



# SAN CARLOS DOWNTOWN SPECIFIC PLAN

## **DRAFT** EXISTING CONDITIONS ANALYSIS



NOVEMBER 13, 2023

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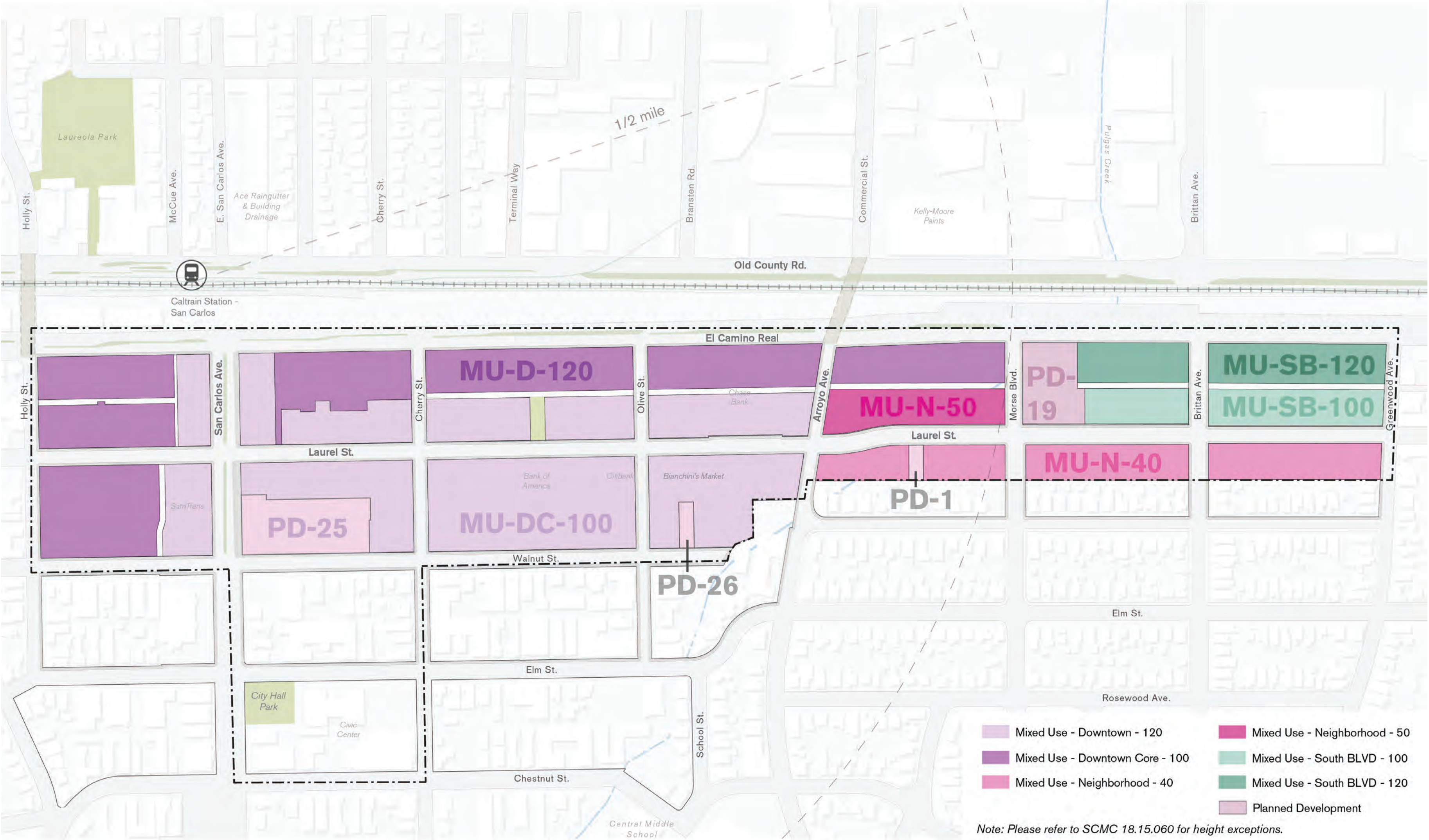
# REGULATORY CONTEXT

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# PLANNING + POLICY FRAMEWORK

## Zoning Designations





# PLANNING + POLICY FRAMEWORK

## Zoning Designations

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

- Physical form is regulated to support pedestrian environment and multi-modal transit-oriented development.
- Residential development: Up to 120 units per acre.
- Other allowable uses: retail, commercial, and office.

### **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.
- Residential development: Up to 100 units per acre.
- Other allowable uses: retail, commercial, and office.

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

- Transition from mixed-use areas into residential neighborhoods.
- Residential development: Up to 50 units per acre.
- Other allowable uses: retail, commercial, and office.

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

- This district ensures a physical form to relate to adjacent single-family residential neighborhoods.
- Residential development: Up to 40 units per acre.
- Other allowable uses: retail, commercial, and office.

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

- The physical form varies to transition from MU-N-40 west of Laurel Street to MU-SB-120 on El Camino Real.
- Residential development: Up to 100 units per acre.

- Other allowable uses: retail and commercial.

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

- This district facilitates the transformation of the southern portion of El Camino Real into a multimodal, mixed-use corridor.
- The physical form varies to reflect the urban character of the El Camino Real corridor.
- Residential development: Up to 120 units per acre.
- Other allowable uses: retail and commercial uses, as well as hotels and other commercial uses oriented toward a regional market.

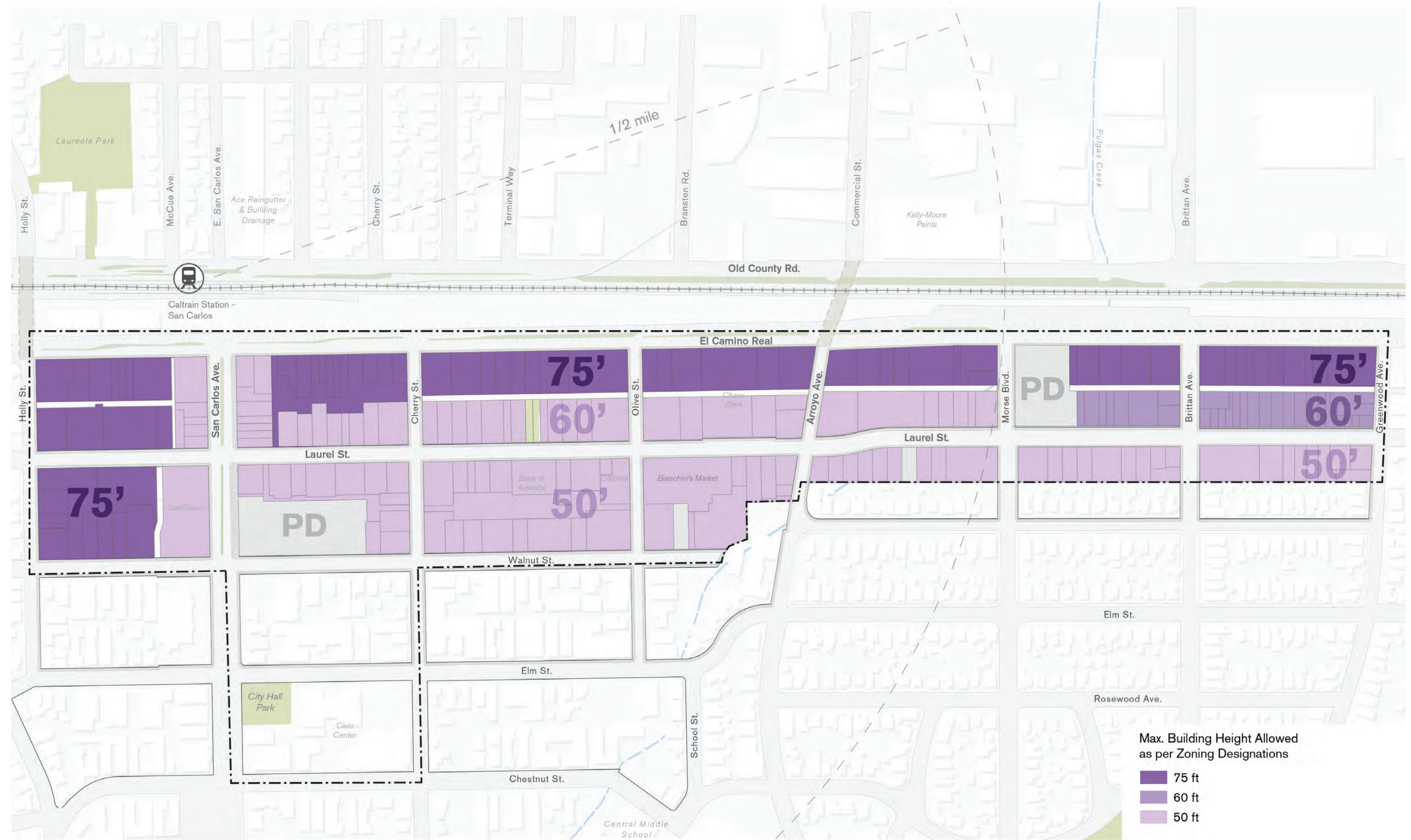


# PLANNING + POLICY FRAMEWORK

## Heights per Zoning Ordinance

### Upper Story Stepbacks.

- Third Story—Laurel Street. The third story along the 600, 700, and 800 blocks of Laurel Street shall be set back a minimum of 10 feet from the story below.
- Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Stories. The fourth, fifth, and sixth stories of all buildings shall be stepped back a minimum of 10 feet from the third story below, except as provided in this section.
- Laurel Street. The fourth story along the 600, 700, and 800 blocks of Laurel Street may align with the story below.
- San Carlos Avenue and El Camino Real. The fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-story front facades may align with the third story below along San Carlos Avenue in the MU-SC District and along El Camino Real (exception: this provision does not apply to the 1100 and 1200 blocks of San Carlos Avenue).



\*Note: The accompanying narrative does not include the Objective Development Standards for mixed-use and multi-family projects that are currently in progress.

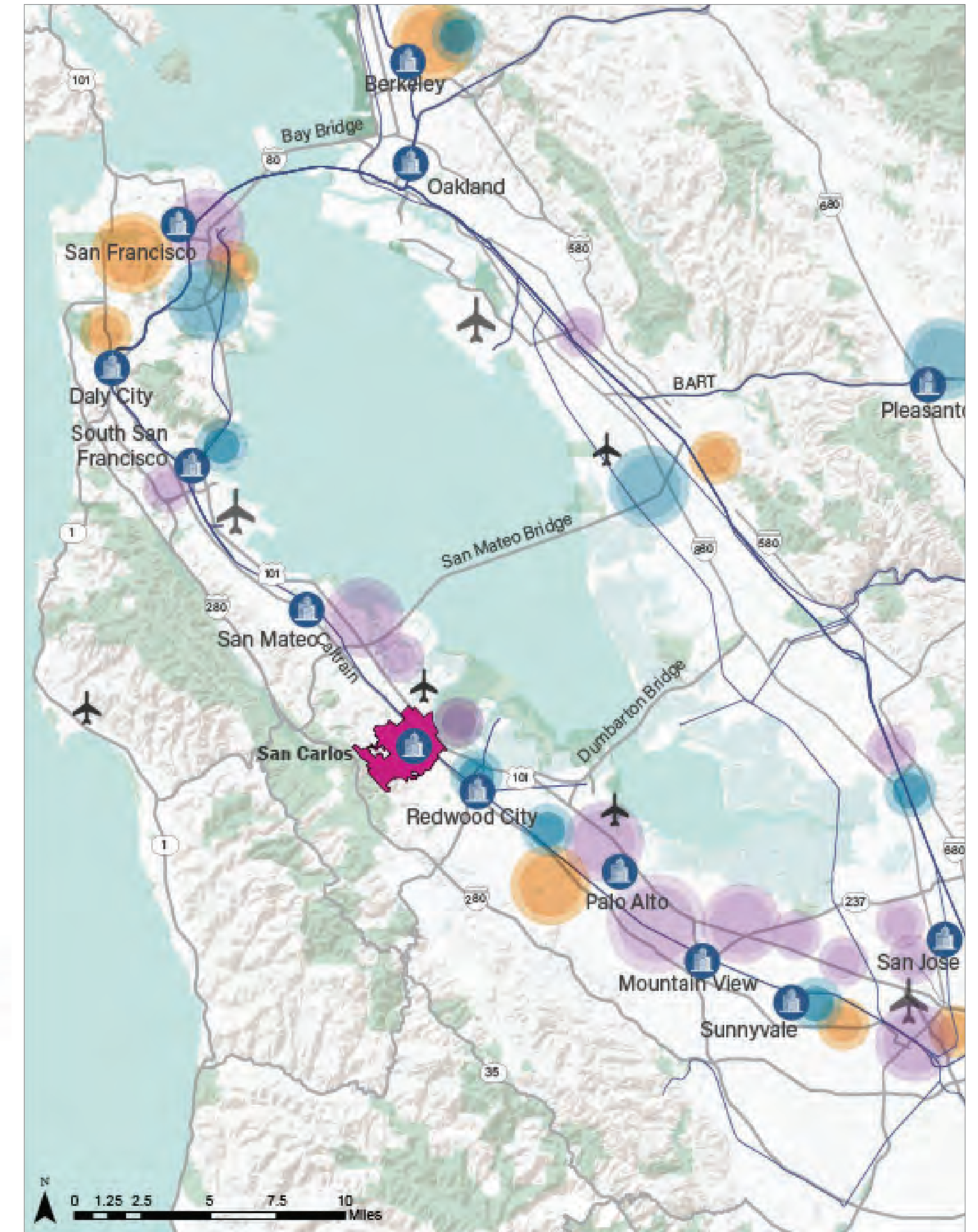
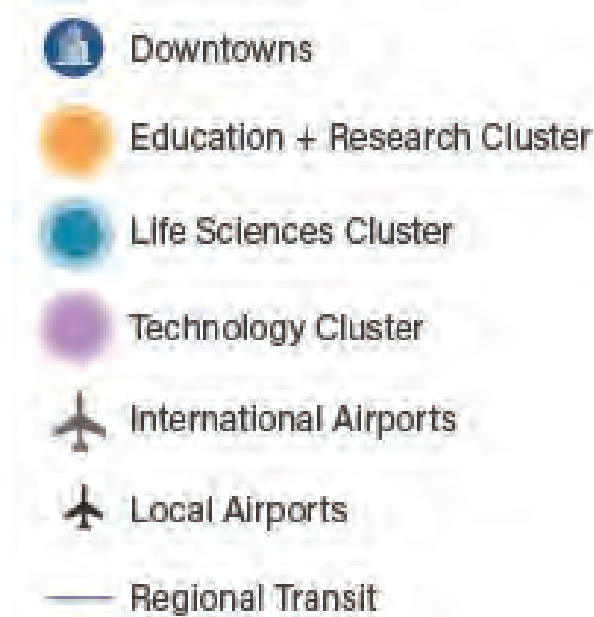


# PHYSICAL CONTEXT

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## A. REGIONAL CONTEXT

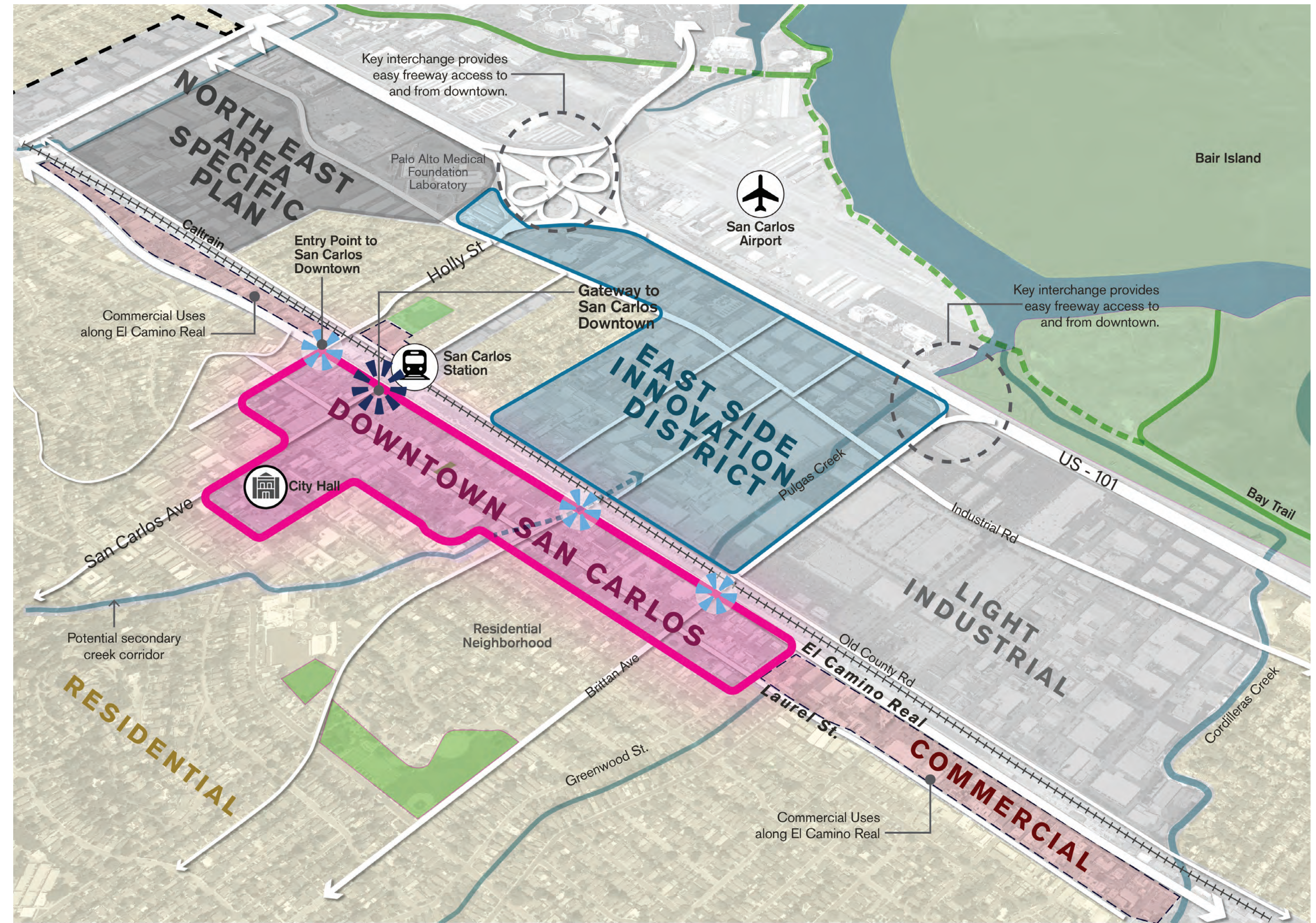
- Downtown San Carlos enjoys an important place in the regional ecosystem of economic drivers such as life science campuses (including the San Carlos East Side Innovation District), technology campuses, premier education and research clusters, and neighboring downtowns on the peninsula.
- It is regionally connected by US 101, Interstate 280, and the Caltrain system. Easy access from the San Mateo and Dumbarton bridges connect it to the east bay.





## B. SITE CONTEXT

- While downtown San Carlos sits in the midst of a regional economic ecosystem, it plays an important role in the local setting, offering a quaint main street environment for the San Carlos community and a local destination for neighboring communities.
- Proximity to the US-101 interchanges at Holly Street and Brittan Avenue, and the Caltrain Station at El Camino Real and San Carlos Avenue, are key assets that provide easy access and connectivity to and from downtown.
- Laurel Street serves as the main spine and hub of activity while El Camino Real forms an edge to downtown offering significant potential for enhancement to serve as the front door to downtown and provide a series of clearly defined entry points along a regional corridor.
- Close proximity and easy connectivity to the Civic Center is an added asset with an opportunity to expand the identity of the downtown district by integrating social and civic activities.

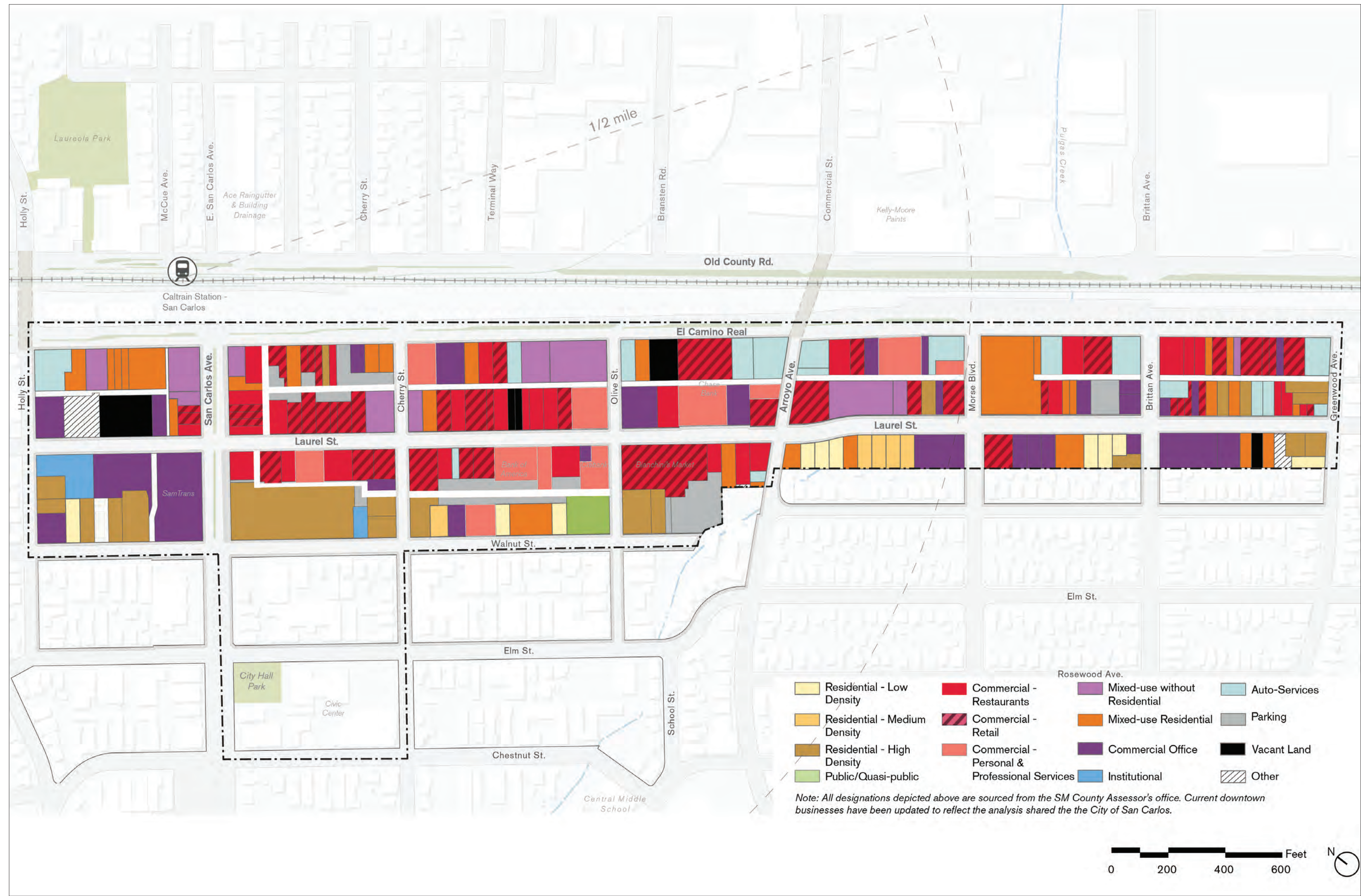




# C. PLAN AREA

## 1. Land Use: Existing Ground Floor Use

- Ground floor uses directly contribute to the pedestrian experience on the street.
- The accompanying map illustrates a wide variety of existing ground floor uses within the Plan Area.
- The downtown core, on Laurel Street between San Carlos Avenue and Arroyo Avenue, houses mostly commercial uses of different types.
- The mix of uses south of Arroyo Avenue includes mixed-use and residential development.
- The mix of uses along El Camino Real includes a significant number of auto-services among commercial and mixed-use residential.



Source: City of San Carlos

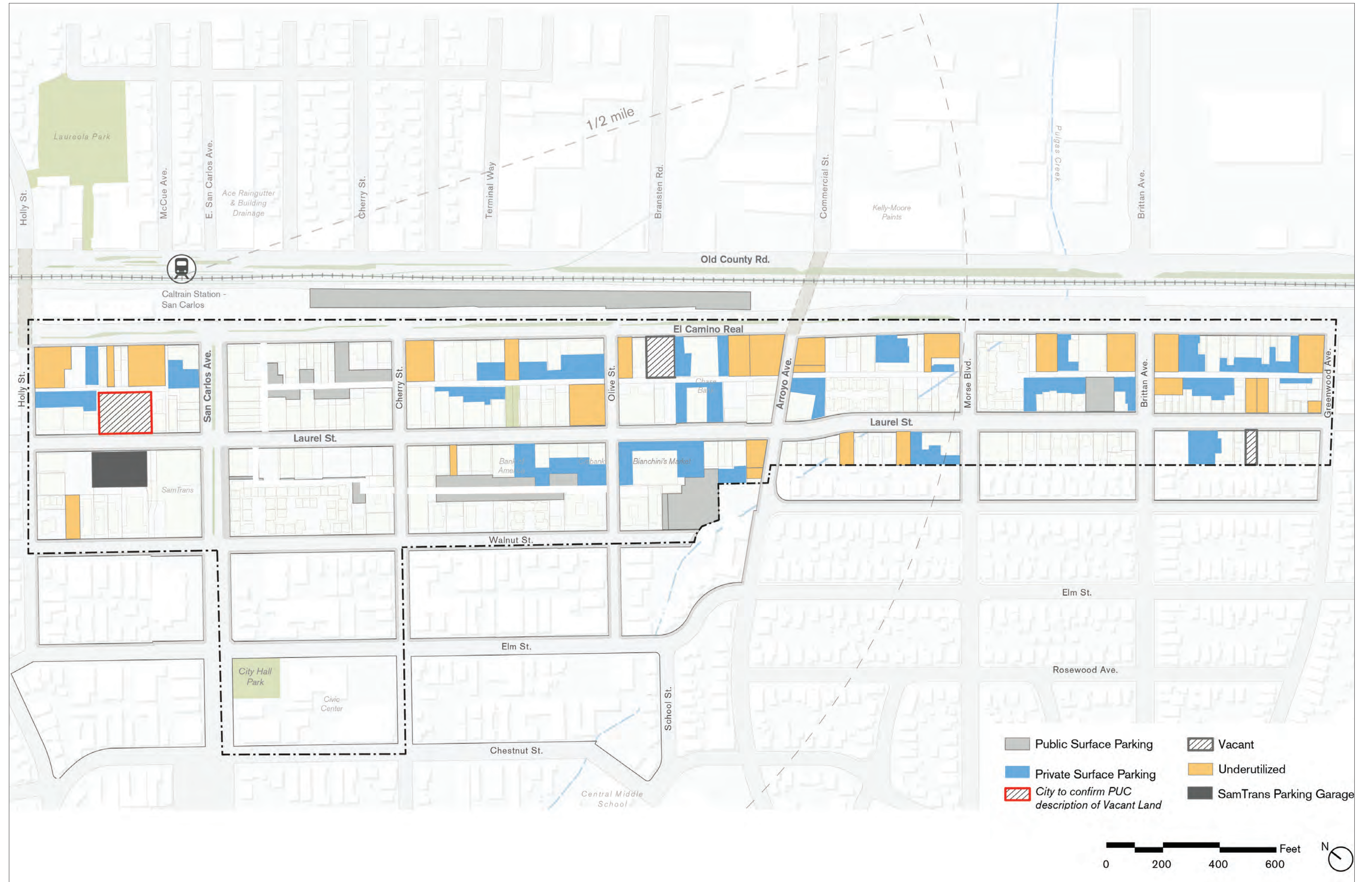


## C. PLAN AREA

### 1. Land Use:

#### Vacant, Underutilized Parcels and Surface Parking

- This diagram shows the distribution of vacant and underutilized parcels, and surface parking lots within the Plan Area, their relative location to each other, and their relationship to the streets.
- Vacant buildings or parcels are those that do not currently have any active uses and could potentially take new uses. There are a few such parcels within Plan Area.
- Under-utilized parcels are those that have currently not maximized the allowed intensity of development, and offer an opportunity for infill development in the future. While most of the parcels within the Plan Area have not fully maximized their development potential, the parcels highlighted in this diagram are those that have a significantly small building footprint.
- A large amount of surface parking is available in the Plan Area, most of which is concentrated on the 600,700 & 800 blocks, west of Laurel and the alleys.



Source: City of San Carlos

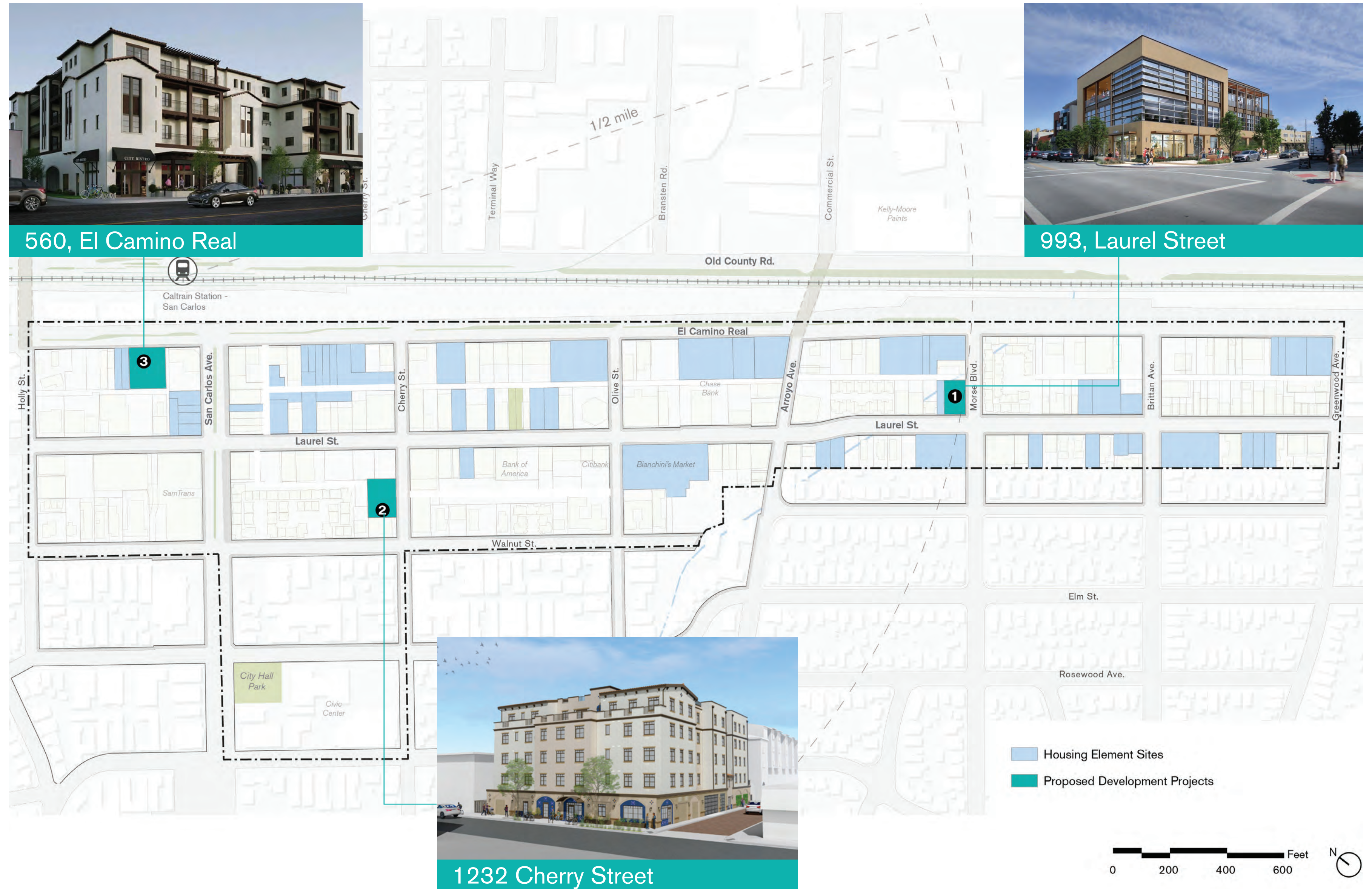


## C. PLAN AREA

### 1. Land Use:

#### Housing Element Sites + Proposed & Under Construction Projects

- Many of the previously described underutilized/vacant parcels have been included in the Housing Element sites inventory for infill housing.
- Net new sites identified in the recent Housing Element update, in the Plan Area are 50, resulting in a total of 757 units in projects ranging from mixed-use, low-, medium-, and high-density residential.
- 993 Laurel Street, currently under construction will have a mix of retail and office uses.
- 560 El Camino Real has been approved by the City and is under construction.



Source: City of San Carlos



## C. PLAN AREA

### 2. Street Character:

#### Figure Ground (Building Footprints)

- The figure ground diagram shows building footprints. The diagram illustrates the downtown to have mostly buildings with small footprints with the exception of projects such as the Wheeler Plaza, which mostly fronts San Carlos Avenue and Walnut Avenue.
- The buildings along Laurel Street are mostly built close to the street with no setbacks, resulting in a continuous street edge defined by building facades.
- The pattern along El Camino Real is quite uneven with a number of parking lots fronting the street which do not create a continuous street edge due to lack of consistent building facades.



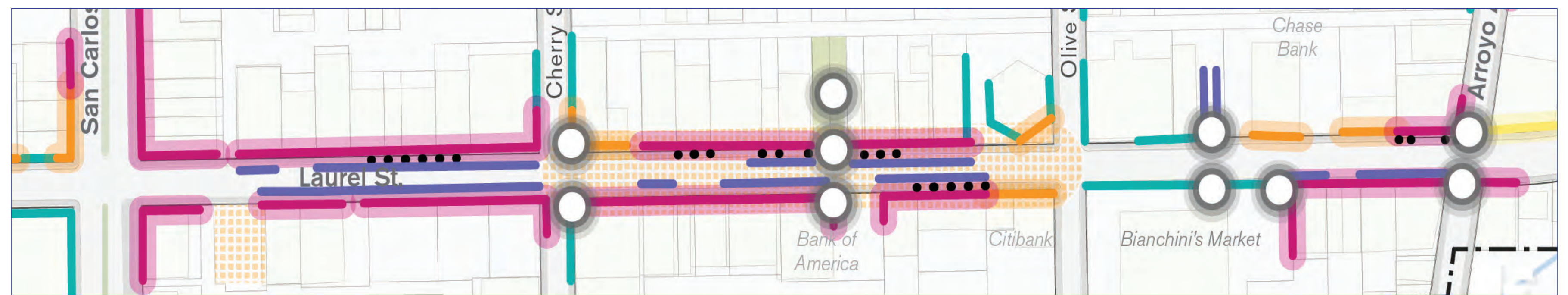
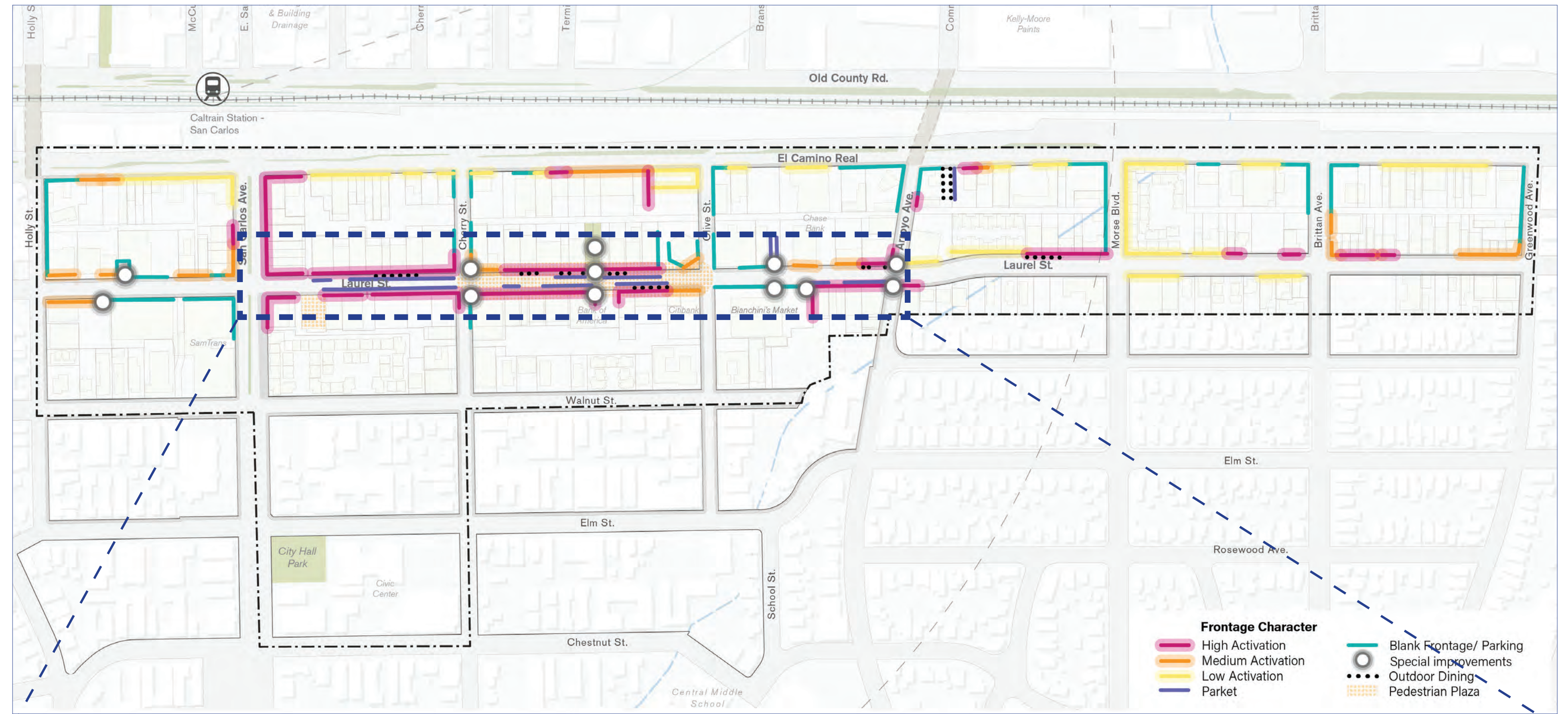
Source: County of San Mateo Open Data



## C. PLAN AREA

### 2. Street Character: Activation on Primary Streets

- High activation frontages are those that provide a high level of active pedestrian engagement with ground floor uses. Restaurants, cafes, and retail establishments fall in this category due to the high frequency of customer visitation they experience. Buildings with transparent ground floor facades that create a visually engaging pedestrian experience also create high activation frontages.
- Medium activation frontages exhibit limited interaction with pedestrians on the ground floor but incorporate elements such as awnings, seating, and greenery within building setbacks to facilitate interaction with pedestrians.
- Low activation frontages belong to offices or large retail stores and offer minimal ground floor interaction but still enhance the pedestrian experience by avoiding large blank walls.
- Special improvements include benches, planters, interactive art, childrens' play area, etc., but does not include parklets and outdoor dining.
- Notably, the 600 and 700 blocks along Laurel Street have a higher concentration of highly active frontages.



Source: WRT



## C. PLAN AREA

### 2. Street Character: Building Entrances

- A primary business entrance serves customers, while a service entry is utilized by employees of the respective businesses for loading and unloading.
- The alleys are currently multipurpose spaces providing service entries, primary entrances, housing trash receptacles, and public/private parking.
- Some businesses have attempted to create a secondary entrance through the incorporation of seating, awnings, and other inviting features.
- There is an opportunity to develop a framework for these alleys to create a more welcoming pedestrian environment.



Source: WRT



## C. PLAN AREA

### 2. Street Character: Storefront Character



The plan area is characterized with varied storefronts. The storefront character is informed by the type of use and broadly categorized into following types:

- Restaurants (with/without parklet)
- Retail
- Personal Services
- Commercial Office/ Banks



- 1 3 Restaurants and Cafes with & without Parklet
- 2 4
- 5 Retail / Personal Services
- 6 Storefronts along Laurel Street

Source: WRT



C. PLAN AREA

2. Street Character:  
Storefront Character



- 7 Commercial/ Office Uses
- 8
- 9 Personal Services: Salon,  
10 Nail Spa and Day Spa
- 11 Financial Services and  
12 Banks

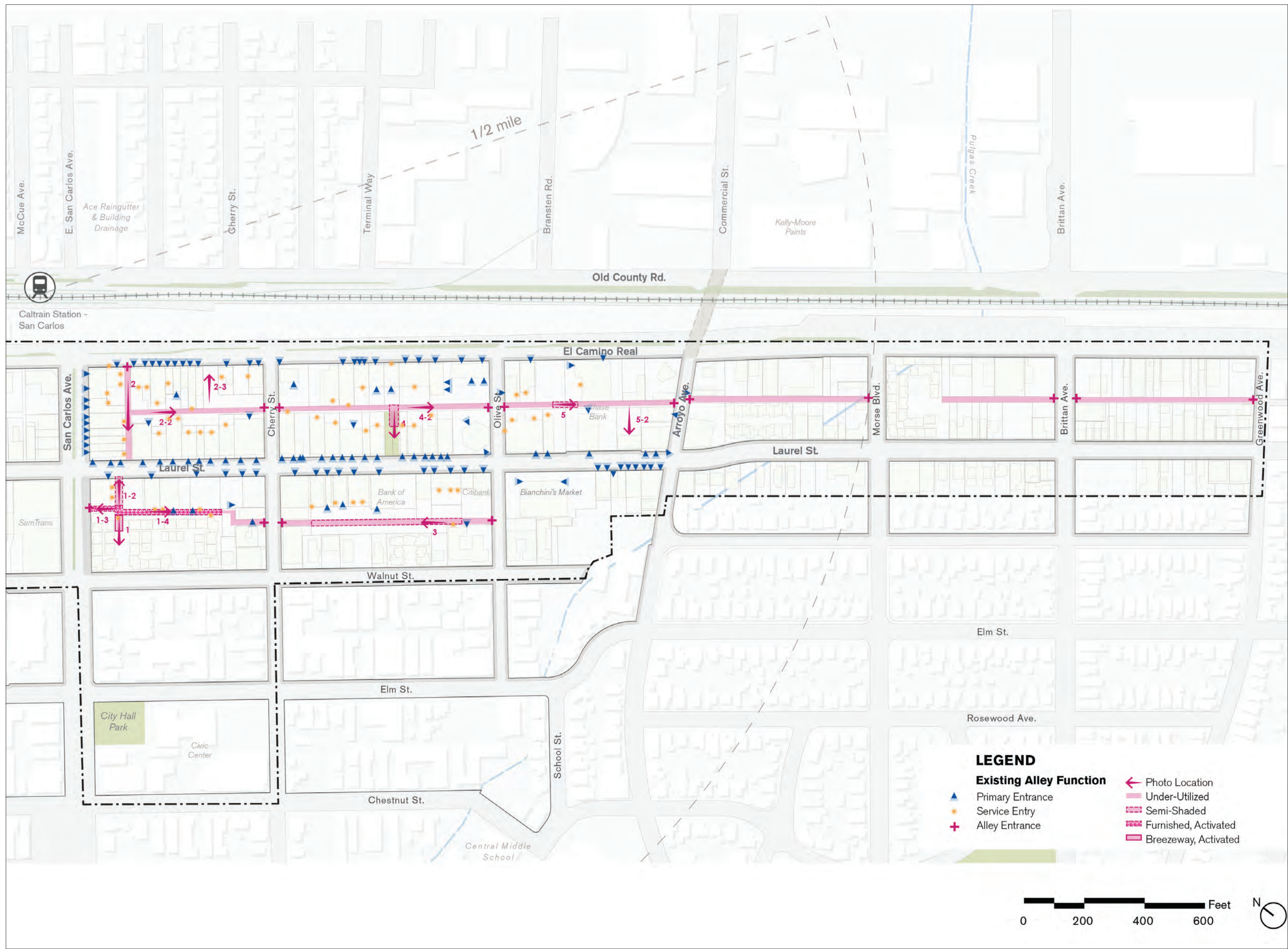
Source: WRT



# C. PLAN AREA

## 2. Streets Character: Alleys Function and Character

### Existing Alley Characteristics



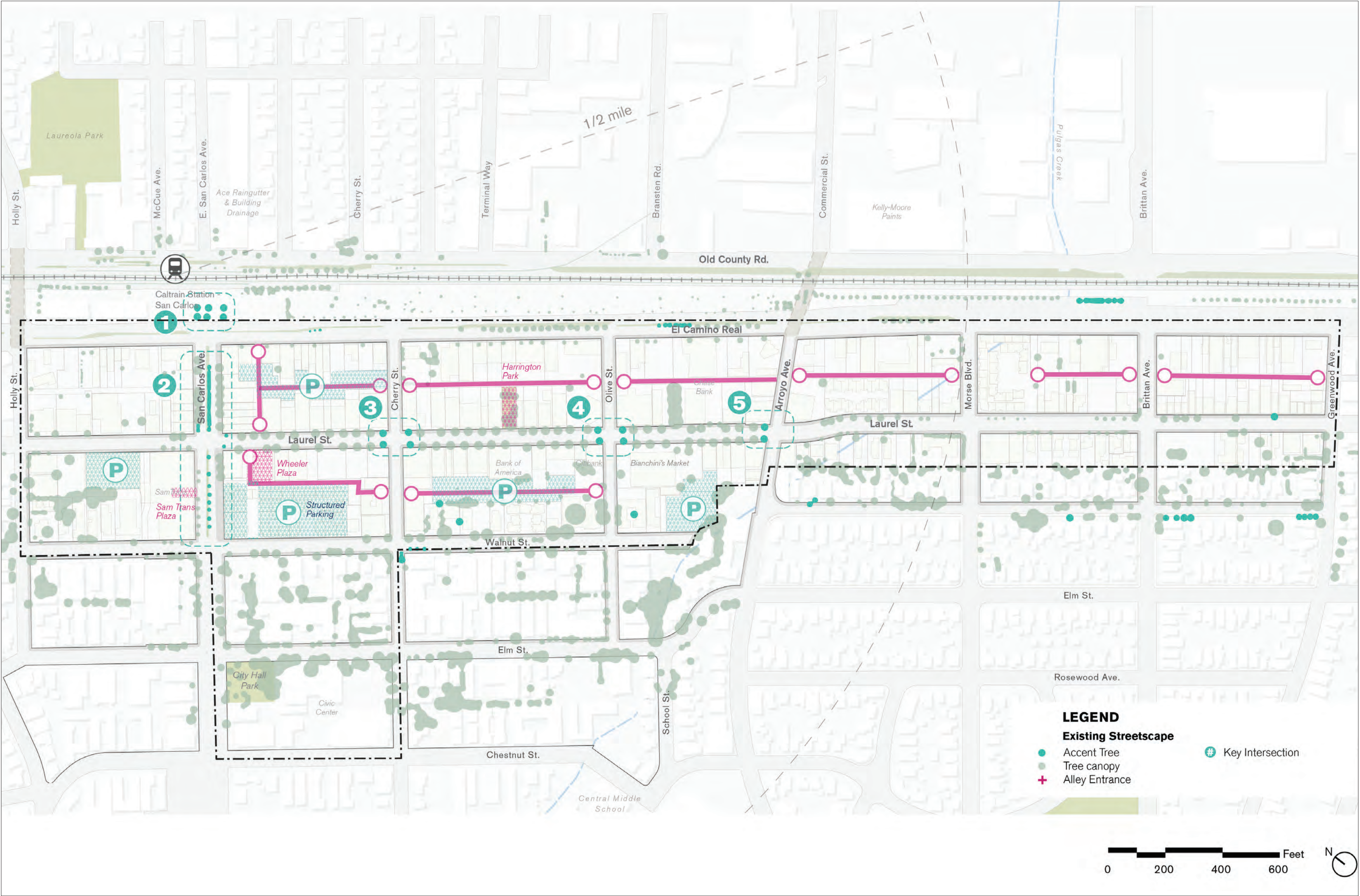
Source: WRT



# C. PLAN AREA

## 2. Streets Character: Accent Trees

### Intersections with accent trees



Source: WRT



# C. PLAN AREA

## 2. Streets Character: Street Furniture

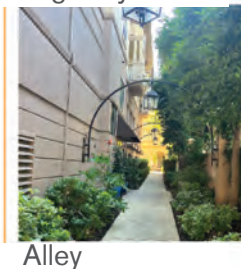
### Existing Street Furniture

#### Lighting Fixture

##### 1 Along El Camino Real



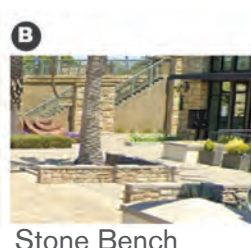
##### 2 Along San Carlos Ave



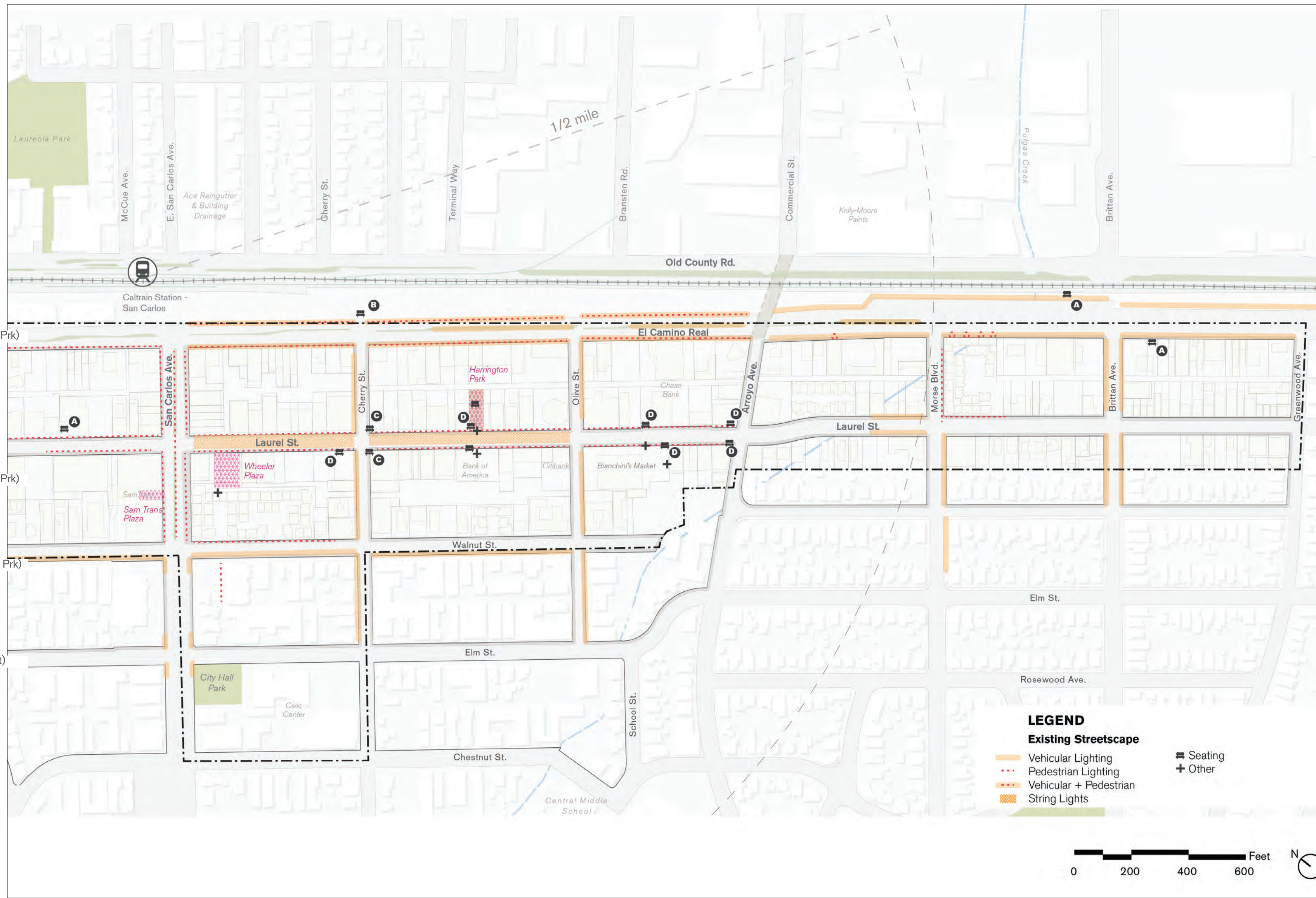
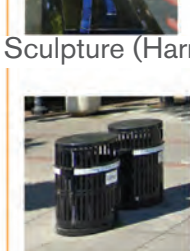
##### 3 Along Laurel St



#### Seating



#### Other





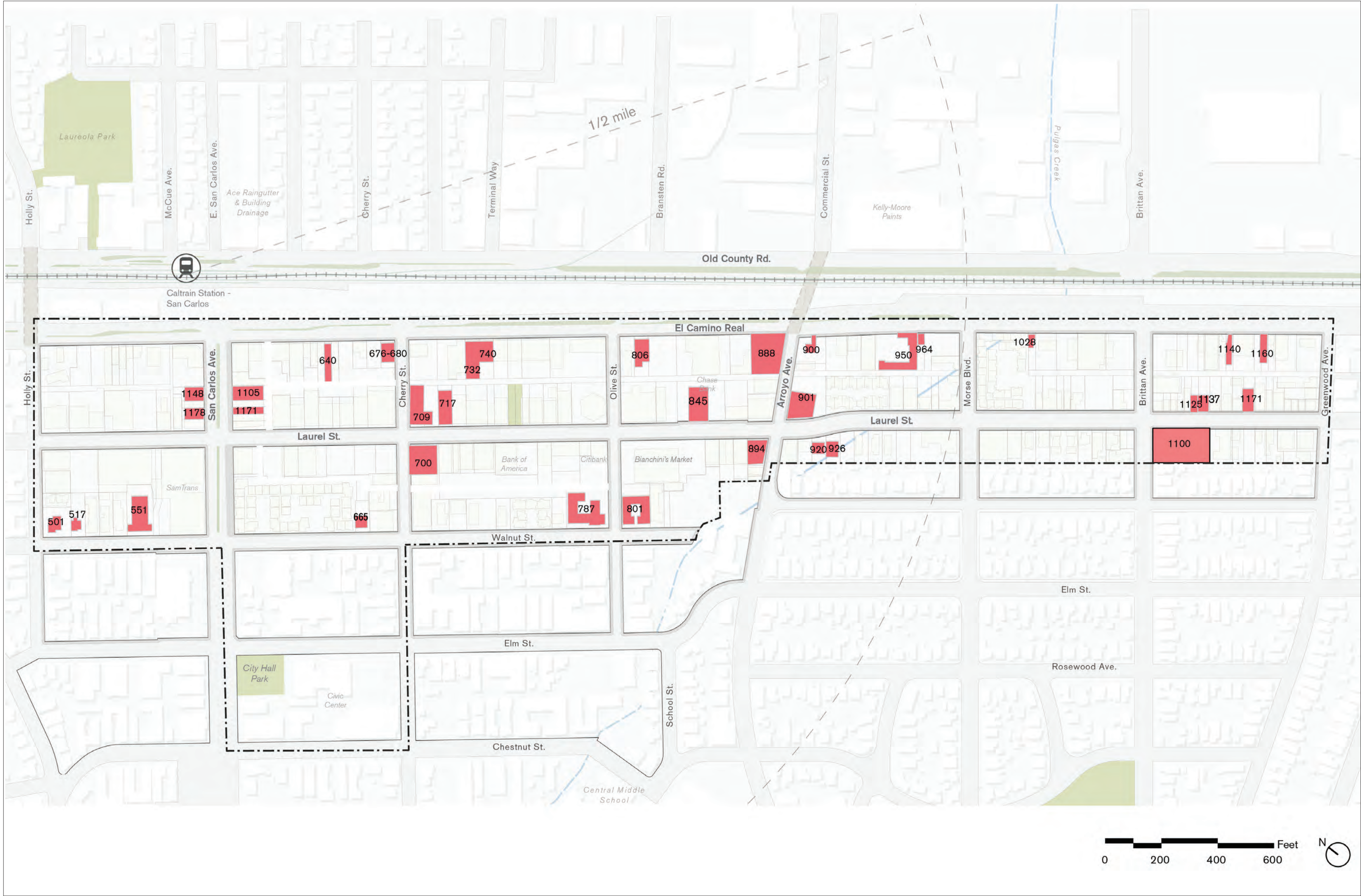
C. PLAN AREA

3. Architectural Character:  
Historically Significant Buildings

Architectural Styles in  
the Project Area

- a. Spanish Colonial.
- b. Edwardian.
- c. Art Deco.
- d. Brutalist.
- e. Craftsman Style

Some of these buildings are documented in the following slides.



Source: GPA Consulting









Architectural Styles of Historic resources buildings:

- 1 501, Walnut Street.
- 2 737, Walnut Street.
- 3 1105, San Carlos Ave.
- 4 787, Walnut Street.
- 5 1171, Laurel Street.
- 6 525 and 533, Laurel Street.

Figures 7 to 11 document some contemporary buildings in the project area. These buildings follow an earthen and beige color Palette, in spite of distinct architectural styles.



## C. PLAN AREA

### 4. Mobility, Circulation and Access: Street Hierarchy

- Within downtown San Carlos and the Plan Area, the existing street system is comprised of five main functional classifications: state highways, arterials, collectors, local streets, and alleys.

#### State Highway:

- El Camino Real (SR-82) acts as the eastern boundary of downtown San Carlos. It runs north-south and connects San Carlos with surrounding Peninsula communities.
- El Camino Real also provides direct connections to Interstates and State Routes providing regional access to the north and east bay communities.

#### Arterial Streets:

- Holly Street, San Carlos Avenue, and Brittan Avenue run east-west and provide connections to the San Carlos residential neighborhoods west of the downtown area.
- Laurel Street runs parallel to El Camino Real through the center of downtown San Carlos. In the past, it provided direct north-south connections between other arterial roadways. The Laurel Street closure created a pedestrian plaza completely separated from vehicles.

#### Collector Streets:

- Arroyo Avenue runs east-west between El Camino Real and Tamarack Avenue west of the downtown area. It connects the downtown with residential communities to the west.

#### Local Streets:

- Olive Street, Morse Boulevard, and Greenwood Avenue all run due west from un-signalized intersections with El Camino Real.
- Walnut Street runs north-south, parallel to Laurel Street, through the downtown area.
- None of the streets continue through for any substantial distance and thus only provide localized connectivity to the downtown area and immediate surrounding area.

#### Alleys

- The downtown area alleyways, all of which run north-south, provide hyper-local access to business parking lots, loading zones, and employee parking lots.
- They also provide connections between the east-west roadways and allow for vehicular movement

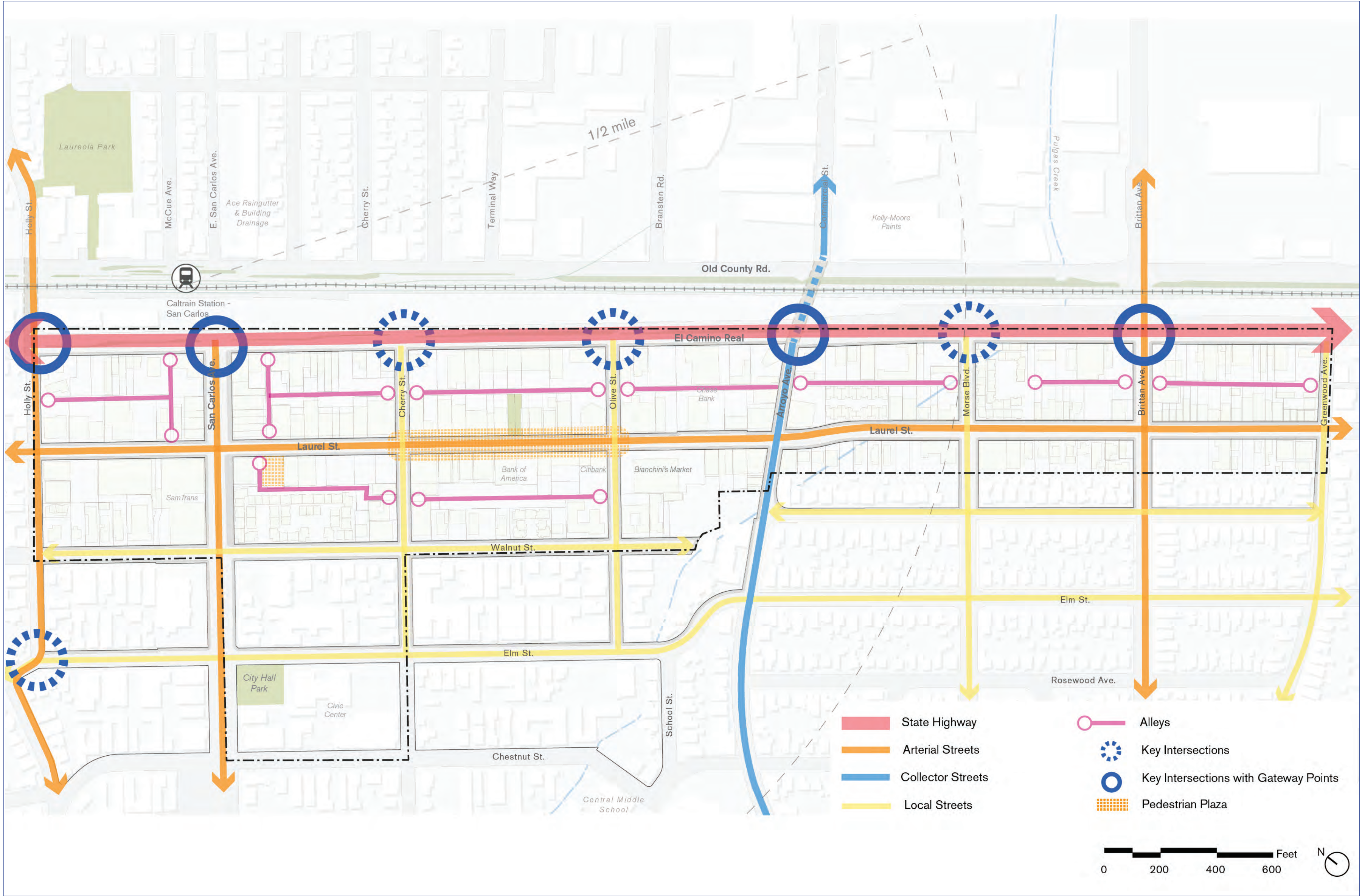
between one area of downtown and another.

- The downtown alleyways play an important role in providing access to parking and a network that connects with the rest of the area but are generally narrower than the surrounding streets and have less direction (e.g., signs and pavement markings) for motorists.
- The alleyways also lack pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure which results in pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists all sharing the same space.



### C. PLAN AREA

#### 4. Mobility, Circulation and Access: Street Heirarchy

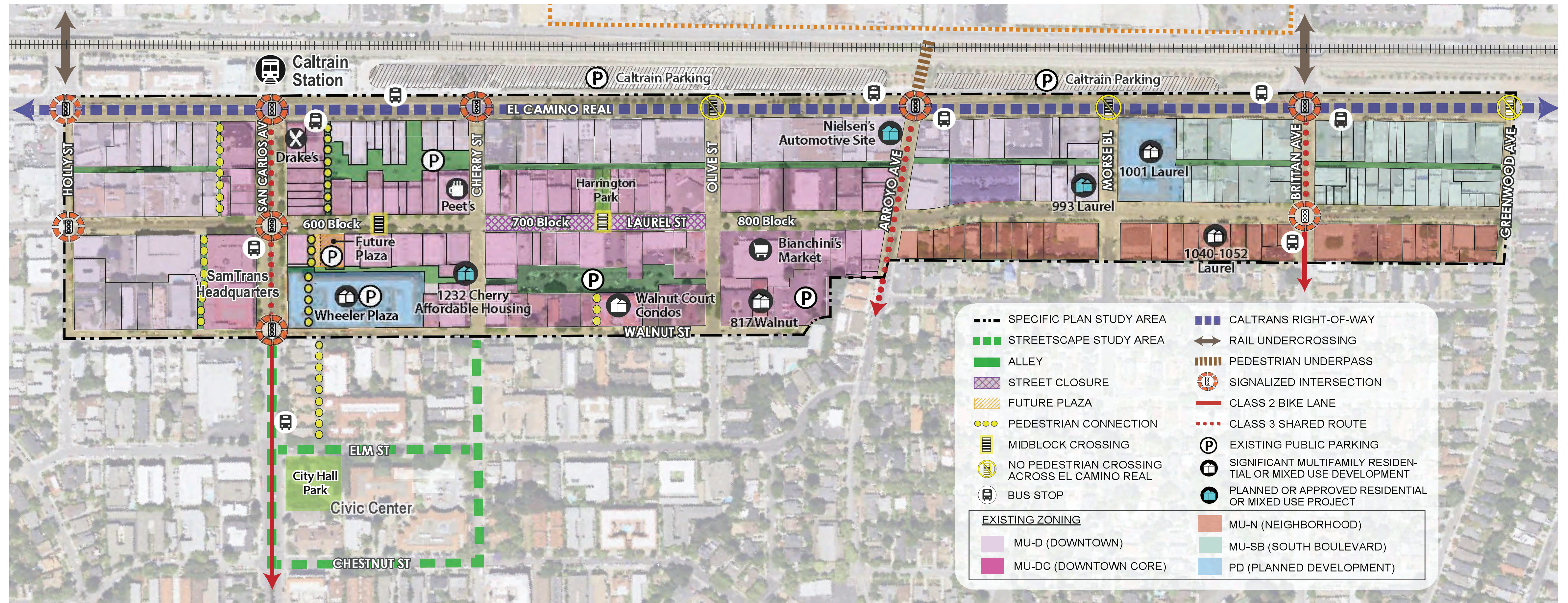


Source: WRT



## C. PLAN AREA

### 4. Mobility, Circulation and Access: Circulation and Connectivity



Source: W-Trans





C. PLAN AREA

4. Mobility, Circulation and Access:  
Parking

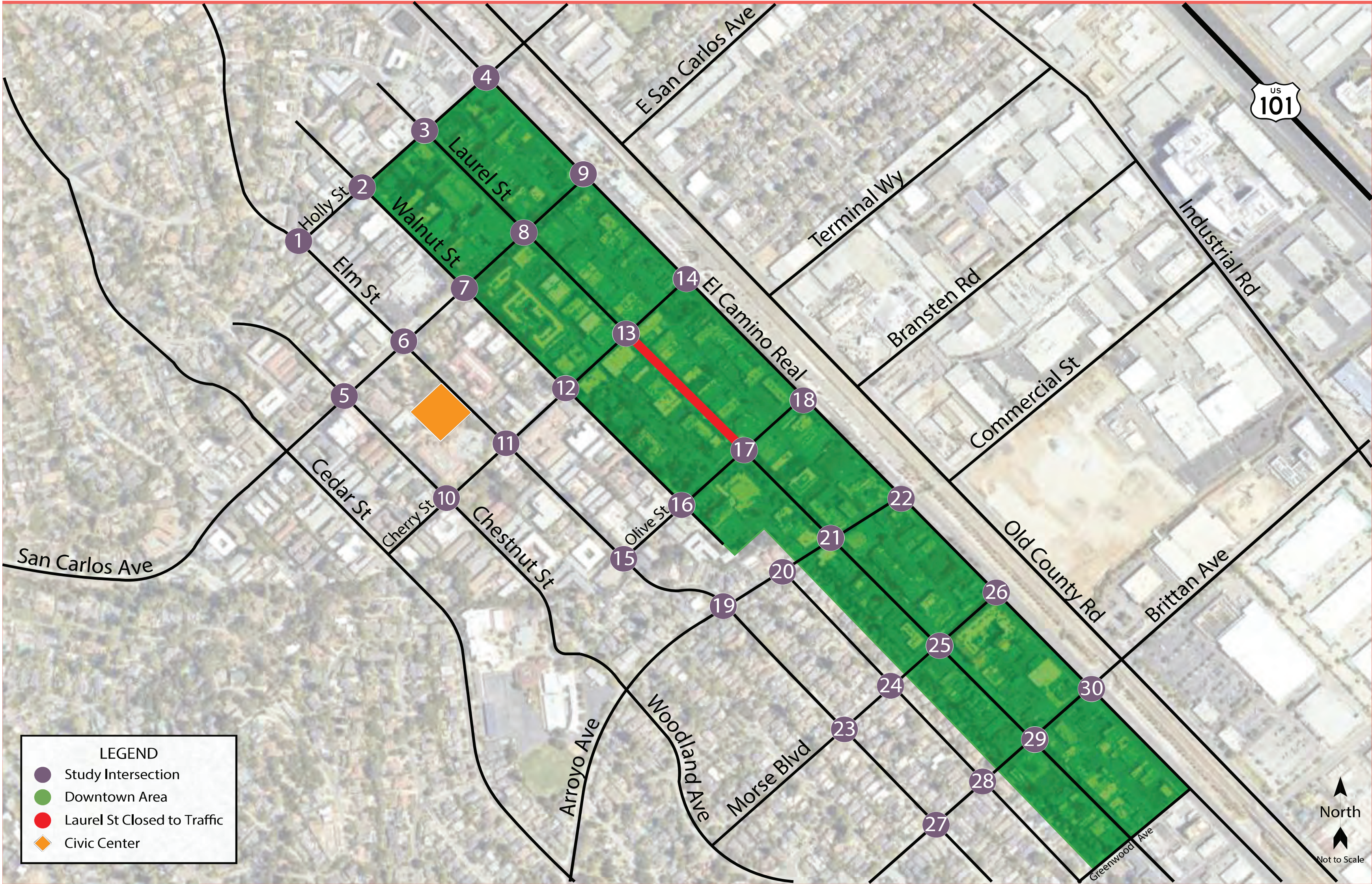


Source: W-Trans



C. PLAN AREA

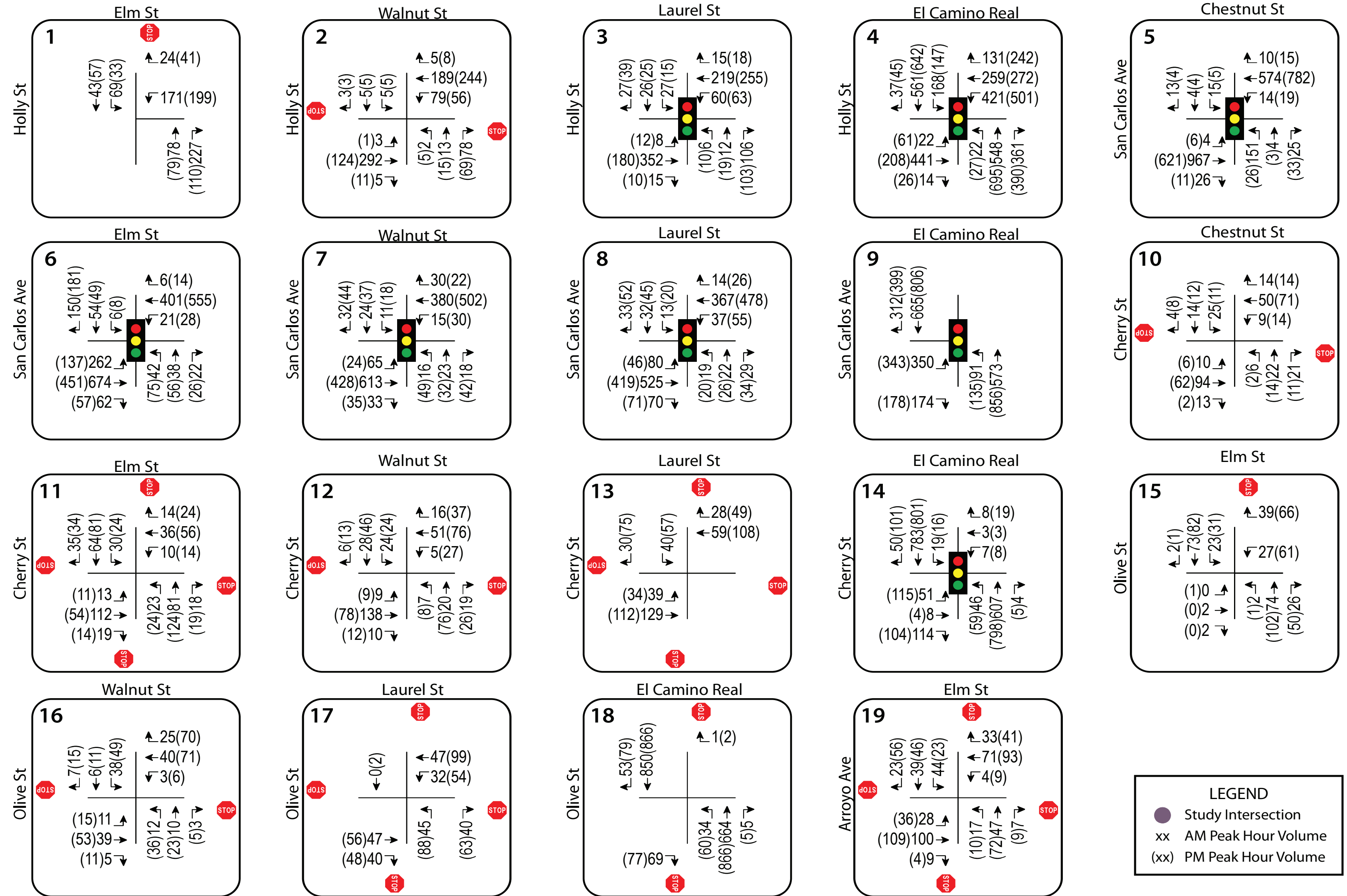
4. Mobility, Circulation and Access: Traffic Operations Study



Source: W-Trans



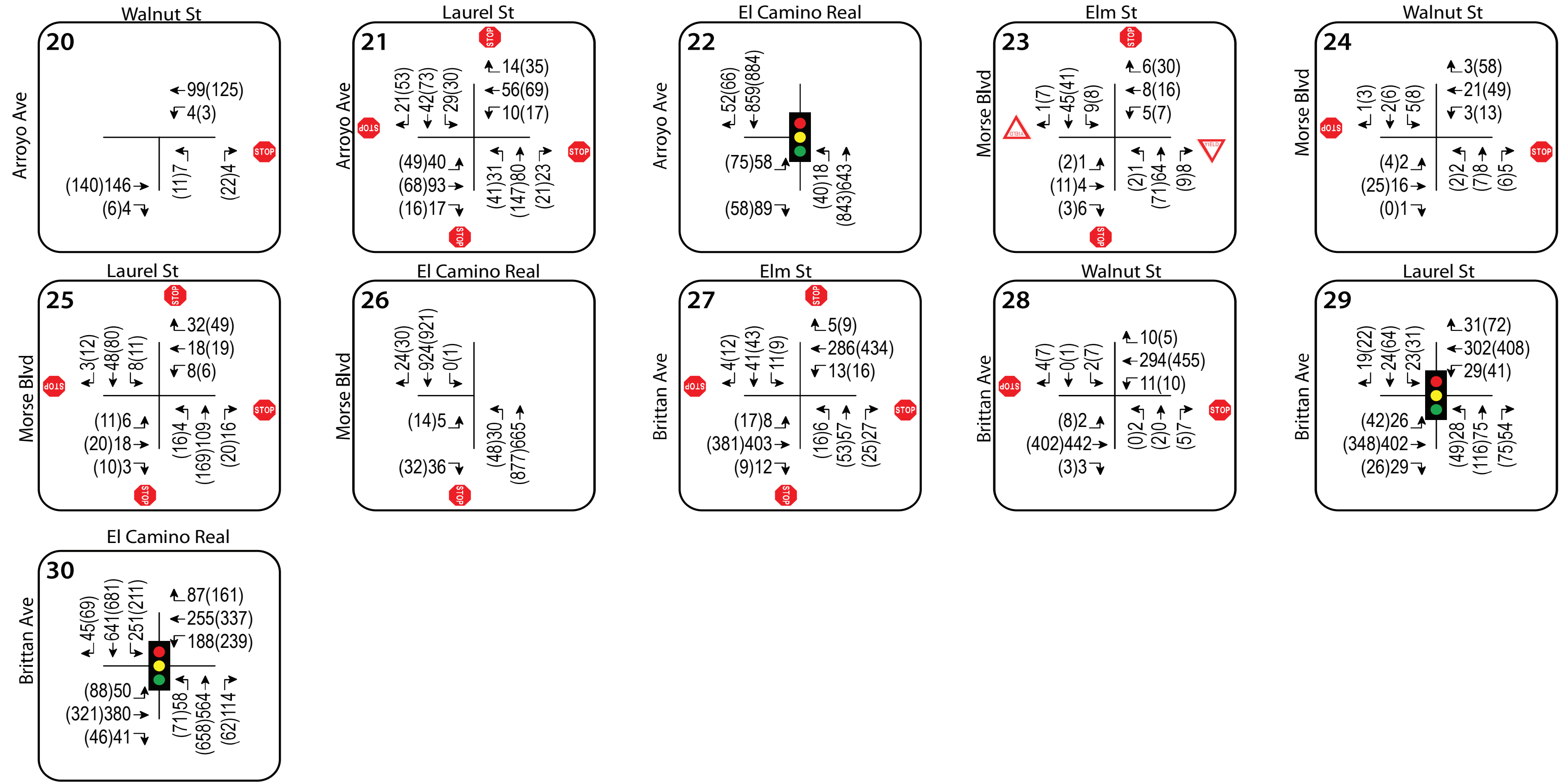
# Traffic Operations Study



Source: W-Trans



# Traffic Operations Study



**LEGEND**

- Study Intersection
- xx AM Peak Hour Volume
- (xx) PM Peak Hour Volume

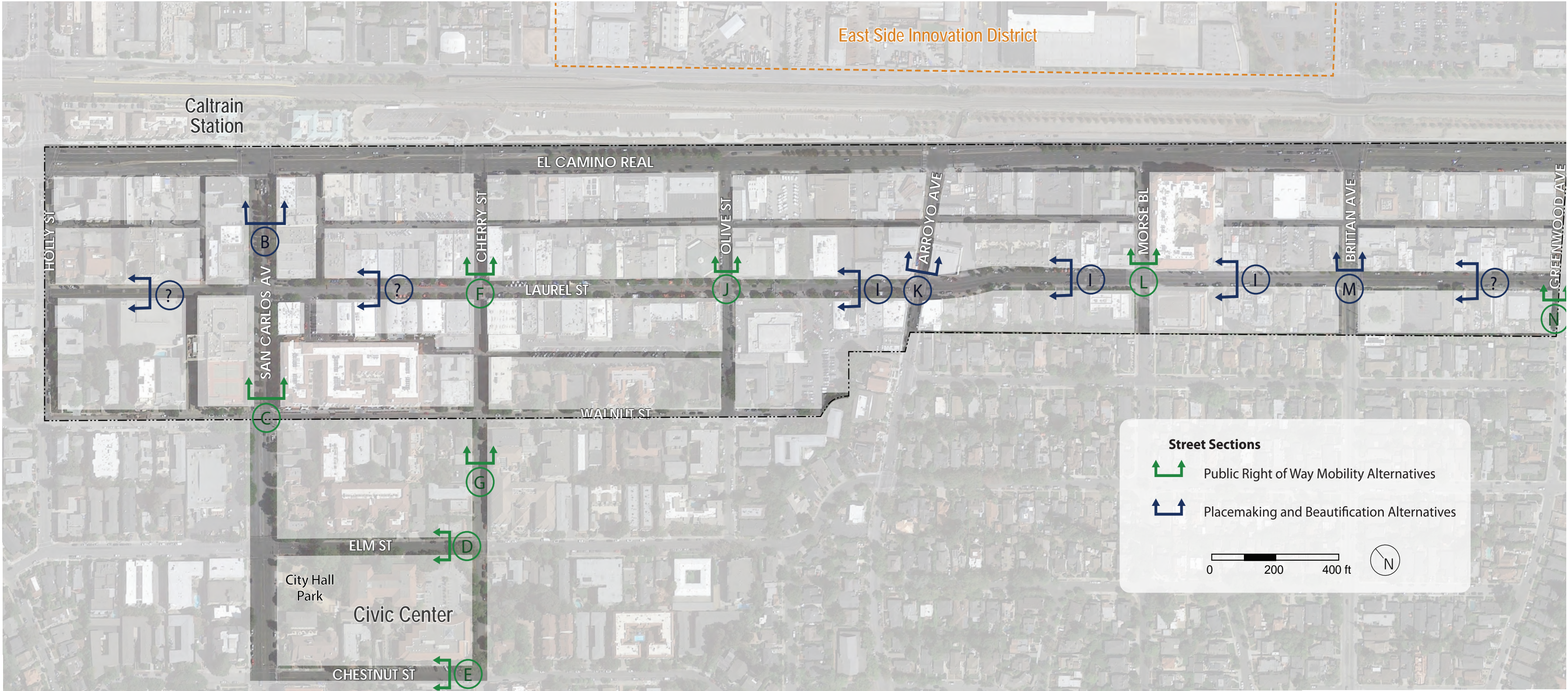
Source: W-Trans



# C. PLAN AREA

## 4. Mobility, Circulation and Access: Street Sections

Key Map

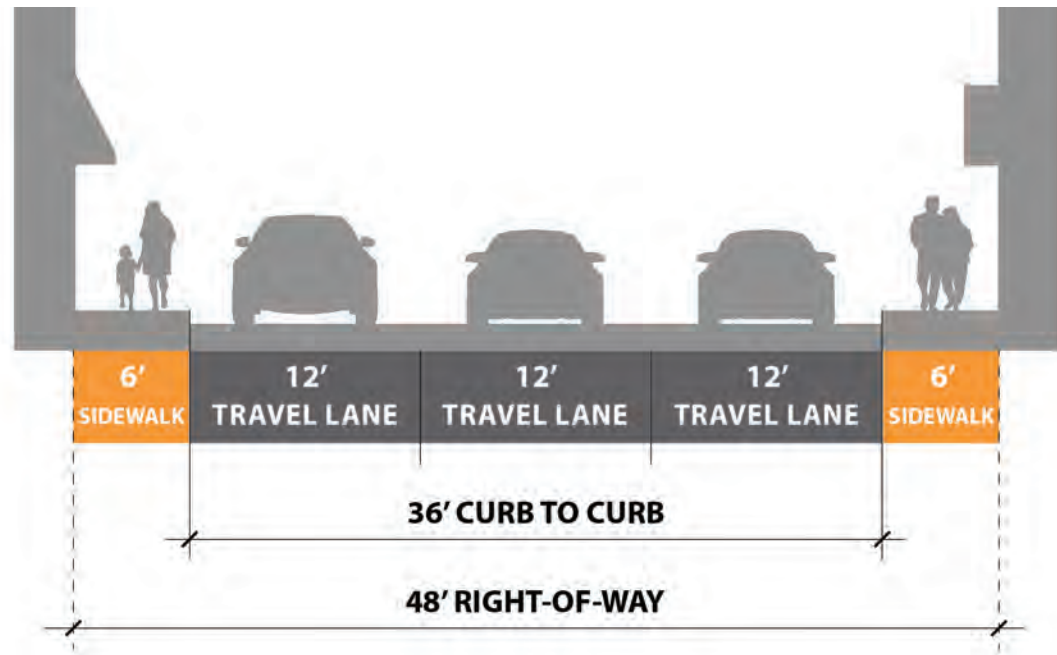


Source: RMM

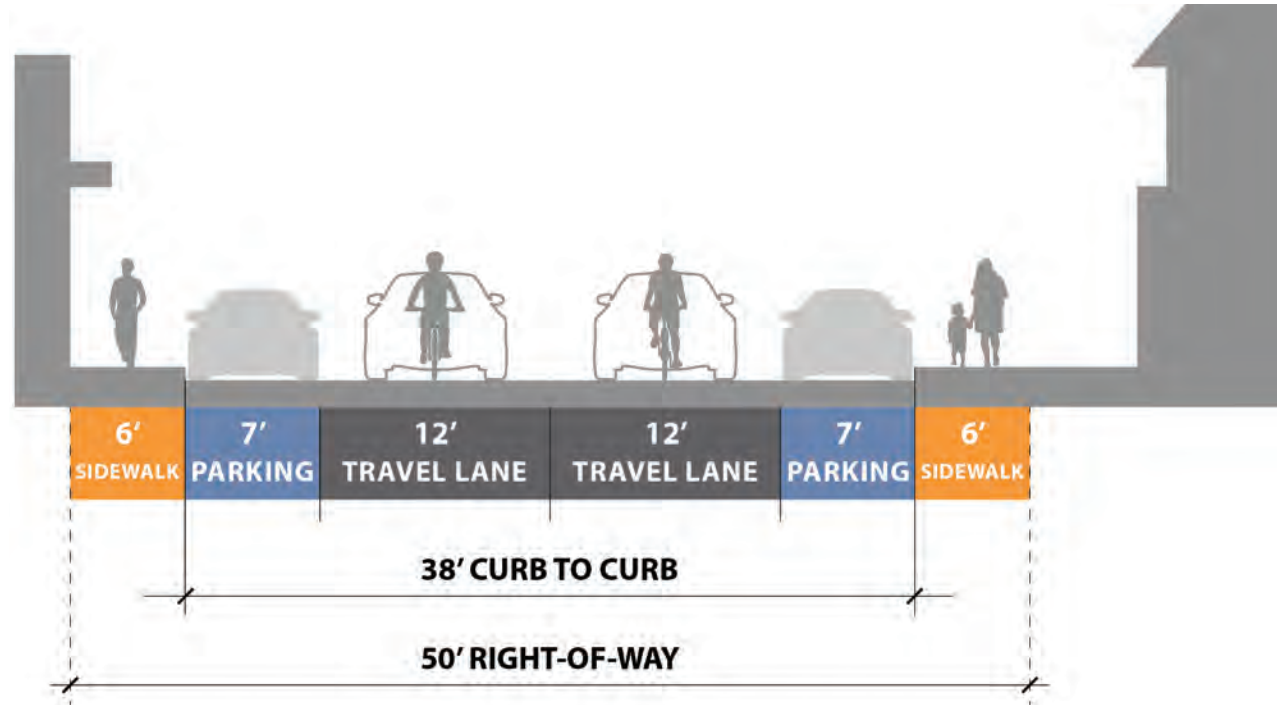


# C. PLAN AREA

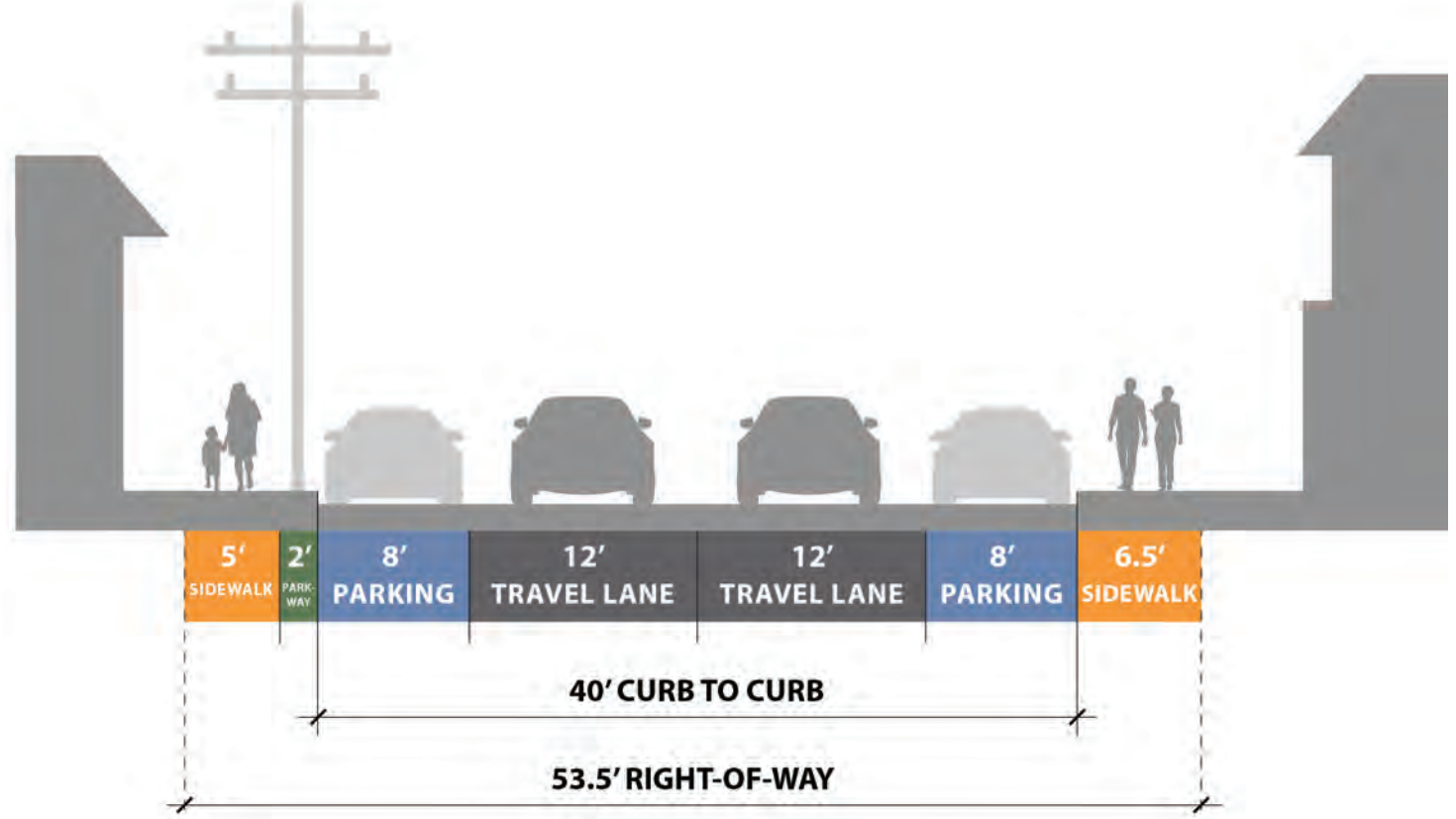
## Street Sections



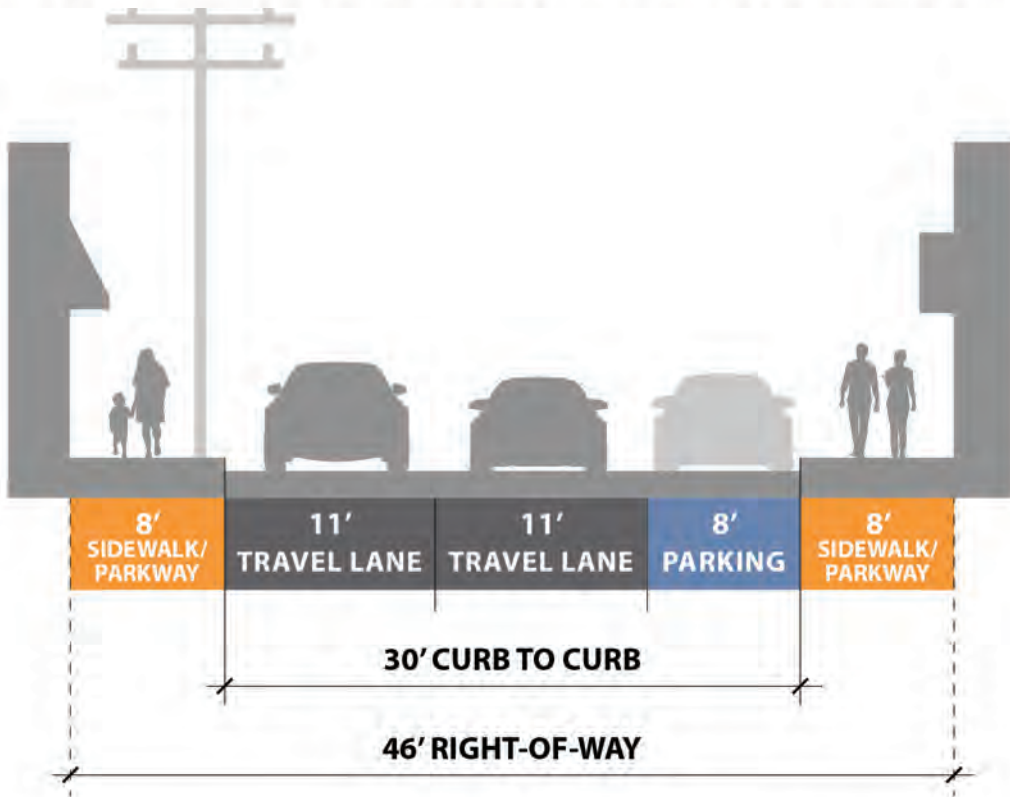
M. BRITTAN AVENUE - EXISTING CONDITION (LOOKING EAST)



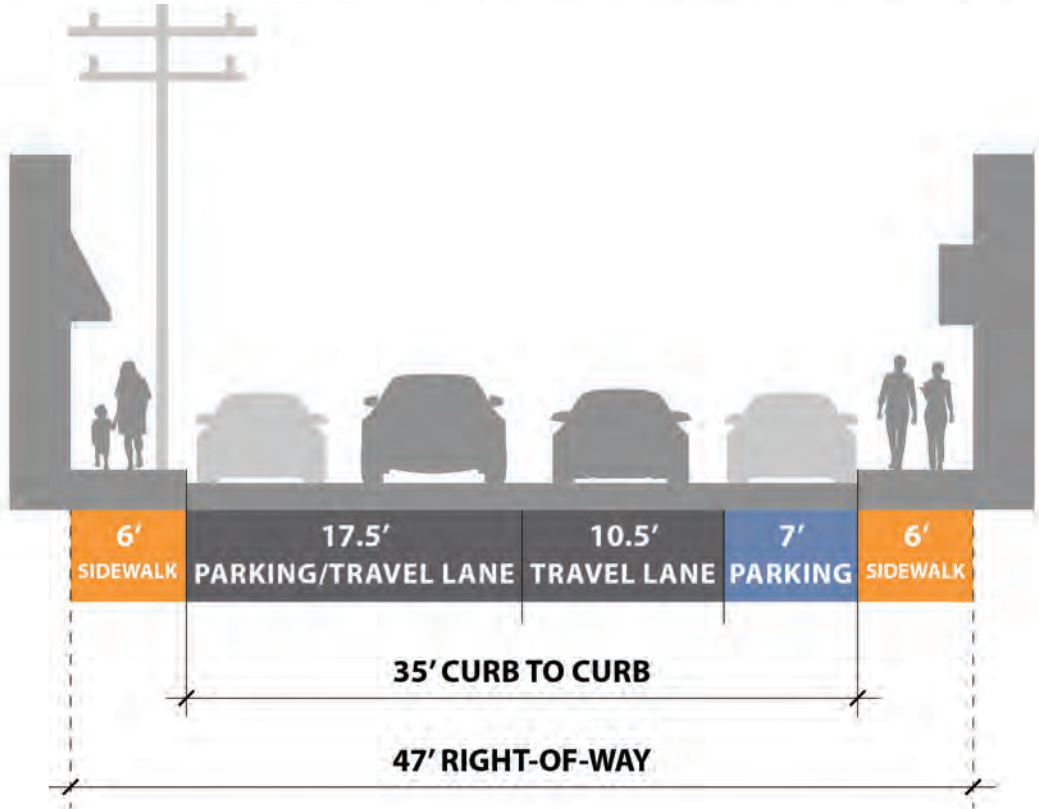
K. ARROYO AVENUE - EXISTING CONDITION (LOOKING EAST)



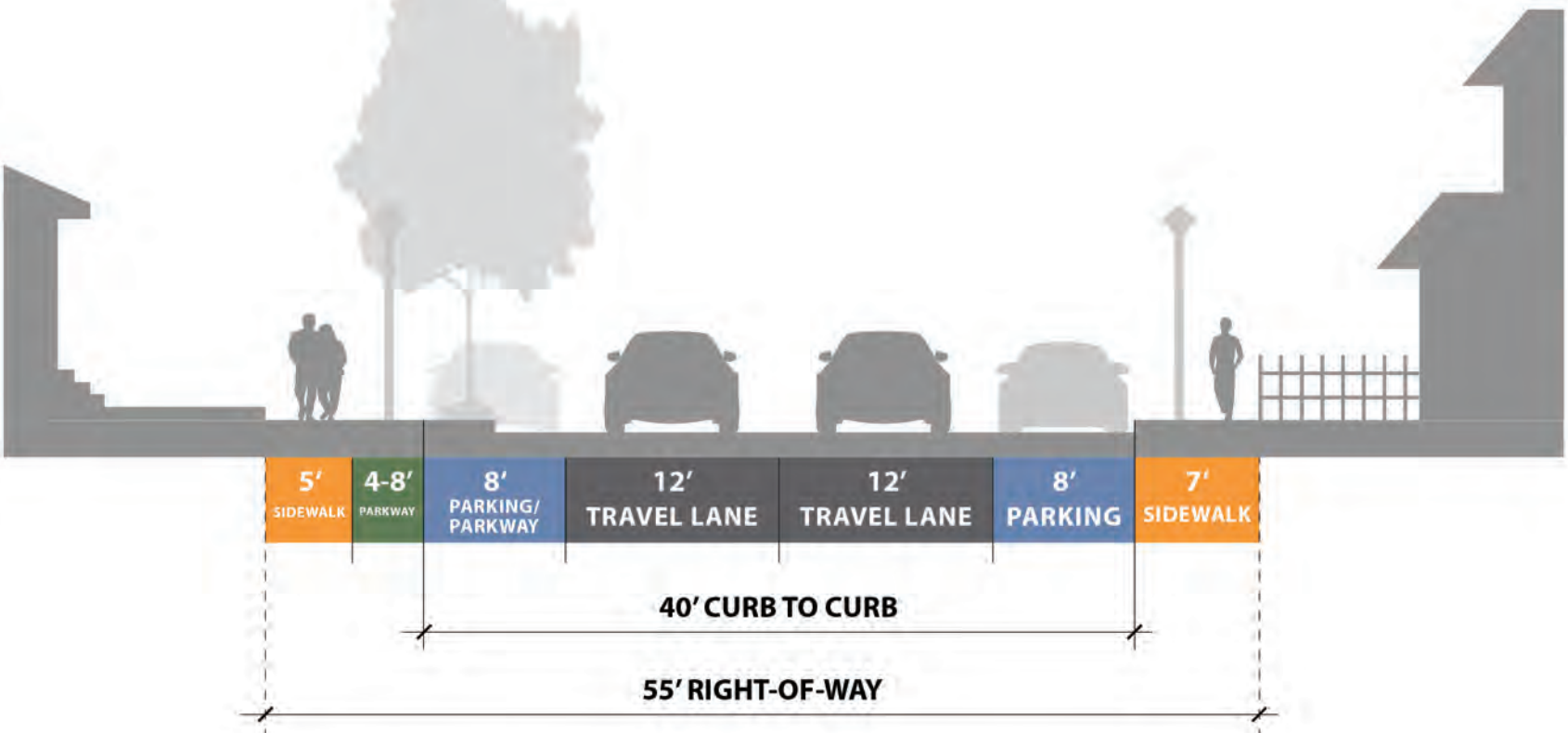
E. CHESTNUT STREET - EXISTING CONDITION (LOOKING NORTH)



G. CHERRY STREET - WEST OF WALNUT EXISTING CONDITION (LOOKING EAST)



F. CHERRY STREET - EAST OF WALNUT EXISTING CONDITION (LOOKING EAST)



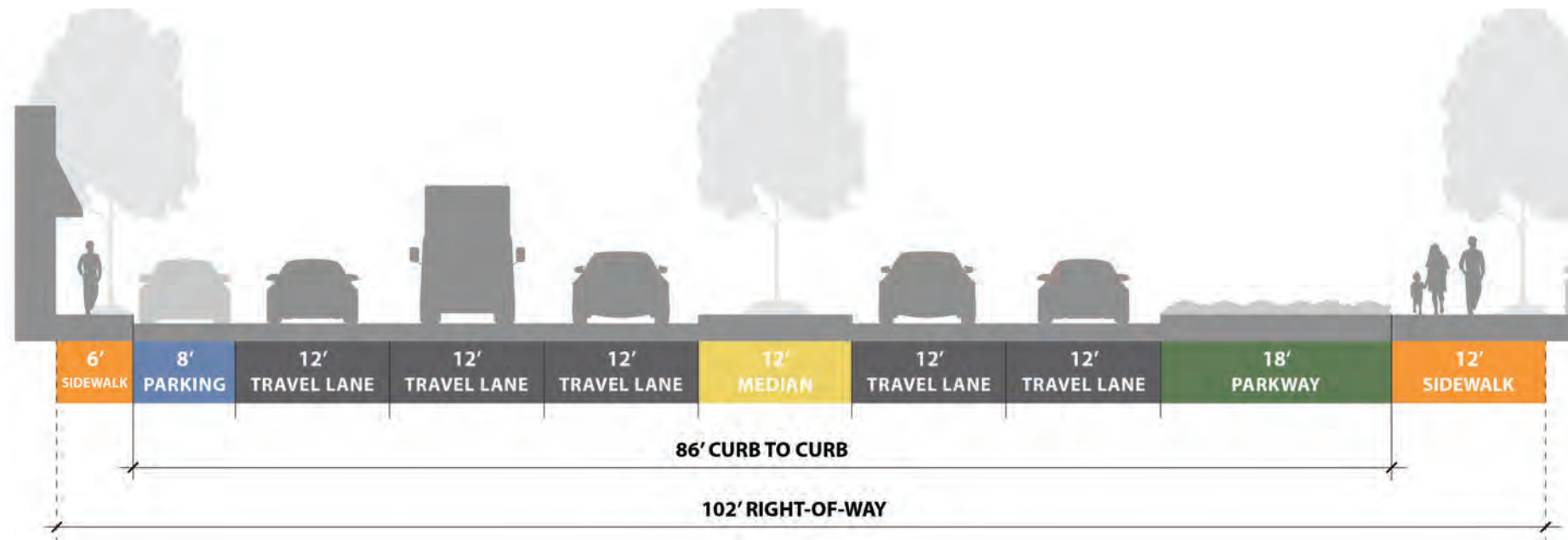
D. ELM STREET - EXISTING CONDITION (LOOKING NORTH)

Source: RMM

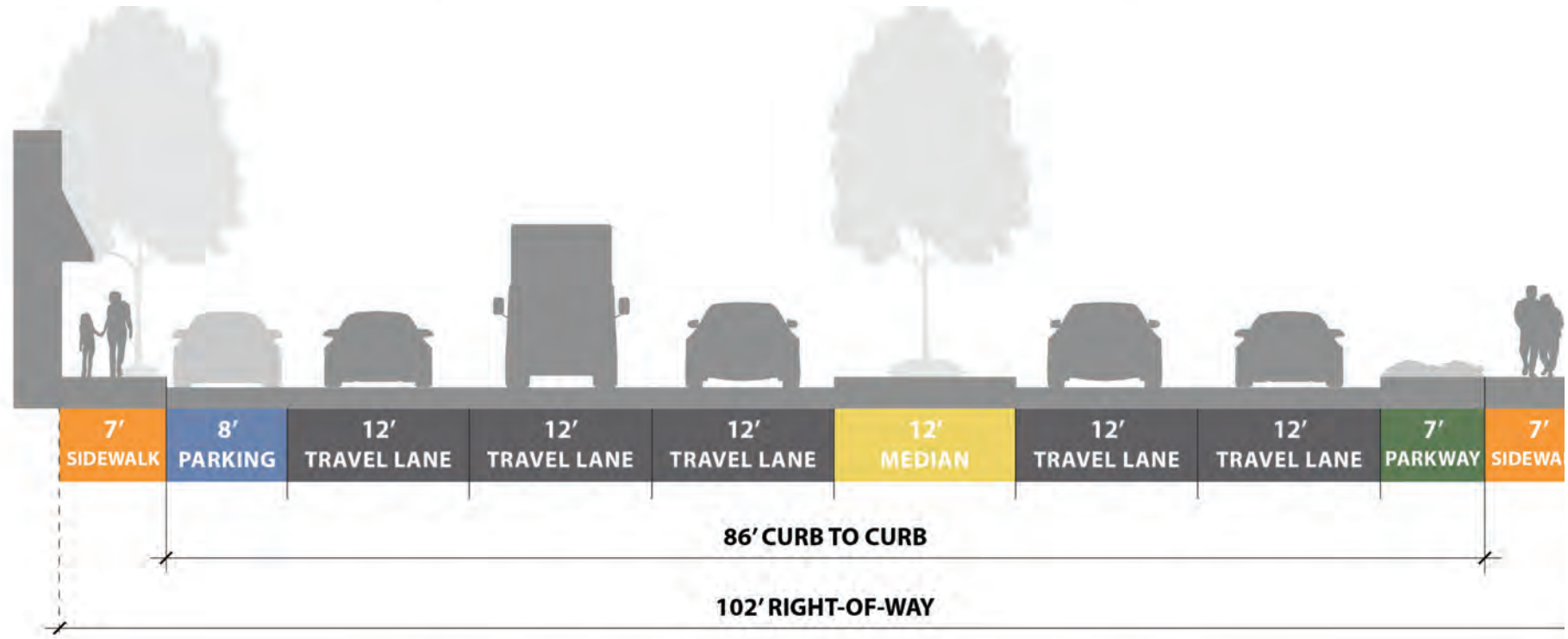


C. PLAN AREA

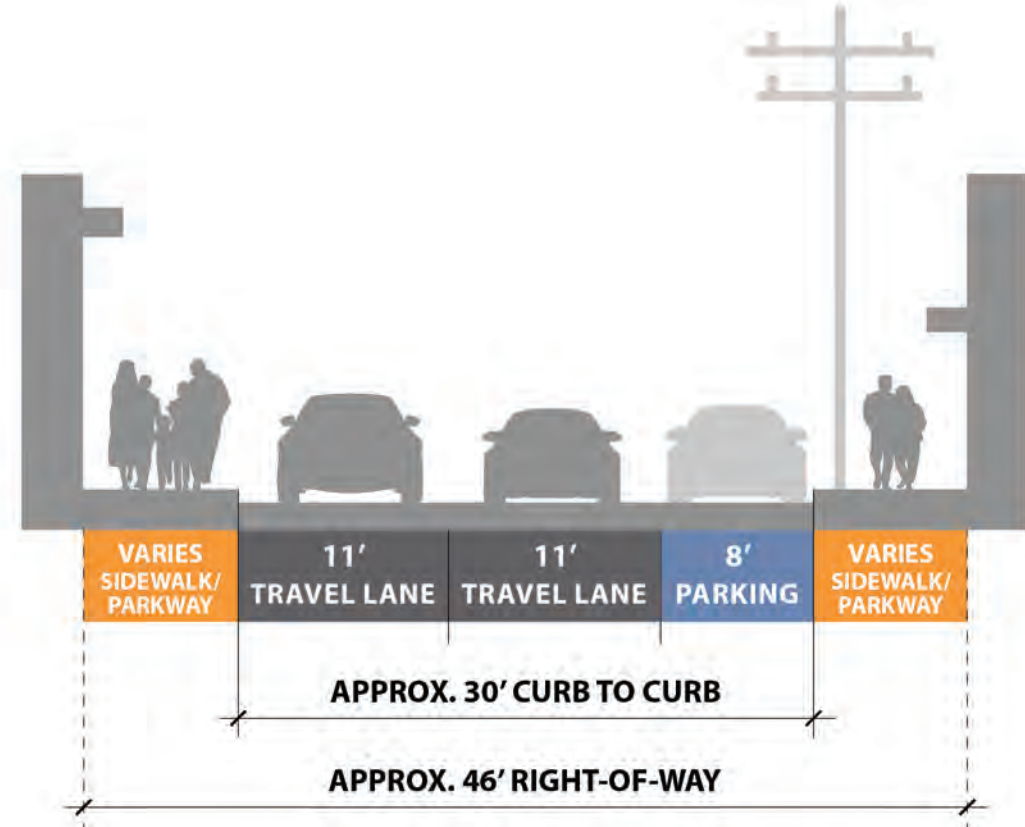
Street Sections



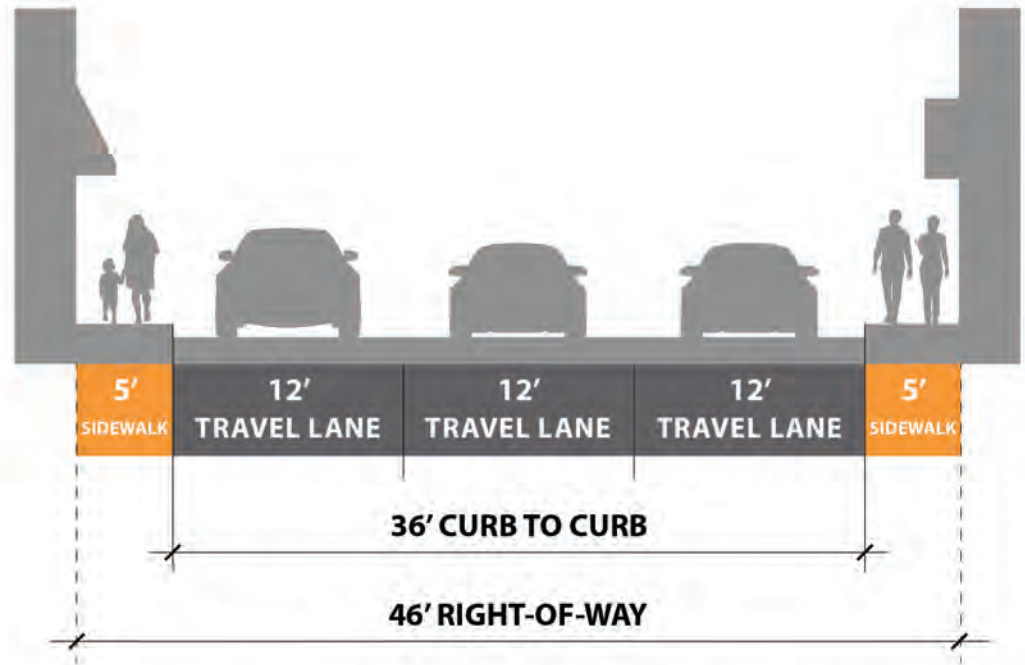
EL CAMINO REAL - EXISTING CONDITION (LOOKING NORTH)



EL CAMINO REAL - EXISTING CONDITION (LOOKING NORTH)



N. GREENWOOD AVENUE - EXISTING CONDITION (LOOKING EAST)



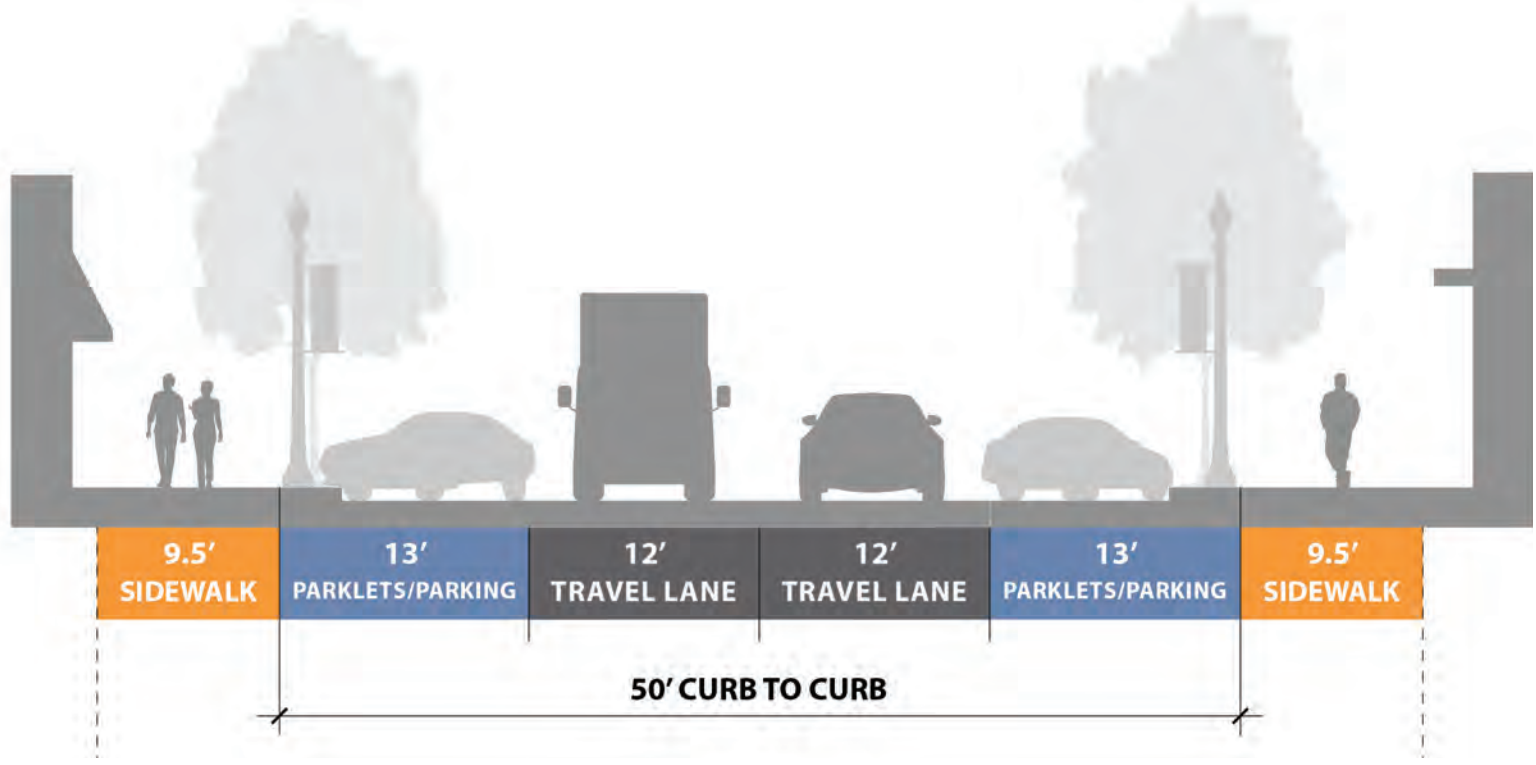
A. HOLLY STREET - EXISTING CONDITION (LOOKING EAST)

Source: RMM

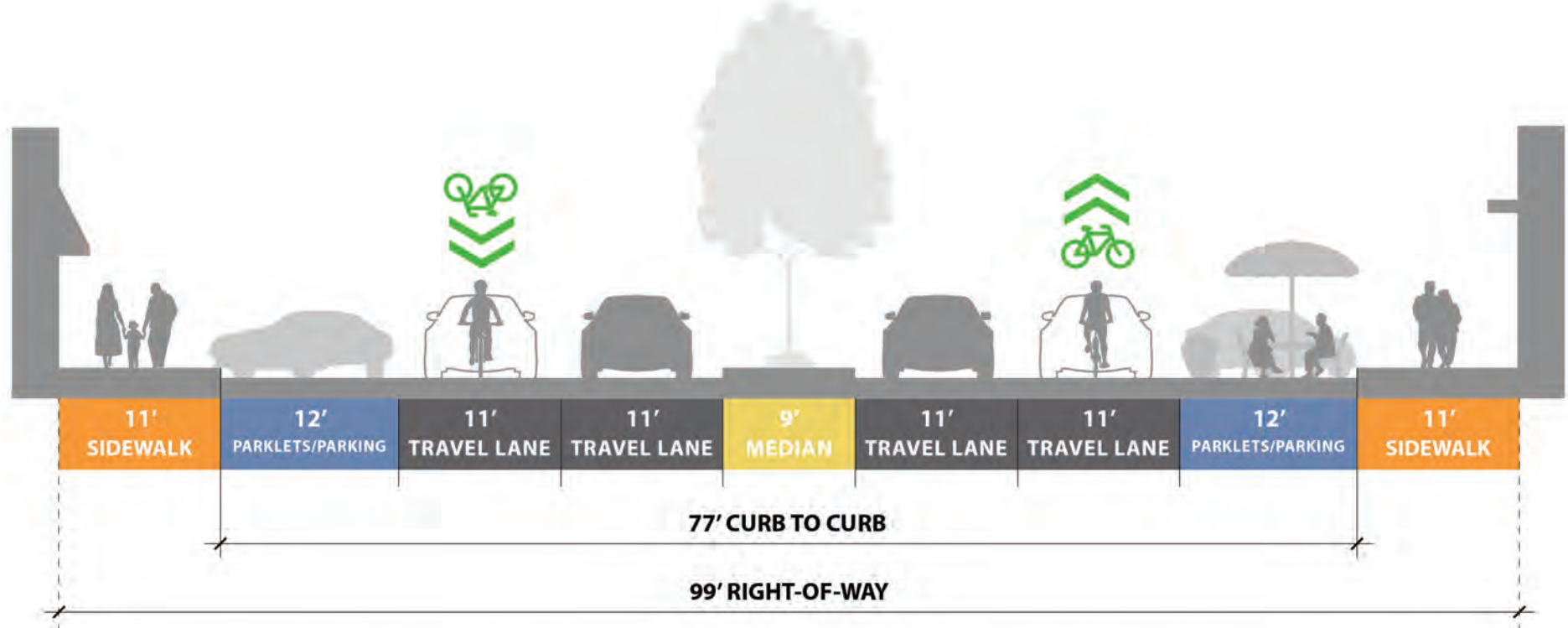


# C. PLAN AREA

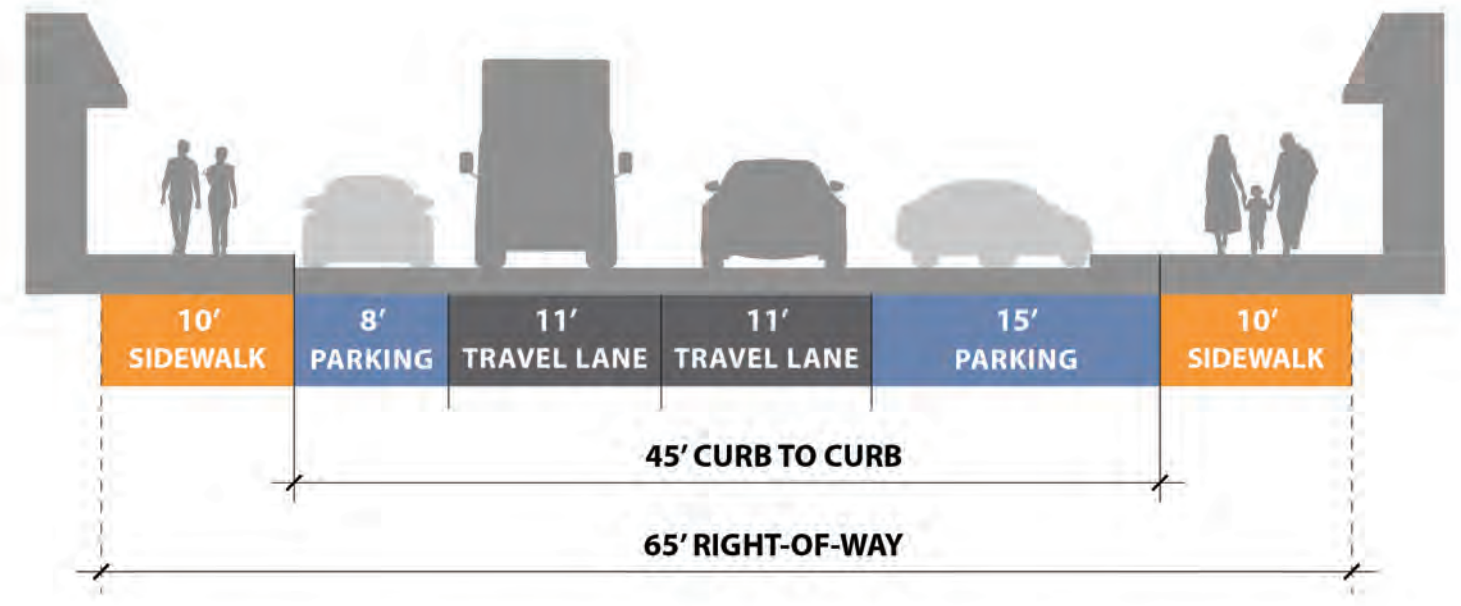
## Street Sections



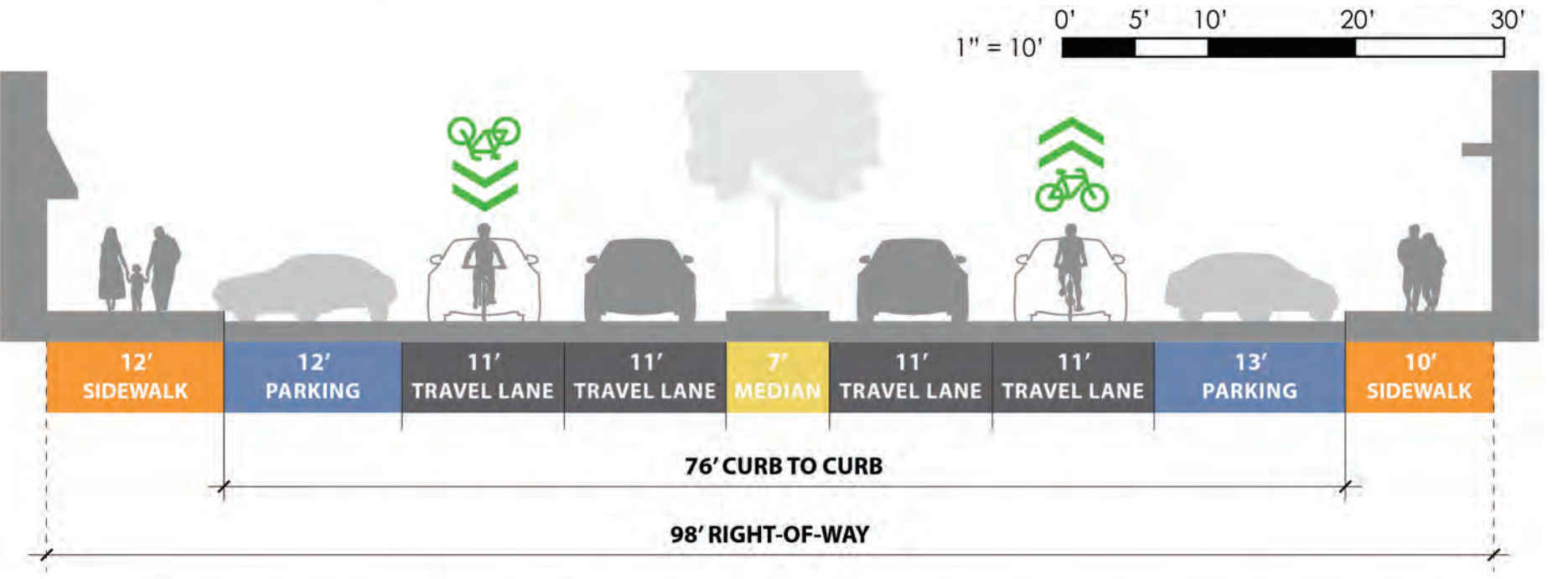
I. LAUREL STREET 1000 BLOCK - EXISTING CONDITION (LOOKING NORTH)



B. SAN CARLOS AVENUE - BETWEEN LAUREL ST. AND EL CAMINO REAL EXISTING CONDITION (LOOKING EAST)



I. LAUREL STREET 1000 BLOCK - EXISTING CONDITION (LOOKING NORTH)



C. SAN CARLOS AVENUE - BETWEEN LAUREL ST. AND WALNUT ST. EXISTING CONDITION (LOOKING EAST)

Source: RMM



# THANK YOU

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