

# C.

## PLAN PRINCIPLES, FRAMEWORK + PROGRAM

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## C.1 OVERVIEW

Based on the Phase I Vision Plan, the Menlo Park El Camino Real/Downtown Specific Plan establishes guiding principles and an Urban Design Framework for public and private enhancements to the plan area. This chapter contains the following sections:

- Guiding Principles;
- Urban Design Framework;
- Sub-Area Concepts;
- Sustainability; and
- Illustrative Plan and Development Program.

A more detailed discussion of the plan's proposed enhancements, such as widened sidewalks, active gathering spaces and new mixed use infill development, is provided in the chapters following.

## C.2 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Building on the Phase I Vision Plan, the El Camino Real/Downtown Specific Plan establishes five key guiding principles for the plan area. A principle is an assumption or fundamental rule that underlies the concepts, policies, standards and guidelines of the Specific Plan.

The Specific Plan's guiding principles are:

- Enhance Public Space;
- Generate Vibrancy;
- Sustain Menlo Park's Village Character;
- Enhance Connectivity; and
- Promote Healthy Living and Sustainability.

As illustrated in Table C1, the guiding principles are directly related to the goals of the Phase I Vision Plan. They bring structure to the Phase I Vision Plan goals, resulting in a comprehensive strategy for expressing and implementing the community's vision and setting the foundation for the plan's Urban Design Framework, which introduces the general approach and broad concepts for the plan area.

“  
*I like the way the city changes gradually as new developments come along, and older, tired buildings are replaced or rebuilt.*  
”

- Workshop #1 Participant

		Specific Plan Guiding Principles					
		Enhance Public Space	Generate Vibrancy	Sustain Menlo Park's Village Character	Enhance Connectivity	Promote Healthy Living and Sustainability	
Phase I Vision Goals	1	Maintain a village character unique to Menlo Park.	X		X		X
	2	Provide greater east-west, town-wide connectivity.				X	X
	3	Improve circulation and streetscape conditions on El Camino Real.	X	X		X	X
	4	Ensure that El Camino Real development is sensitive to and compatible with adjacent neighborhoods.			X		X
	5	Revitalize underutilized parcels and buildings.		X			X
	6	Activate the train station area.	X	X		X	X
	7	Protect and enhance pedestrian amenities on Santa Cruz Avenue.	X	X	X	X	X
	8	Expand shopping, dining and neighborhood services to ensure a vibrant downtown.		X	X		X
	9	Provide residential opportunities in the Vision Plan Area.		X			X
	10	Provide plaza and park spaces.	X	X	X		X
	11	Provide an integrated, safe and well-designed pedestrian and bicycle network.			X	X	X
	12	Develop parking strategies and facilities that meet the commercial and residential needs of the community.		X			X

Table C1. Guiding Principles Matrix

## Enhance Public Space

The Specific Plan establishes an expansive “public realm”, an integrated network of public spaces, including widened sidewalks, plazas and parks, that invites strolling and public gathering and allows for community life, identity and sense of place. The plan’s comprehensive public space network supports a more active, vibrant downtown and healthier living by encouraging walking, biking and social gathering.

“  
*As much public / gathering  
space as possible!*

”  
- Workshop #3 Participant

## Generate Vibrancy

The Specific Plan acknowledges the community’s desire for a more active, vibrant downtown and station area, with a mix of retail, residential and offices uses that complement and support one another and bring vitality, including increased retail sales, to the area. In addition, the Specific Plan establishes standards and guidelines that encourage development of underutilized and vacant land on El Camino Real while ensuring a building character that is modulated and in keeping with Menlo Park’s small-town character. The Specific Plan focuses on creating new connected places of activity and social life that enhance community life and contribute to a vibrant downtown.

## Sustain Menlo Park’s Village Character

The Specific Plan recognizes and builds upon the unique qualities of downtown Menlo Park and El Camino Real, in particular its small town character of lower-scale buildings and diverse and local neighborhood-serving businesses. The Specific Plan accommodates future development in ways that complement the area’s existing character, using design controls and guidelines to regulate building form and scale.

## Enhance Connectivity

The Specific Plan enhances connectivity and walkability throughout the plan area. The plan provides a north-south connection with a wider, more comfortable and continuous sidewalk on the east side of El Camino Real. The plan integrates downtown, the Caltrain station area and the Civic Center with one another through widened sidewalks on Santa Cruz Avenue, Alma Street and El Camino Real. East/west connectivity is enhanced with a number of intersection improvements along El Camino Real, including enhanced crosswalks and new and improved grade-separated pedestrian/bicycle crossings of the railroad tracks.

## Promote Healthy Living and Sustainability

The Specific Plan recognizes and promotes healthy living and activity by encouraging walking, biking and access to transit as alternatives to vehicular use, supported by widened sidewalks and new bicycle facilities; enhanced public spaces; development intensity focusing on the station area; and a greater mix and diversity of uses. The Specific Plan takes a comprehensive approach to sustainability and carbon emissions reduction, utilizing standards integrated with best practices and guidelines for both public and private improvements. The Specific Plan also encourages development sensitive to the character of Menlo Park.

“  
*Bike-ability and safety,  
permeable pavements and  
green roofs!*  
”

- Workshop #3 Participant

## C.3 URBAN DESIGN FRAMEWORK

Expanding on the Specific Plan's guiding principles, the Urban Design Framework introduces the general approach and concepts for the plan area. It emphasizes the following elements:

- Distinct and Connected Areas;
- Integrated Corridor;
- Walking and Connected Community;
- Sensitive Infill and Living Downtown; and
- Mobility Options and Accessibility.

More detail regarding the Urban Design Framework follows in later chapters.

### Distinct and Connected Areas

Illustrated in Figure C1 (next page), the Urban Design Framework recognizes El Camino Real, the Caltrain station area and downtown as distinct areas with their own unique character, activities, places and connections with one another and the surrounding community. The framework also recognizes the Civic Center, which is outside the plan area, as a distinct place that plays a major role in community life.

The Urban Design Framework reinforces the connection between downtown and the station area via Santa Cruz Avenue, which serves as a central east-west spine. The station area focuses on and straddles the Caltrain station and its right-of-way, and it provides a critical linkage to the Civic Center. On a north-south axis, the northern and southern portions of El Camino Real are distinct areas that “bookend” the portion of El Camino Real in the downtown area.

“  
*The plan is varied enough to add vitality with additional greenery with the pocket parks, wider sidewalks and additional parking*  
”

- Workshop #3 Participant



*Public spaces and pocket parks as part of overall pedestrian network (Cambridge, Massachusetts)*

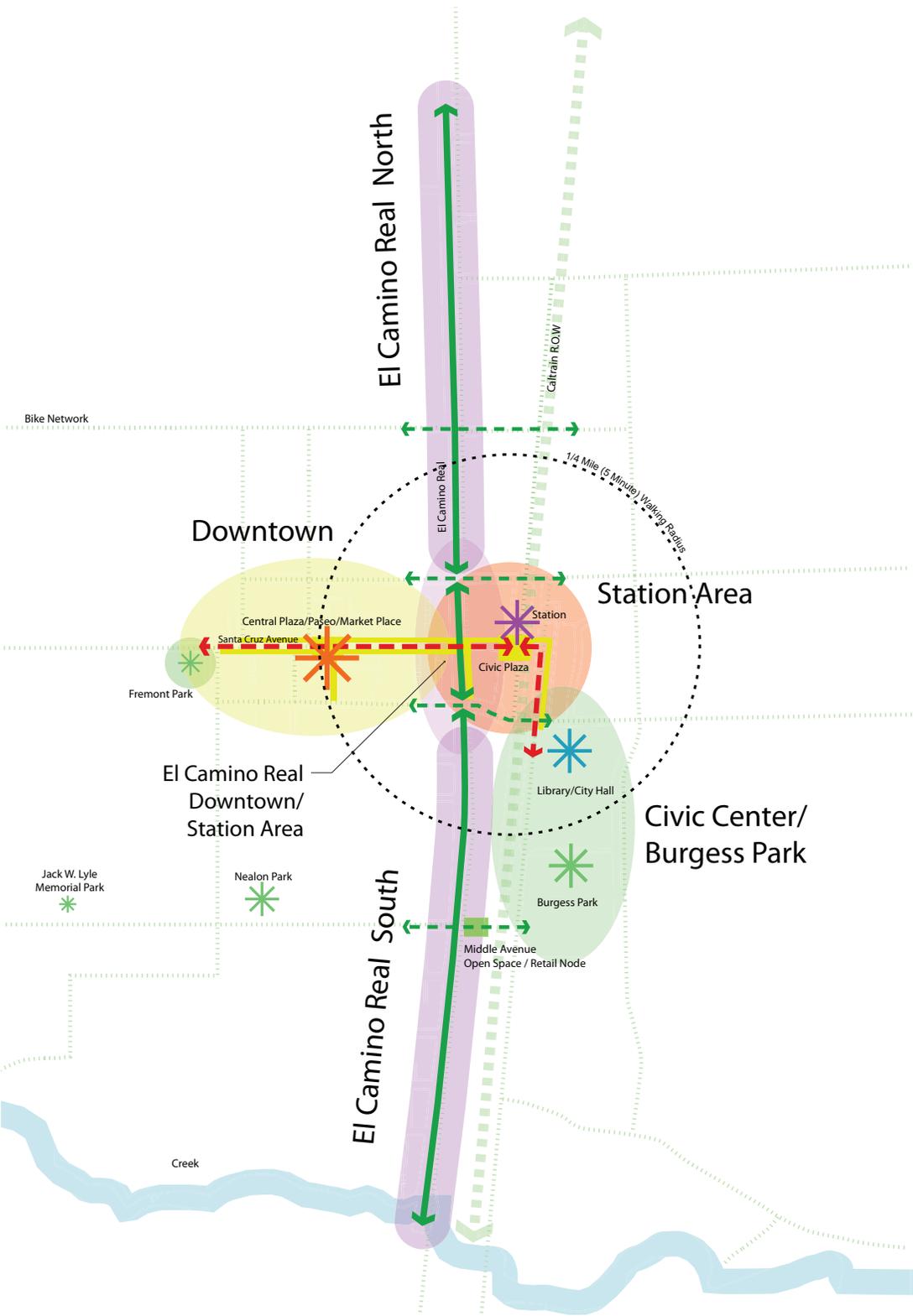


Figure C1. Concept Diagram

## Integrated Corridor

While recognizing the distinct character of different portions of El Camino Real, including building and streetscape character and proximity to different adjacent neighborhoods, including downtown and the station area, the Urban Design Framework unifies the corridor, and enhances its character, through streetscape improvements, street trees and paving.

## Walking and Connected Community

The Urban Design Framework takes a holistic approach to pedestrian improvements throughout the plan area. It envisions a reinvigorated, more pedestrian-friendly El Camino Real corridor intersecting a highly pedestrian-oriented, vibrant and connected downtown and station area.

Adding to the identify and vibrancy of downtown, a pedestrian and public space network connects downtown, the station area and the Civic Center, creating a clear east-west pedestrian “sequence” from Fremont Park to the Civic Center area. A series of public spaces punctuates the sequence: Santa Cruz Avenue Center Plaza, paseo and market place; the station area Civic Plaza; and Civic Center gateway plaza at Ravenswood Avenue. The framework incorporates additional east-west connections through crosswalk improvements at key intersections on El Camino Real and grade-separated crossings of the railroad tracks. It incorporates improved pedestrian comfort and safety with wider sidewalks on El Camino Real, including an expansive promenade on the east side of El Camino Real south of Ravenswood Avenue and north of Oak Grove Avenue.

## Sensitive Infill and Living Downtown

The Urban Design Framework takes into account the existing building character and pattern, and sensitively responds to various locations and their respective character and scale, with appropriate development controls. The framework emphasizes mixed-use residential infill near and in downtown and the station area to enhance vibrancy and support transit use.



*New buildings and streetscape will reinvigorate El Camino Real corridor*



*Highly walkable, vibrant, and interconnected downtown (Seattle, Washington)*



*Sensitive infill development responding to existing character and scale (Santa Cruz, California)*

## Extended Mobility Options and Accessibility

The Urban Design Framework concentrates development, particularly residential uses, in the train station area, both capitalizing on and supporting transit use. It expands the bicycle network and facilities. It continues convenient public parking to support downtown businesses. The framework pursues designs that enhance accessibility ensuring public spaces remain friendly and available to all.



*Development concentrated near and supporting transit and downtown businesses (Pasadena, California)*

“  
*A traffic-free space to sit, let  
children play, etc. Let coffee  
shops expand outside into  
mini-parks*

”  
*- Workshop #3 Participant*

## C.4 SUB-AREA CONCEPTS

The Urban Design Framework establishes concepts for the plan area's three principal sub-areas:

- El Camino Real;
- Station Area; and
- Downtown.

It is important to emphasize that the descriptions below present the broad concepts for the three areas. A fuller explanation of proposed enhancements may be found in the chapters following. It is also important to emphasize that the concept sketches and bird's-eye views, as shown, convey and illustrate key elements of the framework for the three areas, and that the actual build-out will undoubtedly vary from what is shown.

### El Camino Real

The Urban Design Framework for the El Camino Real corridor recognizes the street's role as both a local-serving and a regional-serving arterial roadway. The concept for El Camino Real enhances overall street character, east-west connection opportunities and pedestrian and bicyclist safety and comfort. It recognizes and addresses the character of various areas along the corridor. The concept of El Camino Real embraces the following strategies.

- Provide continuity and consistency along the corridor with coordinated streetscape elements and regular street tree planting as private improvements take place.
- Improve pedestrian crossings at key intersections.
- Provide wider sidewalks and more comfortable walking zones, where possible, within development setbacks.
- Provide a continuous bike route along the length of the corridor, with the potential for a dedicated bike lane in future years.
- Establish development controls and guidelines for buildings that address various conditions along the corridor and enhance building character.

*It is important to emphasize that the concept sketches and bird's-eye views, as shown, convey and illustrate key elements of the framework for the three areas, and that the actual build-out will undoubtedly vary from what is shown.*



*Active public gathering spaces (San Jose, California)*



Figure C2. El Camino Real South



El Camino Real at Partridge looking north

The concept for El Camino Real includes streetscape enhancements along the length of the corridor, including additional street trees, median enhancements consistent with existing median treatment and crosswalk enhancements to improve pedestrian crossing of the corridor.

### **El Camino Real North**

The concept for El Camino Real north of Oak Grove Avenue allows for higher development intensities to support viable investment opportunities while keeping development character compatible with adjacent areas on both sides of the corridor. On the east side, it enhances pedestrian comfort with wider sidewalks, using setback areas as needed. On the west side, guidelines for new construction recognize and address the existing character of narrow parcels and minimal setbacks, introducing the character of downtown to travelers from the north. The concept encourages residential uses, particularly in those areas closest to downtown and the station area.

### **El Camino Real/Downtown/Station Area**

As El Camino Real intersects the downtown area between Oak Grove Avenue and Menlo Avenue, the corridor's character changes and reflects both the higher intensity of the station area and the vibrancy of downtown. The concept for this area, where vehicular traffic is already limited to four travel lanes, emphasizes the public realm, incorporating wider sidewalks within setback areas, bike facilities and additional street trees. Buildings have relatively minimal setbacks and address the street, consistent with the character of the historic downtown. With a higher intensity of uses, particularly residential, ground-floor retail benefits and stimulates further pedestrian and sidewalk activity.



*Future developments will address various conditions along the corridor (Palo Alto, California)*

## El Camino Real South



*Rendering of Burgess Park Linkage/Open Space Plaza*

The southern part of El Camino Real offers substantial development opportunities as well as improved east-west connectivity. The concept for El Camino Real south of Menlo and Ravenswood Avenues recognizes the different conditions on the west and east side of the corridor. On the west side, development is compatible with the character of adjacent residential neighborhoods, both in scale of buildings and transition of building massing to adjacent areas. Figure C2 illustrates the concept for enhancements to the El Camino Real south area.

On the east side, the concept for El Camino Real takes advantage of larger parcel sizes and fewer property owners (including Stanford University) by incorporating publicly-accessible open spaces and a grade-separated pedestrian/bicycle linkage across the railroad tracks to Burgess Park and Alma Street. As part of the redevelopment of the parcels, a continuous, expansive pedestrian promenade fronts El Camino Real from Ravenswood Avenue south to the southern city limits. While allowing for higher intensity of development, including residential uses, standards and design guidelines modulate building massing, avoiding monolithic projects and complementing Menlo Park's small-town character.

## Station Area

The Urban Design Framework for the station area establishes a strong civic presence and statement at the train station, creates an important arrival point into Menlo Park and emphasizes a higher intensity of uses. The concept's Civic Plaza, associated with the Caltrain station, provides a central public space and vehicular pickup and drop-off area. Its design offers an opportunity for a vertical civic element (for example a sculpture, clock tower, fountain or flagpole) as a major landmark for visitors and rail passengers at the terminus of Santa Cruz Avenue. Figure C3 illustrates the concept for enhancements to the station area.

Through enhanced sidewalks, the Civic Plaza engages Menlo Center plaza and integrates connections to downtown and to the Civic Center. The connection across the railroad tracks is grade-separated from the tracks, with its configuration dependent on the final configuration of the proposed high speed rail (i.e. underground or elevated). The linkage to the Civic Center continues along an enhanced sidewalk to small plazas at the corner of Alma Street and Ravenswood Avenue, which serves as a gateway to both the station area and Civic Center.

The concept for the station area includes new higher-intensity residential development, both to the west of the railroad tracks and along Alma Street to the east of the railroad tracks, to maximize transit use and to enhance the station area and downtown activity and vibrancy. Development massing is modulated, providing a sensitive transition to adjacent areas. Retail on ground floors activates key public spaces. Potential Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) service on El Camino Real enhances access to the area and supports downtown businesses and rail service.

“  
*ECR needs far more public spaces*

”  
- Workshop #3 Participant

“  
*Additional residential is good, especially with proximity to train station and retail*

”  
- Workshop #3 Participant

“  
*The area around the train station needs to be expanded as public space in conjunction with transit-oriented housing*

”  
- Workshop #3 Participant



Figure C3. Station Area



El Camino Real at Ravenswood looking north

## Downtown

The Urban Design Framework establishes a more vibrant and active downtown through enhanced pedestrian pathways, active gathering spaces and new mixed-use infill development, including residential uses. The concept for downtown emphasizes the existing small-town character, ensuring a variety of public spaces and smaller-scale buildings complementary to the existing character of the area. The downtown concept celebrates Santa Cruz Avenue, enhances its character and functionality, and positions it for a successful future through wider, more comfortable sidewalks and a refreshed streetscape. Figures C4 and C5 illustrate the concept for enhancements to downtown.

Proposed improvements include the Santa Cruz Avenue Central Plaza and market place, linked by a pedestrian paseo on Chestnut Street. These enhancements create a sense of village center - a “place du village” - in the heart of downtown, which establishes a new destination and reinforces downtown’s image and identity. At the center of Santa Cruz Avenue, the Santa Cruz Avenue Central Plaza accommodates vehicular circulation, although it may be closed temporarily for special events. The market place concept, which describes a range of options including a pavilion of small retail and food vendors, frames the Chestnut paseo and functions in conjunction with the Santa Cruz Avenue Central Plaza and the weekly Farmer’s Market. It also complements the established grocers in the area. Careful design and programming of such a facility, along with requirements for trial implementation, will ensure that such an amenity complements, and does not compete with, the Farmer’s Market and other food retailers downtown.

Adding to the public space programming options, the downtown concept envisions modifying the two parking plazas west of the market place into “flex space,” which accommodates both parking, as exists today, and larger temporary events, such as the Farmer’s Market, evening movie screenings and summer art and community festivals. On the north side of downtown, two pocket parks provide places to sit and relax. They also serve as “gateways” to the Santa Cruz Avenue Central Plaza and center of downtown. A smaller network of improved sidewalks provides additional access from public parking areas and connectivity between key public spaces. Bicycle parking facilities at key locations



*Enhanced character and functionality through wider, more comfortable sidewalks and refreshed streetscape (Santa Cruz, California)*

“  
Interested in the outside  
market idea, imagine that  
as becoming retail space  
of some kind, analogous to  
having a Sunday market but  
all week long

”  
- Workshop #3 Participant



**Figure C4.** Detail View of Downtown Public Space Program

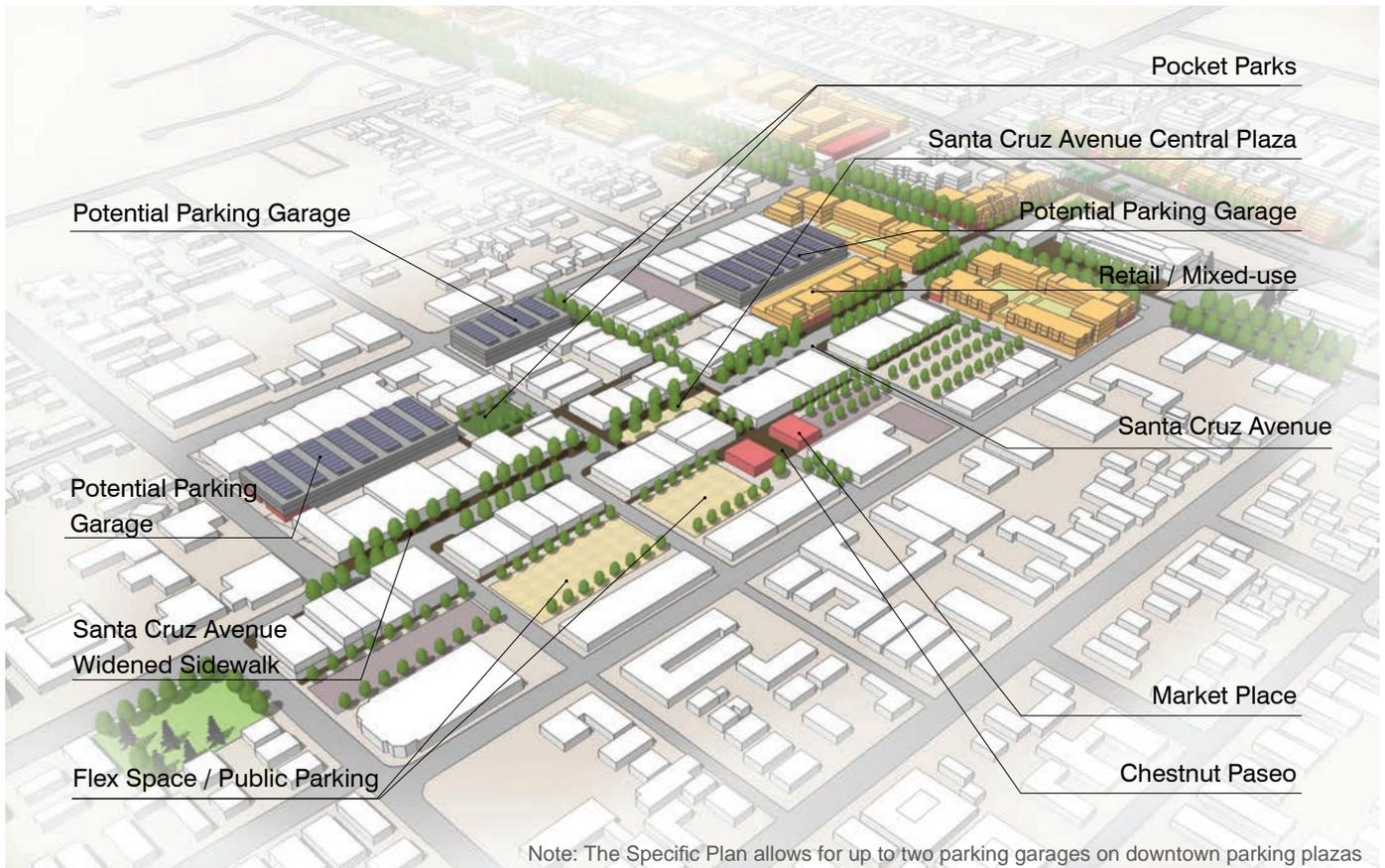


Figure C5. Downtown



Santa Cruz Avenue at Curtis



Santa Cruz Avenue from El Camino Real

encourage use of this alternative transportation and access mode to downtown.

The concept for downtown continues to provide convenient shared parking at public parking plazas. To accommodate public space enhancements and to support downtown businesses and future parking demand, the concept locates up to two parking garages, with one to one and a half levels below-grade and up to four levels above, on a combination of Parking Plazas 1, 2, and 3 north of Santa Cruz Avenue. Public parking continues at parking plazas south of Santa Cruz Avenue.

The downtown concept reinforces and enhances the overall tree canopy to provide shade and to mitigate for heat island effects. It retains the existing median trees in streetscape enhancements of Santa Cruz Avenue.



*Central Plaza accomodating pedestrians, active uses and vehicular circulation (San Jose, California)*

“  
*Create plazas that are used for music festivals. More open space and specialty retail.*

”  
*- Workshop #3 Participant*

“  
*My family and I would walk downtown in the evening if there were a plaza where people congregated... something to look at like a fountain where kids could play*

”  
*- Workshop #1 Participant*

“  
*You could use the parking plazas to create a small park if you built a classy parking garage on a parking plaza*

”  
*- Workshop #3 Participant*

## C.5 SUSTAINABILITY

In addition to the Guiding Principles, Urban Design Framework and Sub-Area Concepts, the Specific Plan supports and advances the principles of sustainability. As summarized below, the Specific Plan incorporates into its concepts and guidelines sustainability strategies reflected in the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design for Neighborhood Development (LEED-ND) rating system credits, developed by the U.S. Green Building Council. These strategies are listed below.

- Reduce automobile dependence by improving walkability, bicycle facilities and access to public transportation, and by providing a greater mix of uses.
- Create a bicycle network and storage by proposing an enhanced bicycle network and facilities downtown.
- Support housing and job proximity by proposing infill development and encouraging residential mixed-use opportunity for living and working downtown.
- Establish walkable streets by proposing wider sidewalks, enhanced public spaces, overall streetscape improvements and active ground-floor retail.
- Promote compact development by optimizing available land made through encouragement of new infill development and higher intensity development.
- Reduce parking footprint by limiting the amount of space dedicated to surface parking, providing shared parking facilities and integrating parking within development footprints.
- Encourage transit use by enhancing the train station area and increasing development intensity in the transit station area.
- Establish tree lined and shaded streets by preserving the extensive existing canopy where possible and replacing or adding to current cover as public or private improvements occur.
- Develop certified green buildings by requiring certification for new buildings as well as retrofit of existing structures.
- Improve stormwater management with best practices and application of existing requirements for private developments as well as new public spaces and parks.
- Reduce heat island effects by reducing the amount of land dedicated to surface parking lots or by mitigating with tree canopy or other shading device, and by advocating green roofs through development guidelines.

## C.6 ILLUSTRATIVE PLAN AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

The previous Sub-Area Concepts figures and the Illustrative Plan of Figure C6 depict how the plan area could potentially build out over the next 20 to 30 years in conformance with the Guiding Principles, Urban Design Framework and the land use and development regulations and design guidelines of the Specific Plan. It is important to emphasize that the Illustrative Plan indicates only one potential development concept and that the actual build-out will likely vary from the initial projection over 20 to 30 years.

The sites shown as opportunity sites in the Illustrative Plan are derived from the sites shown as “proposed development” in the Phase I El Camino Real/Downtown Vision Plan. Some locations were selected by virtue of being vacant or underutilized, and others were chosen to provide geographic diversity. As stated above, the Illustrative Plan shows how development could take place. It is highly unlikely that all opportunity sites shown in the Illustrative Plan will be the exact sites undergoing redevelopment in the plan area.

As envisioned in the Illustrative Plan (Fig. C6, next page), the full build-out of the project area over time could result in the following net new development:

- Residential 680 Units
- Retail Space 91,800 Square Feet
- Commercial Space 240,820 Square Feet
- Hotel 380 Rooms
- Parking Spaces 3,670 Spaces  
(net new public + private)
- Resident Population 1,537 New Residents
- Employment 1,357 New Jobs

*It is important to emphasize that the Illustrative Plan indicates only one potential development concept and that the actual build-out will likely vary from the initial projection over 20 to 30 years.*

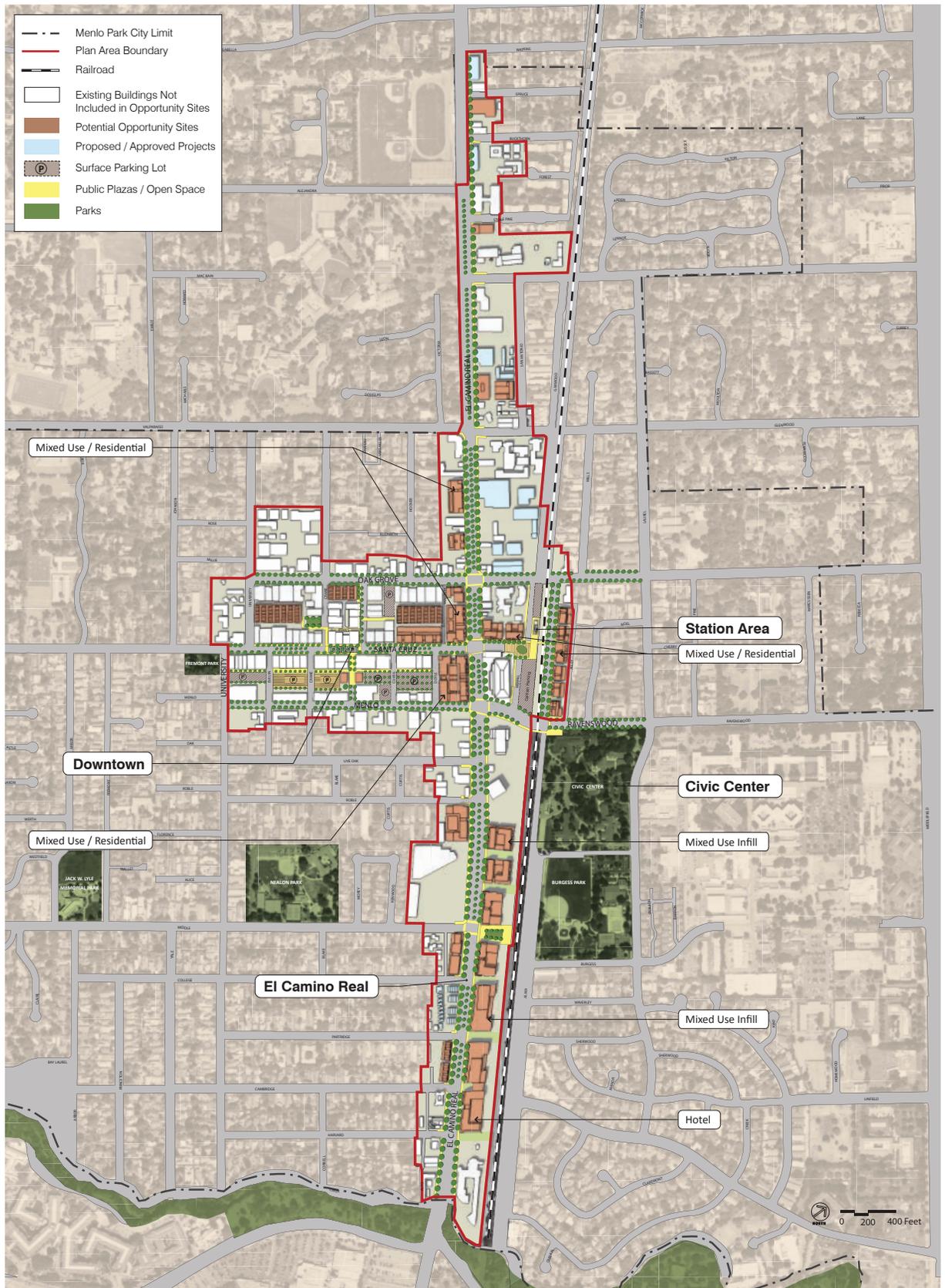


Figure C6. Illustrative Plan

This program summary reflects those developments shown in brown in the Illustrative Plan and labeled as opportunity sites. It excludes proposed and approved projects in the plan area as of November 2009, as shown in blue.

The program summary is supported by this plan's market analysis, as summarized in Chapter B "Plan Context".

The Illustrative Plan and program summary reflects the scale of development that could be developed under this plan's regulations and guidelines. The exact sites to be redeveloped, the timing of redevelopment and the final program mix will be determined by a number of factors, including market conditions, construction costs, land costs (i.e. opportunity costs) and lot size and configuration, among others.