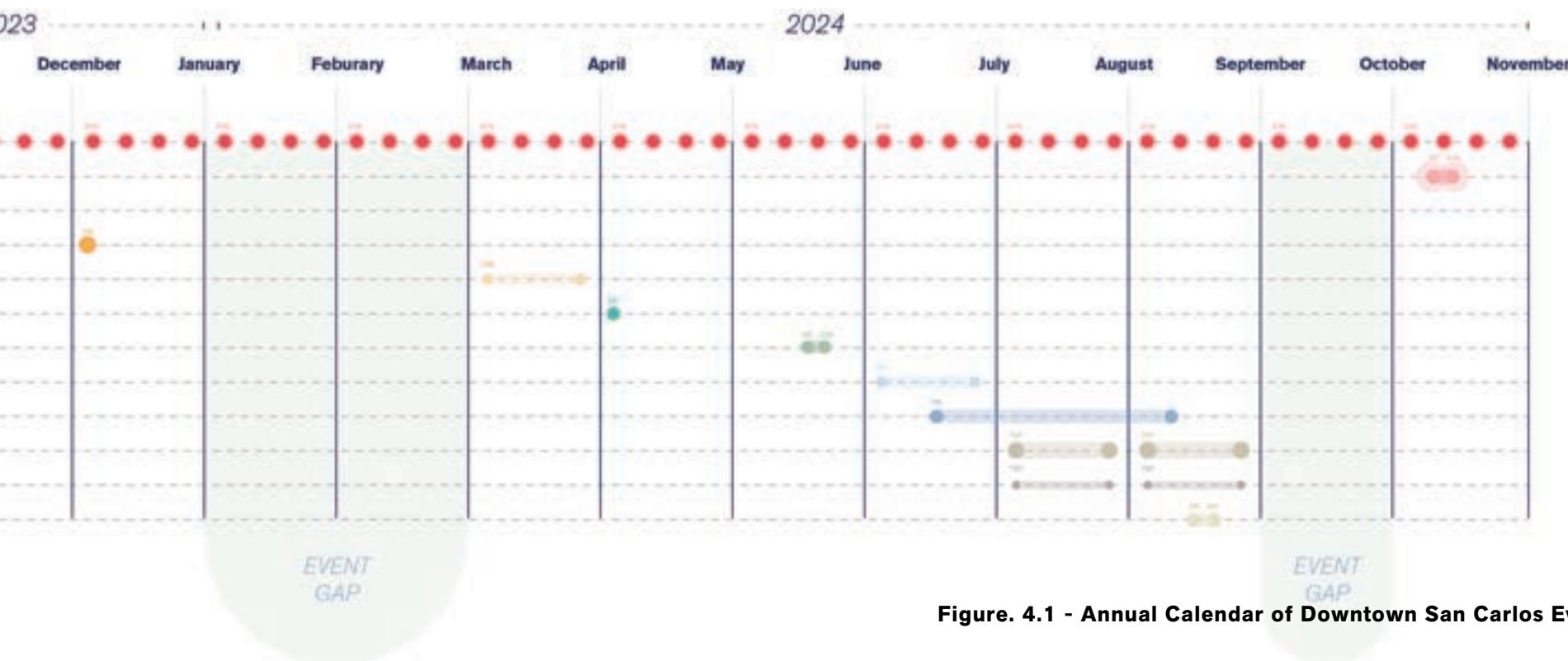


**Action PED-6D:** Develop a ground-floor retail mixed-use checklist to guide project review and promote active ground-level uses. The mixed-use checklist provided in the Downtown Economic Prosperity Plan lends developers and City staff a convenient tool to ensure new ground floor commercial space is planned, designed, and constructed in a manner that meets the physical requirements of retail, particularly restaurants that typically have special plumbing, electrical, and venting requirements.

**Action PED-6E:** Implement a Downtown branding and marketing program to strengthen identity and attract visitors, businesses, and investment.

**PED-7:** The City shall establish the Downtown Core as an attractive destination for entertainment and local events.

**Action PED-7:** Explore feasibility of establishing an entertainment zone in the Downtown area.



**Figure 4.1 - Annual Calendar of Downtown San Carlos Events**





# 05

## MOBILITY AND CONNECTIVITY

## 5.1 OVERVIEW

The Downtown Specific Plan is grounded in the guiding principle that a well-balanced mobility network is essential to creating a healthy, vibrant, accessible, and connected Downtown. By integrating traffic data, community input, and direction from the City's Climate Mitigation and Adaptation Plan and Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan, the Downtown Specific Plan supports a variety of travel choices while enhancing the overall experience of the district.

***Goal: The Downtown Specific Plan sets forth a comprehensive framework for a multi-modal transportation network that prioritizes active transportation, safety, accessibility, and connectivity, while fostering a pedestrian friendly, vibrant and equitable Downtown that serves the needs of all residents, workers, and visitors in alignment with the Downtown Streetscape Master Plan.***

## 5.2 BALANCING THE NETWORK

The Plan supports a multi-modal approach that accommodates vehicles, pedestrians, and cyclists while maintaining adaptability for peak hours and events like the Farmers' Market and the Art and Wine Faire.

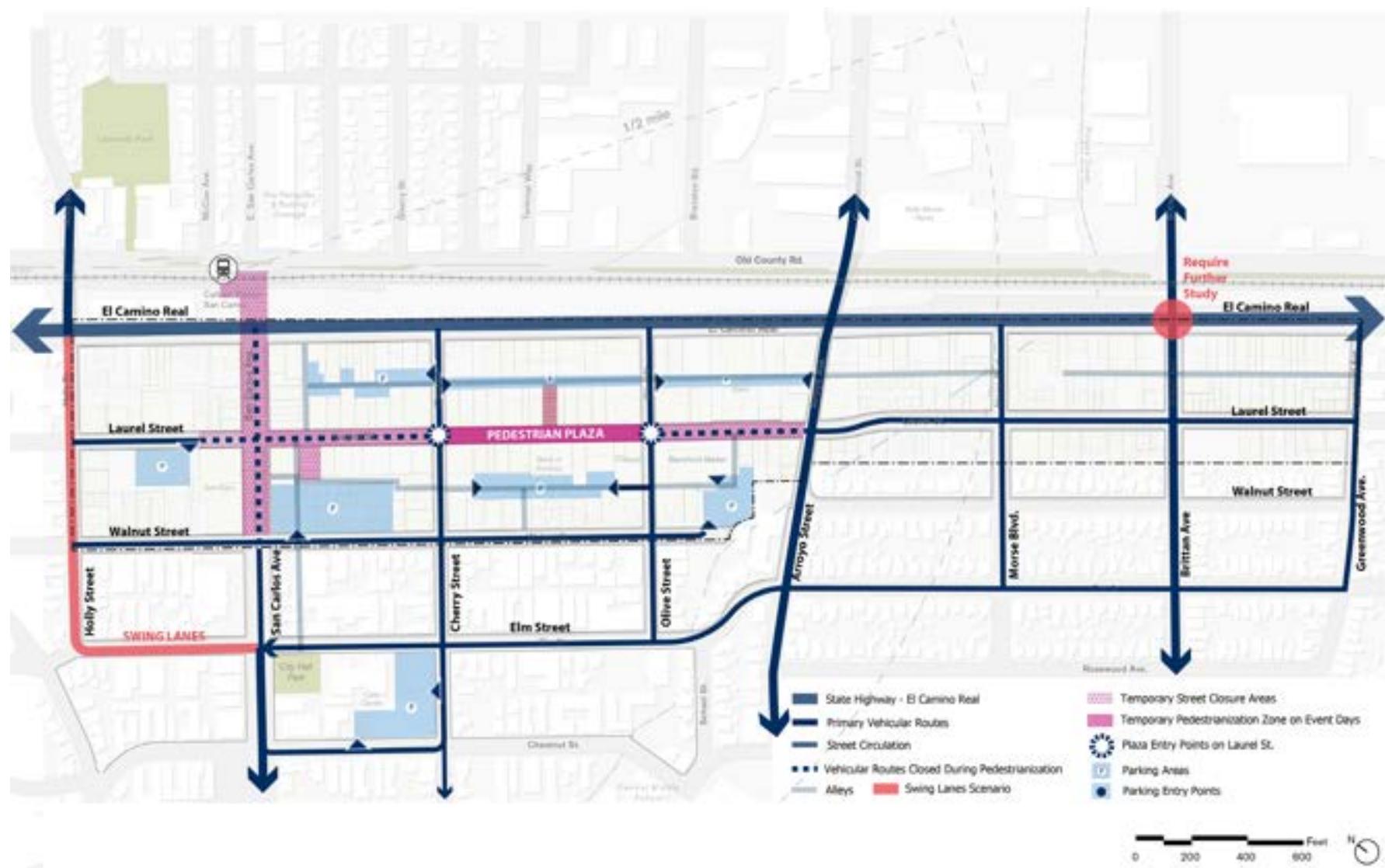
On December 11, 2023, the City Council permanently closed the 700

block of Laurel Street to vehicular traffic. The pedestrianization of the 700 block of Laurel Street has reshaped circulation patterns in the Downtown, highlighting the need to evaluate all modes of travel to create a flexible and integrated transportation system and a street hierarchy. The street hierarchy recognizes El Camino Real as the major arterial, with Brittan Avenue and the San Carlos Avenue–Elm Street–Holly Street corridor serving regional connections.

At the local level, Laurel and Elm Streets function as key collectors into Downtown, with Cherry, Olive, and Morse providing additional links to surrounding neighborhoods. Enhanced east-west connections include the Caltrain and Arroyo Avenue underpasses, facilitating movement for all modes. The 600 and 800 blocks of Laurel Street emphasize walkability while allowing limited vehicle access to support local business activity. Downtown alleys remain essential for circulation and parking and have been reimaged to improve efficiency without compromising the pedestrian experience.

To ensure the Downtown street network remains functional as the City of San Carlos grows, the Downtown Specific Plan integrates adaptive traffic strategies that can respond to future demands. One such option is the introduction of reversible swing lanes on Holly Street, allowing peak-hour traffic flow in opposite directions during the morning and evening rush. This approach preserves on-street parking during off-peak hours and mitigates potential traffic diversion from San Carlos Avenue. The swing lanes are proposed as a future-ready solution, to be activated only if traffic volumes justify it.

Another key focus area is Brittan Avenue, where improved pedestrian



**Figure 5.1 - Vehicular Traffic Network**

and bicycle infrastructure is needed to connect neighborhoods west of Downtown with the City's east side and El Camino Real. These enhancements align with the City's Transportation Demand Management (TDM) goals, encouraging shifts to active and public transportation. Future studies will ensure that improvements are consistent with the City's broader planning efforts, including the East Side Innovation District Vision Plan and Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan.

A comprehensive traffic study including 30 Downtown intersections confirmed that peak-hour congestion and queues are concentrated at key access points: the Holly Street, San Carlos Avenue, and Brittan Avenue intersections with El Camino Real. Yet, despite long-term forecasts showing gradual increases in traffic, the overall network is expected to remain within manageable levels. While individual intersections along El Camino would experience longer delays and queues during peak periods, the overall travel time between north and south San Carlos is only projected to increase by 30-60 seconds with long-term full buildout of the Downtown Specific Plan. Importantly, the study also found that traffic patterns adapt over time, as demonstrated by circulation adjustments following the pedestrianization of Laurel Street's 700 block.

This forward-looking approach blending infrastructure flexibility, long-term traffic forecasting, and demand management ensures that the Downtown circulation system remains balanced, efficient, and aligned with the City of San Carlos' evolving transportation needs. The following section details the multi-modal and accessible strategies that the Downtown San Carlos Specific Plan has recommended.

## 5.3 POLICIES AND ACTIONS

### A. PEDESTRIAN EXPERIENCE

The Plan's Appendix A includes a detailed Downtown Streetscape Master Plan, adopted in April 2025. The Downtown Streetscape Master Plan emphasizes walkability by prioritizing pedestrian comfort, safety, and access as core elements of a vibrant urban environment. Building on the success of the pedestrianized 700 block of Laurel Street, the Plan extends this approach to the 600 and 800 blocks, where wider sidewalks, enhanced crosswalks, and street furnishings create a pedestrian-friendly experience while allowing limited vehicle access to support local businesses and alley connections.

Beyond Laurel Street, the Plan enhances east-west pedestrian connectivity by reconfiguring Brittan Avenue and Arroyo Avenue as key multi-modal and active mobility corridors, linking the East Side Innovation District with the Downtown core.

**M-1:** Prioritize development of the 700 block of Laurel Street as a pedestrian-only plaza and dismount zone, supporting vitality, vibrancy and equity for all users.

**M-2:** Prioritize the pedestrian experience and corresponding street character for all streets within the Downtown core: 1100 and 1200 blocks of San Carlos Avenue; 600, 700, and 800 blocks of Laurel Street; and the



**Figure 5.2 - Pedestrian Circulation**

1100 and 1200 blocks of Cherry and Olive Streets; and the 1100 and 1200 blocks of Arroyo Avenue.

**M-3:** Prioritize pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure by implementing wider sidewalks, protected bicycle lanes with vertical buffers, bicycle parking, green striping for visibility, and safe crossings—particularly along key corridors such as San Carlos Avenue, El Camino Real, Brittan Avenue, Arroyo Avenue, and Laurel Street.

## B. BICYCLING EXPERIENCE

The Plan places strong emphasis on creating a safe, connected, and inviting biking environment to support both daily commutes and short local trips. Building on the foundation of the City's Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan, the Specific Plan outlines key improvements along major corridors such as El Camino Real, San Carlos Avenue, Arroyo Avenue, and Brittan Avenue; these routes are critical for connecting neighborhoods, Downtown destinations, and the Caltrain Station.

To strengthen these connections, this Plan proposes the addition of dedicated bike lanes, improved signage, and enhanced crossings at high-traffic intersections, particularly where bike routes intersect with arterial roads like El Camino Real. Within the slower-paced Downtown core, streets like Laurel Street are designed as shared environments supported by traffic calming and bike-friendly infrastructure. Bicycle parking is also integrated near pedestrian plazas and transit stops, reinforcing biking as a convenient transportation option.

**M-4:** Promote safe and visible bicycle infrastructure by incorporating protected bicycle lanes with vertical buffers, green striping for high visibility, and ample bicycle parking along primary corridors including San Carlos Avenue, El Camino Real, Brittan Avenue, Arroyo Avenue, and Laurel Street.

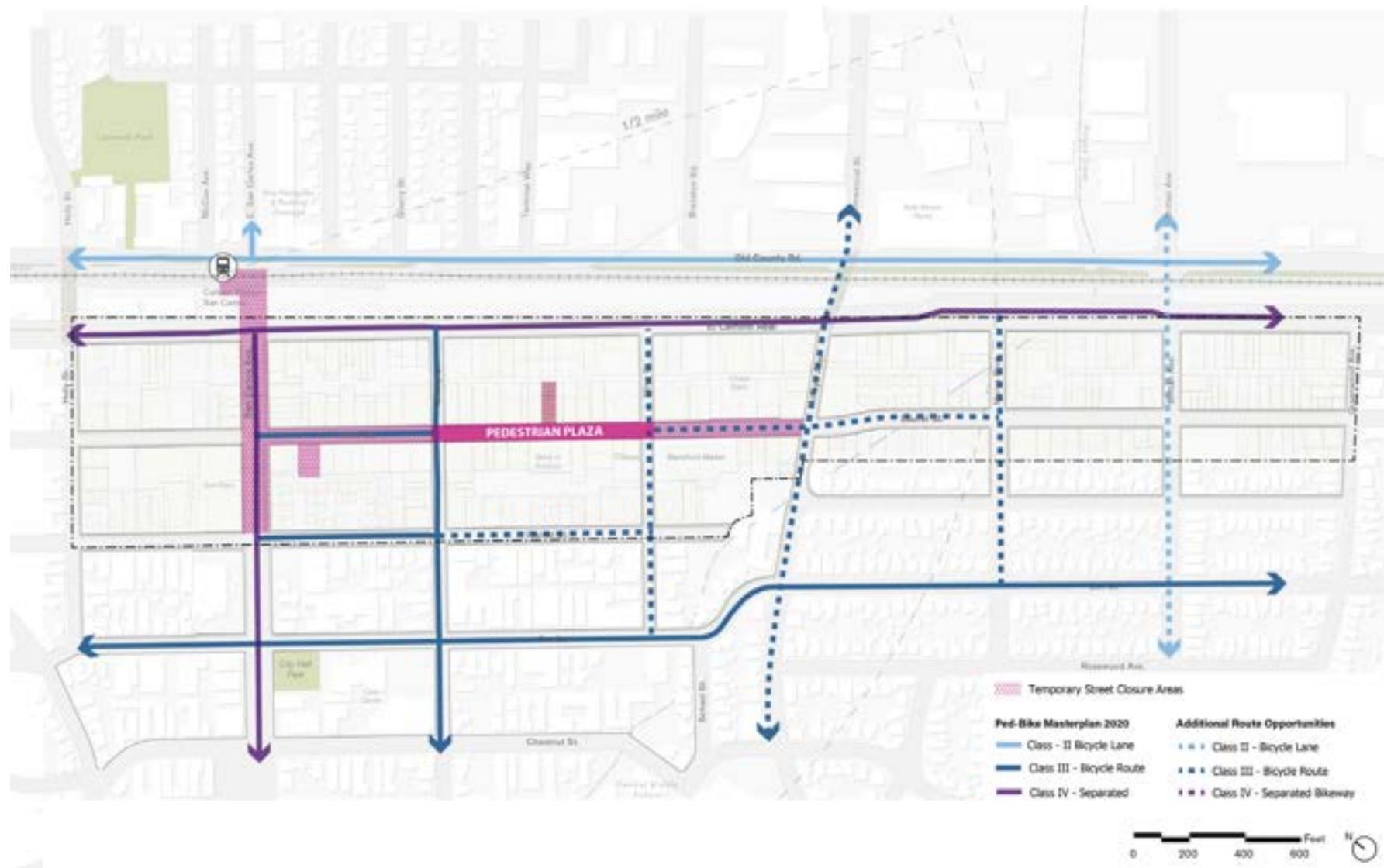
**M-5:** Actively pursue public transit connectivity by enhancing bus stops and improving first- and last-mile connections to Caltrain and bus services through implementation of active transportation infrastructure.

**M-6:** Develop bicycle hubs at the 700 block entrance points that include secure bicycle stands and supportive amenities (i.e. bicycle repair tools) to encourage active transportation and support the 700 block of Laurel Street as a pedestrian-only zone.

## C. ACCESS TO TRANSIT

The Plan strengthens access to transit by improving connections to the San Carlos Caltrain Station and surrounding bus stops.

**M-7:** Design bus stops to safely interface with bike lanes by using features like boarding islands, curb extensions, and clear signage, as specified in SamTrans' Bus Stop Design Guidance.



**Figure 5.3 - Bicycle Network**

## D. ACCESSIBILITY

The Plan prioritizes an inclusive public realm that serves people of all ages and abilities. All streetscape and public space improvements shall be designed in accordance with ADA standards (e.g. Public Right-of-Way Accessibility Guidelines "PROWAG") and universal design principles to ensure equitable access for individuals with mobility, vision, or hearing impairments. Enhancements such as ADA-compliant curb ramps, smooth and widened sidewalks, tactile warning strips, and adjusted pedestrian signal timing help create a Downtown environment that is safe, comfortable, and accessible for everyone.

**M-8:** Ensure equitable access to Downtown by incorporating ADA-compliant infrastructure throughout all streets and public spaces.

## E. TRAFFIC CALMING

**M-9:** Improve street designs with wider sidewalks, high visibility crosswalks, bicycle infrastructure, narrow lanes, as set forth in the Downtown Streetscape Master Plan

**M-10:** Improve street design for streets within the Plan Area with active transportation and promotion of traffic calming measures.

## F. ALLEYS

**M-11:** To strengthen and highlight the important role alleys play within the overall Downtown circulation network, enhance the alleys and extend their function to incorporate secondary access to the businesses as well designated loading and unloading areas. Ensure the Downtown alleys have

designated locations or managed times for delivery services to park and access businesses.

**Action M-11:** *Develop a detailed plan for improving the east side alleys at the 600, 700 and 800 blocks of Laurel Street - including working with property owners and business operators.*

## G. PICK-UP/DROP-OFF

**M-12:** Ensure accessibility to the 700 block of Laurel Street pedestrian plaza by establishing designated pick-up/drop-off points for seniors, children, and people with health conditions or mobility challenges.

## H. LONG-TERM MOBILITY AND CONNECTIVITY

**M-13:** As the Downtown grows and as conditions warrant, evaluate long-term vehicular traffic modifications, including Holly Street swing lanes, emerging transportation technologies, and congestion mitigation strategies to further support the goals and policies for a vibrant and safe pedestrian-oriented Downtown.

**M-14:** Collaborate with SamTrans, Caltrans, and the Grand Boulevard Initiative to plan and implement coordinated improvements along El Camino Real that enhance the quality of the streetscape for the comfort and safety of pedestrians, bicyclists, and public transit riders, consistent with the Downtown Streetscape Master Plan.



**Figure 5.4 - Transit Connectivity**

## 5.4 MOBILITY AND CONNECTIVITY STANDARDS

### A. CROSSWALK DESIGN

Among the safety improvements will be the introduction of high-visibility crosswalks, such as ladders, continental, or even artistically-designed striping, that signal priority for those on foot. At key intersections, raised or textured crosswalks will further elevate visibility and safety. These improvements, combined with curb extensions that significantly shorten crossing distances, will create a more inviting and pedestrian-friendly experience throughout the Downtown.

### B. PROTECTED BIKE LANES

To enhance cyclists' safety and comfort, protected bicycle lanes shall feature vertical separation elements—such as bollards, curbs, or planters—that physically buffer cyclists from vehicular traffic. These design elements help create a dedicated, secure travel space for people bicycling, especially along high-traffic corridors like San Carlos Avenue and El Camino Real.

### C. GREEN LANE STRIPING

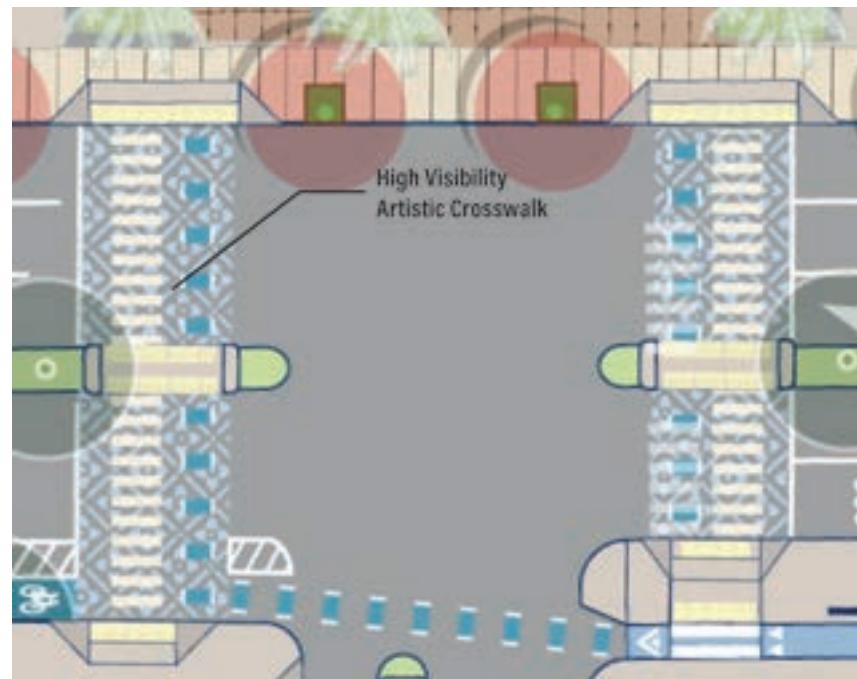
High-visibility green paint shall be applied at key conflict zones and intersections to improve driver awareness and enhance cyclist visibility. These markings provide a visual cue that reinforces the presence and priority of cyclists within the street network.

### D. BICYCLE AMENITIES

Designated tree groves, such as the one planned for the new plaza on the 600 block of Laurel Street, shall include bicycle parking, bicycle repair facilities, a water fountain, and seating. These amenities aim to support the needs of bicyclists while enhancing the overall public space experience.

### E. INTERSECTION TREATMENTS

Intersection designs shall prioritize bicycle safety and clarity through enhanced striping, signal timing, and conflict zone treatments, making it easier for cyclists to navigate complex crossings.



**Figure 5.5 - The Intersection of El Camino Real and San Carlos Avenue**

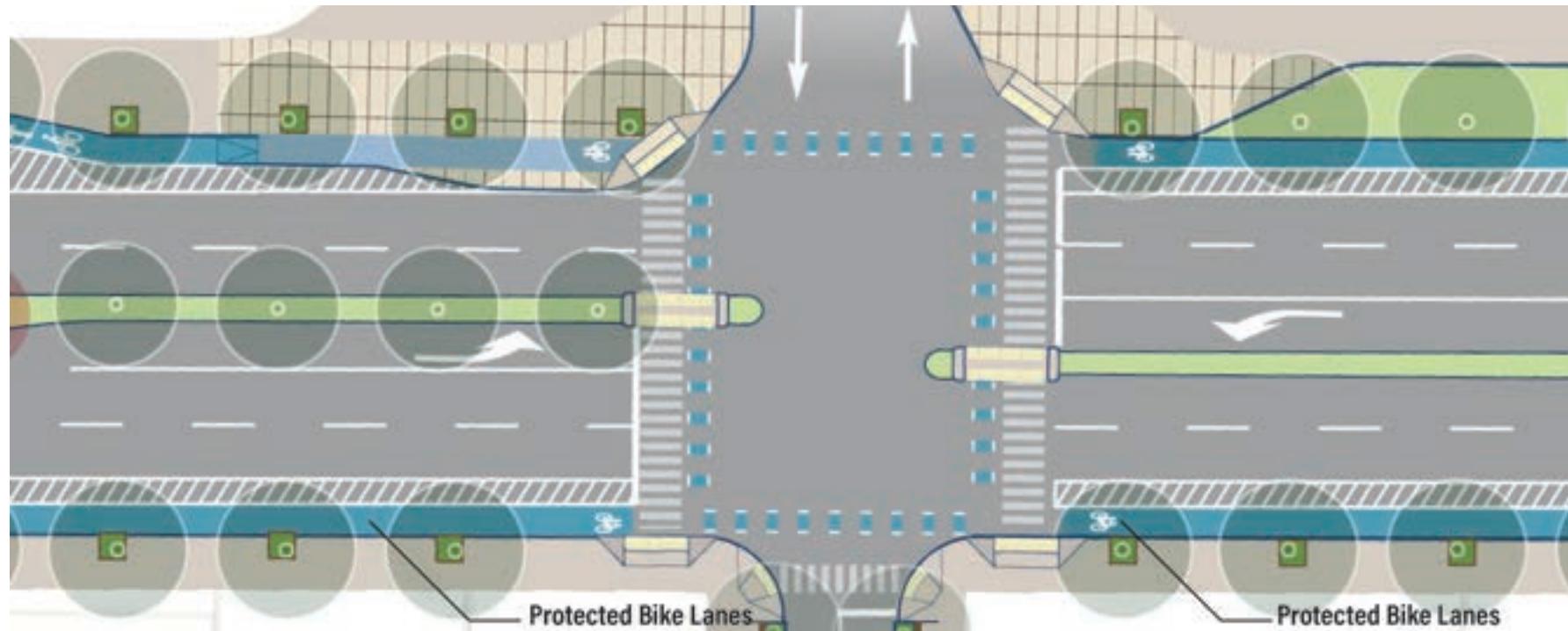
## F. SHARED STREET ENHANCEMENTS

In areas like the 600 and 800 blocks of Laurel Street, shared street design elements shall be incorporated, including sharrows, traffic-calming measures, clear signage, and street furnishings, to promote a pedestrian-priority environment while safely accommodating bicyclists and low-speed vehicle movement.

## G. BUS BOARDING ISLANDS

Bus boarding islands shall be introduced to create a dedicated passenger platform between the bicycle lane and vehicle travel lanes. This configuration allows buses to stop without crossing the bicycle lane, enhancing safety and comfort for both bicyclists and transit riders while improving overall traffic flow.

For more detailed guidance and standards for bus stop design, refer to the SamTrans Bus Stop Design Guidance, adopted in April 2024 or as amended.



**Figure 5.6 - Example of Protected and Painted Bike Lanes on El Camino Real**

## H. CURB RAMPS AND ADA COMPLIANCE

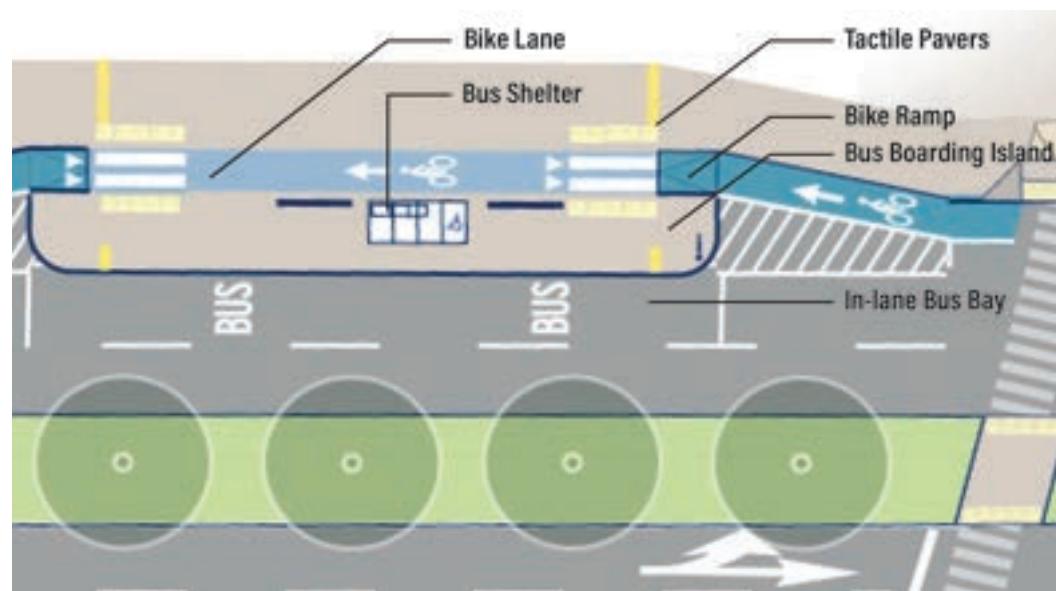
ADA-compliant curb ramps with tactile warning strips shall be installed at all pedestrian crossings to enhance safety and accessibility for individuals with visual impairments. In addition, level landings and smooth transitions between sidewalks and street crossings will ensure comfortable and unobstructed movement for wheelchair users, strollers, and others with mobility needs, creating a seamless and inclusive pedestrian experience throughout Downtown.



**Figure 5.7 - Bike Amenities at the 600 Block Plaza**

## I. ADA-COMPLIANT BUS BOARDING AREAS

All bus stops should be designed to meet accessibility standards, incorporating features such as tactile paving, appropriate curb heights, and level boarding zones. These elements ensure that individuals using mobility aids can board and exit buses safely and comfortably, supporting equitable access to transit throughout the Downtown. For further details, refer to the SamTrans Bus Stop Design Guidance, adopted in April 2024 or as amended.



**Figure 5.8 - Bus Boarding Zone on El Camino Real**

## J. ACCESSIBLE PEDESTRIAN SIGNALS (APS)

Audible and tactile pedestrian signals shall be provided at key crosswalks to assist individuals with visual or hearing impairments. These features enhance safety and independence by offering clear, accessible cues for when it is safe to cross the street.

## K. TRAFFIC CALMING

New street designs as set forth in the Appendix A: Downtown Streetscape Master Plan shall be implemented to support enhanced safety and traffic calming. Measures such as posted speed limit signs, curb extensions, and narrow lanes shall help reduce vehicle speeds and reinforce the pedestrian-focused character of Downtown streets.

## L. PICK-UP/DROP-OFF ZONES

Designated curbside pick-up and drop-off zones shall be clearly marked and ADA-compliant, providing direct, unobstructed access to the pedestrian plaza. Located near primary entrances or high-activity areas, these zones will include tactile paving and other accessibility features to ensure safe and convenient use for all passengers.



**Figure 5.9 - Pick up and Drop-off Zones on Olive Street and Laurel Street Intersection.**

## 5.5 STATE LAW COMPLIANCE

The Downtown Specific Plan has been developed in alignment with applicable California state laws governing land use, transportation, accessibility, and environmental sustainability. It complies with the California Complete Streets Act (AB 1358) by promoting street designs that accommodate all users, including pedestrians, cyclists, transit riders, and motorists—regardless of age or ability. The Plan also supports the goals of SB 743, which shifts transportation impact analysis from vehicle delay (LOS) to vehicle miles traveled (VMT), encouraging land use patterns that reduce driving and promote more sustainable modes of travel.

In terms of accessibility, the Specific Plan adheres to the California Building Code (Title 24) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), ensuring that all public improvements meet or exceed state and federal accessibility standards. It also integrates state-mandated TDM strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in accordance with SB 375 and the state's broader climate goals.

Together, these measures ensure that the Specific Plan is not only responsive to local needs but also legally compliant and aligned with California's broader policy objectives for equity, sustainability, and public health.









# 06

## PARKING AND TRANSPORTATION DEMAND MANAGEMENT

## 6.1 OVERVIEW

A well-managed parking system supports access while fostering a more pedestrian-focused Downtown. The Downtown Specific Plan advances parking policies that balance supply and demand, improve the efficiency of existing resources, and reallocate valuable curb space to prioritize pedestrians, bicycles, and active ground-floor uses. Strategic parking management also supports the City's ongoing efforts to strengthen Transportation Demand Management (TDM) requirements and broader goals of mobility and sustainability.

***Goal: The Downtown Specific Plan sets forth parking management strategies that efficiently address parking needs, respond to changing state and federal laws, and reduce car dependency through innovative Transportation Demand Management strategies***

## 6.2 DEVELOPMENT POLICIES AND ACTIONS

A well-managed and accessible parking system plays a critical role in supporting Downtown vitality, enabling access for residents, visitors, and businesses while complementing broader goals for walkability, transit use, and public space enhancements. To better understand existing conditions and guide future improvements, a comprehensive inventory of parking spaces was conducted within the Downtown area—bounded by El Camino

Real, Holly Street, Elm Street, and Brittan Avenue. This approach provided a foundational understanding of parking supply and usage patterns, informing recommendations that align parking strategy with the City's long-term vision for a vibrant, connected, and pedestrian-friendly Downtown. The following are some key public and private parking facilities in the Downtown:

### **Public Parking Facilities:**

**Wheeler Plaza Garage:** Located at 651 Walnut Street, this garage offers 256 free public parking spaces—120 on the first floor and 136 on the second floor. The spaces are subject to a two-hour time limit from 7:00 AM to 6:00 PM, Monday through Saturday.

**SamTrans Parking Garage:** Situated at 550 Laurel Street, the top floor of this garage provides 76 additional parking spaces.

**Private and Employee Parking:** Downtown Employee Parking Program: This program offers 126 designated spaces for Downtown employees, distributed between the second floor of the Wheeler Plaza Garage and the top floor of the SamTrans Parking Garage.

Additionally, the City has made significant improvements to the 700 Block west-side alley parking lot—commonly known as the Clark parking lot. The lot has been reorganized and optimized to maximize parking efficiency, with clearly marked spaces, updated signage for better wayfinding, and surface upgrades that enhance both functionality and aesthetics. These enhancements not only improve the user experience but also serve as a model for future alley improvements throughout the Downtown core.



**Figure 6.1 - Off-street Public Parking Facilities in Downtown San Carlos**

## A. PARKING MANAGEMENT

Generally, the on-street parking supply appears adequate to meet the expected demand. However, the Downtown Specific Plan's contemplated build out will require the incorporation of parking management strategies to optimize parking use, enhance turnover, and improve availability for various users, including employees, residents, and patrons.

To create more sidewalk space, facilitate outdoor dining, and establish safe (protected) bicycle lanes, the proposed streetscape changes will necessitate the removal of 47 on-street parking spaces on San Carlos Avenue and Laurel Street. With a current total of 1,150 on-street spaces Downtown, this removal represents a four percent (4%) reduction in available parking.

Despite this reduction, the overall on-street parking supply remains sufficient to meet projected demand. At peak periods, 73 empty spaces are typically available within one block of Laurel Street, in addition to 144 spaces in the nearby Wheeler Plaza parking garage and 29 other spaces within the Downtown core. Furthermore, the addition of designated pick-up and drop-off zones will not significantly impede the implementation of the proposed street designs.

To support a more vibrant, connected, and pedestrian-friendly Downtown, parking shall be managed as a flexible, shared resource that complements broader mobility goals. Drawing on best practices from other communities, the parking management plan will explore a range of strategies, including regulation and pricing, shared parking opportunities, new parking sites, permitting and enforcement, and parking and transportation demand management for new developments.

**PTDM-1:** Manage parking resources as a coordinated, shared system to efficiently and flexibly serve the changing needs of residents, businesses, and visitors.

**PTDM-2:** Reduce the reliance on single-occupant vehicle (SOV) travel by requiring the use of cost-effective Transportation Demand Management programs, including transit subsidies, carpool incentives, and unbundled parking for new developments.

**PTDM-3:** Promote shared parking in new commercial developments to better utilize existing private parking resources, reduce land-use inefficiencies, and accommodate mixed-use and off-peak parking demands.

**Action PTDM-3:** *Develop a shared parking standard for commercial projects that meet defined size, occupancy or intensity thresholds, while exempting smaller or lower-impact developments.*

**PTDM-4:** All new development projects shall comply with Transportation Demand Management (TDM) requirements outlined in San Carlos Municipal Code (SCMC) Section 18.25. These requirements are being refined through the ongoing Citywide TDM and Parking project; however, Section 18.25 shall continue to serve as the governing framework for TDM standards until new regulations are formally adopted.

**PTDM-5:** Eliminate obstacles to development by removing unnecessary parking requirements.

**PTDM-6:** Increase housing affordability and commercial viability by separating the costs of parking and development.

**PTDM-7:** Include Downtown San Carlos in any future Transportation Management Association (TMA) to support coordinated mobility strategies, reduce vehicle trips, and enhance access through shared transportation services and programs.

**PTDM-8:** Minimize disruption to residents, businesses, and visitors during construction activities by ensuring equitable access to parking, maintaining safety and mobility, and supporting the ongoing vitality of affected areas.

**Action PTDM-8:** *All streetscape construction projects shall include a Parking Management Plan as part of the project planning and design process. The Plan shall explicitly identify measures to minimize parking spillover and disruption, including but not limited to:*

- 1) Temporary Parking Solutions: Identify alternative on-street or off-street parking areas for affected residents, businesses, and visitors.*
- 2) Public Notification: Provide timely and clear public notification of construction timelines, parking restrictions, and available alternative parking options.*
- 3) Signage and Wayfinding: Deploy temporary signage and digital wayfinding tools to direct drivers to alternative parking locations.*
- 4) Coordination with Stakeholders: Collaborate with local businesses, residents, and transportation agencies to address specific parking needs and concerns.*

*5) Monitoring and Adjustment: Monitor parking conditions during construction and make adjustments as needed to reduce spillover and ensure safety.*

## B. ON-STREET PARKING AND LOADING

The Downtown Specific Plan improves Downtown streets to prioritize walking, biking, and outdoor activity. Accordingly, on-street parking shall be rebalanced to support these goals while still meeting essential Downtown parking needs. The on-street parking strategies are designed to manage limited curb space to accommodate loading zones, ADA access, short-term parking, and passenger pick-up and drop-off. Well-managed curbside uses will help support local businesses, improve circulation, and enhance the overall pedestrian experience Downtown.

**PTDM-9:** Encourage the use of parking areas for temporary public space or commercial activation during annual events such as the Art and Wine Faire.

As part of a broader effort to enhance the vibrancy and flexibility of Laurel Street's 600 and 800 blocks, this policy encourages the temporary use of parking and curbside spaces to support community festivals, farmers' market days, and public life. By repurposing the parking spaces on the 600 and 800 blocks of Laurel Street for short-term activations such as vendor stalls or outdoor seating (Refer to Figures 6.3 and 6.4) the street can better foster a more dynamic, pedestrian-friendly environment which aligns with the vision of the Specific Plan.

**PTDM-10:** Allow for the flexible use of curb space to accommodate a variety of potential needs including vehicle parking (time limited, loading, accessible, etc.), bicycle parking, street trees, temporary event space, etc.

## C. OFF-STREET PARKING AND LOADING

As Downtown evolves to support a more walkable and compact urban form, the off-street parking, wayfinding and loading standards will be encouraged to leverage nearby parking garages and lots, minimizing the need for additional surface parking and reinforcing a pedestrian-oriented environment.

**PTDM-11:** Develop way-finding signage for parking facilities and consider using smart technology that identifies parking availability to reduce congestion from vehicles searching for parking.

**Action PTDM-11:** Refer to SCMC Section 18.20.090 for off-site loading requirements

## D. PUBLIC BICYCLE PARKING

**PTDM-12:** Provide public bicycle parking in Downtown alleys and at entrances to the pedestrian plaza, especially near the 600, 700 and 800 blocks of Laurel Street. Facilities should be easy to find, safe, and convenient for both short- and long-term use.

**Action PTDM-12:** Continue to evaluate the changing needs of bicycle users and demand for additional bicycle racks, long-term bicycle parking solutions, and other supportive amenities over the life of this Plan.



**Figure 6.2 - Bike Parking Facilities in The Entrance of 600 Block Pedestrian Plaza**

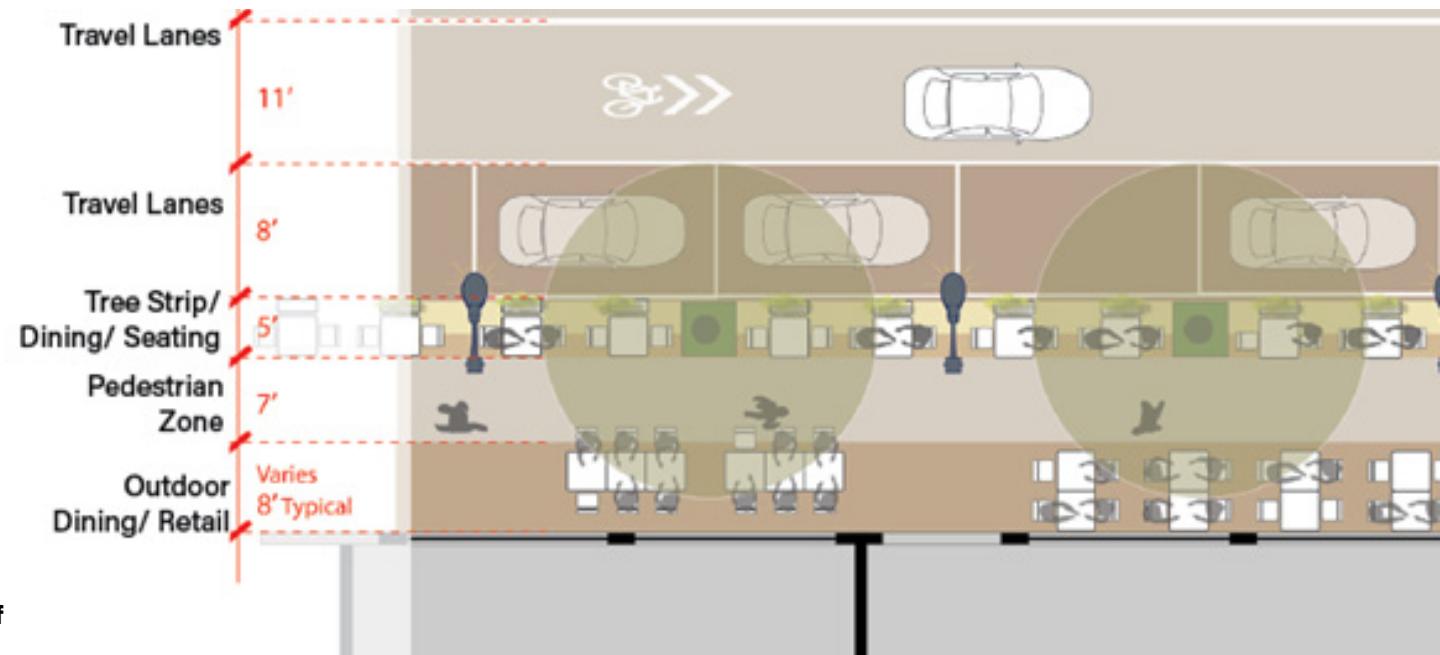


Figure 6.3 - 600 Block of Laurel Street- Detail Layout

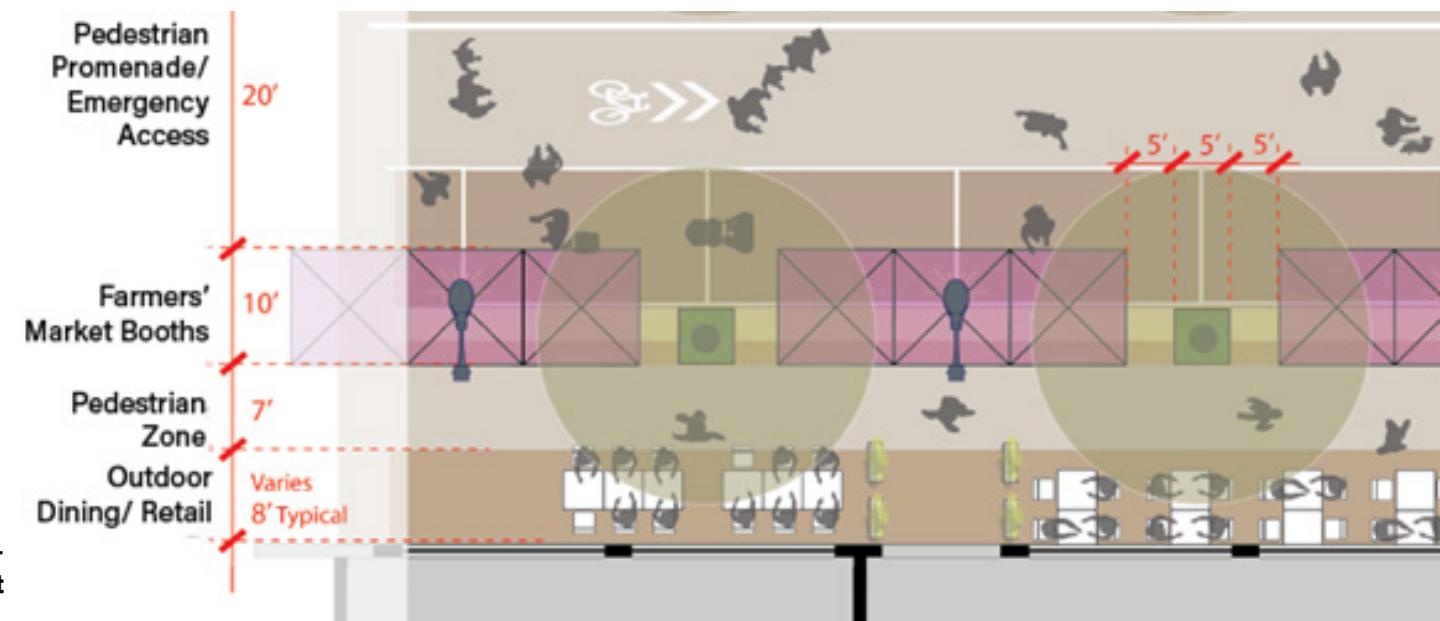


Figure 6.4 - Temporary Public Space- Farmers' Market Scenario - Detail Layout

## E. ALLEYS

The presence of alleys and service entries behind the main street frontages reduces the presence of delivery trucks and service vehicles on the public-facing streets, such as El Camino Real and Laurel Street, thus contributing to a more pedestrian-friendly environment.

### **Alley and Parking Lot East of the 600 Block of Laurel Street:**

Service entries are set back from the alley, allowing space for large vehicles and minimizing conflicts with traffic and pedestrians. However, the layout could be reorganized for better efficiency.

### **Alleys and Parking Lots East and West of the 700 Block of Laurel Street:**

**Street:** The alleys behind the 700 block of Laurel Street experience overlapping uses—parking, loading, and pedestrian access—especially near Olive Street, creating congestion.

The west alley of the 700 block of Laurel Street has been re-organized through a past improvements project and functions very well in terms of circulation clarity, organized parking, service access, trash screening, and secondary entrances to businesses. This alley serves as a model for improvements in other alleys.

### **Alleys and Parking Lots East and West of the 800 Block of Laurel Street:**

**Street:** The 800 block shows a concentration of private parking spaces and a reduced number of loading/unloading entries, which potentially allows it to function more efficiently as a thoroughfare. Further improvements to access, screening, and entry points could enhance its function as a primary access route for this block.

**PTDM-13:** Improve alley parking and access by organizing loading, service (i.e. trash pickup), and parking functions to reduce street congestion and enhance pedestrian safety, using successful alley layouts as models for future improvements.

**PTDM-14:** Reorganization plan/layout of alleys shall meet California Fire Code apparatus access requirements and maintain 20-foot minimum width where used for emergency ingress/egress.

**Action PTDM-14:** Notify Fire for review of all alley upgrade plans for conformance to emergency access standards.

## F. FUTURE PUBLIC PARKING GARAGE

The anticipated redevelopment of the SamTrans site in San Carlos presents a valuable opportunity. If the SamTrans garage remains and is upgraded, it could serve as a public parking facility for the Downtown Specific Plan Area and its surroundings. By providing additional parking capacity, this facility can alleviate existing or future parking constraints, support local businesses, and accommodate visitors, thereby enhancing the overall accessibility and vibrancy of Downtown San Carlos.

Complementing this, the establishment of a dedicated bicycle parking facility at the San Carlos Caltrain Station would significantly bolster first- and last-mile connectivity. Such a facility would encourage residents and visitors to integrate cycling into their daily commutes, reducing reliance on automobiles and promoting sustainable transportation modes. This initiative aligns with the goals outlined in the San Carlos Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan, which

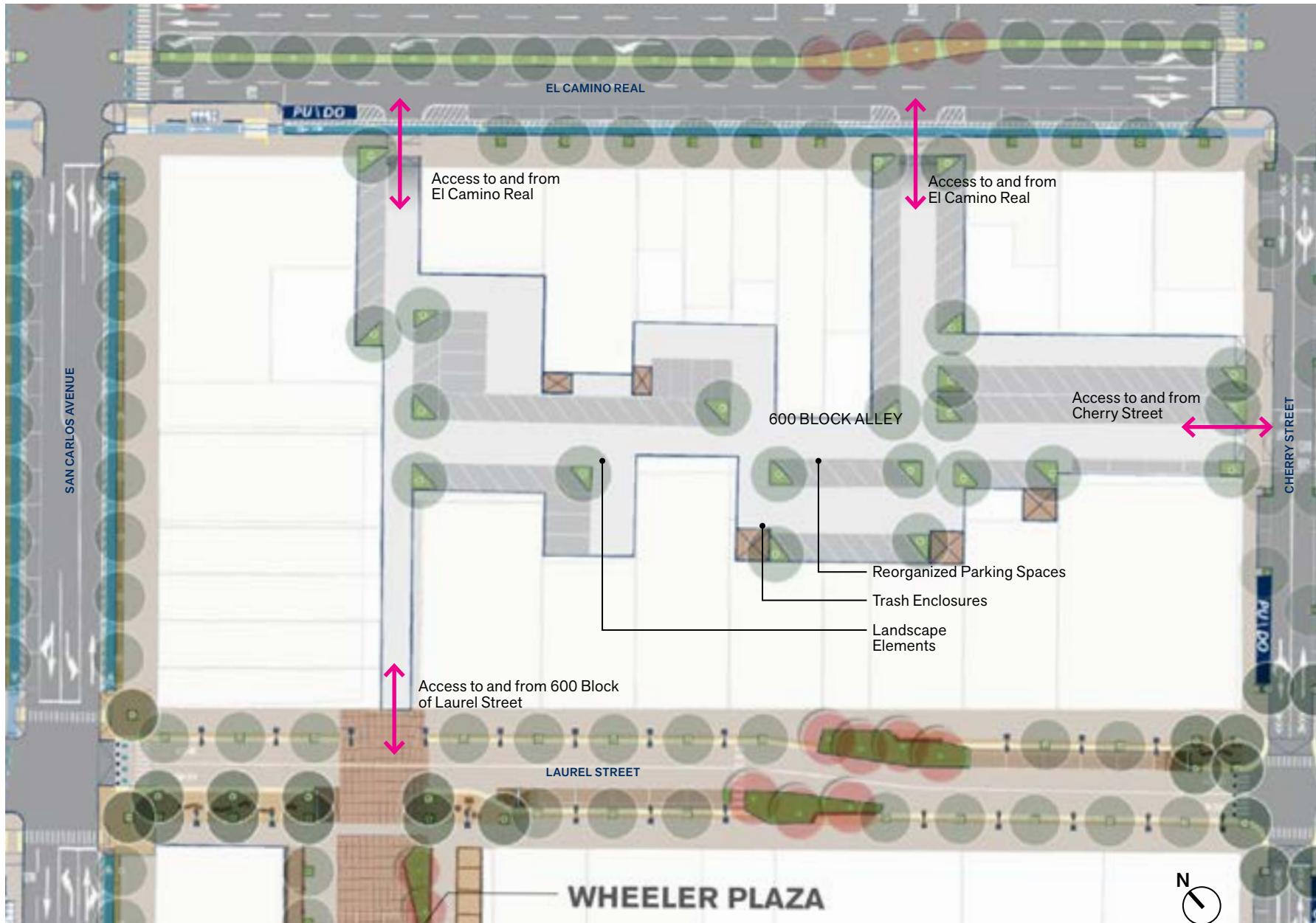


Figure 6.5 - Alley/ Parking Area in 600 Block of Laurel Street

emphasizes improving bicycle access to transit stations and enhancing the comfort of transit stops by providing secure bike parking and other amenities.

**PTDM-15:** In collaboration with SamTrans, explore the feasibility of adaptive reuse of the SamTrans garage for public parking.

**PTDM-16:** Work with Peninsula Corridor Joint Powers Board (JPB) to explore the establishment of a secure bicycle parking facility at the Caltrain station.

**PTDM-17:** In collaboration with SamTrans, explore prioritization of multi-modal design principles, including clear pedestrian connections, wayfinding to transit and bicycle facilities, in the redevelopment of the SamTrans site.

## 6.3 PARKING AND TDM STANDARDS

### A. MINIMUM PARKING REQUIREMENTS

All minimum vehicle parking requirements within the Downtown Specific Plan Area shall be removed. Consistent with AB2097, there are no minimum parking requirements.

### B. UNBUNDLED PARKING

For market-rate residential units in projects of three (3) units or more, all off-street spaces shall be leased or sold separately from the rental or purchase

fees for the life of the project, such that potential renters or buyers have the option of renting or buying at a price lower than would be the case if there were a single price for the residential unit or non-residential space, and the parking space.

### C. VEHICULAR DIRECTIONAL WAYFINDING FOR PUBLIC REALM

As per the City of San Carlos' Wayfinding plan, a vehicular directional wayfinding signage plan for public realm consists of three main types of signage:

- Vehicular Directional Signage: These signs guide drivers along roadways, helping them navigate toward specific destinations, such as points of interest or major intersections.
- Parking Directional Signage: These signs direct drivers to available parking areas, indicating the location of parking facilities and guiding them to these spaces.
- Parking Identification Signage: These signs indicate the specific locations of parking facilities, often located to mark entranceways to the parking facility.

Additionally, based on community feedback, the Downtown Streetscape Master Plan recommends locating Parking Placement Signage. These signs indicate the specific locations of parking spaces within a facility, often designating spots for different user types, such as handicapped, reserved,

or general parking. These signage types enhance navigation and improve the parking experience.

## D. TRANSPORTATION DEMAND MANAGEMENT

For Transportation Demand Management (TDM) applicability, requirements, and measures and strategies, refer to SCMC 18.25.

## E. BICYCLE PARKING STANDARDS

The on-site bicycle requirements are set forth in Table 6.1 below.

## F. PARKING, LOADING, AND RELATED REQUIREMENTS

Refer to SCMC 18.20

Table 6.1

### BICYCLE PARKING REQUIREMENTS FOR DOWNTOWN

LAND USE	SHORT-TERM SPACES	LONG-TERM SPACES	CARGO & ADAPTIVE	ELECTRIC BICYCLES	SHOWERS	LOCKERS
Residential	0.25 per unit	0.75 per unit	10% of required LT spaces	1 outlet or other charging infrastructure per 5 required LT spaces	N/A	N/A
Office	0.167 per ksf	0.50 per ksf			1 unisex for first 40 ksf; 1 unisex for each additional 20 ksf; minimum of 1	75% of required LT bicycle spaces, minimum of 2
Hotel	0.05 per room	0.05 per room			N/A	
Retail/Dining	0.375 per ksf	0.125 per ksf	5% of required LT spaces		N/A	N/A

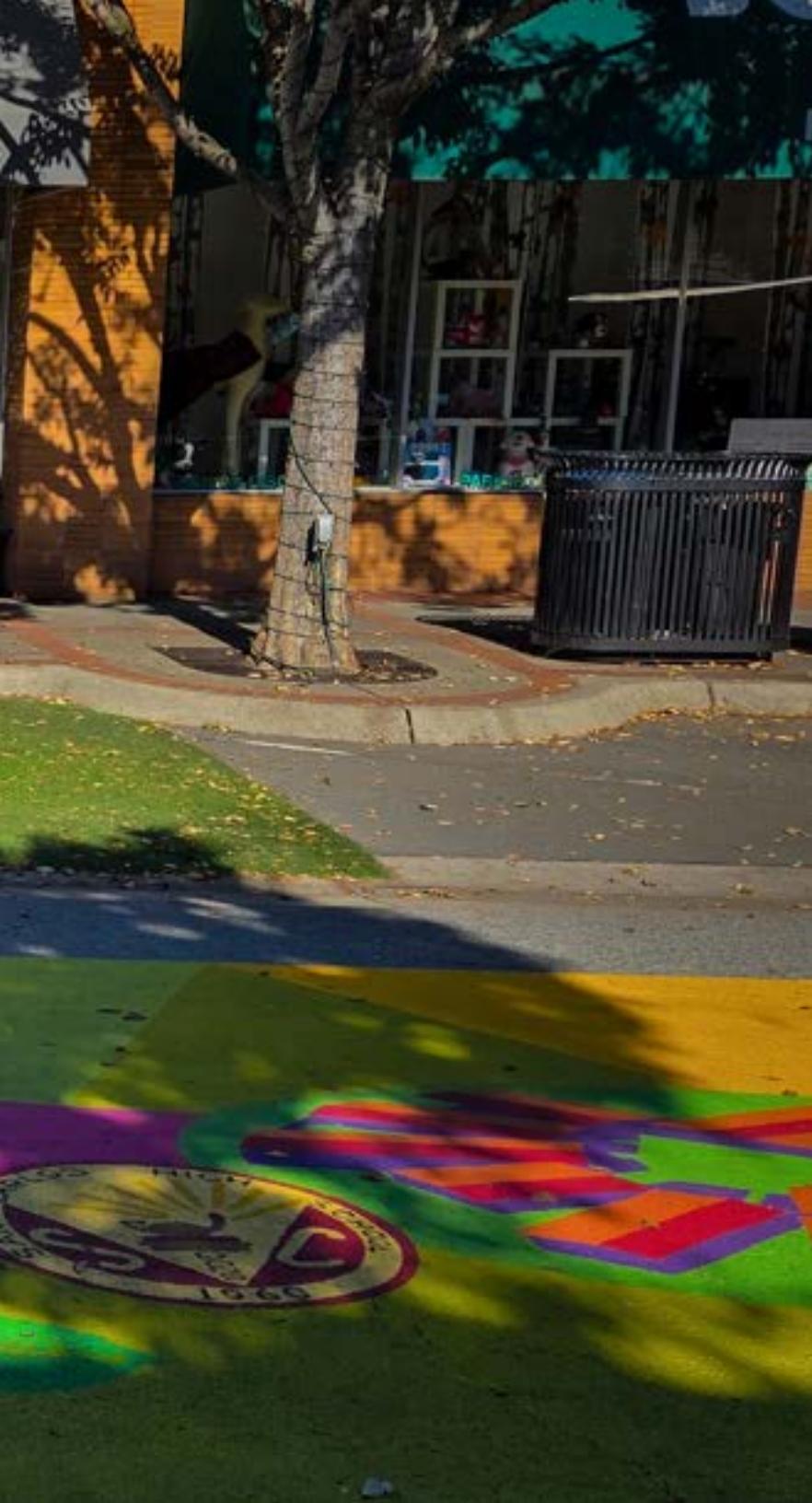
Note: A minimum of two short-term spaces and one long-term space shall be provided for each site with a non-residential use included in this table; LT = long-term; sf = square feet; ksf = 1,000 square feet



733

LAUREL STREET  
ARTS

Native Chestnut Tree



# 07

## PUBLIC REALM

## 7.1 OVERVIEW

The Downtown Specific Plan is built on the premise that a well-developed public realm is the key to a socially vibrant and economically successful Downtown. The Plan recommends Laurel Street as the heart of Downtown—a space that connects the entire community. The pinnacle of the public realm strategy is to transform the 700 block of Laurel Street into the Downtown's central gathering place, with its energy radiating out to the 600 and 800 blocks, and to the 1100 and 1200 blocks of San Carlos Avenue. Providing a robust public realm framework that includes multi-functional streets, ample sidewalks, plazas and green space will ensure those goals.

***Goal: Create high-quality, multi-functional public spaces and a well-connected street network that foster social interaction, promote health and well-being, and enhance Downtown's vibrancy. With an expanded tree canopy for comfort, shade, and to establish a sense of place, public spaces are designed to be inclusive, ensuring equitable access for all users while contributing to a more sustainable and visually appealing Downtown environment.***

## THE DOWNTOWN CORE: ESTABLISHING THE PUBLIC REALM

While the Downtown Streetscape Master Plan, detailed in Appendix A, defines design strategies for the Downtown's entire street network, it lends particular focus to the Downtown core connecting from the Caltrain Station, up the first block of San Carlos Avenue to Laurel Street and down the 600, 700 and 800 blocks of Laurel Street. This Downtown core comprises the heart of San Carlos' Downtown.

### GATEWAY TO DOWNTOWN

San Carlos Avenue is envisioned as the gateway to Downtown linking El Camino Real, Laurel Street, and the San Carlos Caltrain Station. The design rebalances the right-of-way toward people, establishing a pedestrian- and bicycle-priority corridor with generous, shaded sidewalks, continuous protected bikeways, reconfigured intersections, and shorter crossings. Active frontages and small threshold plazas at the intersection of El Camino Real and San Carlos Avenue announce arrival, and integrated robust tree canopy and permeable paving adds comfort and climate resilience. Together, these elements make San Carlos Avenue an intuitive, safe, and welcoming environment, setting the tone for a pedestrian-oriented multi-modal Downtown.



## **Figure 7.1 - Plan Area: Mobility & Connectivity**

## AN EXTENDED CENTENNIAL PLAZA

Throughout the Downtown streets, the Plan proposes a higher-quality pedestrian experience through the use of street trees, wider sidewalks, better lighting and ample shaded seating. The improvements proposed for the areas highlighted in pink (see Figure 7.1) take those strategies even further. Building on the closure of the 700 block of Laurel Street, the Plan defines a pedestrian plaza extending across the full span of the 700 block of Laurel Street serving as a pedestrian promenade that meanders side to side between groves of flowering trees and raingardens. This plaza, designated by the City Council as Centennial Plaza, is curbless from building face-to-building face allowing outdoor dining tables ample room in front of restaurants. A central gathering space at mid-block marks the entry to a redesigned Harrington Park as a formal event space and a water feature adds sound and animation to celebrate this area as the central meeting place. The 600 and 800 blocks of Laurel Street are also recommended to continue the curbless street design. Additionally, the 600 block of Laurel Street features a new plaza on the west side of the street, and the 800 block of Laurel Street features special paving design at the center of the block that can serve as a plaza or focal point during street closures.

The 600, 700 and 800 blocks are unified with a common design language so that the Downtown core is experienced as one integrated place. The meandering promenade of the 700 block of Laurel Street becomes a

meandering street in the 600 and 800 blocks of Laurel Street. The tree groves and raingardens are similarly interspersed throughout the 600, 700, and 800 blocks. Furnishings, lighting, street trees and pavement design all work to further unify the spaces.

## VITALITY THROUGH CURATION & PROGRAMMING

To further fulfill the Vision for a vibrant Downtown, the San Carlos Downtown Specific Plan is designed to make the most out of the mix and intensity of land uses and accommodates a wide variety of programmed activities throughout the spaces in the Downtown core

Public outdoor seating is provided throughout the Downtown core along with ample space for either outdoor dining or merchant displays in defined spaces along the storefront edge. In addition, plaza spaces – small and large – are provided in the 600, 700 and 800 blocks of Laurel Street accommodating a wide variety of activities from permanent outdoor activity spaces and music venues to places for temporary festivals, events, and pop-up vendors.

**Figure 7.2 - Downtown Core Axonometric**

The Downtown core is conceived as a "T", strongly connecting the train station to Laurel Street, and integrating San Carlos Avenue with the 600, 700, and 800 blocks of Laurel.



## 7. 2. DEVELOPMENT POLICIES AND ACTIONS

These development standards and policies are intended to guide both public and private investment in ways that support an attractive, accessible, and pedestrian-friendly streetscape experience. To ensure a high-quality public realm, all developments within the Plan Area shall adhere to standards that reinforce this distinction. Improvements made by private developers should respect the public edge and contribute to the overall streetscape character, while public improvements undertaken by the City shall follow the same design standards to ensure consistency, safety, and visual continuity.

### A. PLAZAS/OPEN SPACES/PARKS

As stated in the vision, the Downtown core should act as the community's living room and to do that, the Downtown should have public spaces that make gathering, socializing, shopping and dining feel comfortable and inviting. This can be accomplished in several ways.

**PR-1:** To ensure the success of the Downtown as the heart of the city, implement the adopted Downtown Streetscape Master Plan as funding becomes available. Establish a well-defined streetscape connecting the Downtown core and the civic center to foster synergy and activation between the two areas.

**Action PR-1:** Seek and apply for funding and technical assistance

*from federal, state, and local resources and investigate other funding mechanisms.*

**PR-2:** Expand and enhance public plazas within the Downtown core, including the pedestrian plaza along the full span of the 700 block of Laurel Street (Centennial Plaza), the new plaza on the 600 block of Laurel Street, and Harrington Park, to create vibrant community gathering spaces.

### B. INTEGRATED MOBILITY

The entire Downtown is to be re-invented as a much more pedestrian-friendly environment that balances all modes of mobility with an emphasis on pedestrian and bicycle circulation. This goal is to be accommodated in a way that is integrated with the thoughtful design of public space.

**PR-3:** Enhance connectivity between public spaces to ensure seamless, accessible movement for pedestrians and bicyclists.

### C. PUBLIC SEATING

One of the most consistent themes encountered during the civic engagement process was the desire for a variety of more informal public seating Downtown. This Plan provides that in several ways.

**PR-4:** Activate streets by providing public outdoor seating areas that enrich the pedestrian experience and support local businesses.

## D. EXPANDED SIDEWALKS

Perhaps the most dramatic change to the Downtown public space environment will be the widening of sidewalks of primary Downtown streets – Laurel Street and San Carlos Avenue – from their current dimension of nine and a half (9-½) feet – to twenty (20) feet – more than doubling the amount of space. This change will be transformative in terms of the diversity and volume of social activity it will accommodate.

The primary focus of sidewalk widening to accommodate outdoor dining and retail display space is in the Downtown core area and in particular on the 1100 and 1200 blocks of San Carlos Avenue and on the 600, 700, and 800 blocks of Laurel Street, although some widening is also proposed on the north frontage of Arroyo where some outdoor dining currently occurs and on the west frontage of El Camino Real where active ground floor uses are anticipated.

**PR-5:** Widen sidewalks in the Downtown core to accommodate comfortable space for outdoor dining and retail displays, new street trees, and ample space for pedestrian circulation.

**PR-6:** Optimize sidewalk width wherever possible on other Downtown streets such as El Camino Real, and key cross streets, sometimes requiring additional building setbacks to ensure sufficient space.

## E. OUTDOOR DINING AND RETAIL DISPLAY

**PR-7:** Require high-quality design standards for outdoor dining and retail displays to ensure they are clean, attractive, and contribute to a vibrant and cohesive public realm.

**Action PR-7A:** *As needed, evaluate the design, location, and operational standards for outdoor dining and retail display areas.*

**PR-8:** Consider allowing additional outdoor seating for restaurant use in newly configured streets. Additional outdoor dining space within the public right-of-way may be considered on a case by case basis. Such requests shall not be eligible for review until a minimum of one (1) year after completion of streetscape construction at the sole discretion of the City.

## F. PUBLIC AMENITIES

For the Downtown to fully function in the many ways the community wants – acting as the “living room” of the community – it will be fully equipped with public amenities that facilitate social function, commercial activity, safety, health, and comfort. The public amenities discussed in this section provide policies and standards for street furniture, outdoor dining enclosures, pavilions/ performance stage, public bicycle racks, fountain and water features, drinking water fountains, smart poles, wayfinding and trash screening. The design for these amenities are described here as part of a comprehensive approach to providing public street amenities. More detailed standards are provided in the Downtown Streetscape Master Plan included in Appendix A, and may be modified during Plans, Specifications, & Estimates (PS&E) construction Phase.

**PR-9:** Provide the full range of public street amenities and furnishings to support an active public realm and provide a rich Downtown experience. These should include distinctive paving, street furnishings (including benches, drinking fountains, news racks, trash and recycling receptacles, bicycle parking racks), signage, wayfinding, and lighting.

**PR-10:** Incorporate a water feature in the center of Centennial Plaza that serves as a focal point and gathering space, offering seating, visual interest, and the calming effects of moving water.

**PR-11:** Provide pavilion stages on the 600 and 700 blocks of Laurel Street to host performances, while serving as sculptural landmarks that invite informal seating, pop-up exhibits, and community use when not programmed for events.

**PR-12:** During Downtown streetscape implementation, include "Smart Poles" throughout the Downtown to provide a range of courtesy amenities such as vendor outlets, car charging, courtesy outlets for phone and laptop charging and Wi-Fi. These will be housed in streetlight poles to the greatest extent possible.

**PR-13:** Implement a comprehensive Downtown signage and wayfinding program that builds upon the City's existing wayfinding standards, to guide users of all travel modes visiting or passing through the Downtown.

## **G. LANDSCAPE, GREENING & GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE**

In response to the community's vision for a green, sustainable, and resilient Downtown, a full program of urban greening, stormwater management, and native landscapes will be implemented throughout the Downtown. The elements of this program are fully described in Appendix A: Downtown Streetscape Master Plan.

**PR-14:** Provide extensive greening in the Downtown by planting consistent street trees on all Downtown streets for shade, cooling, and seasonal variation (spring flowering and fall color). Trees shall be planted per the palette specified in the Downtown Streetscape Master plan or comparable alternatives may be determined during streetscape implementation and approved through Plans Specifications & Estimates (PS&E) drawings by City Council.

**PR-15:** Without impeding ample pedestrian space, integrate green infrastructure throughout Downtown, including rain gardens and permeable surfaces, to enhance sustainability and improve stormwater management.

**PR-16:** Continue preserving and enhancing the urban canopy through the City's Tree Preservation Ordinance that protects mature trees and encourages long-term maintenance.

**PR-17:** Coordinate early with the City Arborist and tree growers on all Downtown improvements to ensure successful cultivation of street trees and long-term enhancement of the urban tree canopy.

**PR-18:** Require native and drought-tolerant landscape in all new public realm projects to promote sustainability.

**PR-19:** Ensure regular maintenance of landscaped areas to sustain their ecological, functional, and aesthetic benefits.

**PR-20:** Create distinctive public spaces by planting accent trees and establishing groves at key nodes along the 600, 700, and 800 blocks of Laurel Street and 1100 and 1200 blocks of San Carlos Avenue to strengthen placemaking and reinforce local identity, as set forth in the Downtown Streetscape Master Plan.

**PR-21:** Incorporate climate-resilient plantings in all rain gardens, prioritizing native, drought-tolerant, and stormwater-friendly species to support biodiversity and manage urban runoff.

**PR-22:** Encourage and allow for vertical greening, including green walls and rooftop gardens, to improve air quality and mitigate the urban heat island effect.

## H. ACCOMMODATING PROGRAMMING/ACTIVITIES /TEMPORARY USES

**PR-23:** Design and program public spaces for inclusivity, incorporating features and offering activities and events that engage and accommodate all users.

**PR-24:** Ensure that all City programs are designed, implemented, and evaluated in ways that promote fairness, remove barriers, and produce

equitable outcomes for all residents.

**PR-25:** Support the public realm design as set forth in the Downtown Streetscape Master Plan, especially along the 700 block of Laurel Street and expandable to the 600 and 800 blocks, to accommodate large community events and gatherings such as farmers markets, the Art and Wine Faire, and other celebrations.

**PR-26:** Downtown programmed activities will follow the City's noise ordinance Title 9, Chapter 9.30 and shall follow regulations prescribed in SCMC Section 9.30.040 Permit to exceed noise levels when City-sanctioned or sponsored activities are scheduled. Music stage venues will be situated and equipped to minimize excessive ambient noise.

**PR-27:** Integrate music performance stages into key Downtown public spaces, including Centennial Plaza on the 700 block of Laurel Street and the new plaza on the 600 block, to support cultural events and community gatherings.

**PR-28:** Designate specific Downtown locations to accommodate pop-up businesses, supporting flexibility, activation, and diverse community experiences

**PR-29:** Upon completion of downtown streetscape improvements and the provision of electrical outlets, gas-powered generators shall be prohibited for Downtown events, vendors, performers and pop-ups. Instead, the Downtown will be equipped with a network of electrical outlets integrated in "smart poles" to accommodate electrical needs

**Action PR-29:** *Events shall be inspected for fire safety, egress*

*planning, and emergency access clearances. Fire department shall be notified for review of permitting for all amplified events, tents >400 sq ft, cooking equipment, and temporary power setups.*

## 7.3 DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS

### A. PLAZAS/OPEN SPACES/PARKS

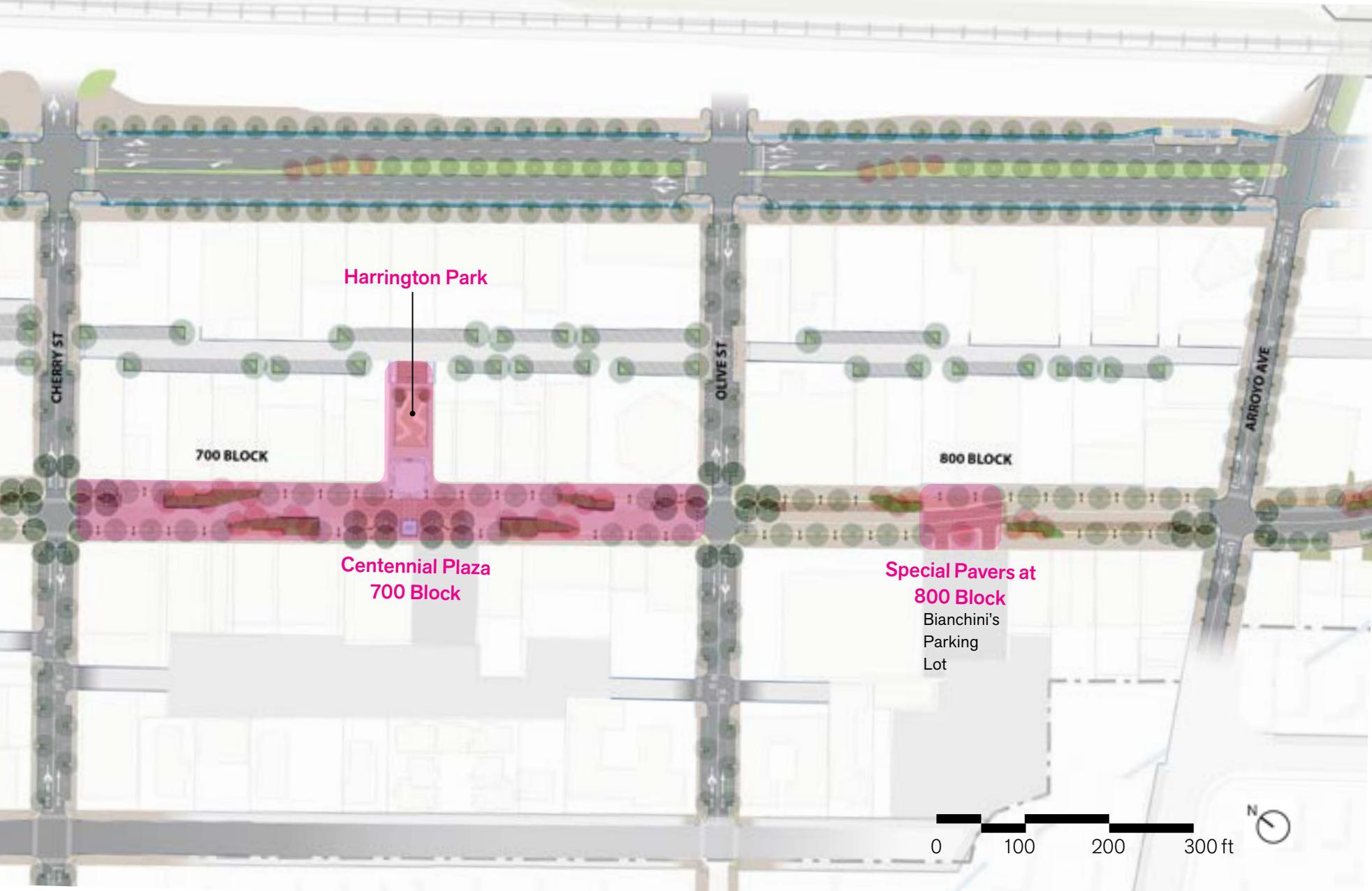
As specified in the Downtown Streetscape Master Plan, public spaces will be provided in each of the three core blocks of Laurel Street – 600, 700 & 800. For the 600 block, the space currently occupied by overflow public parking will be redeveloped as a multi-use public plaza. This plaza will be flexible in its programmed uses and will have a performance pavilion and stage at the west end, a space for pop-up vendors along its southern edge, and a large open space in the center to accommodate a variety of activities.

For the 700 block, the entire Laurel Street right-of-way will be redeveloped as a curbless, linear public plaza which will accommodate a variety of activities including a wide pedestrian promenade in the center, designated space for outdoor dining and retail display areas, raingarden planting areas featuring groves of trees and additional space for special programming and public art.

In addition, the 700 block will have a central pavilion and performance stage positioned directly in front of Harrington Park. This space will also contain

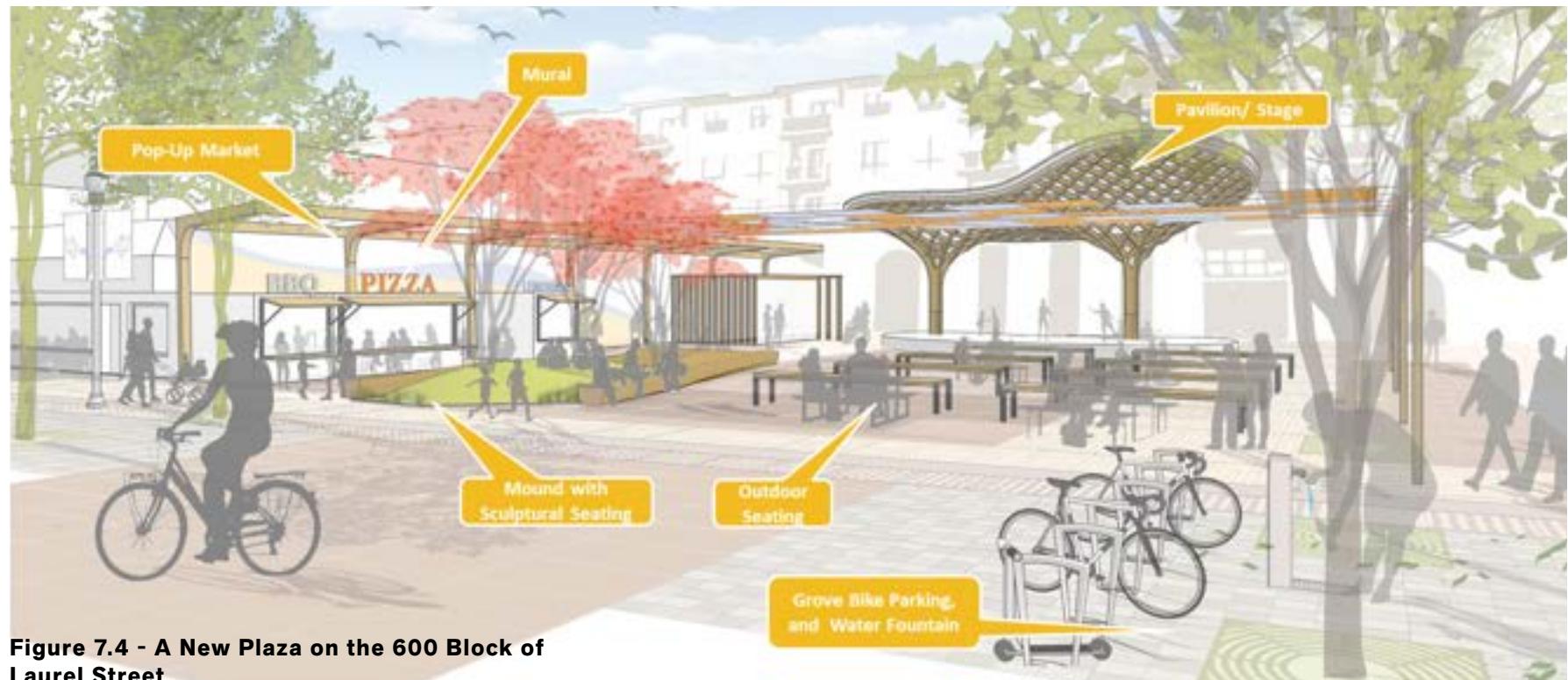


Figure 7.3 - Downtown Core Illustrative Plan- Series of Plans



a water feature. Extending eastward from this central gathering space will be the redeveloped Harrington Park featuring a multi-purpose plaza, a multi-purpose building (restrooms, storage, and mechanical room), public seating, and a raingarden with a grove of trees. The existing donor bricks in Harrington Park will be retained and incorporated into the park design.

The 800 block of Laurel Street will also feature a central plaza at mid-block, which can be used for programmed events during street closures. The ends of all three blocks of Laurel (600, 700 and 800) will be equipped with



**Figure 7.4 - A New Plaza on the 600 Block of Laurel Street**

removable bollards which can be used to close one or more of the blocks for annual festivals and events. In addition to the central plaza spaces, each of the Downtown core blocks will feature groves- small entry plazas at each end with shaded seating, drinking fountains, and bicycle racks.

## B. EXPANDED SIDEWALKS

Perhaps the most dramatic change to the Downtown public space environment will be the widening of sidewalks of primary Downtown streets



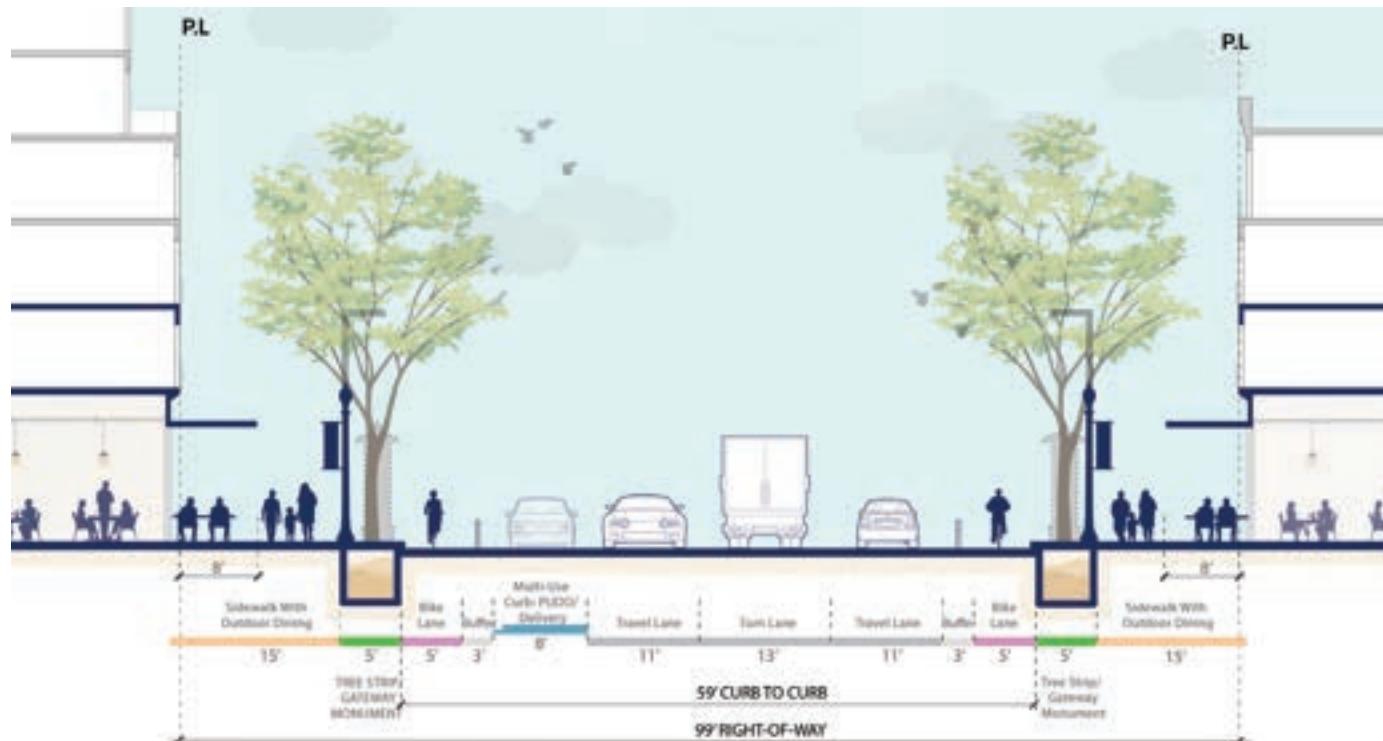
**Figure 7.5 - Centennial Plaza on the 700 Block of Laurel Street**

– Laurel Street and San Carlos Avenue – from their current dimension of 9-½ feet – to 20 feet – more than doubling the amount of space. This change will be transformative in terms of the diversity and volume of social activity it will accommodate.

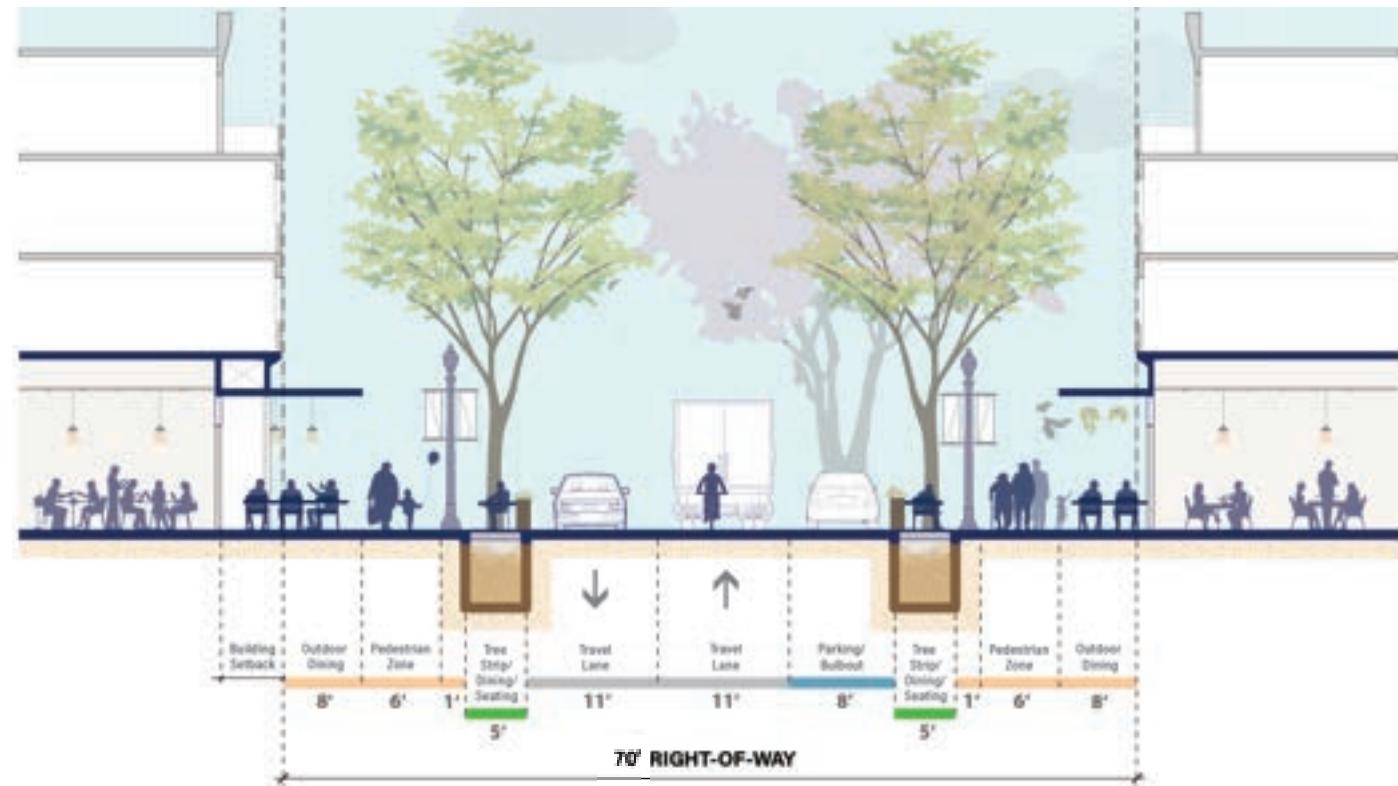
The primary focus of sidewalk expansion is to accommodate outdoor dining and retail display space is in the Downtown core area and in particular on the 1100 and 1200 blocks of San Carlos Avenue and on the 600, 700 and 800 blocks of Laurel Street, although some widening is also proposed on

the north frontage of Arroyo where some outdoor dining currently occurs and on the west frontage of El Camino Real where active ground floor uses are anticipated.

Details are set forth in the Downtown Streetscape Master Plan included as Appendix A of this Plan. Additional standards that address requirements for expanded sidewalks can be found in Chapter 3 and within this Chapter.



**Figure 7.6 – Integrated Mobility for seamless connectivity: San Carlos Avenue**



**Figure 7.7 - Expanded Sidewalks on 600 and 800 Block of Laurel Street**

## D. OUTDOOR DINING AND RETAIL DISPLAY

One of the most significant changes to the Downtown as mentioned earlier will be the expansion of sidewalk widths and the corresponding ability to accommodate outdoor dining and retail display areas in a spacious dining/retail zone adjacent to the storefronts rather than in a post-COVID parklet configuration.

Parklets served a critical need during the COVID pandemic when retailers and restaurants needed a quick way to add outdoor seating to maintain social distancing and ventilation requirements. With expanded sidewalk widths, those temporary parklet provisions will no longer be needed. One of the disadvantages of the parklet configuration is that the individual parklet structures create a wall effect, blocking the street from the sidewalk space, leading to a divided, non-integrated street environment.

### 1. Two-Pronged Approach

Within this Plan, a two-pronged approach to outdoor dining is established, with standards tailored to the existing street layout and separate provisions planned for future street redesigns or reconstructions featuring wider sidewalks.

The primary focus of sidewalk widening to accommodate outdoor dining and retail display space is in the Downtown core area and in particular on the 1100 and 1200 blocks of San Carlos Avenue and on the 600, 700 and 800 blocks of Laurel Street, although some widening is also proposed on

the north frontage of Arroyo where some outdoor dining currently occurs and on the west frontage of El Camino Real where active ground floor uses are anticipated.

The space allocations for the 600 and 800 blocks of Laurel have been carefully designed to accommodate ample outdoor dining and retail display space and also a “market day” condition which accommodates vendor tents, patron circulation, and emergency access.

Eating and drinking establishments with outdoor dining areas within the Downtown Specific Plan Area shall be located, developed, and operated in compliance with the following standards:

#### **Application Information:**

Applicant shall submit a site plan and description of the proposed outdoor dining area. The plan shall be drawn to scale showing the location of buildings and structures and in the case of dining in the public right-of-way, the extent of the outdoor dining zone in relationship to the pedestrian zone, the location of street furnishings and trees, and on-street parking (where applicable), adjacent to the proposed outdoor dining. The plan shall show locations, number and the arrangement of the following if proposed: planters, umbrellas, sun screens, tables, chairs, and other portable appurtenances proposed. Colors and commercial grade materials shall be specified. An electrical plan, when applicable, shall include any lighting and electrical connection proposed including specification of fixtures, type and location. In addition to any other application materials required, an application for an outdoor dining area shall state the anticipated periods of use during the

year, and the proposed hours of daily use, including Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays; and whether any liquor will be sold or consumed in the area to be covered by the permit.

### Hours of Operation:

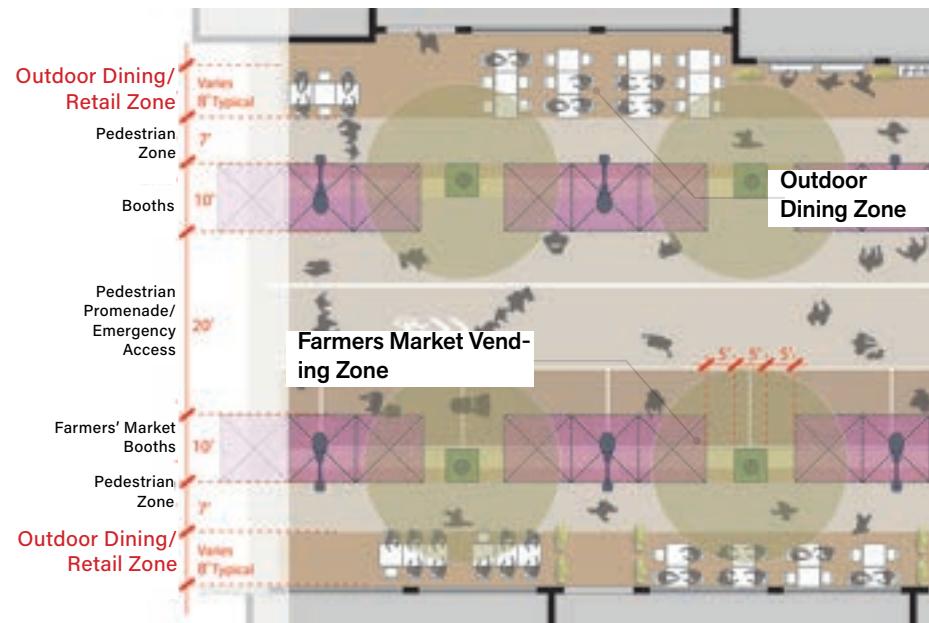
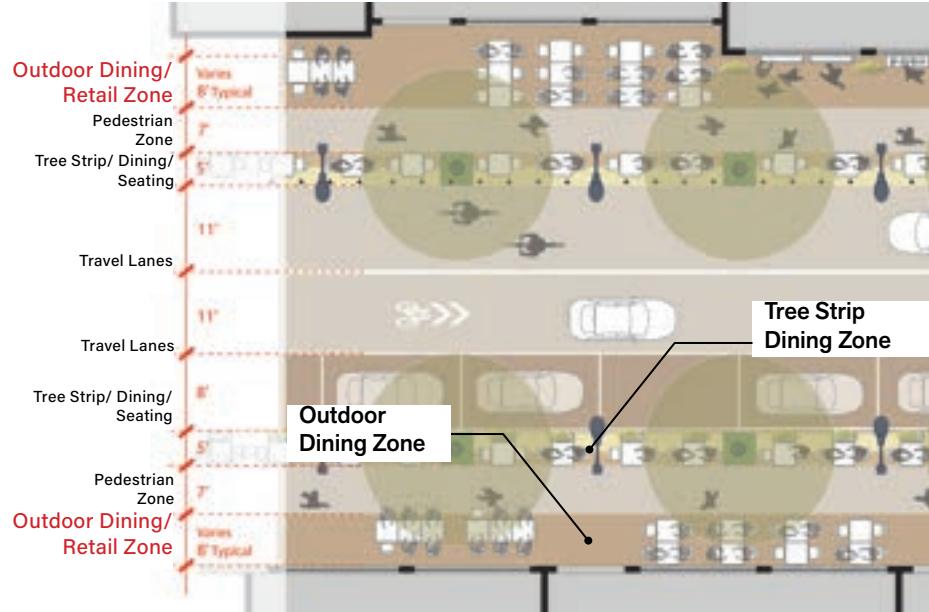
Hours of operation for the outdoor dining area shall be limited to the hours of operation of the associated eating and drinking establishment.

### Permits and Licenses:

The applicant shall obtain a City of San Carlos zoning clearance/approval from the City's Planning Division, and approval from the from the City's Building Division, Fire Department, and Public Works Department, and an annual business registration from the City's Finance Division. The applicant shall also obtain approval from the San Mateo County Health Department. In the case of outdoor dining in the public right-of-way, an annual City of San Carlos encroachment permit is required pursuant to SCMC Section 12.36. As applicable, a current and valid liquor license issued by the California Department of Alcoholic Beverages Control is also required.

**Figure 7.8 - 600 & 800 Outdoor Dining Layout.**

Top: Outdoor Dining/ retail Arrangement Study – Business-As-Usual)  
Bottom: Outdoor Dining/ retail Arrangement Study – Farmers' Market Scenario)



## 2. Outdoor Dining Area in the Public Right-of-Way

### **Encroachment Permit:**

An encroachment permit approved by the City Engineer is required for any outdoor dining area located in the public right-of-way.

### **Minimum Clearance– Pre-Streetscape Construction:**

For outdoor dining in the MU-DC zoning district, the outdoor dining area may be located no further than the extent of the brick demarcation line that is closest to the front property line. For all other zoning districts, a minimum of four(4) feet of unobstructed, clear path sidewalk area must remain available for pedestrians. For purposes of the minimum clear path, parking meters, traffic signs, trees, tree grates and all similar obstacles shall constitute obstructions within the sidewalk area.

- 1) Outdoor dining areas are limited to the width of the adjoining storefront and shall not extend beyond that into the storefront of any separate business.
- 2) Where the outdoor dining area is located adjacent to a street, an eighteen (18)-inch clearance shall be maintained from the face of the curb to the outdoor dining area unless there is parking parallel to the street, in which case a two(2)-foot clearance is required.
- 3) Minimum width of access opening shall be forty-four (44) inches. No outdoor dining area shall obstruct any points of building ingress and/or egress.
- 4) On a corner lot, the outdoor dining area shall not be located within the area bound by the extensions of the corner building walls between the building and the curb.
- 5) Vertical clearance of seven (7) feet shall be maintained.

### **Minimum Clearance– Post-Streetscape Construction:**

For outdoor dining in the MU-DC zoning district, the outdoor dining area shall be located within the limits of the designated outdoor dining zone. The designated outdoor dining zone is defined for the 600 and 800 blocks of Laurel Street as: an area eight (8) feet wide, measured from the building face; for the 700 block of Laurel Street, an area ten (10) feet wide, measured from the building face; for the 1100 and 1200 blocks of San Carlos Avenue, an area eight (8) feet wide, measured from the building face, and for El Camino Real as an area five (5) feet wide, measured from the building face. For all other zoning districts, a minimum of four (4) feet of unobstructed, clear path sidewalk area must remain available for pedestrians. For purposes of the minimum clear path, parking meters, traffic signs, trees, tree grates and all similar obstacles shall constitute obstructions within the sidewalk area.

#### Outdoor Dining Zone Dimensions:

##### **Laurel Street**

- 600 and 800 blocks: eight (8) feet from building face
- 700 block Centennial plaza: ten (10) feet from building face (expansion beyond the 10 ft outdoor dining zone may be considered on a case by case basis at the sole discretion of the City, and only after at least one (1) year following construction of the streetscape)

**San Carlos Avenue:** eight (8) feet from building face

**El Camino Real:** five (5) feet from building face

**Five (5) Foot Tree Strip Zone:** At the sole discretion of the City, outdoor dining zone may be considered in the 5 ft tree strip zone on a case-by-case basis, and shall only be considered after at least one (1) year following construction of streetscape improvements.

Additional outdoor dining space within the public right-of-way that is beyond the permitted designated 10 ft outdoor dining zone along the 700 block of Laurel Street may be considered only on a case-by-case basis. Such requests shall not be eligible for review until a minimum of one (1) year after completion of construction on the 700 block of Laurel Street. After that time, the City may, at its sole discretion, consider allowing additional outdoor dining space, subject to applicable design standards and the payment of any required additional fees.

Additional Requirements:

- 1) Outdoor dining is limited to the width of the adjoining storefront and shall not extend beyond that into the storefront of any separate business.
- 2) Where the outdoor dining area is located adjacent to a street, an eighteen (18)-inch clearance shall be maintained from the face of the curb to the outdoor dining unless there is parking parallel to the street, in which case a two and a half (2.5)-foot clearance is required.
- 3) Minimum width of access opening shall be forty-four (44) inches. No outdoor dining area shall obstruct any points of building ingress and/or egress.



Rope barriers, metal crowd barriers, and jersey barriers are not permitted.



Maximum barrier height four feet (4ft) including plants  
Gaps between barrier elements shall be maintained.



Faux plants and hedges are not permitted as barriers

**Figure 7.9 - Outdoor Dining Standards - Furniture and Barriers**

- 4) On a corner lot, the outdoor dining area shall not be located within the area bound by the extensions of the corner building walls between the building and the curb.
- 5) Vertical clearance of seven feet shall be maintained.

### **Design:**

- 1) Furniture shall be commercial grade, and be of durable materials such as wrought iron, wood, steel, or cast aluminum. Plastic chairs and table and vinyl or plastic tablecloths are not permitted. No dining area furniture shall be permanently attached to the public right-of-way.
- 2) Planter boxes, when provided, shall be of quality materials such as finished wood, precast concrete, terra cotta, or other pottery.
- 3) Umbrellas must be a single, solid color selected from the City of San Carlos' official color palette. Black and white are not permitted. Minor variations in tone or hue within the official color palette may be approved at the discretion of City of San Carlos staff. Umbrellas shall not display any signage, logos, decals, patterns, or decorative motifs. Colors outside the official color palette may be allowed only upon approval by the Zoning Administrator.
- 4) Awnings may be single-color, multi-color, or patterned, provided the design complements the approved umbrella color. Signage on awnings is permitted, subject to the requirements of the City of San Carlos Sign Ordinance (San Carlos Municipal Code 18.22). Awnings may extend and cover the full extent of the established outdoor dining zone (i.e. either 8 ft or 10 ft.). Fabric side panels, including retractable or drop-down panels, are permitted as part of the awning design, but shall not be bolted to the ground.



Solid Color Canvas Umbrellas in City's official color palette are permitted.



Patterned Umbrellas are not permitted

**Figure 7.10 - Umbrella Standards for Outdoor Dining**



Open lattice projections are permitted



Awnings with patterns are permitted, advertising on awnings is not permitted.



Street-facing awnings may include retractable windscreens as long as they are transparent and only used in inclement weather



Retractable curtains perpendicular to building facade are permitted to block wind or create privacy from neighboring businesses

**Figure 7.11 - Awnings Standards**

- 5) Street-facing awnings may include retractable windscreens as long as they are transparent and only used in inclement weather. Retractable curtains perpendicular to building facade are permitted to block wind or create privacy from neighboring businesses.
- 6) Permanent shelters over outdoor eating areas shall be prohibited, with the exception of projecting awnings attached to the building facade.
- 7) Barriers delineating the outdoor dining space are optional; if used, they may include planter boxes but not wrought iron fencing, rope, jersey, crowd barriers, etc.
- 8) No platforms or floor coverings are permitted within the outdoor dining area.

#### **Operation:**

- 1) No entertainment or use, operation, or playing of any musical instrument, loudspeaker, sound amplifier, or other machine for the production or reproduction of sound is permitted in the outdoor areas.
- 2) No electrical appliances, heating or cooking of food or open flames shall be allowed in the outdoor dining area. Use of all heating devices may be permitted with approval from the Fire Marshal.
- 3) No structure or enclosure to accommodate serving or clean-up stations, storage of trash or garbage shall be erected or placed on, adjacent to, or separate from an outdoor dining area on the public right-of-way. No storage directly or indirectly related to the business operation shall be allowed in the outdoor dining area.
- 4) All umbrellas, tables, chairs and other portable appurtenances may remain in the outdoor dining area at the end of each business day.

- 5) All outdoor dining shall be of the same business conducting the indoor sale.
- 6) Outdoor dining areas may not be subleased to another business.

#### **Maintenance:**

- 1) The permittee and the property owner shall maintain the outdoor dining area and the adjoining sidewalk zone, street, curb, and gutter in a neat, clean and orderly condition at all times, regardless of the source of the refuse and litter.
- 2) Activities involving the outdoor dining area shall be conducted in a manner that does not interfere with pedestrians, parking or traffic.
- 3) If necessary, the permittee or the property owner shall clean the surface of the sidewalk by washing or buffing to remove any stains, marks, or discoloration and in accordance with prevailing stormwater and water quality regulations.
- 4) Furniture and appurtenance shall be kept clean and in good condition. Umbrellas shall be kept secure in windy conditions, and fire-treated.

### **3. Outdoor Retail Display**

#### **Encroachment Permit:**

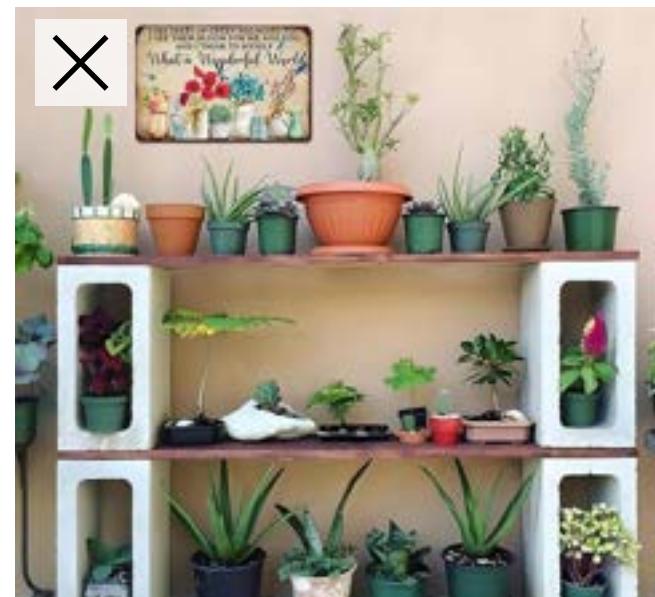
An encroachment permit approved by the City Engineer is required for any outdoor retail display located in the public right-of-way.

#### **Minimum Clearance– Pre-Streetscape Construction:**

For outdoor dining in the MU-DC zoning district, the outdoor retail display may be located no further than the extent of the brick demarcation line that is closest to the front property line. For all other zoning districts, a minimum

Color	PMS	CMYK				RGB			HEX
Navy	Pantone 282	100	68	0	64	0	45	98	002D62
Gold	Pantone 123	0	24	94	0	255	195	37	FFC325
Orange	Pantone 151	0	48	95	0	248	151	40	F89728
Coral	Pantone 1787	0	76	60	0	241	100	93	F1645D
Green	Pantone 368	57	0	100	0	122	193	67	7AC143
Teal	Pantone 326	87	0	38	0	0	177	176	00B1B0
Sky	Pantone 284	55	19	0	0	108	173	223	6CADDFF
Crimson	Pantone 227	0	100	7	19	198	0	111	C6006F

City of San Carlos's Official Color Palette



Plastic card tables, cinder blocks, and cardboard are not permitted in the outdoor display area.



No platforms or floor coverings are permitted within outdoor dining or retail display areas.



Nothing shall be bolted or attached to the ground.  
Mannequins/ outdoor display figures are not permitted in the outdoor display area.

**Figure 7.12 - Outdoor Retail Display Standards**

of four (4) feet of unobstructed, clear sidewalk area must remain available for pedestrians. For purposes of the minimum clear path, parking meters, traffic signs, trees, tree grates and all similar obstacles shall constitute obstructions within the sidewalk area.

- 1) Outdoor retail display areas are limited to the width of the adjoining storefront and shall not extend beyond that into the shopfront of any separate business.
- 2) Where the outdoor retail display area is located adjacent to a street, an eighteen-inch (18") clearance shall be maintained from the face of the curb to the outdoor retail display area unless there is parking parallel to the street, in which case a two-foot clearance is required.
- 3) Minimum width of access opening shall be forty-four (44) inches. No outdoor dining area shall obstruct any points of building ingress and/or egress.
- 4) On a corner lot, the outdoor dining area shall not be located within the area bound by the extensions of the corner building walls between the building and the curb.
- 5) Vertical clearance of seven feet shall be maintained.

### **Minimum Clearance— Post Streetscape Construction:**

In the MU-DC zoning district, the outdoor retail display area shall be located within the limits of the designated outdoor retail display zone. The designated outdoor retail display zone is defined for the 600 and 800 blocks of Laurel Street as: an area 8 feet wide, measured from the building face; for the

700 block of Laurel Street, an area ten (10) feet wide, measured from the building face; for the 1100 and 1200 blocks of San Carlos Avenue, an area 8 feet wide, measured from the building face, and for El Camino Real as an area 5 feet wide, measured from the building face.

For all other zoning districts, a minimum of four feet of unobstructed, clear path sidewalk area must remain available for pedestrians. For purposes of the minimum clear path, parking meters, traffic signs, trees, tree grates and all similar obstacles shall constitute obstructions within the sidewalk area. Outdoor retail display within the Plan Area shall be located, developed, and operated in compliance with the following standards:

The temporary outdoor display and sale of merchandise shall comply with SCMC Section 18.23.240, Temporary uses, and SCMC Chapter 18.31, Temporary Use Permits. An encroachment permit is required for any temporary outdoor display and sales within the public right-of-way; reasonable conditions of approval of such permits may be imposed to ensure unobstructed pedestrian movement in a minimum clear zone and to maintain clean sidewalks.

Outdoor display and sale of merchandise in Downtown districts shall comply with this section and Title 12 of the San Carlos Municipal Code. Outdoor display and sale of merchandise is permitted on private property all Mixed-Use Zoning districts within the Plan Area. Outdoor display and sale of merchandise is permitted on public property and in the right-of-way in the MU-DC-100, MU-D-120 with frontage on Laurel Street and San Carlos Avenue, and in Mixed-Use districts south of Arroyo Avenue with frontage on Laurel Street. The display area shall not encroach in a public right-of-way, street, alley, sidewalk without first obtaining an encroachment permit.

## General Requirements

**Application Information:** Applicant shall submit a site plan and description of the proposed outdoor display and sales area. The plan shall be drawn to scale showing the location of buildings and structures. In cases where outdoor sales are proposed for a location in the public right-of-way, the site plan shall include the location of the extent of the outdoor retail display zone in relationship to the pedestrian zone, the street furnishings and trees adjacent to the proposed outdoor display and sales area. The plan shall show locations, number and the arrangement of portable appurtenances proposed. Colors and commercial grade materials shall be specified. In addition to any other application materials required, an application for an outdoor display and sales area shall state the anticipated periods of use during the year, and the proposed hours of daily use, including Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays.

**Hours of Operation:** Hours of outdoor display and sales shall be limited to the hours of operation of the associated commercial establishment.

**Permits and Licenses:** The applicant shall obtain a City of San Carlos zoning clearance approval from the City's Planning Division, and approval from the City's Building Division, Fire Department, and Public Works Department, and an annual business registration from the City's Finance Division. In the case of outdoor display and sales in the public right-of-way, an annual City of San Carlos encroachment permit from the Public Works Department is required.



Figure 7.13 - Outdoor Retail Display Examples

## **Design**

- 1) The design of all improvements, sales racks and furniture shall be of a quality to sustain weather and wear, and shall be of commercial grade materials. Vinyl or plastic tablecloths are not permitted.
- 2) No platforms or floor coverings are permitted within the outdoor retail display area.
- 3) The merchandise in the outdoor display and sales area including but not limited to the display racks, tables and stands shall not exceed a height of six (6) feet and in no case be lower than two (2) feet.
- 4) Display and sales area fixtures and appurtenances shall be stable and secure in all wind and weather conditions.
- 5) Umbrellas must be a single, solid color selected from the City of San Carlos' official color palette. Black and white are not permitted. Minor variations in tone or hue within the official color palette may be approved at the discretion of City of San Carlos staff. Umbrellas shall not display any signage, logos, decals, patterns, or decorative motifs. Colors outside the official color palette may be allowed only upon approval by the Zoning Administrator.
- 6) Awnings may be single-color, multi-color, or patterned, provided the design complements the approved umbrella color. Signage on awnings is permitted, subject to the requirements of the City of San Carlos Sign Ordinance (San Carlos Municipal Code §18.22). Awnings may extend and cover the full extent of the established outdoor dining zone (i.e. either 8 ft or 10 ft.).

- 7) Nothing shall be bolted or attached to the ground. Mannequins/ outdoor display figures are not permitted in the outdoor display area.
- 8) All displays shall consider ADA accessibility and clear space requirements.
- 9) Zoning Administrator may consider deviations from these standards

## **Operation**

- 1) Outdoor display and sales conducted by a business shall be located directly in front of the associated business storefront and shall not extend into the frontage of any other storefront.
- 2) All merchandise or services displayed outdoors shall be of the same types ordinarily sold indoors at the business conducting the sale.
- 3) Amplified sound is prohibited.
- 4) Outdoor cooking and open flames are not permitted.
- 5) Portable heating devices require Fire Department approval.
- 6) Subleasing of outdoor display areas to other businesses is prohibited.
- 7) Outdoor retail display appurtenances may remain overnight or be stored inside the business.

## **Maintenance**

- 1) Business shall maintain area, adjoining street and gutter in neat, clean, orderly condition at all times. Retail activities shall not interfere with pedestrian zone, parking or traffic.

- 2) Furniture must be kept in good condition; umbrellas shall be kept secure in windy conditions and shall be fire-treated.

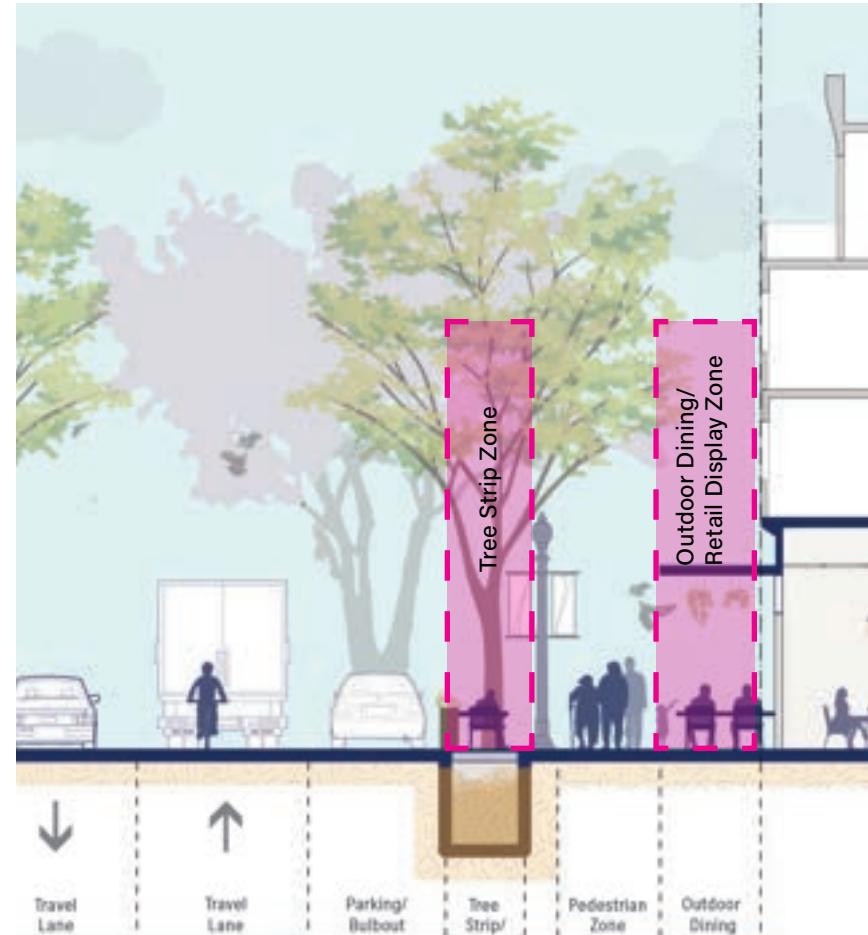
#### 4. Tree Strip Zone, Post Streetscape Improvements

At the sole discretion of the City, additional outdoor dining may be allowed in the tree strip. Such requests will only be considered after one (1) year post streetscape construction. The tree strip zone standards are developed for the Post-Streetscape Construction condition, until then, the Pre-Streetscape Construction Standards apply.

- 1) Maintain a 2.5-foot setback from curb face or bollard for passenger loading/unloading at parallel parking spaces.



**Figure 7.14 - Tables & Chairs Must be Set Back 2.5 Feet From a Curb Face or Bollard (Where Parallel Parking Occurs)**



**Figure 7.15 - Tree Strip Zone and Outdoor Dining/ Retail Display Zone along 600 and 800 blocks of Laurel Street**

- 2) Provide a 5-foot buffer between adjacent tree strip dining areas for pedestrian access.
- 3) Keep tables and chairs 4 feet clear of utility access panels, survey monuments, and manholes.
- 4) Maintain a 3-foot setback from fire hydrants and Fire Department Connections.
- 5) At ADA parking spaces, ensure a 3-foot clear path for each vehicle door.
- 6) Tables and chairs in the tree strip zone must match those in the outdoor dining zone and shall be brought into the business or business' outdoor dining zone overnight.
- 7) Portable heaters are prohibited. Electrical lines or lighting may not be strung between businesses and the tree strip zone.



**Figure 7.16 - Examples of Fixed Benches and Movable Seatings** (Source: Bellringer)

## E. PUBLIC SEATING

Public seating shall be provided throughout the Downtown in a variety of forms including stand-alone benches, integrated seating along raingarden edges, and informal movable chairs and tables, and sculptural stone block seating as part of the water feature design at the center of Centennial Plaza, located in the 700 block of Laurel Street. Example public seating types – and their context – are shown below.

The standards for public seating are further detailed in the Downtown Streetscape Master Plan included as Appendix A of this Plan.





**Figure 7.17 - Example of Integrated Benches at Rain Garden Edges**



**Figure 7.18 - Example of Integrated Fountain Seating (Source: Hudson Yards Park & Boulevard, Kelco)**

## F. PUBLIC AMENITIES

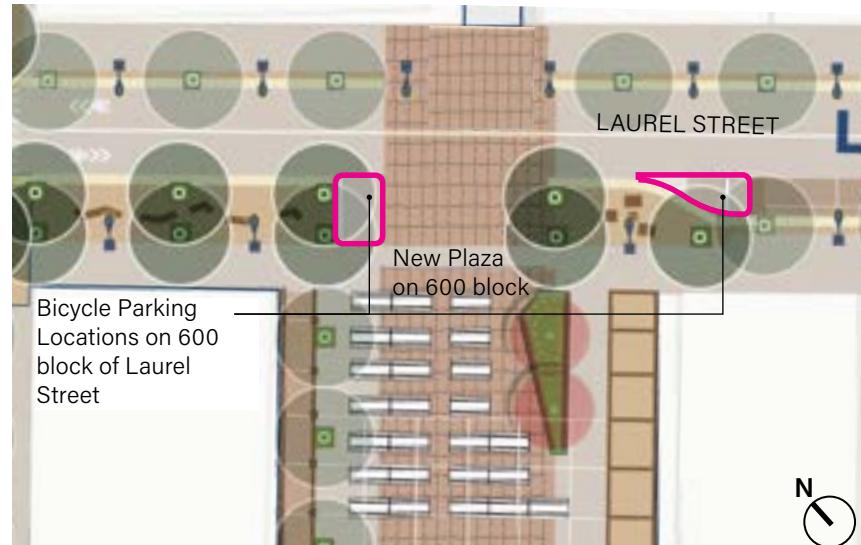
### 1. Public Bicycle Racks

Public bicycle racks shall be provided at key entry points to each block, adjacent to the groves, in the Downtown core to encourage bike mobility and to provide easily accessible places for bicycle parking.

For a full description of bicycle rack locations and standards, refer to the Downtown Streetscape Master Plan in Appendix A.

### 2. Fountain/Water Feature

The vision for Downtown includes a water feature to be located in the center of Centennial Plaza, within the 700 block of Laurel Street. This feature will activate this important central gathering space for the community, as well as providing the calming sound and cooling effects of moving water. Three important elements will distinguish the water feature: 1) a vertical element providing a focal point for the centennial plaza, 2) seating at the water feature's edge, and 3) the sound and sight of moving water. The water feature is not intended to be a fully immersive, interactive feature but will provide an opportunity to sit close to the water to enjoy the soothing sights and sounds of flowing water.



**Figure 7.19 - Public Bicycle Racks at the New Plaza at 600 Block of Laurel Street**

### 3. Drinking Fountains

Drinking fountains will be located throughout the Downtown core to provide easy access to hydration. The fountains will be generally located at the end of each block within the small entry plazas. Fountains will be equipped with 3 elements – standard drinking spout, bottle refill and dog basin at the ground level.



**Figure 7.20 Fountain Feature on 700 Block of Laurel Street**

### 4. Street Lighting

New outdoor lighting will be provided throughout the Downtown area including streetlights at minimum and low-level accent lights and overhead catenary lights in certain special areas, such as Centennial Plaza at the mid-point of the 700 block of Laurel Street.

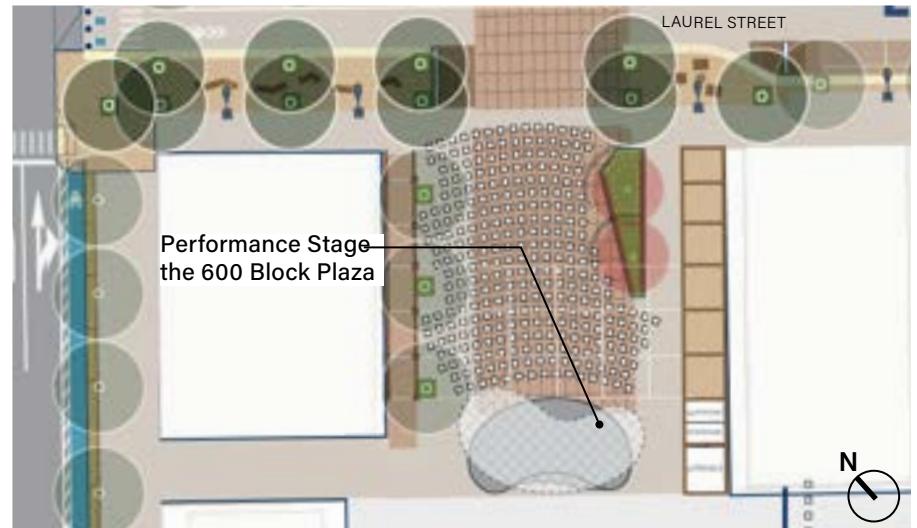


**Figure 7.21 Streetlights and Low Level Accent Lights**



## 5. Pavilions/Performance Stages

A core tenet of the Downtown Specific Plan is Downtown vibrancy and activation. This Plan aims to encourage events and performances of different types. To that end, both the 600 and 700 blocks of Laurel Street are envisioned to provide permanent performance stages under pavilion structures. These pavilion stages are intended to accommodate fully amplified performances – and therefore would be equipped with the proper electrical and lighting infrastructure. When not in use, the stages would serve as a sculptural elements within the Downtown landscape and attract other informal uses such as informal seating, pop-up exhibits, etc. These pavilion stages will be of sufficient size to accommodate medium-size group music performances (typically 5-to-6-piece bands).



**Figure 7.22 - Pavilion/Performance Stage at 600 Block Plaza**

## 6. Smart Poles

The Downtown area – and in particular, the Downtown core – will be equipped with electrical amenities such as charging outlets for vendors, charging for cell phones and laptops, Wi-Fi, security cameras and ambient music speakers. To the greatest extent possible, electrical amenities will be consolidated in “smart poles” using streetlights.

## 7. Trash Screening, Service Areas

Throughout the Downtown, care will be taken to provide screened trash collection areas, as well as service and delivery access. These functions will rely heavily on the Downtown alley network to provide easily accessible trash collection and service areas. The alley west of the 700 block serves as a successful example of this re-organization. (Refer to Chapter 5. Mobility and Transportation Framework of this document as well as Section 3.5 of the Downtown Streetscape Master Plan for additional detail.)



**FIGURE 7.23 - “SMART POLES”** (Source(R): [fsypvenergy.com](http://fsypvenergy.com))

## G. LANDSCAPE, GREENING & GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

### 1. Planting Palettes

Downtown greening strategies shall follow the street typologies specified in the Downtown Streetscape Master Plan, as illustrated in Figure 7.24-Street Character Typology, with each street type following a prescribed planting palette. Those street typologies are briefly summarized as follows:

- Grand Boulevard (El Camino Real)
- Civic (San Carlos Avenue & Cherry Street)
- Pedestrian Promenade (600, 700, 800 Blocks of Laurel Street)
- Pedestrian & Bicycle (All other cross-streets)
- Parkway (Laurel Street, South of Arroyo Avenue)

An additional category of Plaza Character is also defined for the feature plazas in the 600, 700 and 800 blocks of Laurel. Each of the typologies specified above will follow a prescribed planting palette prioritizing native species and creating a distinct aesthetic and sense of place for a particular street type. Each street must require specified planting types or comparable alternatives, with final plant selections determined during streetscape implementation and approved through Plans Specifications & Estimates (PS&E) drawings by City Council. These trees are fully described in the Downtown Streetscape Master Plan.

### 2. Street Trees

Consistent and unified rows of street trees will be planted throughout the Downtown area on all street types to provide greenery, shade, and seasonal change. Configurations of street trees by street type and species is detailed in the Downtown Streetscape Master Plan in Appendix A. Each street requires specified planting types or comparable alternatives, with final plant selections determined during streetscape implementation and approved through Plans Specifications & Estimates (PS&E) drawings by City Council.

The exception to a unified approach to street tree planting – one species, evenly spaced for each street type – will be the segment of Laurel Street south of Arroyo which is defined as a mixed species “parkway”. Here, the street tree will build on the mix of different species that exist today and continue a varied planting as these blocks are redeveloped.

### 3. Raingardens & Groves

In keeping with a “garden” concept established early on in the community engagement process for the Downtown Streetscape Master Plan, “rain gardens” or bio-retention planting areas will be created as a defining feature of the Downtown street environment – particularly on Laurel Street where these generous garden spaces alternate from side to side through the length of the 600, 700 and 800 blocks creating a meandering path of travel and unifying the Downtown core. Each rain garden features a grove of ornamental trees providing shade and seasonal change.

Bio-retention planting areas will also be provided on other street types and in plaza spaces such as Harrington Park and the new plaza on the 600

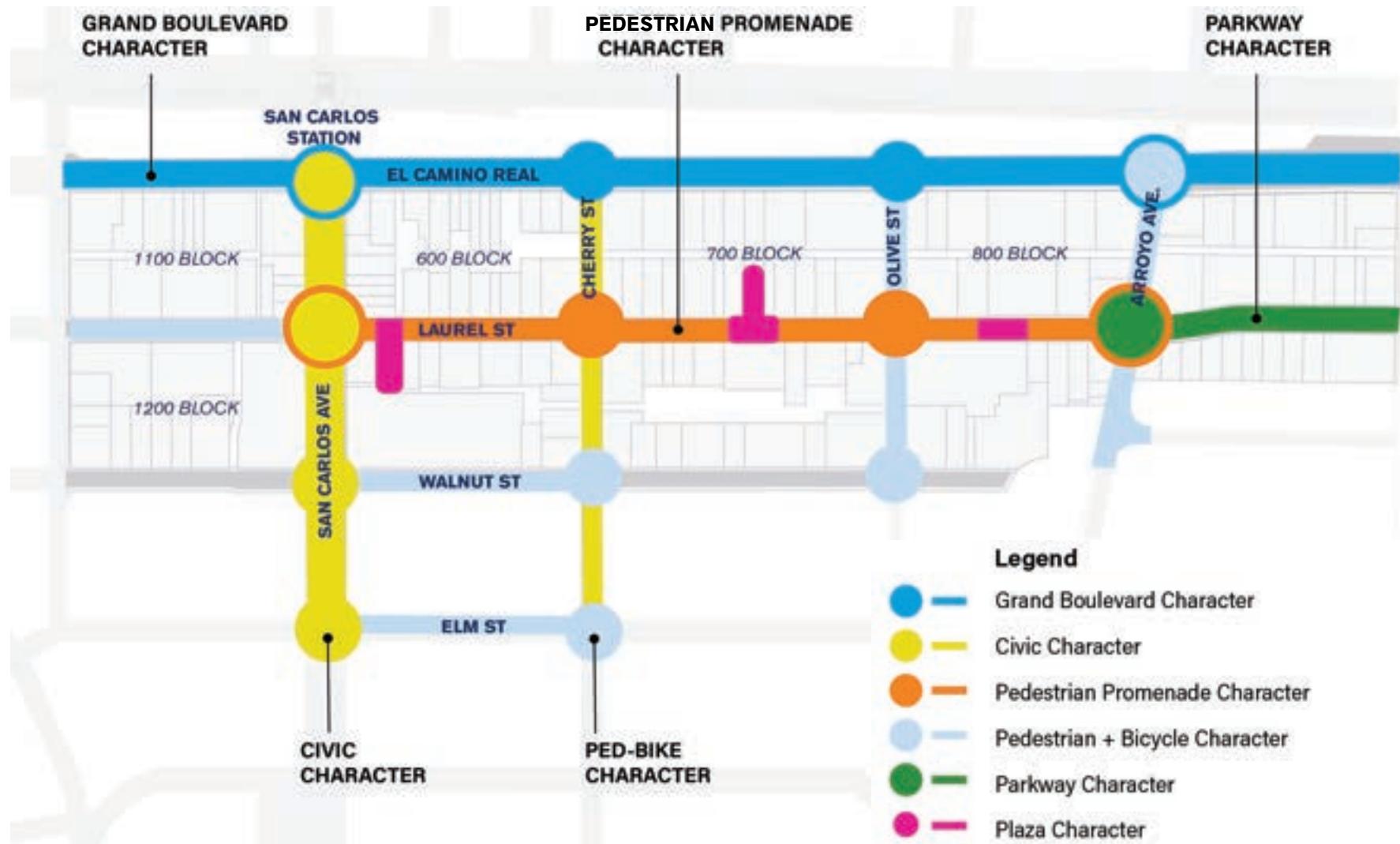


Figure 7.24 - Plan Area Street Character Typology

block of Laurel. Other street types with more constrained conditions will utilize smaller configurations to integrate bio-retention capabilities. Refer to Chapter 9, Sustainability and Resiliency for the standards regarding raingardens.

#### 4. Permeable Paving and Soil Trenches

In addition to the use of bio-retention planting areas, stormwater absorption will also be facilitated through the use of permeable paving. This will occur predominantly along street tree planting strips in which trees are planted with tree grate covers, the soil zone is continuous from tree to tree, and the entire strip zone is paved with a permeable paving system. This allows water to percolate into the paving and contributes to soil moisture in the tree root zone as well as promoting tree health. Refer to Chapter 9 - Sustainability and Resiliency for the standards regarding permeable paving.

### H. ACCOMMODATING PROGRAMMING/ACTIVITIES /TEMPORARY USES

A key aspect of a successful Downtown is the continuation of programming activities and events which bring people Downtown and enliven it. Currently, the City of San Carlos runs a series of events throughout the year to activate the Downtown core (Refer to Fig. 4.1 Annual Calendar of the Downtown San Carlos Events). The Downtown Specific Plan and Downtown Streetscape Master Plan propose improvements to Downtown public space that will accommodate these on-going activities both spatially and with supportive infrastructure.

#### 1. Markets & Festivals

The Downtown public realm design anticipates markets and festivals of different sizes and configuration throughout the year. The design of Laurel Street and San Carlos Avenue accommodates the configuration of market booth tents allowing space for circulation and emergency access.

The standard size of the tent/vending stalls shall be ten-feet (10') x ten-feet (10'), allowing three (3) units to be positioned between two street trees as indicated in Figure 7.8.

Electrical outlets shall be provided throughout the Downtown in locations where events are planned, using streetlights as "smart poles".

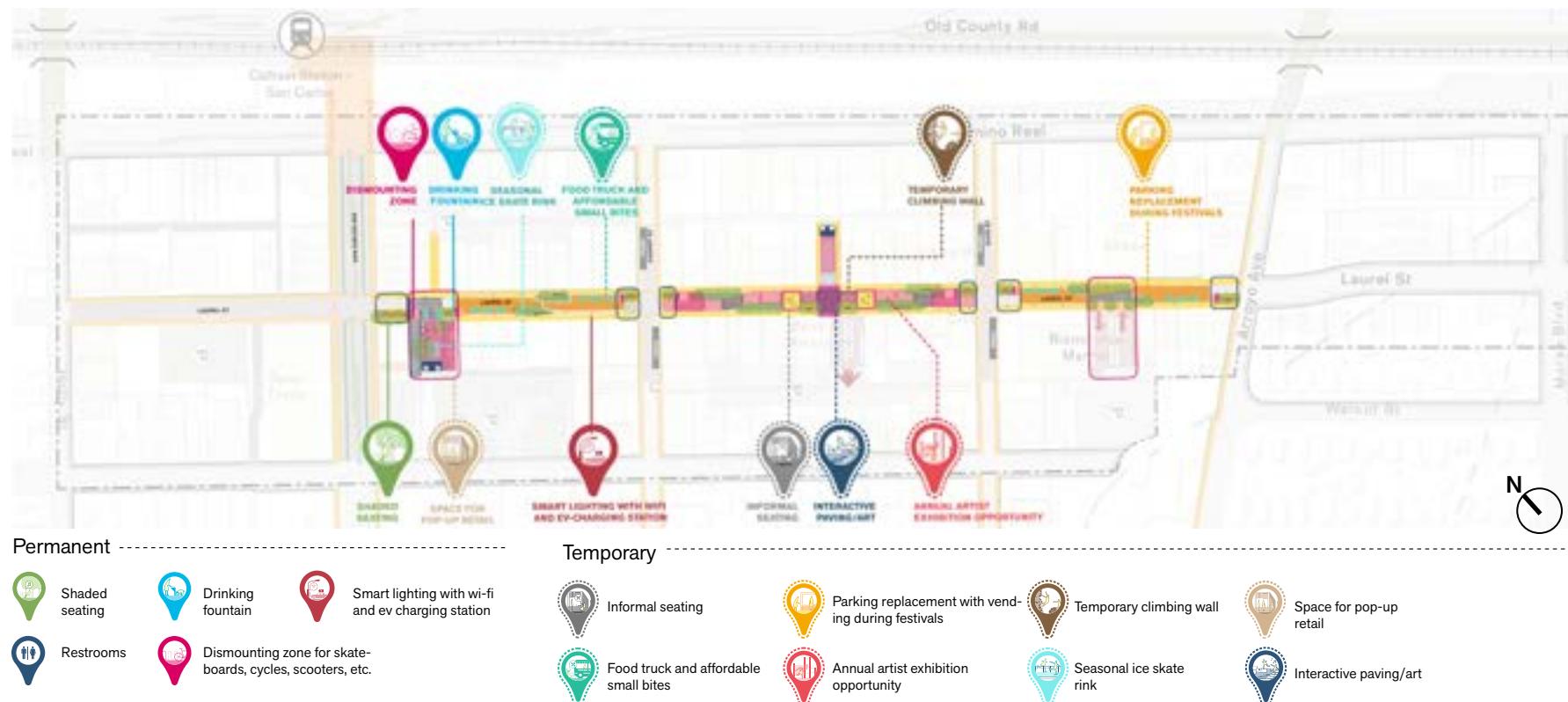
#### 2. Pop-ups

- 1) Pop-up businesses shall be accommodated in specific places throughout the Downtown as determined by the City and in line with the Prosperity and Economic Development Policy PED6.
- 2) Space for pop-up markets is planned in the new plaza on the 600 block of Laurel along its southern edge.
- 3) Provide utility connections (electricity, water, and waste disposal) at designated sites to support temporary vendors.
- 4) Define maximum vendor footprint to ensure pedestrian circulation.
- 5) Limit hours of operation to balance activation with noise and neighborhood compatibility.

- 6) Require vendors to maintain clean, well-kept setups and comply with City health and safety regulations.
- 7) Establish a process for permitting including addressing any additional standards required, such as performance standards,

### 3. Programmed Spaces

Throughout the Downtown and in particular, the Downtown core, space for programmed activities such as outdoor chess, corn-hole, hop-scotch, ping-pong and impromptu spaces for musicians, jugglers and other performers is provided in the new street configurations.



**Figure 7.25 - Programmed Activities in the Downtown Core**

A Wide Array of Programmed Activities Enriching the Public Realm Experience of the 600, 700, and 800 blocks of Laurel Street





# 08

## PUBLIC ART

## 8.1 OVERVIEW

Public art in the Downtown streetscape enhances the cultural identity and visual appeal of the area, creating a more inviting and vibrant place. It fosters community engagement by offering spaces for cultural expression and interaction, making the Downtown experience more meaningful. Additionally, public art can promote local culture and history, contributing to a sense of place and pride among residents and visitors.

According to community feedback from an online survey conducted in August 2024, the top three ways that the community wants to experience



**Figure 8.1 - Online Street Character Survey Result – Public Art [Survey date: August 2024]**

art throughout Downtown San Carlos are through gathering spaces (88%), murals (70%), and public streetscape elements (61%). These findings highlight the community's desire for more engaging and interactive public spaces that integrate art into the fabric of Downtown.

***Goal: Create a culturally rich and dynamic Downtown through public art that reflects San Carlos' cultural and ecological heritage to foster placemaking and inspire both residents and visitors.***



**Figure 8.2 - Existing Public Art in the Plan Area- Balancing Act**

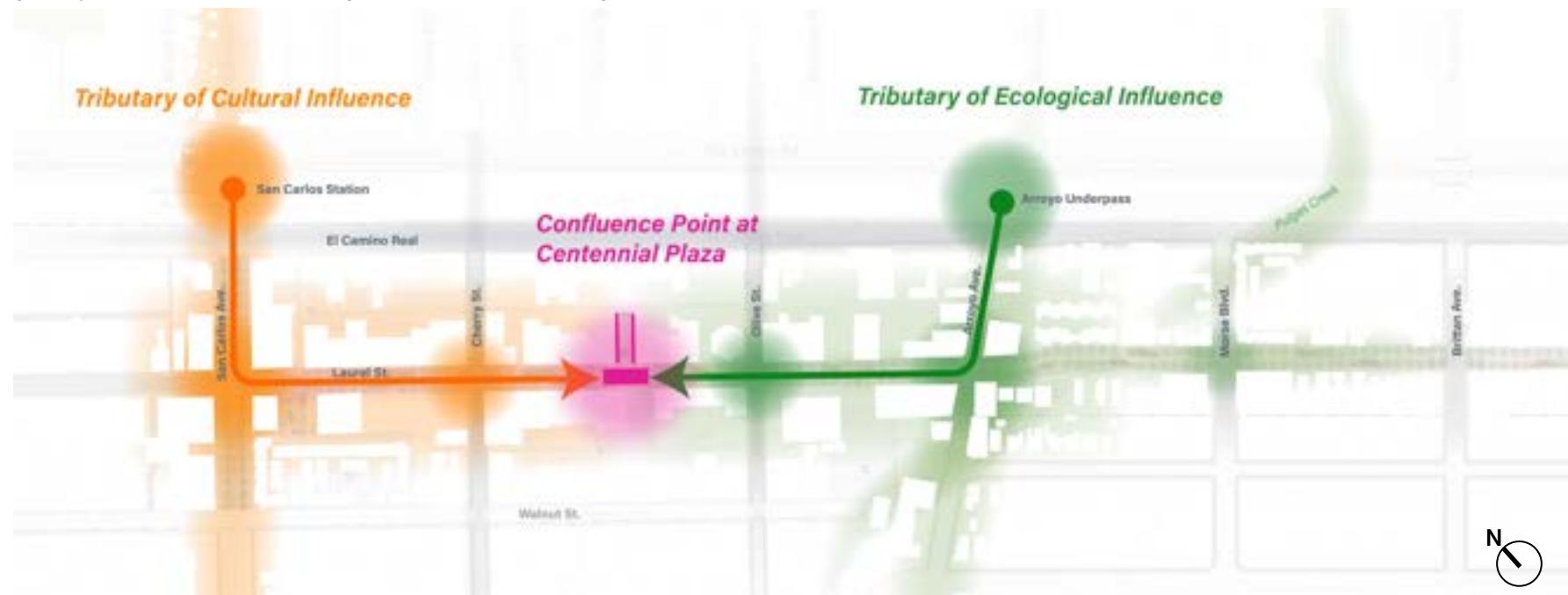
## 8.2 PUBLIC ART STRATEGY

### Incorporating Cultural and Ecological Elements

The incorporation of cultural and ecological motifs, including references to the City's sister-city concept, in public murals, sculptures and surface designs can help create a welcoming environment in Downtown rooted in a globally-minded culture, local indigenous culture, and ecological awareness.

These artistic interventions could be featured on walls, crosswalks, entry plazas and other urban surfaces, or as individual sculptures, contributing to a more immersive and meaningful streetscape experience.

The concept of the cultural and ecological tributaries was developed as a unifying framework to celebrate San Carlos's unique history and environment. Emerging from the City's commitment to honor both people and place, the idea expresses how cultural narratives, and natural systems flow together into Downtown as parallel yet interconnected storylines. The



**Figure 8.3 - Street Character Influences**

cultural tributary originates at the Caltrain Station—the City's primary arrival point—and highlights milestones from indigenous stewardship and early settlement to immigration, women's rights, and contemporary achievements. The ecological tributary traces the path of the former Pulgas Creek from the south, symbolizing the area's native flora and fauna and its ongoing role in local ecology. Together, these tributaries create opportunities for public art, landscape design, and interpretive elements throughout Downtown, offering residents and visitors a chance to engage with San Carlos's layered identity and to celebrate its cultural and natural heritage.

#### **Figure 8.4 - Cultural Murals in the Plan Area.**

(L) "Blossoms" and is a collaboration between Bay Area artist Yucali Seki and Omura-based calligraphist Housui Sato.



## **8.3 DEVELOPMENT POLICIES AND ACTIONS**

**PA-1:** Strengthen community identity and enhance the public realm by integrating art into the Downtown streetscape, alleys, plazas, and civic spaces, and encourage art in private development.

**PA-2:** Express community cultural and ecological heritage through public art.

(R) "Horizon Light", by artist Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya. August 12, 2021.



**PA-3:** Maintain and preserve existing public art that holds community significance, such as the “Balancing Act” (Blue Man) sculpture and the murals on the 800 block of Laurel Street and along the Sister City Alley.

**PA-4:** Promote rotating art installations and interactive public art experiences using innovative technology, such as QR codes, that lead visitors online to learn about art in existing or newly-created public plazas and public spaces in the Downtown.

**PA-5:** Prioritize collaboration with local artists, while also welcoming opportunities to feature national or international talent for projects of regional or global significance.

**PA-6:** Support the creation of permanent site-specific artworks and temporary exhibits along the 700 block of Laurel Street/ Centennial Plaza, the new public plaza on the 600 block of Laurel Street, and the gateway to Downtown at San Carlos Avenue and El Camino Real, to enrich the Downtown core with vibrant cultural expressions.

**PA-7:** Collaborate with community stakeholders to identify key locations for murals, sculptures, and other forms of public art.

**PA-8:** Adhere to the City of San Carlos' Public Arts Master Plan and consider updating it as needed to meet Downtown and citywide objectives.

**PA-9:** Provide opportunities for local artists and designers to exhibit their work in seasonal art installations throughout Downtown to enhance the cultural vibrancy of the area while showcasing local talent.

**PA-10:** Establish sustainable and diverse funding mechanisms to support public art that reflects community values, enhances public spaces, and engages residents and visitors.

**Action PA-10A:** *Collaborate with developers, local businesses, and community organizations to integrate public art into new developments and civic projects.*

**Action PA-10B:** *Pursue funding from federal, state, and regional arts agencies, private foundations, and national endowments.*

**Action PA-10C:** *Partner with local arts nonprofits to co-sponsor projects, and administer artist opportunities.*

**Action PA-10D:** *To augment the City's annual budget allocation for public art, research, evaluate, and consider establishing a “percent-for-art” program.*

**Action PA-10E:** *Explore sponsorships, donor recognition programs, and crowdfunding for specific high-profile projects.*

**PA-11:** Support the installation of larger sculptures and monuments at key gateways and intersections, such as the area across from the San Carlos Caltrain Station at El Camino Real and San Carlos Avenue, as well as within Centennial Plaza. These installations can serve as significant landmarks and enhance the aesthetic appeal of these vital pedestrian-oriented areas.

**PA-12:** Consider updating the Public Art Master Plan to reflect desired arts programming in the Downtown and to reflect the City's unique identify, promote cultural expression, and enhance the public realm.

## **8.4 PUBLIC ART STANDARDS**

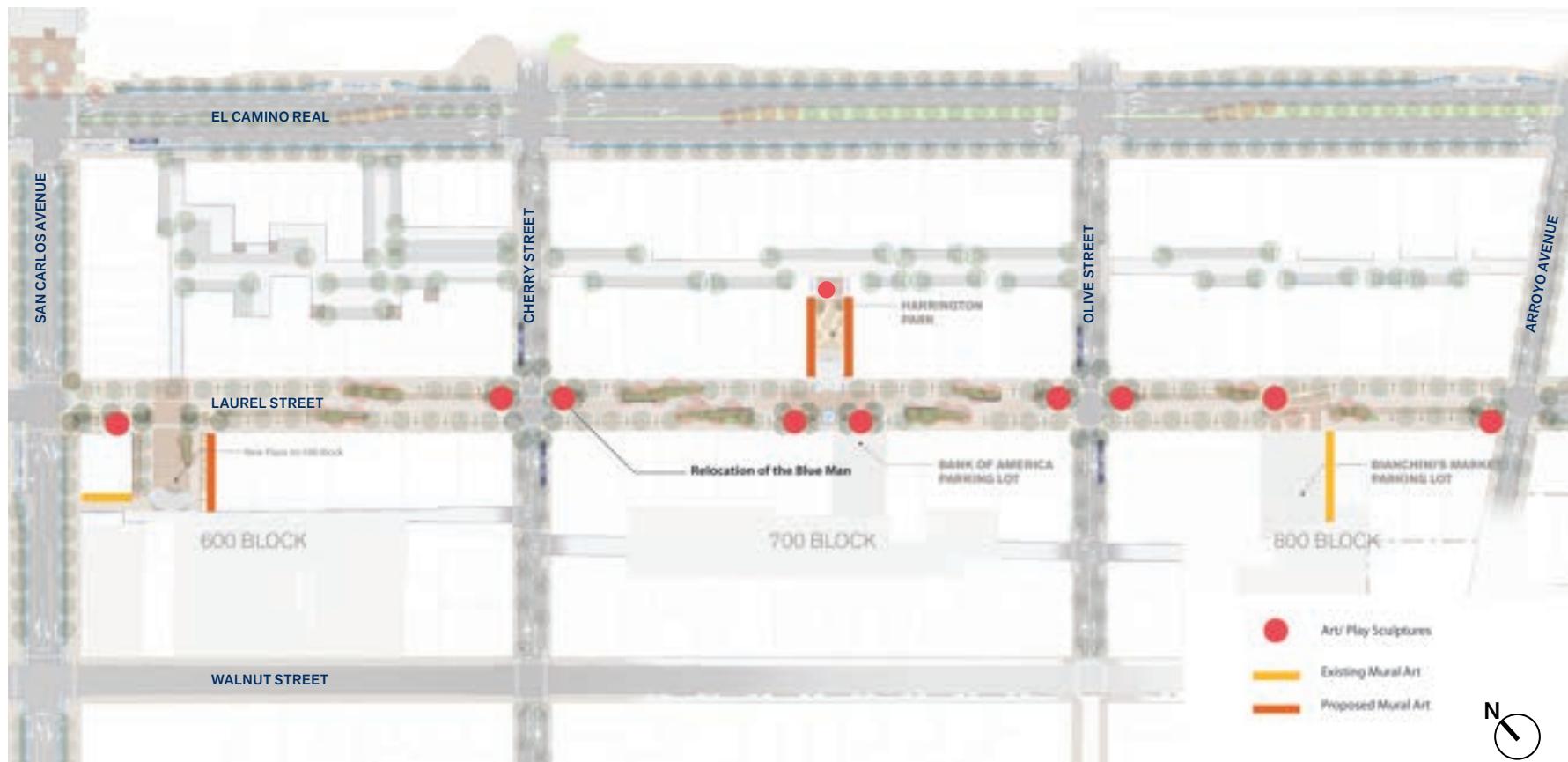
The process by which public artists are engaged is set forth in the City's Public Arts Master Plan.

### **A. RECOMMENDED LOCATIONS FOR PUBLIC ART INSTALLATION:**

Street Intersections: Intersection at El Camino Real and the Caltrain Station, at San Carlos Avenue and Laurel Street, and at the mid-block crossing in the South of Arroyo part of Laurel Street are some of the key nodes for installation of public art such as sculptural gateway elements, surface paintings on walls or pedestrian crossings.

Plazas and Parks provide opportunities for elevated public art experience with murals, sculptures, and other painted street furnishings; areas include: Harrington Park; Centennial Plaza located along the 700 block of Laurel Street; the new plaza on the 600 block of Laurel Street; and the temporary plaza at the mid-point of the 800 block of Laurel Street.

Along Sidewalks and Pedestrian Strips: The entire 600, 700, and 800 blocks of Laurel Street can be closed off from vehicular access on special occasions to accommodate temporary local artist exhibitions.



**Figure 8.5 Potential Public Art Installation Locations in the Downtown Core**





# 09

## SUSTAINABILITY AND RESILIENCY

## 9.1 OVERVIEW

Building a sustainable and resilient future for Downtown San Carlos is established through goals, policies, and actions designed to advance environmental sustainability and climate resilience. Promoting green infrastructure, sustainable mobility, clean energy, energy efficiency, and climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies can prepare the Downtown for future challenges.

***Goal: Enhance Downtown's long-term sustainability and resilience to climate change and natural hazards by promoting environmentally-sustainable development and infrastructure, while fostering a vibrant and adaptable urban environment. This includes integrating resilient infrastructure and climate-responsive strategies to mitigate the impact of environmental challenges and ensure the sustainability of the Downtown area for future generations.***

***Action SR-1:*** Incorporate green infrastructure throughout all street segments within the Plan Area to mitigate the impacts of extreme weather events and provide key environmental benefits such as passive-cooling, carbon sequestration, and rainwater interception.

**SR-2:** Implement green infrastructure through raingardens, permeable tree strips, green roofs, and low-impact development strategies to reduce runoff and improve water quality.

**SR-3:** Require new developments to incorporate green building standards and energy-efficient design.

**SR-4:** Promote sustainable mobility and support the adoption of clean energy transportation options throughout Downtown.

***Action SR-4A:*** Where feasible, integrate electric vehicle (EV) charging facilities in both on-street and off-street parking spaces.

***Action SR-4B:*** Implement active transportation infrastructure within the Downtown to support and facilitate walking, bicycling, and access to public transit.

**SR-5:** Consistent with the City of San Carlos' Climate Mitigation and Adaptation Plan, and subsequent updates, support local businesses and residents in adopting sustainable practices through incentive programs and education campaigns.

## 9.2 DEVELOPMENT POLICIES AND ACTIONS

**SR-1:** Integrate resilient infrastructure and climate-responsive strategies to mitigate the impact of environmental challenges and ensure the sustainability of the Downtown area for future generations.

## **9.3 DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS FOR CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS**

### **A. SUSTAINABILITY STANDARDS FOR NEW DEVELOPMENTS**

New developments in the Plan Area shall follow City's Green Building Codes and any subsequent updates in coming years.

### **B. RAINGARDENS**

Raingardens proposed for the 600, 700, and 800 blocks of Laurel Street shall follow the layout, materials and planting palette as specified in the Downtown Streetscape Master Plan, incorporating flowering tree groves and native or climate-adapted plantings that enhance visual appeal and ecological function. Each raingarden shall be designed as both a stormwater management system and a passive recreation amenity, with features such as seating edges, pathways, or viewing areas that invite public interaction without compromising drainage performance.



**Figure 9.1 - Raingarden and Seating Along Its Edge, at 700 Block of Laurel Street**

## **C. TREE PITS AND PERMEABLE TREE STRIPS**

Tree pits with mountable grates measuring 5 feet by 5 feet shall be introduced on all the streets in the Plan Area and these pits shall be connected underground through expanded soil trenches. These interconnected trenches shall be designed to promote improved rainwater percolation and support healthy root growth, ensuring long-term tree health and stormwater performance.

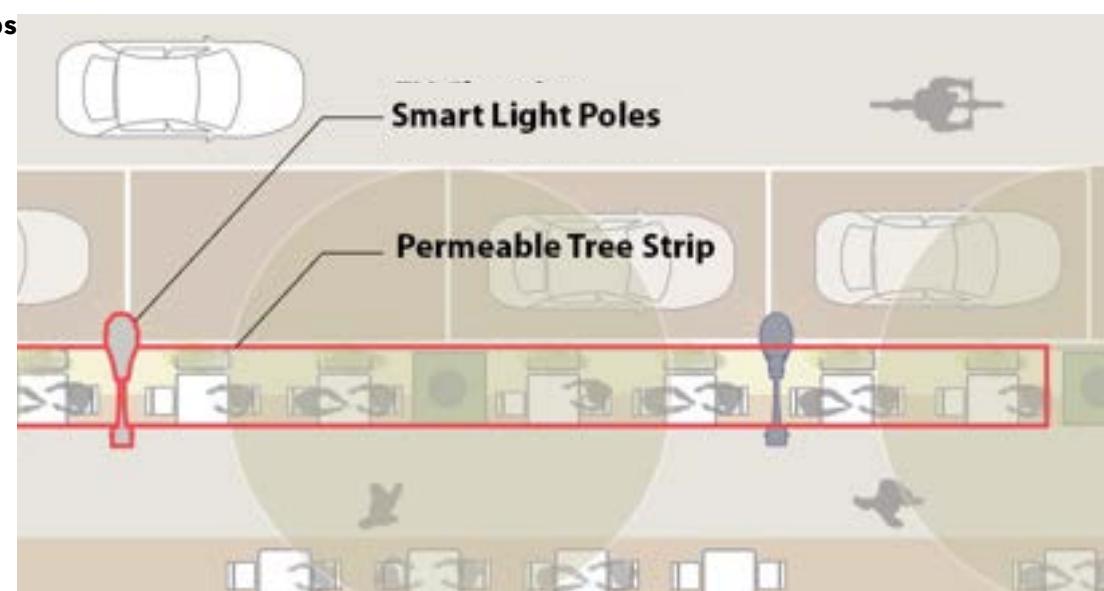
At the surface level, tree pits shall be connected by a continuous five-foot-wide (5') permeable paving strip (Refer to Figure 9.2) composed of permeable pavers and engineered soil. This strip shall facilitate surface infiltration, promote shared root zones, and enhance stormwater management while supporting healthy tree growth along the corridor. The permeable strips shall consider decorative paving pattern as specified in the Downtown Streetscape Master Plan.

## **D. ELECTRICAL INFRASTRUCTURE**

Along Laurel Street integrate smart poles equipped with green power outlets powered by renewable energy. These can provide electricity for street fairs and event-day vendors. Refer to the Downtown Streetscape Master Plan for details and specifications.



**Figure 9.2 - Raingardens and Permeable Tree Strips Along 700 Block of Laurel Street**



**Figure 9.3 - Smart Poles and Permeable Tree Strip on 600, 700 and 800 Blocks of Laurel Street**





# **10**

## **INFRASTRUCTURE AND UTILITIES**

## 10.1 OVERVIEW

The Infrastructure & Utilities section outlines necessary improvements within the Plan Area, including wet utilities and solid waste management.

***Goal: Ensure a robust, adaptable, and future-ready infrastructure system that supports growth, enhances quality of life, and meets the evolving needs of the community.***

## 10.2 DEVELOPMENT POLICIES AND ACTIONS

### A. INFRASTRUCTURE AND EQUITY

**IU-1:** Invest in modern infrastructure, embracing innovative technologies, and promoting sustainable practices to create a resilient Downtown that can effectively accommodate future development and improve the overall urban experience.

**Action IU-1A:** Upgrade water and sewer systems to meet growing demands and incorporate water-saving technologies in new developments and public infrastructure.

**Action IU-1B:** Implement smart technologies such as smart street lighting, EV charging stations, public Wi-Fi connectivity,

smart waste management etc. for improved energy efficiency, waste management, and public services

**Action IU-1C:** Enhance broadband connectivity to support economic growth and innovation.

**IU-2:** Ensure equitable access to community services, including emergency services for all Downtown residents, workers, and visitors.

**Action IU-2A:** Secure funding through public-private partnerships and other models to implement sustainable and cost-effective infrastructure improvements.

### B. PUBLIC AND PRIVATE UTILITIES

In 2022, the City initiated an assessment of existing public and private utilities within the San Carlos Downtown Specific Plan Area. This assessment provided a summary of general conditions, system characteristics, and a planning-level overview of potential infrastructure upgrades.

**I-U3:** Partner with California Water Service (CalWater) and other utility providers to align infrastructure upgrades with Downtown Streetscape Master Plan projects, ensuring seamless coordination, minimizing disruptions, and optimizing project efficiency.

**I-U4:** The City shall coordinate with public utility providers serving the Plan Area to identify existing capacity deficiencies and anticipate demands from future development.

**Action IU-5:** In the absence of existing infrastructure models, a qualitative assessment shall be conducted collaboratively with utility providers to gain a comprehensive understanding of system needs. This assessment will inform recommendations for necessary pipeline and system upgrades, including associated costs.

**IU-6:** Recognizing that numerous underground utility systems may require upgrades alongside surface improvements, the City shall prioritize understanding these needs, phasing, and costs to ensure streetscape enhancements are accurately budgeted and implemented efficiently. Accordingly, the following actions shall be undertaken in all areas slated for streetscape improvements:

**Action IU-6A:** Coordinate with CalWater to determine the appropriate pressure zones for future development within the Plan Area.

**Action IU-6B:** Provide CalWater with early notification and ongoing coordination as developments and street improvement projects are identified to determine required system enhancements.

**Action IU-6C:** Coordinate with Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E) and Peninsula Clean Energy (PCE) to assess and plan for future power demands.

**Action IU-6D:** Main electrical service points shall be established in coordination with Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E).

**TABLE 10.1 EXISTING UTILITIES AND PROVIDERS IN THE PLAN AREA**

OWNER	SERVICE	BASIS OF UNDERSTANDING
City of San Carlos	Sanitary Sewer and Storm Drains	GIS and Master Plan Documents
California Water Service	Water Service	Service Area Maps
Pacific Gas and Electric	Electrical and Natural Gas	Service Area Maps
Comcast	Telecommunications	Service Area Maps
AT&T	Telecommunications	Service Area Maps
Sonic	Telecommunications	Not within area but is servicing the city

**Action IU-6E:** Feeder circuits shall be distributed from these points to power street lighting, EV chargers, and outlet locations throughout the project area.

## C. WATER AND SEWER SYSTEMS

**IU-7:** Upgrade water, stormwater, and sewer systems to meet growing demands while incorporating water-saving technologies in new developments and public infrastructure. Infrastructure upgrades shall account for future climate change conditions, including increased storm intensity, sea level rise, and potential flooding, to enhance system resilience and protect public health and safety.

**Action IU-7A:** Assess the sewer system's capacity to support additional growth, particularly under wet weather conditions that may be intensified by climate change. Identify vulnerabilities under projected future rainfall events and incorporate adaptive strategies to manage higher flows, prevent system overload, and reduce flood risk.

**Action IU-7B:** The City's video inspections of wastewater pipelines and manholes were last conducted in 2013 and do not reflect current infrastructure conditions. A comprehensive reassessment following National Association of Sewer Service Companies (NASSCO) standards shall be conducted in the near term to accurately evaluate system integrity and identify necessary upgrades.

**Action IU-7C:** Upgrade stormwater infrastructure within the Plan Area to address identified capacity limitations, with particular focus on FEMA flood-prone zones AO and AE near Pulgas Creek. Upgrades shall consider projections due to climate change, including higher peak flows, more frequent extreme rainfall events, and sea level rise, to ensure long-term flood resilience.

**IU-8:** Individual project developments are encouraged to utilize onsite alternative water sources, regardless of whether recycled water infrastructure is extended to the Downtown in the future.

**Action IU-8:** Evaluate feasibility of connection to the City of Redwood City's Recycled Water system and extending a pipeline to the Downtown.

## D. TELECOMMUNICATIONS

**IU-9:** Evaluate the feasibility of providing free public Wi-Fi service within the Downtown district, recognizing that technology is continually evolving. This evaluation shall include an assessment of technical requirements, costs, funding sources, potential partnerships, and long-term maintenance responsibilities. As part of this process, all future streetscape improvements and infrastructure projects should consider the flexible deployment of connectivity technologies, ensuring that any new installations remain relevant and adaptable in a changing technological environment. Where feasible, conduit, fiber, or other supporting facilities should be incorporated during construction to reduce costs, maximize efficiency, and allow for future upgrades or modifications.

**Action IU-9A:** Conduct a feasibility study analyzing costs, technology options, and coverage areas for public Wi-Fi in the Downtown.

**Action IU-9B:** Explore potential partnerships with internet service providers, technology firms, and community organizations.

**Action IU-9C:** Identify potential funding opportunities, including grants, public-private partnerships, and capital improvement program allocations.

**Action IU-9D:** Integrate digital infrastructure into the design and engineering of upcoming streetscape projects.

**Action IU-9E:** Report findings and recommendations to the City Council for consideration and direction.

## E. WASTE MANAGEMENT

**IU-10:** Develop a waste management strategy that prioritizes reduction, recycling, and composting, emphasizing circular economy practices.

**Action IU-10:** Work with agency partners such as Rethink Waste to implement waste management infrastructure and programs within the Plan Area that prioritize minimizing waste generation through public awareness, maximize diversion of waste through clearly designated recycling and composting bins, and support circular economy principles by facilitating the reuse of materials.

## F. COMMUNITY SERVICES

**IU-11:** Ensure equitable access to community services, including emergency services for all Downtown residents, workers, and visitors.

**Action IU-11:** Coordinate with the City of San Carlos' public safety departments and programs and consider service response times and physical accessibility during infrastructure planning activities to meet future demand.

## **10.3 DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS FOR PUBLIC REALM UTILITIES**

### **A. SEWER LINES AND STORM PIPES**

Sanitary sewer pipelines shall be increased to a minimum diameter of eight (8) inches, with additional upsizing needed for some lines to support future demands.

The sanitary sewer lines along Arroyo and Brittan Avenues shall be upgraded to a minimum of eight (8) inches in diameter, with select segments increased to ten (10) inches as needed to accommodate future capacity. Upgrades should utilize pipe-bursting methods along existing alignments.

A minimum eighteen (18)-inch diameter shall be used for storm drainpipes, with upsizing as needed based on site-specific conditions and tidal influences. Improvements should align with the City's 2017 Storm Drain System Master Plan (and subsequent updates) and incorporate strategies to manage sedimentation, sea level rise, and incidental high-flow events such as utility breaks and hydrant flushes.

### **B. STREET LIGHTING- SMART POLES**

All new street lighting on the 600 and 800 block of Laurel Street shall utilize "smart poles" that integrate multiple infrastructure functions. Each smart pole shall be equipped with LED luminaries, energy-efficient drivers, and digital controls that support dimming, scheduling, and remote monitoring. Lighting shall comply with Illuminating Engineering Society (IES) standards and Dark Sky guidelines, with a color temperature not exceeding 3,000 K.

Smart poles shall also be designed to accommodate additional features such as EV charging ports, Wi-Fi access points, power outlets and security equipment, where feasible.

### **C. EV CHARGING**

Smart poles, where installed, shall include provisions for Level 2 Electric Vehicle (EV) chargers (with adaptability to future conditions requiring Level 3 EV charging as feasible) operating on 240-volt AC circuits at 40 amps. EV charging stations shall be implemented in partnership with a qualified charging provider, who will manage operations and maintenance.

EV charging stations shall be located within the alleys rather than along the Downtown core streets.

EV charging stations shall include emergency shutoffs and be UL-listed

with proper separation from pedestrian zones and combustibles. Fire safety signage, shutoff locations, and training for emergency response to EV fires shall be coordinated with the Fire department.

## **D. PUBLIC WI-FI**

Smart poles shall include Public Wi-Fi covering 600, 700 and 800 blocks of Laurel Street and shall prioritize seamless, outdoor access without interfering with private or business networks.

## **E. POWER OUTLETS**

Smart poles shall include 120-volt convenience outlets and 240-volt, 30-amp outlets to support audio/visual and small-scale electrical needs and food vendors and special event operations, respectively.

## **F. SMART WASTE RECEPTACLES**

Within the public realm, install solar-powered waste and recycling bins equipped with sensors that monitor fill levels and compact waste as needed. Receptacles shall send real-time alerts to collection services to optimize pick-up routes and reduce overflow.

All new developments and public spaces shall provide accessible, dual- or triple-stream waste receptacles designed to meet the City's waste reduction goals and align with San Carlos' sustainability targets.





# 11

## ADMINISTRATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

# 11.1 PLAN APPROVAL AND ADMINISTRATION

## Specific Plan Authority

California Government Code Section 65450 enabled the creation of the Downtown Specific Plan. The Downtown Specific Plan is an extension of the City of San Carlos' General Plan, but provides more localized goals, policies, and actions for the Downtown over the next 20 years.

## Specific Plan Contents

State law requires that a Specific Plan includes text and a diagram or diagrams which specify all of the following in detail:

- The distribution, location, and extent of the uses of land, including open space, within the area covered by the plan.
- The proposed distribution, location, and extent and intensity of major components of public and private transportation, sewage, water, drainage, solid waste disposal, energy, and other essential facilities proposed to be located within the area covered by the plan and needed to support the land uses described in the plan.
- Standards and criteria by which development will proceed, and standards for the conservation, development, and utilization of natural resources, where applicable.
- A program of implementation measures including regulations, programs,

public works projects, and financing measures.

- The specific plan shall include a statement of the relationship of the specific plan to the general plan.

## Specific Plan Adoption and Amendments

The Downtown Specific Plan shall be adopted and amended in the same manner as the City's General Plan (see Chapter 18.34 of the City of San Carlos' Municipal Code). However, State law allows a specific plan to be adopted by resolution or by ordinance and may be amended as often as deemed necessary by the San Carlos City Council.

State law also mandates that no local public works project may be approved, no tentative map or parcel map for which a tentative map was not required may be approved, and no zoning ordinance may be adopted or amended within an area covered by a specific plan unless it is consistent with the adopted specific plan.

## 11.2 DEVELOPMENT REVIEW

Article IV – Administration and Permits, of Title 18, San Carlos Municipal Code (SCMC), sets forth the regulatory framework governing permits and entitlements.

### **Design Review and Compliance Review Process**

Section 18.29 establishes the design review and compliance review process for development applications.

### **Planning Authorities**

Applicants shall refer to SCMC 18.25 Planning Authorities to identify responsibilities for specific bodies, officials and administrators as it pertains to development in the Downtown Specific Plan Area. Table 18.26.070: Review Authority provides a summary of review authorities for decisions and appeals.

### **Common Procedures**

Applicants shall refer to SCMC 18.27 Common Procedures to identify procedures that are common to the application and processing of all permits and approvals.

## 11.3 STREETSCAPE PHASING

### **PHASING STRATEGY**

To implement improvements contained in the San Carlos Downtown Streetscape Master Plan, a strategic, step-by-step phasing plan was developed and is illustrated in Figure 11.1. Due to the scale and complexity of the project, a total of 13 different segments were identified and designed to minimize disruptions while ensuring continuous community access. The precise sequencing of the phases, or segments, will ultimately be decided by the San Carlos City Council and based on funding availability.

Each phase is prioritized based on factors such as pedestrian flow, infrastructure needs, and budgetary considerations. This phased approach allows for flexibility and adaptation as the project progresses, ensuring that the improvements align with the long-term vision for the area. These phases, mapped across different streets, aim to gradually enhance the Downtown core, these phases are:

**Phase 1A – Harrington Park:** Improvements to enhance its usability and attractiveness, complementing the new pedestrian plaza and providing a platform for performances and public gathering to increase multi-purpose usage of the park.

**Phase 1B - 700 block of Laurel Street:** Initial improvements focused

on creating a pedestrian plaza, aligning with the city's strategy for increased walkability in Downtown.

### **Phase 1C – Wheeler Garage + Alley Improvements**

Enhancements to the Wheeler Garage and short term improvements to east side alleys, including improved wayfinding, to better support garage parking and effectively serve downtown visitors. (Phase 1C refers to phase 1.2 in the Streetscape Masterplan Table 4.1 Initial Phasing Strategy)

### **Phase 2 – 600 Block East Alley Parking Improvements:**

Reorganization of alleyways and parking spaces for improved parking efficiency, flow, and pedestrian experience. This phase also includes infrastructural improvements including installation of EV charging stations.

**Phase 3 - 600 Block Laurel Street and the New Plaza:** Further improvements on Laurel Street to extend the cohesive streetscape design strategy and continue the pedestrian-friendly experience in the Downtown core. This phase also includes improvements at the new plaza to create a vibrant public space by introducing a performance space, gathering spaces and pop-up markets.

**Phase 4 - San Carlos Avenue 1100 and 1200 Blocks:** Improvements to introduce the Civic character as discussed in Chapter 3, to make San Carlos Avenue a welcoming complete street for all.

**Phase 5 - 700 and 800 Block Alleyways:** Reorganization of alleyways and parking spaces for improved parking efficiency, flow, and pedestrian experience. This phase also includes infrastructure improvements including

installation of EV charging stations.

**Phase 6 – 800 Block Laurel Street:** Improvements on Laurel Street to extend the cohesive streetscape design strategy as introduced in Phase 1B and continue the pedestrian-friendly experience in the Downtown core.

**Phase 7 – Arroyo Avenue:** Improvements to Arroyo Avenue to support an enhanced pedestrian experience, bicycle connections and on-street parking.

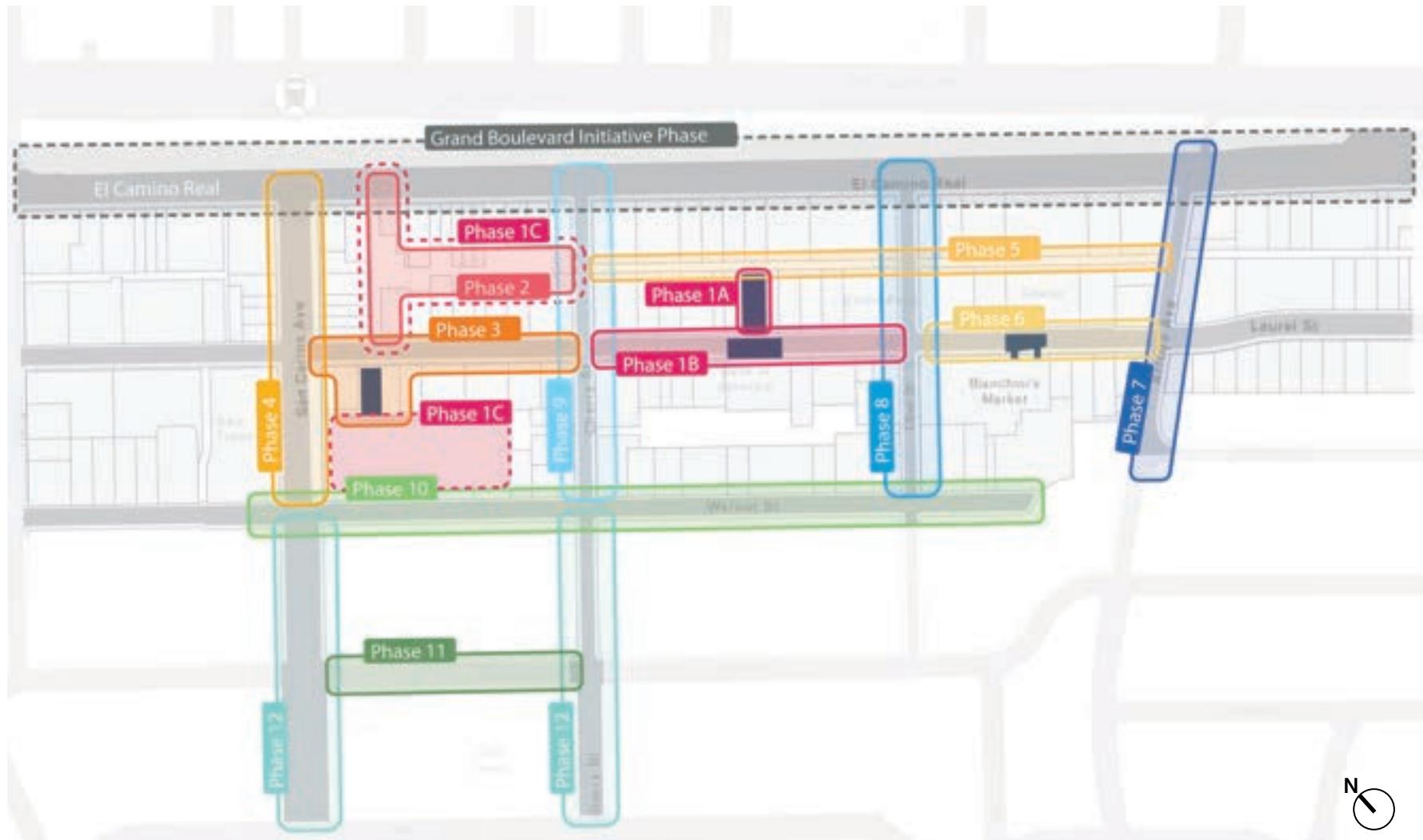
**Phase 8 – Olive Street:** Improvements to Olive Street to support an enhanced pedestrian experience, bicycle connections and on-street parking.

**Phase 9 – Cherry Street (between El Camino Real and Walnut Street):** Improvements to Cherry Street to support an enhanced pedestrian experience, bicycle connections and on-street parking.

**Phase 10 – Walnut Street:** Improvements to Walnut Street to support an enhanced pedestrian experience, bicycle connections and on-street parking.

**Phase 11 – Elm Street:** Improvements to Elm Street to support an enhanced pedestrian experience, bicycle connections and on-street parking. Additionally, this phase will include the introduction of a crosswalk connecting City Hall to the pedestrian paseo leading to Walnut Street and through the arched walkway out to the new plaza at the 600 block.

**Phase 12 – San Carlos Avenue 1300 and 1400 Blocks and Cherry Street (Between Walnut Street and Chestnut Street):** Improvements on the 1300 and 1400 blocks of San Carlos Avenue to introduce the Civic character as discussed in Chapter 3, to make San Carlos Avenue a welcoming complete street for all. Simultaneously, improvements will



**Figure 11.1 - Initial Phasing Strategy**

introduce pedestrian-bicycle friendly character on Cherry Street between Walnut and Elm Street.

**El Camino Real – the Grand Boulevard Initiative Phase:** The City should continue to collaborate with SamTrans, who is overseeing the Grand Boulevard Initiative. San Carlos will implement transformation of El Camino Real through alignment of policies and plans and develop an Action Plan and coordinated Project Initiation Document.

**AI-1:** During Downtown streetscape implementation, the City of San Carlos shall minimize disruptions while ensuring continuous access for the community.

**Action AI-1:** *The City shall proactively inform, communicate, and collaborate with Downtown businesses and the broader community throughout construction. Outreach will include sharing schedules, timing, and phasing details; providing clear points of contact; and offering support resources to reduce impacts during construction.*

**Action AI-2:** *All streetscape construction projects shall include a Parking Management Plan as part of the project planning and design process. The Plan shall explicitly identify measures to minimize parking spillover and disruption, including but not limited to:*

1) Temporary Parking Solutions: Identify alternative on-street or off-street parking areas for affected residents, businesses, and visitors.

- 2) Public Notification: Provide timely and clear public notification of construction timelines, parking restrictions, and available alternative parking options.
- 3) Signage and Wayfinding: Deploy temporary signage and digital wayfinding tools to direct drivers to alternative parking locations.
- 4) Coordination with Stakeholders: Collaborate with local businesses, residents, and transportation agencies to address specific parking needs and concerns.
- 5) Monitoring and Adjustment: Monitor parking conditions during construction and make adjustments as needed to reduce spillover and ensure safety.

## 11.4 FINANCING STRATEGY

Implementation of the San Carlos Downtown Specific Plan and the associated Downtown streetscape improvements will be a long-term transformation of the Downtown that will require collaboration between the City of San Carlos, property owners, businesses, community stakeholders, and developers. Funding for proposed public improvements, as well as ongoing maintenance and operations, will represent key challenges. The City will play a key role in the development of infrastructure to support the buildout of the Plan Area by planning and designing infrastructure system improvements, providing a framework to allocate the financial burden for public improvements among various parties, leveraging private investments with available public resources, and providing tools to raise funds and finance the necessary improvements.

The purpose of this financing strategy is to identify the public improvements and actions needed to implement the Plan, identify an array of appropriate funding sources and financing mechanisms, and provide a list of actions that the City should take to implement or coordinate execution of this financing strategy.

## A. FINANCING INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS

**AI-2:** Infrastructure improvements within the Downtown Specific Plan Area shall be supported through a diversified funding strategy that includes public-private partnerships, developer impact fees, grant programs, and other alternative financing models.

**AI-3:** All projects shall be evaluated for long-term cost-effectiveness and sustainability, with funding mechanisms coordinated across City departments and stakeholders to ensure timely and efficient implementation.

**AI-4:** Secure funding through public-private partnerships and other models to implement sustainable and cost-effective infrastructure improvements.

For detailed guidance on infrastructure funding and financing strategies, refer to Section 11.7 Funding Sources and Financing Tools.

## B. FINANCING STRATEGY PRINCIPLES

The public improvement program spans the next 20 years. While some funding sources are identified upfront, others will be determined during implementation and based on available resources.

The following principles will guide funding decisions:

### 1. Equitable Cost Distribution

Costs should be allocated fairly, minimizing the burden on those least able to afford them. When specific community segments benefit more from an improvement, they should contribute proportionally.

### 2. Leveraging City Resources

The City will amplify its resources by pursuing external funding—such as regional, state, and federal grants—and in-kind contributions from its property owner and developer partners. This approach aims to supplement the General Fund and staff resources, reducing expenses for residents and businesses.

### 3. Long-Term Cost Efficiency

Investments should offer long-term value, offsetting initial expenditures. For instance, enhancing Downtown infrastructure can attract development, boost property values, and increase tax revenues, which can then support debt repayment, maintenance, and service improvements.

### 4. One-Time Capital Improvements vs. Ongoing Operations and Maintenance

The improvement program is primarily focused on one-time capital improvement costs or one-time actions to implement Downtown streetscape improvements. Consequently, the funding sources and

financing tools identified in this financing strategy are primarily focused on identifying ways to pay for these one-time costs. However, the City will also be responsible for covering ongoing operations and maintenance costs for some improvements, such as the costs associated with maintaining redesigned and improved streets and new hardscapes and landscapes in Downtown San Carlos.

## 11.5 WHAT NEEDS TO BE FUNDED

### A. DOWNTOWN STREETSCAPE MASTER PLAN

The largest category of costs associated with the Downtown Specific Plan are the improvements set forth in the Downtown Streetscape Master Plan which was formulated concurrently with the Plan and separately adopted on April 28, 2025. There are 18 discrete projects indicated totaling upwards of \$120 million. Budgets shown in the Streetscape Master Plan are estimated 2024 costs - depending on how projects are phased and when any given project is built, these numbers would be escalated accordingly. Phase 1A (Harrington Park improvements) is expected to break ground in spring 2026. The timing of the construction of the other phases will depend on availability of funding.

The largest category of costs associated with the Downtown Specific Plan are the improvements set forth in the Downtown Streetscape Master Plan

which was formulated concurrently with the Plan and separately adopted on April 28, 2025. There are 18 discrete projects indicated totaling upwards of \$120 million. Budgets shown in the Streetscape Master Plan are estimated 2024 costs – depending on how projects are phased and when any given project is built, these numbers would be escalated accordingly.

Phase 1A (Harrington Park improvements) is expected to break ground in spring 2026. The timing of the construction of the other phases will depend on availability of funding.

## 11.6 FUNDING SOURCES AND FINANCING TOOLS

With a range of improvement types and projects, it is essential to draw on a range of both broad-based and project-specific funding sources to support both short-term and long-term implementation of the Downtown Specific Plan and Downtown Streetscape Master Plan. This includes sources that are locally controlled, such as General Fund monies and City's development impact fee revenue, among others, as well as funding from regional, state, and federal agencies, and funding from assorted private sources.

### A. TYPES OF FUNDING SOURCES

The following section lists potential funding sources and programs available through local, regional, state, and federal agencies and organizations (see Table 11.1). Local funding is typically the least competitive but is often already allocated to existing funding priorities. Increasing the amount of local funding

**TABLE 11.1 SUMMARY OF FUNDING SOURCES**

LOCAL FUNDING AND FINANCING SOURCES	REGIONAL/ STATE FUNDING	FEDERAL FUNDING	PRIVATE/ NONPROFIT FUNDING
General Fund Allocations	Bay Area Air Quality District – Clean Air Funds	Community Development Block Grant Program	Private Donations
Existing Staff Workplans	Affordable Housing & Sustainability Communities (AHSC)		Sponsorship Programs
Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT)	Urban Greening Grants (UGC)		Private Charities and Foundations
Development Impact Fees and Mitigations	Active Transportation Grants (ATP)		National Endowment for the Arts (Our Town)
Development Agreements & Community Benefits	State Highway Operation and Protection Program (SHOPP)		
User Fees, Rents and Concessions	Caltrans Sustainable Transportation Planning Grant (SB1)		
Revenue Ballot Measures	Local Streets and Roads Program (LSRP) Local Transportation Funds (LTF) Energy Conservation Assistance Act (ECAA) California Public Utility Commission – Rule 20A		

available may require dedicating incremental property tax revenue and/or additional taxation. Local funding can be leveraged for one-time capital costs, ongoing operations and maintenance, and can be used to leverage outside funding and as a dependable source for debt repayment. Federal funding is generally limited and allocated based on fixed funding criteria, though a significant amount of federal funding is also provided as pass-through dollars to regional and state agencies. The identified regional and state funding programs vary in size and are most well suited to off-setting

one-time fixed improvement costs. The regional and state funding sources are the most competitive.

## 1. Local Funding Sources

The City should consider using locally-controlled funds strategically (i.e., in a way that leverages local monies to secure funds available from other sources). For example, the City could utilize local funds as the required matching source for state or federal grant programs or where other funding sources and financing tools are not available or appropriate. Local funding

should also be reserved to offset the costs of ongoing operations and maintenance activities which are typically not eligible for outside funding.

## **General Fund Allocations**

The General Fund is the main operating fund for the City of San Carlos and is the least restrictive of all potential funding sources. The use of General Fund monies is at the discretion of the City Council, including application of unassigned fund balance and established reserves where appropriate. Subject to the need to balance many budgeting needs, the City Council could decide to spend General Fund dollars on any of the desired Downtown Specific Plan or Downtown Streetscape Master Plan implementation items.

## **Existing Staff Workplans**

For some actions, such as amending the zoning code and implementing the ground floor retail checklist per recommendations made in the Economic Prosperity Plan, existing staff can be utilized by programming these initiatives into existing workplans as other planning activities reach completion. The General Fund would cover staff costs, but the additional net cost to the City could be minimal.

## **Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT)**

This special tax is charged to visitors who rent overnight accommodations (e.g., hotels and motels) for 30 days or less. Revenues are collected at the time of payment by the lodging operator and lodging establishments located within the City of San Carlos remit the TOT collections to the City's

General Fund. The applicable TOT rate is set by the local jurisdiction and can be increased or decreased with local voter approval. In San Carlos, the TOT revenue is used to offset general fund costs. The current TOT rate in San Carlos is 14 percent and this rate is comparable with other nearby Peninsula cities.

## **Development Impact Fees and Mitigation Requirements**

Development impact fees (DIFs) are another potential funding source for the Plan's physical improvements such as roadway improvements, utility improvements and upgrades, streetscape improvements, and parks and recreational open space, among other improvements. These fees, paid by new residential and commercial development projects, can only be used to pay for improvements that can be demonstrated to serve new residents and businesses (from new development), but these fees can be combined with other sources to fund a project that serves both new and existing residents or businesses. A nexus study, which calculates the new increment of development, estimates the portion of an improvement project attributable to that increment of growth, and allocates the costs across the new development projects by land use, is required by state law for implementation. Additional impact fees could be considered as a means to fund improvements if a nexus can be established. Similarly, to the degree that a project requiring discretionary approvals generates impacts in a way not covered by the existing impact fee schedule, the City may also negotiate additional mitigation requirements which may also be used for desired improvements. According to its current fee schedule, the City of San Carlos levies impact fees for traffic, park facility development, commercial linkage

fee for affordable housing, sewer capacity, and childcare development. The City also collects park and affordable housing impact fees. The level of fees and scope of eligible projects to be funded by them can be reviewed by the City to include Downtown Specific Plan and Downtown Streetscape Master Plan improvements.

## **Development Agreements and Community Benefits**

In cases where the City and developers elect to negotiate and execute a development agreement (typically for larger or multi-phase projects), the city will have opportunities to negotiate improvements that could benefit Downtown. The scope of negotiated improvements from these citywide projects in the form of project mitigation requirements and community benefits can include roadway and intersection improvements, parking management, and utilities upgrades, landscaping and street furniture, park and/or parklet improvements, or contributions to local arts programs, among other options.

The exact nature of any such agreement will depend on the willingness and ability of the developer to make public concessions in exchange for approval, as well as the priorities of the City Council regarding Downtown implementation. These types of public benefits agreements may apply to new developments outside of the Downtown area if the new development is perceived to have a relationship to the Downtown area, such as generating new residents or employees who will want to travel to and spend time in the Downtown area, utilize Downtown parking, sidewalks, and/or other bicycle and pedestrian facilities included in the Plan Area. For example, the East Side Innovation District Vision Plan lists citywide priorities, including public

space activation, small business networking opportunities, and arts and cultural uses. To implement this funding source, the City would prepare a financial analysis of a project to determine the level of community benefits the project can support.

## **User Fees and Concessions**

To the extent that new facilities charge fees for access or usage, said fees can be used to offset the costs of operations and maintenance. User fees may include new parking fees, as well as park usage fees (e.g., for Harrington Park and the new public plaza envisioned on the 600 block of Laurel Street), either for day use or for special events. If concessions are provided, such as snack stands, food trucks, or vending machines, concession fees may also be used to offset operations and maintenance costs, such as for supporting a Laurel Street/Downtown event series. User and concession fees are insufficient to offset construction costs for most types of public facilities but can be part of a balanced and multifaceted financing strategy and/or help provide funding for ongoing operations and maintenance once improvements are in place. User fees and concession fees would only contribute modestly to ongoing costs given the small size of these venues.

## **2. Regional and State Funding Sources**

The following section describes several state and regional funding sources that generally align with the improvements and actions identified in the Downtown Specific Plan.

### **Bay Area Air Quality Management District (AQMD) Transportation Fund for Clean Air**

The Transportation Fund for Clean Air (TFCA) Funds program is administered by the Bay Area Air Quality Management District (BAAQMD) and offers grants for projects designed to reduce emissions from mobile sources. The Clean Air Funds Program is funded by a four-dollar surcharge on all vehicles registered in the district, as authorized by the Assembly Bill 2766. The program aims to reduce mobile emissions, private business, non-profit organizations, and public agencies are encouraged to apply if their proposals include projects that fall under one of four categories: clean technologies and low-emission vehicles; alternative transportation; transit; and public education.

### **Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities (AHSC) Program**

The California Strategic Growth Council administers the Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities (AHSC) program to provide affordable housing and transportation infrastructure funding for transit-oriented development and related infrastructure projects that reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Eligible applicants include local governments; transportation and transit agencies; non-profit and for-profit housing developers; joint power authorities; K-12 school, college, and university districts; and federally recognized Native-American tribes. Because the AHSC program is funded by California's Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF), the program's primary objectives are to reduce GHG emissions and vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and to increase accessibility of housing, employment, and other key destinations through low-carbon transportation options, such as walking, biking, and public transit. Eligible

projects may include affordable housing developments; active transportation improvements, such as sidewalks, paths, and bike lanes; transportation-related amenities, such as bus shelters, benches, or shade trees; and other programs that demonstrate improvements to connectivity and accessibility of jobs and housing, increase options for mobility, reduce air pollution, and encourage infill development.

### **Urban Greening Grants (UGG) Program**

Implemented by the Strategic Growth Council (SGC) and the California Natural Resource Agency (CNRA), the Urban Greening Grant (UGG) was created under the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006 (Proposition 84). The act authorizes grants to be appropriated for urban greening projects and plans that reduce energy consumption, conserve water, improve air and water quality, and provide other community benefits. Eligible applicants include cities, counties, non-profit organizations, special districts, and joint power authorities. A minimum of 80 percent of awarded funds are expected to go to disadvantaged and low-income communities, per AB 1550. San Carlos would have to compete for a small share of the remaining pool of funds. Competitive applicants include those developing master urban greening plans that result in projects that meet State environmental goals.

### **Active Transportation Program (ATP)**

The Caltrans Active Transportation Program (ATP) consolidates funding from various transportation programs at both the state and federal level, including the federal Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP), Bicycle

Transportation Account (BTA), and Safe Routes to School program. Approximately \$440 million was approved and awarded through the 2024 ATP and distributed into three categories: Statewide competition, Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) with 200,000 or more residents, and small urban and rural regions with less than 200,000 residents. The purpose of the ATP is to encourage and increase use of active modes of transportation, including walking and biking, as well as the safety and mobility of non-motorized users. Eligible entities include local, regional, or state agencies; Caltrans and transit agencies; natural resources and public land agencies; public school districts; tribal governments; private non-profit organizations and other entities responsible for transportation or recreational trails. Eligible projects may include infrastructure projects, such as capital improvements; non-infrastructure projects, such as education, encouragement, and enforcement activities; combination projects, such as those that combine infrastructure and non-infrastructure projects; and transportation plans located in disadvantage communities, such as community-wide bicycle, pedestrian, safe routes to school, or other active transportation plans. Given these criteria, several planned improvements may be eligible for ATP funding, including bike path planning and related Downtown Streetscape Master Plan improvements.

### **State Highway Operation and Protection Program (SHOPP)**

The purpose of the State Highway Operations and Protection Program (SHOPP) is to maintain the integrity of the state highway system. Funding for this program is provided through gas tax revenues. This funding source

is specific to Caltrans and is not a grant program. Projects are nominated for funding within each Caltrans District office. Proposed projects are sent to Caltrans Headquarters for programming on a competitive basis statewide. Final project determinations are subject to additional review. Individual Districts are not guaranteed a minimum level of funding. SHOPP projects are based on statewide priorities within each program category (i.e. safety, rehabilitation, operations, etc.) within each Caltrans District. Projects included in the program are capital improvements relevant to the maintenance, safety, operation, and rehabilitation of the state highway system that do not add new capacity to the system. SHOPP also funds legally mandated project categories such as retrofitting existing facilities to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and has a \$42 million reservation to augment projects to include complete street elements. The City of San Carlos may consider the SHOPP program for several of the planned improvements in Downtown, including the complete streets projects and the pedestrian and lighting improvements that promote safety and walkability, to the extent that these projects are located on or adjacent to state highways such as El Camino Real.

### **Caltrans Sustainable Transportation Planning Grant (SB1)**

The Sustainable Transportation Planning Grant program is administered by Caltrans and includes the Sustainable Communities Grant and Strategic Partnership Grant programs. The program included a total of \$51 million in funding for the 2024-2025 fiscal year. The Sustainable Communities Grants are intended to encourage local and regional planning that furthers various state goals, including those that implement the Regional

Transportation Plan Guidelines adopted by the California Transportation Commission. The Strategic Partnerships Grant, by comparison, is designed to identify and address transportation deficiencies on the state highway system in partnership with Caltrans. Eligible planning projects shall have a transportation nexus and are expected to directly benefit the multi-modal transportation system.

### **Local Streets and Roads Program (LSRP)**

Under SB1, the Road Maintenance and Rehabilitation Account (RMRA) provides \$5.0 billion annually for maintenance, repair, and safety improvements on state highways, local streets and roads, bridges, tunnels, and overpasses, including \$1.5 billion to the Local Streets and Roads Program (LSRP). Prior to receiving a formulas-based allocation, a City or County shall submit an adopted list of proposed projects by May 1st of each year to the California Transportation Commission (CTC). Many of the Streets Master Plan phases and phase components may be eligible for LSRP funding include the intersection and crossing enhancements, ADA improvements, and the repairs to deteriorating pavement in the Downtown alleys. LSRP may also be used for complete streets initiatives, including pre-construction and construction.

### **Local Transportation Funds (LTF)**

Local Transportation Development (LTF) Funds are equal to one-quarter cent of the statewide retail sales tax receipts. The funds are returned to each county by the State Board of Equalization based on the pro-rata share of statewide retail sales and use taxes collected within each area.

Administration of LTF funds is undertaken by the San Mateo County Transportation Authority. LTF can be used for the administration of the Transportation Development Act (TDA), pedestrian and bicycle facilities, the public transit system (both operations and capital), and for street and road projects. TDA requires that two percent (2%) of the annual estimate be set aside for bicycle and pedestrian improvements. Claims for administrative, pedestrian and bicycle, and public transit are to be funded first. Any remaining funds, after deducting operating costs, may be allocated for streets and road purposes. Projects eligible for funding should be identified and included in the City's overarching Capital Improvement Program (CIP).

### **Energy Conservation Assistance Act (ECAA)**

The California Energy Commission's (CEC) Energy Conservation Assistance Act (ECAA) program provides low-interest loans of one percent to public entities with projects with proven energy or demand cost savings. Eligible applicants include cities, counties, special districts, public colleges and universities, public care institutions and hospitals, University of California system, and California State Universities system. Eligible projects may include lighting system upgrades; installation of pumps and motors, streetlights and LED traffic signals, energy management systems and equipment controls, building insulation, heating and ventilation equipment, and water and wastewater treatment equipment; renewable and combined-heat-and-power projects; and load-shifting projects, such as energy storage. Loan agreement terms and conditions state that the loan can fund 100 percent of the project cost within a 17-year (maximum) simple payback and that the loan shall be repaid from energy savings within a maximum

of 20 years.

## **California Public Utility Commission (CPUC) Rule 20A Under-grounding**

The Rule 20A program managed by the California Public Utility Commission requires utility companies to allocate a certain amount of work credits each year to cities and county unincorporated areas for conversion projects that are subsequently paid for in whole, or in part, by the utility ratepayers. Projects shall be in the public interest by eliminating an unusually heavy concentration of overhead power lines; involve a street or road with high public traffic volumes; benefit a civic or public recreation area; and/or be listed as an arterial street or major collector as defined in the Governor's Office of Planning and Research (OPR) Guidelines. Participating jurisdictions shall accumulate enough Rule 20A work credit allocations to fund each nominated project, with allocations given out each year by the utility. Participating jurisdictions can accumulate credits over time until they have sufficient funding to complete a project and may also borrow forward five years to obtain additional credits. Once enough credits are available, the jurisdiction shall then form a "utility underground district," which can be done by resolution, in order to initiate the project.

### **3. Private/Non-Profit Funding Sources**

In addition to public funding sources from various levels of government, private funding may play a role in Downtown Plan implementation.

#### **Private Donations**

Contributions from private donors, such as individuals, businesses, or charitable foundations, whose interests align with the goals of the Plan are another potential source of funds that could support either capital improvements or ongoing operations and maintenance. Donations can take the form of cash contributions or in-kind donations of time or materials. One particular type of improvement identified in the Plan that should be targeted for private in-kind funding are the arts-oriented improvements, like the mural program, Main Street Arts Fair, the Call for Artists to Implement the Arts Plan, and the Main Street Art Walk. The City should work with local arts groups who can organize volunteer labor and provide donations of in-kind materials. Other improvements that may benefit from private donations include some of the other placemaking, streetscape, and park improvements, where smaller donations could be combined to achieve larger goals.

#### **TABLE 11.2 Types of Financing Tools & Mechanisms**

**Cost Reimbursement Agreements**

**Municipal Bonds**

**Special Assessment Districts**

**Landscaping and Lighting Assessment Districts (LLADs)**

**Parcel Taxes**

**Infrastructure State Revolving Loan Fund (ISRF)**

## **Sponsorship Programs**

Similar to private donation drives, organized sponsorship programs solicit larger donations from individuals, business, and organizations which can be used to fund improvements. Sponsorship campaigns often include some form of public recognition, such as participation in ribbon cutting ceremonies, naming rights to a park or public space, or a commemorative plaque. Some of the specific items that may benefit from sponsorship programs include gateway signage, which often features logos from local community organizations. Another category of improvement well suited to a sponsorship approach to funding is the construction and maintenance of parklets, particularly those that most directly benefit specific businesses.

## **Private Charities and Foundations**

In addition to donations from private individuals and named sponsors, additional voluntary donations may be available from private charities and foundations. Funds are often secured through the submission of applications to charities and foundations with stated missions which align with the goals of the project in question. Improvements that could be at least partially funded with funding from private charities and foundations include bicycle and pedestrian facilities; gateway, signage, and wayfinding improvements; and placemaking, urban greening, and public arts installations among other possible improvements. A few possible options include:

- San Mateo County Chamber of Commerce
- American Association of Retired Person (AARP) Community Challenge

- Local Healthcare Providers
- National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Our Town Program
- Community Foundation of San Carlos
- Parks and Recreation Foundation of San Carlos

## **B. TYPES OF LOCAL FINANCING TOOLS**

The following section summarizes common financing tools and mechanisms which are most useful in combination with municipal bonds to advance “big-ticket” projects that require up-front funding, as well as a reliable source for debt repayment. Nonetheless, some of the financing tools discussed below may also be used to generate ongoing funds that the City could use to fund projects on a “pay-as-you-go” basis or to pay for ongoing operations and maintenance activities.

Many of the financing tools require some level of public support. For example, general obligation bonds require two-thirds voter approval, while establishment or modification of a special district requires a majority vote of the impacted property owners. Similarly, most of the financing tools discussed here place a financial burden on the owners of property within the district, which can impact the competitiveness of real estate compared to alternative locations elsewhere in the community.

### **1. Cost Reimbursement Agreements**

In some cases, developers may elect to pay the full up-front cost for infrastructure improvements that are required for their own development,

but for which they cannot be held wholly responsible. In these cases, many communities will execute a cost reimbursement agreement with the original developer, under which future projects that benefit from the infrastructure in question (e.g., water and sewer improvements, roadways, etc.) will be charged impact fees, or make other similar payments, that are then passed on the first developer as reimbursement. The relative cost share is typically determined based on the extent to which each development is expected to benefit from the new improvements. Cost reimbursement agreements are typically executed between a developer, or developers, and the local jurisdiction.

## 2. Municipal Bonds

General Obligation Bonds, or G.O. Bonds, are tax-free municipal bonds backed either by the full faith and credit of the issuing jurisdiction, or by a pledge by the local jurisdiction to levy additional ad valorem property taxes in an unlimited amount, as necessary to satisfy debt service. Due to the broad pledge of revenues associated with General Obligation Bonds, the State Constitution requires two-thirds voter approval prior to issuance. General Obligation Bonds have historically provided the lowest borrowing costs due to the broad security pledge. By comparison, revenue bonds are tax-free municipal bonds that are issued to cover the costs of construction for revenue-generating public facilities, where the anticipated cash flow is sufficient to cover operating costs and debt service. Revenue bonds are often used to finance construction of and improvements to paid municipal parking facilities, among other revenue generating uses.

Proceeds from bond issuance can fund a wide variety of activities. However,

bonds are for one-time infrastructure investments, and are not to be used for ongoing maintenance or operations. General obligation bonds may be well suited to paying for the Downtown Streetscape Master Plan improvements and in improving park spaces like Harrington Park and the new plaza on the 600 block of Laurel Street. Revenue bonds may also be used for similar purposes but are best suited for use in combination with other public and private funding for planning and construction of specific revenue generating improvements. In these cases, revenue bonds are issued based on the anticipated revenue raised through parking fees or in combination with special districts.

## 3. Parcel Taxes.

These are taxes that are based on a flat per parcel rate or a rate that varies based on size and/or number of units on the parcel. Parcel taxes require approval by a two-thirds super majority vote of the electorate. However, if initiated by voters, they may require only a simple majority. Parcel tax revenues can fund debt service, pay-as-you-go capital projects, maintenance or support City services.

## 4. Special Assessment Districts

A special assessment district can be used to fund any improvement that provides a “direct and special” benefit to the assessed property. By this definition, improvements like parking facilities, sidewalks, parklets, and lighting can be funded via special assessments, while “general” benefits like parks and schools may not. There are two primary challenges in establishing special assessment districts, particularly for those in already developed

areas. The first is that total property taxes can only increase a certain amount before they begin to disadvantage new development relative to properties not subject to an assessment. The second is that assessment districts require a majority vote of property owners, weighted by property value. All the affected properties shall stand to benefit from that particular improvement, and no assessment can exceed “reasonable cost.”

## 5. Landscaping and Lighting Assessment Districts (LLADs)

A landscaping and lighting assessment district (LLAD) is another type of special district established by a local government to finance the costs of landscaping and lighting in public areas. Revenues are most often used toward the installation and maintenance of landscaping, statues, fountains, general lighting, traffic lighting, recreational and playground equipment, and public restrooms. Revenues can also be used to back revenue bonds, which can fund acquisition of land for parks and open space, and construction of community centers, auditoriums, and other similar public uses.

By law, the levy associated with a LLAD cannot be tied to the value of land or improvements, but shall be established using a “benefit formula” that allocates benefits and costs to providing service to each parcel. LLADs that provide ongoing services may remain in place for as long as service is provided. A majority vote is required to establish a LLAD, as well as to increase the assessment rate. A LLAD could be used to directly fund the construction and maintenance of landscaping along Laurel Street, El Camino Real, and San Carlos Avenue or in any of the public spaces along the corridor. Funds may also be used to support intersection improvements

throughout the Downtown. If the revenue from a LLAD is insufficient to fully fund construction activities, the funds could be used to back issuance of a revenue bond; in which case future annual assessment revenue would be dedicated to debt service and would be unavailable to fund ongoing maintenance.

Prior to forming a LLAD, the City should assess the ability of the affected parcels to support an additional assessment without imposing undue economic strain.

## 6. Infrastructure State Revolving Loan Fund (ISRF)

The California Infrastructure and Economic Development Bank (I-Bank) manages the Infrastructure State Revolving Fund (ISRF) program to provide loans to public agencies and non-profits for a wide variety of public infrastructure and economic expansion projects. Eligible applicants shall be local government entities, or non-profit organizations sponsored by public agencies, and meet the criteria for an infrastructure or economic expansion project. Subsidies are available based on the local unemployment rate and median household income. Eligible project categories include rehabilitation of City streets, rehabilitation and/or replacement of water and wastewater treatment facilities; new parks and recreational facilities; flood control measures; educational, cultural, and social facilities; goods movement related infrastructure; and expanded public transit. Applications are accepted continuously with loans ranging from \$50,000 to \$25 million. The ISRF program could be paired with local revenues (used for debt service) to fund a variety of planned improvements, including the water and sewer system upsizing and upgrades, and repairs to Downtown alleyways.

**TABLE 11.3 ANNUAL NET FISCAL IMPACT TO THE CITY OF SAN CARLOS GENERAL FUND, SOURCES: BAE, 2025.**

<b>CITY OF SAN CARLOS DOWNTOWN SPECIFIC PLAN</b>	
<b>General Fund Revenues</b>	
Property Tax	\$1,943,000
ILVLF	\$339,000
Sales Tax	\$415,000
Transient Occupancy Tax	\$1,120,000
Other Revenues	\$657,000
<b>Net Change in General Fund Revenues</b>	<b>\$4,474,000</b>
<b>General Fund Expenditures</b>	
General Government	\$112,000
Community Development	\$421,000
Parks and Recreation	\$183,000
Public Safety	\$2,415,000
Public Works	\$637,000
<b>Net Change in General Fund Expenditures</b>	<b>\$3,768,000</b>
<b>Net Fiscal Impact</b>	<b>\$706,000</b>

## 11.7 ANTICIPATED FISCAL IMPACTS

A Fiscal Impact Analysis (FIA) evaluating the annual General Fund revenue and expenditure impacts of the Plan was prepared for this Financing Strategy, based on 2045 buildout projections for the Plan Area. As shown in Table 11.3, the FIA estimates that the new development associated with the Plan will have a positive net fiscal impact on the City of San Carlos' annual General Fund revenue. The Plan is estimated to generate an annual net fiscal benefit of approximately \$706,000 at full buildout (in 2025 \$). This annual surplus represents the net impact of new General Fund tax revenue associated with new development after accounting for municipal service costs associated with increased employment and residents. The analysis used the City's 2024/25 Adopted Budget Update and other sources as cited in this report to evaluate existing City revenues and service costs and estimate the revenue and service costs associated with the Plan. See Appendix F for a summary of the full FIA.

## 11.8 FINANCING STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS

The following is a list of actions that the City should consider implementing to execute the financing strategy. These actions are by no means exhaustive but provide initial direction to City staff and stakeholders regarding things that can be done to position the City and its partners to leverage the funding sources and financing tools that are currently available.

### **Action AI4 A- Monitor and Refine Annual Implementation Plan:**

**Identify critical path improvements and prepare an annual action plan that identifies the improvements to be implemented and provides staff and stakeholders with an annual work plan that clearly identifies funding priorities and objectives.**

### **Action AI4 B- Review and Update Development Impact Fee Program(s):**

**Review existing impact fee and in-lieu fee programs so that new development can help pay for Plan improvements. Consider the extent to which certain improvements may have citywide benefits, so that developments outside of the Downtown can also help pay their fair share for Downtown improvements; explore establishing a Plan Area impact fee for improvements that primarily benefit development within the Downtown.**

### **Action AI4 C- Review and Update Capital Improvement Plans:**

**Review and update the City's capital improvement plan**

*to incorporate the Downtown Streetscape Master Plan phased improvements, expanded wayfinding, water and sewer line upgrades, and other improvements set forth in the Plan.*

### **Action AI4 D- Assess Need for Change(s) to Special District(s):**

*Review existing special tax and benefit assessment districts, and BID to determine whether amendments are necessary and/or whether new districts should be formed to help raise funds for specific improvements and/or to help finance the cost of improvements over time. Conduct outreach to property owners to determine their support for changes and determine most viable course of action.*

### **Action AI4 E- Inventory Local Match Funding Sources:**

*Identify funds to serve as a local match to leverage grant funding opportunities.*

### **Action AI4 F- Pursue Outside Grant Opportunities:**

*Aggressively pursue grants that can help to reduce the cost burden on local taxpayers to pay for improvements.*

### **Action AI4 G- Create a Reimbursement Policy:**

*Establish and implement a reimbursement policy to follow in the event that a developer wishes to advance funds for improvement costs that exceed their fair-share of improvements that are necessary for projects to move forward.*

### **Action AI4 H- Assess Support for Local Funding Tools:**

*Assess the willingness of the community to absorb an increase in*

local revenues, such as TOT, revenue measures or local sales and use taxes to function as a dedicated funding source for Downtown improvements and/or ongoing operations and maintenance costs.

**Action A14 I- Update User Fee Schedule:** As part of the Parks and Open Space Master Plan update, review and update the City's existing fee structure administered by the Parks and Recreation Department for the use of existing and planned City facilities in the Downtown, such as for use of the Harrington Park or the new plaza envisioned on the 600 block of Laurel Street.

Collected funds can contribute to ongoing maintenance and operations.

**Action A14 J- Identify and Prioritize City-Wide Community**

**Benefits:** Review current pipeline and future projects inside and outside the Plan Area that can be prioritized for negotiation of community benefits and identify Downtown community benefits scope for developer implementation, funding, or contribution. This will support the City's pursuit of grant, philanthropic, and sponsorship funding for the arts component of the Plan.

**Action A14 K- Update the Public Art Master Plan:** Consider updating the Public Art Master Plan to reflect desired arts programming in the Downtown and to reflect the City's unique identify, promote cultural expression, and enhance the public realm. This will support the City's pursuit of grant, philanthropic, and sponsorship funding for the arts component of the Plan.

**Action A14 L- Create Sponsorship Program:** For Harrington Park, the Parks and Recreation Foundation of San Carlos operated a sponsorship program under which individuals made contributions by purchasing a brick that carries the donor's name or business. Conduct active outreach to the local business community to recruit sponsorships for publicly visible Downtown improvements, such as signage, wayfinding, public art, and other related improvements. To the extent that sponsorships do not cover the full cost of the identified improvements, consider ways that sponsorships can be used to leverage additional outside funding prior to committing City funds.



**DOWNTOWN  
TOGETHER**

**City of San Carlos**  
600 Elm Street  
San Carlos, CA 94070



**CITY  
IS  
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