

SECTION 2

**Central City  
Urban Design Guidelines  
Framework**



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# Section 2 Central City Urban Design Framework

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## A: The Vision for the Central City

### A. The Vision for Central City

Sacramento has set as its goal to be nothing less than “America’s most livable city.” As the heart of “America’s most livable city,” the vision for the Central City encompasses a number of broad themes that will enhance the quality of life, not only in the Central Core and surrounding neighborhoods, but in the city as a whole. These themes serve as guideposts that help to frame the design guidelines and policies and inform decisions about future growth and development in the Central City.

#### A Destination and a Center – City, Region, State

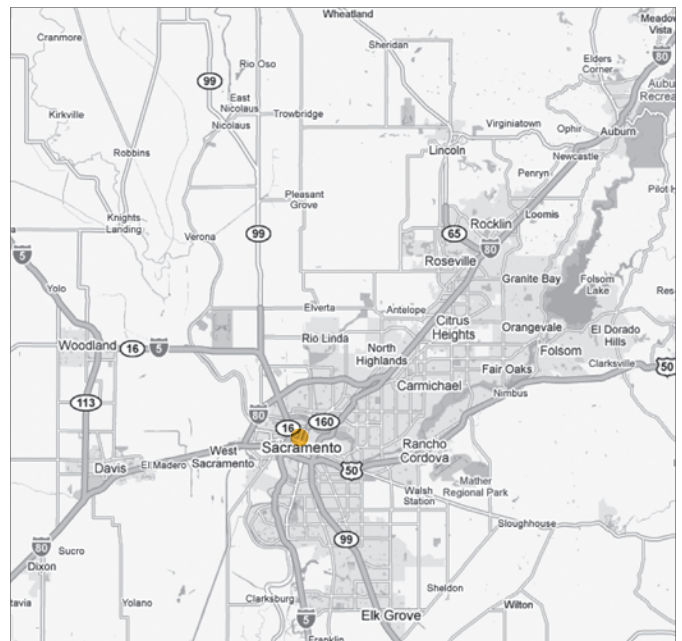
Sacramento’s Central City combines many roles: state capital; center for California’s fourth largest metropolitan region; county seat; and a young, but maturing urban center. In addition to being an important center for business and institutions, the City is a major tourist destination with numerous cultural amenities. The Central City needs to continue to augment its capacity as the pre-eminent center for commerce and government in the region and build on its historic, cultural, and open space assets to enhance its role as a premier cultural and tourist destination.

#### A Vibrant, Around-the-Clock Center

As the premier urban center in the region, the Central City is only recently beginning to overcome its historic 9:00-to-5:00 business orientation where life in the downtown comes to a halt at the end of the business day. The key to creating of a more vibrant downtown with an active night life, is achieving a better balance between residential, retail, and employment. Introducing more residential use to the Central City is the critical component. New residents will contribute to a lively street life and create demand for new retail, restaurants, entertainment and service uses. These, in turn, will attract more nighttime visitors downtown, which in turn will attract more entertainment and cultural activities. Thus, through this incremental process, a balanced mix of uses will result in the lively mix of activities that defines a truly livable city. In addition to entertainment and cultural activities, a vibrant and sustainable Central City will also need to provide neighborhood retail and services uses that support the day-to-day needs of those who live and work in Central City neighborhoods.



Serving as the seat of State government is a key function of the Central City.



Sacramento is the heart of the region.



Downtown residential uses contribute to a more vibrant night-life.

## A: The Vision for the Central City

### A Central City with Distinct Neighborhoods and Special Places

The Central City is made up of several distinct neighborhoods from Downtown to Poverty Ridge, and from J Street to the Broadway commercial corridors. It also includes numerous emerging or transitioning areas such as the River District, Docks Area, and Railyards which are developing their own distinct characteristics. Each district or neighborhood should play its special part within the Central City. The diversity in identity, character and scale of the various neighborhoods contributes to the richness of the urban experience and should be preserved and enhanced.

### A Sustainable Central City

Sacramento's Sustainability Master Plan—Creating a Sustainable City—was developed in recognition of the threat that climate change and global warming pose to the community's quality of life. As the center of the city and the region, the Central City should be the main stage for demonstrating how to create a sustainable city. The amount of development projected for the Central City provides a unique opportunity to advance the sustainability agenda by implementing a walk- and transit-first agenda that reduces automobile dependence, promotes more energy and resource efficient buildings and infrastructure, supports greater recycling and waste reduction, and creates



Old Sacramento-veranda arcaded streets were an early response to local climate

greater biodiversity within the urban setting. A Sustainable Central City should achieve measurable goals in terms of the performance of its buildings and infrastructure.

In addition to resource and energy efficiency and environmental sustainability, a sustainable Central City must also be socially and economically sustainable. Development patterns need to create safe and attractive environments that are conducive to a lively social life and foster a positive sense of community. The mix of uses in the Central City needs to not only accommodate employment and residential uses, but also needs to provide services and facilities such



The LEED-certified CalPERS Building is a contemporary response to Central Valley summers and fog-shrouded winters

## A: The Vision for the Central City

as schools, parks, grocery stores, and commercial and social services that support a healthy and complete community. To be socially and economically sustainable, it is also important that the housing inventory is both affordable and diverse in its composition to meet the needs of all segments of the community.

### A Transit-oriented Central City with Transportation Choices

A city with broad access to transit and viable choices in transportation will have less traffic congestion, cleaner air, and more pedestrian activity. Continuing to expand transit service in the Central City and focusing higher intensity development near light rail stations will provide the community with greater independence from automobile use. Increasing coordination of bus service with light rail, enhancing intermodal connections for both local and regional transit, and introducing technologies and equipment that increase transit efficiency will broaden the appeal, convenience, and hence ridership on city transit. Other transportation alternatives that reduce automobile dependence, such as bicycle facilities, buses, streetcars, car share, taxis, and pedicabs should also be supported as a means of providing citizens with additional viable transportation choices.

### Vibrant Pedestrian-Friendly Streets and Urban Spaces

To become the vibrant urban center envisioned, the Central City needs to provide a safe and attractive pedestrian environment. This will include a network of streets that calm traffic and cater to pedestrians and bicyclists. Wide sidewalks, bulb-outs at intersections, enhanced pedestrian crossings, traffic circles, and on-street parking are all features that can enhance pedestrian safety and produce traffic calming. Although the dimensions of the street grid are quite uniform, a range of street types can be accommodated whose design is more responsive to their specific location, context, and function. These include corridor streets, leading to and from the freeways, transit streets, bicycle streets, retail streets and various categories of residential streets. The 1987 Downtown Urban Design Plan recognized the need to encourage pedestrian activity and promoted the concept of sidewalk cafes and outdoor eating, which led in turn to



Light rail on K Street provides convenient transit access to nighttime activities



Sidewalk cafes on 18th and Capital Streets promote an active and vibrant pedestrian environment (Midtown Entertainment District)

the adoption of the City's Sidewalk Café ordinance. These actions resulted in the emergence in the late 1980's of more active Central City street life, particularly in the Midtown area.

Sacramento has been identified as one of the most diverse and culturally integrated cities in the nation. This diversity can have a direct bearing on the demand for public spaces as well as on how they are designed and used. People whose origins are from cultures that enjoy a rich, active, and accessible public realm may find the Central City lacking in quality plazas and other pedestrian environments. The Central City needs to recognize the diversity of needs for public spaces that are associated with the city's diverse demographics.

## A: The Vision for the Central City

### 'The City of Trees'- A Healthy Urban Forest

One of Sacramento's most attractive and distinctive features is its mature urban forest—including both street trees and trees in the City's parks and open spaces. In addition to playing an important aesthetic role, the urban forest provides important benefits to environmental sustainability, including reducing heat island effects, improving air quality, reducing stormwater runoff, and enhancing biodiversity. As such, the urban forest is an important component of the City's sustainability agenda. These magnificent trees were planted over a 150 year period since the City's founding and require careful attention for their survival. Urban development and public street trees need to be planned and implemented together to ensure compatibility and long-term health of the urban forest. Appropriate building guidelines and tree selection guidelines are needed to protect tree canopies and roots from being compromised and ensure long-term compatibility.

### 'Green Streets' and Stormwater Management

An important aspect of Sacramento's commitment to sustainable design is the creation of 'green streets' that incorporate new stormwater management features. Currently Sacramento's Central City has a combined sewer system, with pipes that carry both sanitary sewage and storm water. During peak storm periods, the vast amount of stormwater can overwhelm the capacity of the sewers requiring the use of overflow reservoirs, such as that in the Docks Area to handle the overflow, and occasionally overflow into the river. A wide-scale program of introducing bio-swales, rain gardens, permeable pavers, and other storm water management techniques into street design to reduce the rate and volume of stormwater runoff would reduce the need for overflow reservoirs and the potential for untreated flows onto streets and sidewalks and into the river, but also benefit the environment by filtering urban pollutants from stormwater runoff.

### A City Re-connected to its Rivers

The Sacramento and American Rivers are major features and potential amenities that frame the Central City, yet they remain largely hidden from view. This is due in part to the levees that rise high above the grade of the downtown to

protect it from flooding. It is also a product of historic land use and infrastructure decisions that resulted in the siting of utilities, such as the sewage treatment plant and PG&E facilities, transportation infrastructure such as freeways and railroads, and industrial uses in a manner that obstructs access to the River.

Creating new paths and improved connections to the riverfront from Central City neighborhoods and enhancement of the river edge with the continuation of the riverfront promenade will help to overcome existing obstacles and open up this important amenity to the community.



Sacramento is renowned for its mature urban forest.



Integration of stormwater management features into street design can provide multiple benefits.



The riverfront promenade allows people to enjoy Sacramento's primary open space amenity.



**B: Urban Design Framework Concepts**

## **B. Urban Design Framework Concepts**

### **1. The Central City Skyline**

Until the 1990's the Central City skyline was dominated by a handful of landmark buildings, with the 220-foot tall Capitol Dome, the 226-foot tall (18 stories) Elks Club building, the 217-foot tall Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament at 11th and K streets, and the 14-story 926 J Street building being the tallest and most recognizable. Beyond that, the Central City, as seen from the Yolo Causeway or from southbound I-5, had a low profile dominated by its canopy of trees with only the occasional building rising above 50 feet, including a few State office buildings south of Capitol Mall and some of the grain elevators along the railroad tracks.

Today's skyline is one that emerged largely in the 1990's. The construction, in 1989, of the 372-foot, 28-story Renaissance Tower at 8th and K Street kicked off just over a decade of development that would generate 9 of Sacramento's 10 tallest buildings, including:

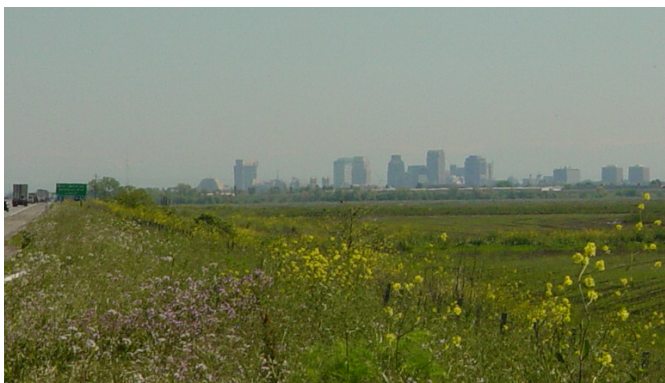
- U.S. Bank Plaza (26 stories, 380 feet, 1991);
- Wells Fargo (30 stories, 423 feet, 1992);
- Capitol Square (25 stories, 351 feet, 1992);
- 1200 K Street Tower (18 stories, 238 feet, 1992);
- Department of Justice (18 stories, 227 feet, 1995);
- U.S. Courthouse/Federal Building (18 stories, 350 feet, 1999);
- Cal/EPA (25 stories, 372 feet, 2000); and
- the Sheraton Grand Sacramento (28 stories, 318 feet, 2001).

Collectively these towers substantially exceeded the historic building heights, raising the apex of the skyline by nearly 200 feet (from 226' to 423'), and in the process significantly altered the Central City's skyline.

In the early '90s in response to this surge in high-rise towers, the State Legislature adopted height limits, in the form of "view protection zones," around the Capitol in recognition of its symbolic importance. The zones establish a 150-foot height limit in the half block nearest Capitol Park, and then



1906 view of Sacramento from the Railyards shops with China Slough (Sutter's Lake) , since filled, and Chinese neighborhood along I Street in the foreground



Sacramento as seen from the Yolo Causeway eastbound



Sacramento as seen the southbound I-5

**B: Urban Design Framework Concepts**

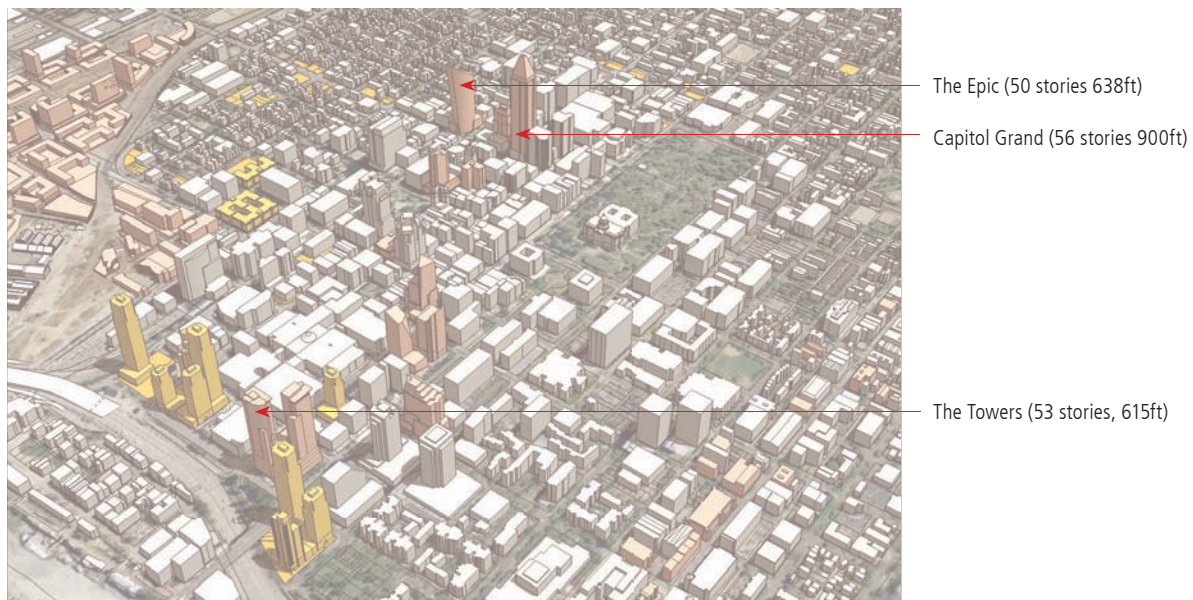
on the north and west sides step up in half block increments to a maximum height of 450 feet along 7th and J streets. Beyond the Capitol Area height zone, there currently is no height limit in the surrounding CBD, or in Old Sacramento. Outside of the CBD ‘no-limit zone’ building height limits of 60-, 45-, and 35-feet are enforced in the adjoining Alkali Flats, Mansion Flat, Midtown and Capitol Area neighborhoods.

The first seven years of the new millennium saw a new surge in development proposals for new, taller buildings, including high-rise buildings in the CBD and mid-rise buildings in the Midtown area. Unlike the surge of development in the ‘90s, which consisted solely of commercial (primarily office) buildings, the more recent surge consisted of primarily residential and mixed use buildings. As in the ‘90s development surge, recent development proposals have ratcheted up the average building heights, with several proposals for the CBD exceeding 50 stories and heights ranging from 600 to 900 feet. Of the proposals put forward in early 2007, the tallest included the Sacramento Towers (53 stories, 615 feet) at 301 Capitol Mall, the Epic (50 stories, 638 feet) at 1201 I Street, and the Capitol Grand (56 stories, 900 feet) at 1215 J Street (see diagram). Similarly, recent residential mixed use projects in the Midtown area have

consistently been proposing building heights of 80 to 90 feet, exceeding the 35 to 60 foot height limits and requiring height variances for approval.

**Building Height Urban Design Recommendations**

1. Attention should be paid to the effect of building heights on the character of the Central City skyline and the effect the skyline character has on Sacramento’s emerging identity. Given their prominence and visibility, the tops of high-rise towers should be designed to be attractive and add visual interest to the skyline.
2. Generally, building height regulation should attempt to create a sculpted skyline silhouette that provides visual cues to the organization of the Central City and the location of key activity centers.
3. The urban design strategy should maintain a dramatic core of high-rise towers in the Central Core that signifies the importance of this area as the pre-eminent regional center of culture, commerce, and government.
4. Buildings on the edges of differing height zones, such as between the Central Core and adjoining residential neighborhoods, need to be sensitive to the potential impact that dramatic transitions in scale can have on their low-rise neighbors.



The Downtown skyline with pipeline projects (in pink) that were being proposed in early 2007. Buildings in yellow represent potential development under proposed design guidelines.

**B: Urban Design Framework Concepts****2. Central City Gateways**

The Central City has several important entry corridors that serve as gateways to the downtown. These gateways are important because they typically shape one's first impression of Sacramento. Historically, these gateways related to available bridge crossings, such as the Tower Bridge, or to key travel routes, such as the Stockton Boulevard (P Street) and Folsom Boulevard (Capitol Avenue) entries from the east and Freeport Boulevard (21st Street) from the south.

The introduction of the freeway system has obscured these historic gateways to freeway interchanges and off-ramps, and in the process has degraded the quality of those historic entry corridors. While the historic gateway corridors still exist they are now secondary routes into the Central City whose entry points are marked by the hulking infrastructure of the elevated freeway.

Clearly the most attractive and symbolic gateway to the downtown is from the west across Tower Bridge, on axis with The Capitol. The entry sequence provided by the compression of the historic bridge, the formal elegance of



The elevated freeways at 5th and 16th streets provide unappealing entries into the Central City from the south.



The Elevated freeway severing I/J Streets at 3rd Street creates an unwelcoming entry to Sacramento's Central Core.

the broad Capitol Mall parkway, and the bold visual terminus of the Capitol Building create a memorable impression. This is in contrast to the off-ramps from Interstate 5 at J Street for downtown, at Q Street for the Capitol Area, and at Richards Boulevard for the River District, and from the Business 80 off-ramps at 5th and 16th streets. These are utilitarian entries at best, and typically reflect their late insertion into the urban fabric through their awkward ramp geometries and remnant parcels and building patterns. The sole northern gateway along Highway 160/12th Street is more intentional in its layout as an entry than the freeway off-ramps and has the benefit of the American River as a gateway element. The entry experience is compromised by the industrial area and the railroad underpass it passes through before entering the Central City.

The future planning should address the enhancement of the gateways to the Central City. Landscape, lighting, signage, and public art can be introduced to improve the entry experience for those arriving off the freeway and transitioning to city streets in well established areas. In redevelopment areas such as at Richards Boulevard and North 12th Street, there is much greater opportunity to use built forms and patterns, in addition to these other elements, to enhance and reinforce the entry experience—creating a new gateway to the Central City at the crossing of the American River.

**Gateway Urban Design Recommendations**

1. A concerted effort is required to enhance the entry experience to the Central City.
2. Landscape, lighting, signage and public art should be used to enhance the entry experience at key freeway entry corridors (e.g., 5th, 16th, and J streets).
3. New development should be used to create more attractive and well-defined gateways into the Central City, such as along North 12th Street in the Richards Boulevard area and at 3rd and J streets in the CBD.
4. Care should be taken to preserve and enhance the formal clarity and elegance of the Capitol Mall entry to the Central Core.

**B: Urban Design Framework Concepts**

**3. Primary Streets and The Street Grid**

Although the Central City's street grid tends to be quite egalitarian and provide great flexibility in route choice, a number of factors combine to give certain streets more important roles in the function of the Central City. Clearly one factor influencing this is the location of freeway on- and off-ramps, and a related factor is the designation of one-way streets (i.e., on- and off-ramps at the same interchange

are served by different streets). I and J Streets, and Q and P Streets serve as important east/west pairs, and 9th and 10th streets, 15th and 16th streets, and 19th and 21st streets serve as important north/south pairs.

The other major factor influencing which streets serve a primary function is the closure or discontinuity of some streets due to circulation infrastructure or development. The key elements in the infrastructure category include I-5, which



Primary paired streets play a critical circulation function for the Central City that influences urban form and function

## **B: Urban Design Framework Concepts**

creates a major disconnect between the Central City and the Sacramento Riverfront (including Old Sacramento and the Docks Area), the Railyards, and rail lines that create a major barrier between the historic downtown and the City's largest redevelopment area.

In the development category, a number of developments over the years have consolidated blocks and closed streets that in turn affect the street hierarchy and its function, including:

- Cal Pers Lincoln Plaza (4th Street abandoned between P and Q streets)
- Cal Pers Expansions (4th Street abandoned with limited auto use between P and Q streets)
- Capitol Towers/Villas (O Street abandoned between 5th and 7th streets)
- John Moss Federal Building (6th Street abandoned between Capitol Mall and N Street)
- Sacramento Bee (22nd Street abandoned between Q and R streets)
- Chinatown (4th Street abandoned between I and J streets)
- Downtown Plaza (4th and 6th streets abandoned between I and J streets, and K Street between 3rd and 7th streets)
- Convention Center (K Street between 13th and 15th streets, and 14th Street between I and J streets).

Key streets that play a primary function in the downtown in spite of these discontinuities include Capitol Mall, 5th Street, 7th Street, and 12th Street.

As important routes into and through the downtown, primary streets tend to carry large volumes of traffic and attract businesses seeking visibility to that traffic. The urban design challenge is to balance their function as important traffic arterials with their role in the urban fabric, and not allow them to be high-speed, automobile-dominated corridors that create barriers to a safe, convenient, and attractive pedestrian and bicycle environment.

### **Primary Streets Urban Design Recommendations**

1. Design key primary streets so that they effectively accommodate high traffic volumes without creating barriers to a safe, convenient, and attractive pedestrian and bicycle environment.
2. Protect the integrity of the Central City grid of streets. Prohibit closure of existing streets and encourage the extension of the grid pattern to surrounding redevelopment areas (i.e., Docks, Railyards, and River District).
3. Pursue initiatives to re-connect discontinuities in the street system such as the re-connection of east-west streets with the riverfront by decking of I-5 and the re-connection of the Railyards/River District via Railyards street network, and north-south streets such as 5th, 6th, 7th, and 10th streets.

**B: Urban Design Framework Concepts**

**4. Transit Streets and Transit-Oriented Development**

The introduction of light rail has added an important framework element around which the Central City can grow and re-structure. The light rail lines and their station areas provide significant opportunities for locating higher density, transit-oriented development (TOD) that promotes transit use and walkable neighborhoods. To date the light rail system has focused on bringing people into the downtown from surrounding suburban areas, and the City is only beginning to realize the potential benefit of this resource as a magnet for development.

In the historic downtown, 7th, 8th, 12th, K and R streets all offer opportunities for infill and redevelopment that is sensitively inserted into existing neighborhoods. The Sacramento Valley Station area is a prime location for high density transit-oriented development, and the zoning along the R Street corridor was amended specifically to allow more height around LRT stations to encourage higher density development. In the outlying redevelopment districts the 12th Street corridor and the proposed DNA line along 7th Street and Richards Boulevard represent major opportunities to concentrate larger scale residential, employment, and mixed use development within convenient walking distance (e.g., a ¼ mile radius) of light rail stations.

In addition to transit-oriented development, the character of transit streets in the Central City is determined by the presence and position of transit vehicles, and the facilities that support transit users in both the vehicular and pedestrian realms. At present, the match between light rail facilities and City objectives for the public realm is not always

harmonious. For example, the high-boarding trains used by the Sacramento Regional Transit District (RT) currently require raised platforms and ramps on the sidewalk and in the street that complicate circulation and accessibility, although RT is looking to transition to low-boarding trains over time.

RT transit furniture such as shelters, trash receptacles, maps and schedules, etc. are an important part of the pedestrian realm, but do not always convey the character or quality envisioned for the downtown. The City needs to be more proactive in working with RT to articulate its design objectives for transit streets.

**Transit Street Urban Design Recommendations**

1. A concerted effort should be made to locate higher density transit-oriented development within 1/4 mile of transit stations.
2. The City should work with RT to develop:
  - a Best Practices Manual for transit design that promotes accessibility and pedestrian use on transit streets
  - a coordinated street design review process and specifications for transit facilities that are consistent with these Urban Design Guidelines
  - an inter-agency Transit Task Force to coordinate technical and operational matters.
3. The City should continue to encourage RT to transition the light rail fleet to low-boarding trains that eliminate the need for raised platforms, and to shorter trains (on shorter headways) that better fit Sacramento’s block size.



Cathedral Square



12th Street



K Street

**B: Urban Design Framework Concepts****5. A Pedestrian- and Bicycle-Friendly Central City**

To reduce automobile dependence, it is critical to provide comfortable, convenient choices. Transit is one option, but walking and bicycling are also important options. A vibrant and vital downtown can only exist with a lively street life. Of course, the streets that must accommodate pedestrians and bicyclists are the same that need to accommodate transit and motor vehicles. Thus, the key is to design public street rights-of-way that balance the needs of each of these modes.

On a block by block level this means structuring the street right-of-way to include wide sidewalks, bulb-outs at intersections, safe cross-walks, bicycle lanes and other traffic-calming techniques that support pedestrian and bicycle safety. It also means designing the pedestrian realm to include street furniture, pedestrian-scaled lighting, landscaping, and quality paving that create an attractive setting that conveys the community's commitment to a walkable and bikeable Central City. Establishing connected routes with nighttime pedestrian lighting is one way to promote a lively pedestrian environment while also supporting cultural and entertainment activities in the Central City.

As with transit, to truly support walking and bicycling it will be important to design certain corridors with special features that identify them as primary pedestrian or bicycle streets. Such streets may include features such as a reduced number of vehicle lanes, wide greenways with tree-lined trails, pedestrian trail lighting, and public art that will enhance their use by pedestrians and bicyclists. Similar to the light rail that connects the Central City to the outlying suburban neighborhoods, the concept for the pedestrian and bicycle streets is to connect the Central City to its open space perimeter along the two rivers where people can enjoy a vehicle-free environment.

Given their even distribution and low traffic volumes, the alleys in the Central City also represent a unique opportunity, which was identified in the 1987 Urban Design Plan, to create a network of pedestrian and bicycle friendly routes using the alleys. While alleys will be used for service traffic and parking structure access, they also should be designed

to accommodate pedestrian-oriented uses and discourage vehicular through traffic. Installing lighting, adding pedestrian amenities, screening trash and service areas allowing uses to face onto alleys, and introducing mid-block pedestrian crossings at alleys are all actions that should be considered to enhance their use by pedestrians and bicyclists.

In addition to accommodating pedestrians, bicycles, and transit, another strategy for reducing automobile dependence is to encourage taxi and pedicab service in the Central City. The availability of these services will help reduce the need for automobile ownership by Central City residents and reduce traffic associated with tourists to the area. Additionally, taxis and pedicabs can become iconic elements that positively contribute to the Central City's identity, such as London's black taxis and San Diego's pedicabs.



Bicycle lanes are appropriate for bicycle priority streets.



Wide sidewalks and outdoor seating encourage pedestrian activity.

## B: Urban Design Framework Concepts

### Pedestrian and Bicycle Street Urban Design Recommendations

1. To support walking and bicycling, specific street corridors within the Central City should be designated and designed with special features that identify them as primary pedestrian or bicycle routes.
2. To promote a clear and conscious connection to the riverfront, designate streets that will serve as prime circulators for pedestrians and bicyclists to move from Central City neighborhoods to the riverfront open space and trail system.
3. While alleys will be used for service traffic and parking structure access, they also should be designed to accommodate pedestrian and bicycle use and discourage through traffic.
4. Design features on alleys may include pedestrian scale lighting, enhanced paving, street furniture, screening of trash and service areas, mid-block (i.e., alley to alley) pedestrian crossings, and uses that front onto the alley.
5. The City of Sacramento and Regional Transit should coordinate to eliminate barriers to pedestrian accessibility at transit stations.
6. To promote alternative ways of moving around within the Central City, the City should consider the introduction of 'thematic' visitor-friendly designs for taxis and pedicabs.



A new and colorful form of transportation in the central city, pedicabs signal a desire for more sustainable transportation options to support downtown living & activity.



Bicycle racks



**B: Urban Design Framework Concepts****6. A Healthy Urban Forest**

Preserving and enhancing the heritage of Sacramento's splendid canopy of street trees is a critically important goal of the City. Sacramento's identity as "the City of Trees" is based on its long history of tree planting and advocacy, but it is not a static condition. The urban forest's 150-year history means that a large proportion of the City's trees are mature and declining. In addition, changes in the Central City to more urban development patterns, including increased building heights, reduced building setbacks and increased number of utility vaults, means that trees are experiencing increased pressures for space for tree canopies and root zones. As a result, strategies for maintaining, enhancing and expanding the urban forest, selecting compatible species and promoting design that provides appropriate root zone protection and setbacks for tree canopies are all important elements of these guidelines. The opportunity, however, is much greater.

Just as good urban design is not just about constructing nice buildings, good urban forestry is not just about planting and trimming trees. The urban forest needs to be considered much more strategically as a contributor to the form, character and identity of the Central City and its diverse neighborhoods. Sacramentans have long taken pride in their urban forest, their tree-lined streets, and the distinction of living in the "City of Trees." In addition to the obvious aesthetic benefits and enhanced identity provided by trees, studies indicate that mature trees can also add as much as 7-10% to homeowners property values. Research has also indicated that tree planting can have diverse additional benefits such as increased consumer spending, lower crime rates, and enhanced road safety.

The urban forest also has the potential to fulfill a significant function as part of the City's 'green' infrastructure, and in addressing the City's sustainability goals. The urban forest has a role in the City's strategy for meeting requirements of AB32 to reduce carbon generation. Trees, like all vegetation, absorb carbon dioxide (one of the principal greenhouse gases), but perhaps more significantly trees can reduce energy use for both heating and cooling. In the winter, trees help reduce heat loss from buildings by sheltering them from wind. In the summer, the shade they provide has been shown to reduce local air conditioning costs by



Residential district with mature tree canopy

20-57%. Trees also provide important hydrological effects, including reducing rate and volume of stormwater runoff, and improving water quality by intercepting pollutants and reducing erosion. Trees also help improve air quality by removing pollutants such as ozone, nitrogen, and particulate matter from the atmosphere.

## B: Urban Design Framework Concepts

### Urban Forest Urban Design Recommendations

1. A primary objective of the City shall be to preserve and enhance Sacramento's urban forest.
2. Ensuring the health of the urban forest requires implementation of guidelines for selection of species, protection of root zones and tree canopies, and replacement and revitalization.
3. The urban forest needs to be considered strategically as a design element that significantly contributes to the form, character and identity of the Central City, as well as to the social and economic well-being of the Central City.
4. The role of the urban forest in addressing the City's sustainability goals and as part of the City's "green" infrastructure needs to be fully explored and implemented for its potential benefits to energy reduction and air and water quality enhancement.
5. Street tree planting programs should be implemented to maximize shade coverage of streets throughout the Central City.



The mature tree canopy contributes to the character of the Midtown commercial district

**B: Urban Design Framework Concepts**

**7. Distinctive Neighborhoods & Districts**

The richness and vitality of a city is reflected in the diversity of its neighborhoods. The Central City includes a variety of distinct neighborhoods whose unique character and qualities need to be preserved even as new infill and redevelopment occur. With as much new brownfield development as is proposed for the Railyards, River District, and Docks Area, it is equally important that new neighborhoods be planned and built that have real diversity in form, character, and uses, and not anonymous master planned projects. It is critical that as the Central City expands through redevelopment, that it not lose those qualities which make it so attractive—legible, well-structured neighborhoods; distinctive civic buildings; varied architecture; lush tree-lined streets; and attractive residential districts.

The principal strategy for ensuring the quality and distinctiveness of the various neighborhoods and districts is to emphasize quality design of individual buildings and of the public realm. The design of individual buildings and spaces should respond to the physical, historical and cultural context in order to enhance and reinforce the identity of existing neighborhoods. New development should also utilize high quality, durable materials that convey a sense of quality and permanence. Similarly, the design of streets and parks that form the public realm can establish or enhance a district’s identity through the consistent use of distinctive street trees, landscaping, street lighting, paving, signage, and street furniture.



Old Sacramento’s historic district includes a concentration of 19th century commercial buildings.



Chinatown introduces Asian styling to its buildings.



Midtown mixes historic rehabs with contemporary loft living and mixed use.

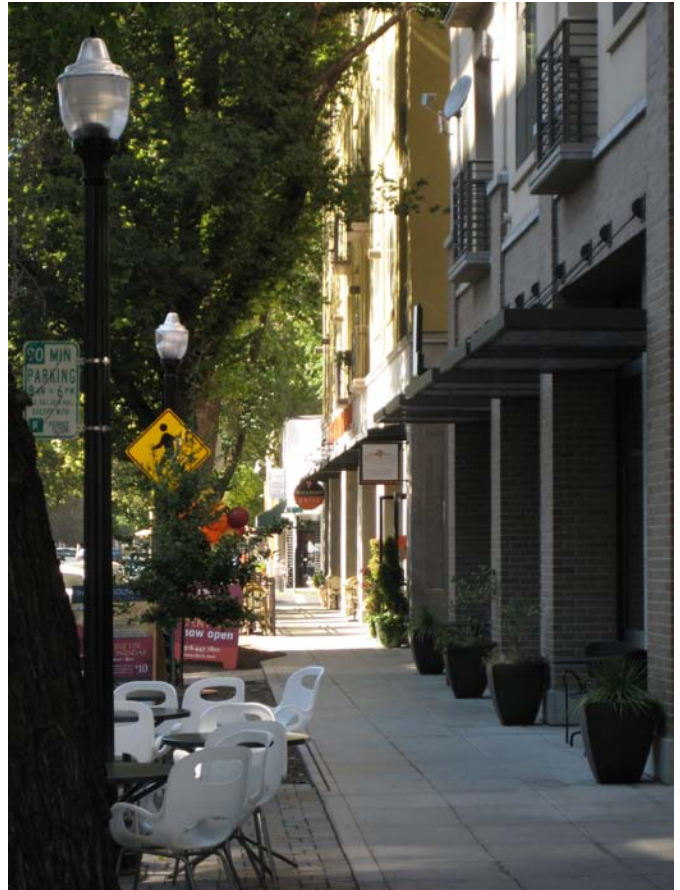


Boulevard Park neighborhood in Midtown has a diversity of buildings that contribute to its historic character.

**B: Urban Design Framework Concepts**

**Distinctive Neighborhoods & Districts Urban Design Recommendations**

1. The City shall promote high quality design of the public realm that unifies and distinguishes individual neighborhoods through the use of landscaping, paving, lighting, and signage.
2. To ensure the creation of attractive new neighborhoods in redevelopment areas such as the Docks, Railyards, and River District, it is critical that neighborhoods be well-designed, and include distinctive civic buildings and spaces, varied architecture, lush tree-lined streets, and attractive residential districts.
3. New infill development and redevelopment should contribute to and reinforce those positive qualities and characteristics that give an established district or neighborhood its own unique identity.
4. Private development shall be required to design buildings and spaces that respond to the physical, historical and cultural context and enhance and reinforce the identity of the existing neighborhood.



18th and L Street mixed-use residential and retail project.



MARRS - 20th Street adaptive reuse project that brings life to the street.



R Street at 25th medium density residential in-fill project.

**B: Urban Design Framework Concepts**

## 8. Preserving Historic Resources

Sacramento’s rich and diverse heritage is reflected in its individually-listed Landmarks and contributing resources in the many Historic Districts throughout the Central City. The preservation of these resources and their character-defining features is an important part of the city’s identity and visual vitality. The contribution of individual Landmarks such as Tower Bridge, Sacramento Memorial Auditorium, the Elks Building, the Sacramento Valley Station (Depot), Cesar Chavez Plaza Park, and Globe Mills, to name a few of the most well-known, as well as the variety of historic districts throughout the Central Core, including those in the downtown such as the Old Sacramento Historic District and Merchants Row Historic District, and residential historic districts such as the Boulevard Park Historic District and the Industrial R Street Historic District, cannot be overstated. The prevalence of these resources throughout the Downtown and Central City provides a rich resource base upon which to build. Historic resources add texture and character to the urban fabric that cannot be replicated by new development. While the design of future developments should honestly reflect their contemporary era, they should also take special care to ensure that their orientation, form and massing respects adjacent historic structures, districts or spaces.



Old City Hall



Merchant National Bank



Cesar Chavez Plaza Fountain



Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament

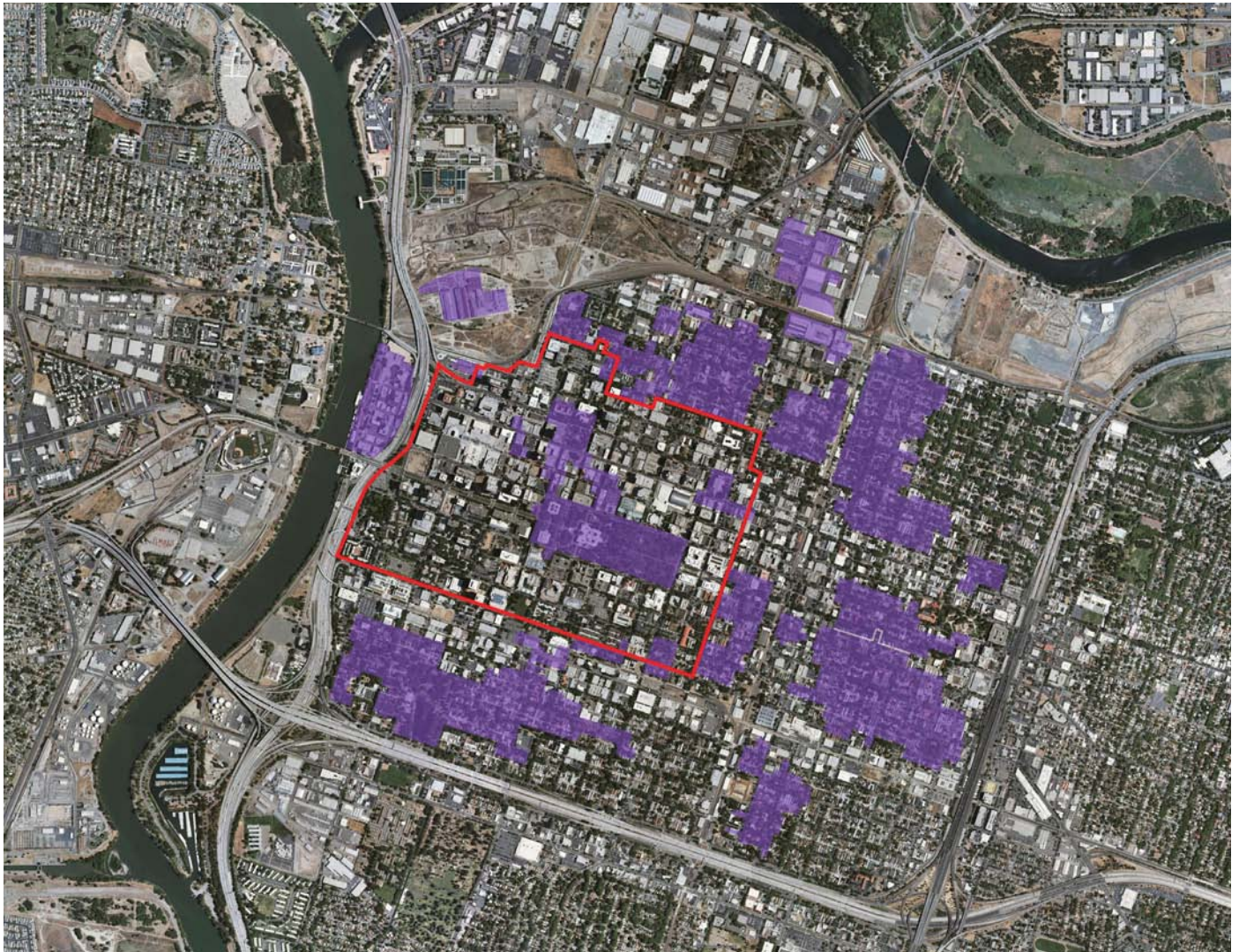


Old Governor’s Mansion

## B: Urban Design Framework Concepts

### Historic Resource Urban Design Recommendations

1. The Central City's historic resources, whether distinctive individual buildings or districts, are a rich resource that gives texture and character to the urban fabric. The City's Historic Preservation Program helps to ensure that these properties are preserved, restored, and reused to reflect Sacramento's unique sense of place.
2. New development should be responsive to historic resources. New development should take special care to ensure that the scale, form and materials used relate positively to adjacent historic buildings.
3. Historic streetscape elements, such as granite curbs, hollow sidewalks and glass block lights, street lights, railroad tracks, and horse rings, are important features that reflect the Central City's rich heritage and should be retained and, as feasible, incorporated into the design of the public realm.



Historic Districts in the Central City

**B: Urban Design Framework Concepts**

## 9. Parks and Open Space

Increasing the residential population in the Central City requires a strategy for addressing the increased need for public parks and open space. The Central City has a considerable inventory of existing or planned public parks and open space, but facilities such as the State-owned Capitol Park and Capitol Mall do not necessarily match up with the recreation needs of a residential population. Similarly facilities such as the River Promenade and proposed Robert Matsui Park will provide attractive recreation opportunities, but are not conveniently accessible to downtown populations. The American River Parkway is another great asset to the City of Sacramento and the region. The River District has great geographic proximity to the river and new connections are planned to bring Central City residents, workers, and visitors to the river. The River District Specific Plan intends to provide such a direct line to the Parkway with new bikeways and pedestrian connections to the recently completed Two-Rivers Trail that traces the top of the south levee.

The high cost and relative scarcity of land in the historic downtown will continue to present a barrier to large-scale development of active parkland in the heart of the Central City. The City must explore new ways of acquiring and developing open space, connecting urban populations to dispersed open space resources, and leveraging under-utilized public lands. A combination of approaches should be employed to meet the needs of future residents. The Department of Parks and Recreation is leading an effort to develop policies for the creation of small parks and urban plazas (Small Public Places) in higher density areas of the City and in park deficient neighborhoods where there are no large undeveloped parcels. These policies will be included in the update of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan 2005-2010, and are already reflected in the General Plan 2030.



Cesar Chavez Park and other existing parks provide a rich open space network on which to build



Improving access to riverfront resources such as Miller Park will help address future recreation needs

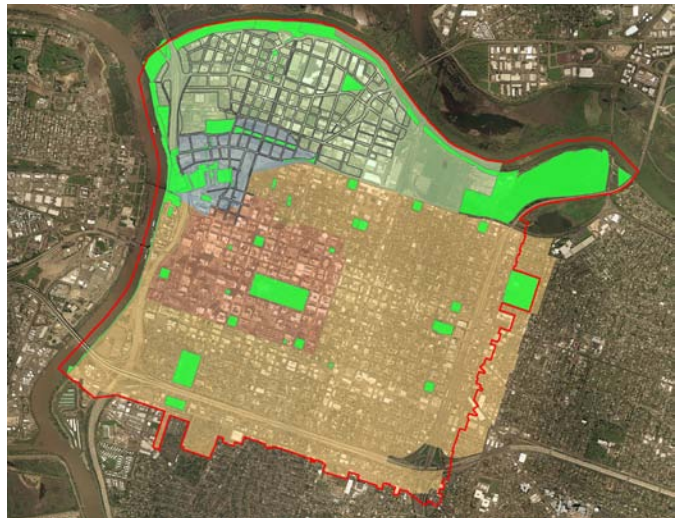
**B: Urban Design Framework Concepts**

**Parks and Open Space Urban Design Recommendations**

1. In order to serve the residential community projected for the Central City, the City will need to continue to explore several strategies for adding new parks, enhancing existing parks, and improving accessibility to open space resources, including:
2. Enhancing existing parks, particularly to accommodate diverse recreation needs;
3. Using public streets as greenways that connect Central City neighborhoods to the riverfront and other major parks;
4. Pursuing adoption of policies for Small Public Places in the Central City to help fill park deficiency gaps;
5. Exploring an increase in park development impact fee on new development or establishing an assessment district;
6. Encouraging the provision of private open space and recreation facilities in high density residential projects, mixed use projects and employment centers in the vicinity of transit corridors to meet a portion of open space and recreation needs of residents, employees and visitors that will be generated by that development;
7. Developing parks, trails, and other recreational amenities in a manner that is consistent with flood protection goals. Ensure balance in uses between public spaces and private development along the American and Sacramento River Corridors.



Non-City parks, such as Capitol Park, provide for passive recreation and a dramatic visual amenity



Parks in the Central City



**B: Urban Design Framework Concepts**

### 10. Creating a Complete, Well-served Community

The development of high density residential uses in the Central Core, Railyards, River District and Docks Area will introduce a new dynamic to the Central City. As a predominantly employment-oriented downtown, these areas currently have few of the facilities or services that will be needed to serve a residential population. A new residential population with a wide range of incomes, ages and household types will need schools, parks, community centers, and fire stations. They will also need retail and services that address their daily needs, such as grocery stores, dry cleaners, etc. While it can be assumed that the marketplace will respond to demand for the latter, the public facilities will require advance planning by the City to ensure adequate facilities and distribution are provided. Consistent with the concept of a walkable downtown, public facilities such as parks, schools, and community centers should be located within walking distance of all Central City residents.

#### Complete, Well-Served Community Urban Design Recommendations

1. The City will need to plan for new parks, schools, community centers, fire stations and other public facilities as the residential population in the Central City expands.
2. Public facilities such as parks, schools, and community centers should be located within walking distance of all Central City residents.
3. The City should work with the private sector to ensure that retail and services that address the daily needs of residents (e.g., grocery stores, dry cleaners, etc.) are incorporated into new mixed use developments, and exist within walking distance of all Central City residents.



Schools and daycare facilities will need to be added to serve new residents



The projected residential population will require at least one more grocery store downtown



Adding new parks and community facilities will be important to the quality of downtown neighborhoods

**B: Urban Design Framework Concepts**

## 11. Active Streetscapes and Sidewalk Cafes

The 1987 Downtown Plan recognized the importance of maintaining and creating active streetscapes with cafes and seating. The pedestrian sidewalk experience is to be enhanced by mandating the need for active storefronts on retail and commercial streets, avoidance of blank walls and exposed parking garages. This is especially important in Central Core and other intensive land use areas where large parking garages and service areas frequently compromise the quality and continuity of the pedestrian sidewalk experience. The guidelines mandate that above-grade structured parking garages be screened from the street with liner elements such as residential flats, townhouses, lofts, or retail and commercial space. This guideline shall be a priority for the entire Central City.

In addition, the guidelines define the preferred locations for both building entrances and the preference for using the alleys for garage/service areas. On residential streets the guidelines establish the preference for frequent entrances and define the criteria for such elements as stoops, porches, portals and bay windows.

Sacramento's climate is ideal for outdoor dining, and sidewalk cafes are an excellent way of activating the streetscape and energizing the retail environment by creating an interface that bridges the public and private

realms. Sidewalk cafes, like retail in general, tend to develop a synergy when clustered together. Thus, specific areas have been highlighted for such uses, not to their exclusion elsewhere, but to encourage the creation of dynamic café districts in the downtown. Similarly, guidelines are provided that identify minimum dimensional and performance requirements that ensure that café design is functionally compatible with other public realm needs, such as pedestrian flow requirements.

### Active Streetscapes and Sidewalk Cafes Urban Design Recommendations

1. Ensure that new development actively engages the public realm in terms of their orientation, façade transparency, and design treatments.
2. Ensure that the design of public streetscapes supports active use of the public realm by providing adequate space, appropriate lighting to accommodate safe nighttime use, street tree planting that provides appropriate seasonal microclimate benefits, etc.
3. Promote the use of the Central City's alleys for sidewalk cafes as one strategy for activating the public realm with minimal impact on storefronts and sidewalk capacity.



Providing outdoor areas to sit, eat and talk enhances sidewalk activity and energizes the retail environment



**B: Urban Design Framework Concepts****12. The Retail Environment**

Retail activity is a critical component of maintaining a vibrant and active Central City. It supports the area's employment and residential function, but it also is the component that makes the Central City an interesting and exciting place to be and a destination for visitors. Continuity and diversity are important to the success of the retail environment. Too much dispersion of retail activity or too much duplication in the type of retail will undermine retail viability. It is important therefore to identify priority retail streets and districts, and to require minimum retail frontages to ensure well-defined, identifiable retail zones that establish the retail synergy that energizes the downtown and makes it special.

Retail has traditionally struggled in the Central City due in part to the Central Core's historic focus on office and governmental uses, the limited amount of housing in the Central Core, and the resulting lack of activity outside the 8-to-5 weekday workday. As identified in the 1987 CBD Framework Plan, J and K streets function as the primary retail streets in the Central Core area, complemented by 9th and 10th streets (between I and L streets). K Street, with the Downtown Plaza and K Street Mall, tends to function as a regional retail destination. Otherwise, retail in the Central City has tended to develop linearly along corridors, rather than as districts. In recent years, a significant new entertainment-oriented retail district has emerged in the Midtown area along 16th Street (and J, K, and L streets in the vicinity of 16th). 19th and 20th streets are more-vehicular oriented retail corridors, as are the Broadway and Alhambra corridors. In addition to being more automobile-oriented in their design character, the retail in all three areas tend to be more local-serving and include a higher proportion of commercial services. Old Sacramento represents a clear exception to the corridor retail pattern. It is a well-defined district that provides a very specialized range of retail and entertainment geared primarily to tourism. As it builds out, the Railyards will also have a significant retail component within the historic Shops District. Future retail in the River District is anticipated to be predominantly neighborhood serving.

Existing Central City retail provides the framework for a vibrant urban experience, but also raises a number of urban

design issues. The success of Midtown entertainment uses and the rise in complaints about noise and traffic raises questions about the design of compatible mixed use buildings and neighborhoods. The 19th/20th Streets, Broadway, and Alhambra corridors raise issues about how to create more pedestrian friendly development patterns that will serve surrounding neighborhoods with less dependence on driving. Old Sacramento raises issues about creating a more broadly based mix of uses that will enhance the vitality of the area. The introduction of a major new retail center in the Railyards presents potential competition for other retail in the Central City, particularly the more regionally oriented retail along K Street. Thus, enhancing the stability and vibrancy of existing retail areas is extremely important to ensuring their long-term viability.

Opportunities should be explored that will better integrate the Downtown Plaza with the surrounding areas and create a more pedestrian-friendly environment, including re-introducing through street connections and creating retail frontages that face onto and activate J and L streets.

A number of mixed use redevelopment projects are in the works which should enhance the vitality of the K Street Mall, but unless more balanced access is provided the Mall may continue to languish as a viable retail area. The current restrictions on vehicular access and the design of the existing LRT facilities create an environment that is not conducive to retail, and the resulting empty storefronts create an undesirable social environment. Opportunities need to be explored for re-introducing low volume, low



Proposed redesign of the Downtown Plaza mall at 5th Street.

## B: Urban Design Framework Concepts

speed automobile traffic to K Street to create the pass-by traffic that “main street” retailers so depend on. In order to do this, it will be important to concurrently find a transit solution that is less disruptive to the function of vehicular circulation. This could include replacing current light rail cars with shorter, at-grade accessible vehicles that would not obstruct intersections or require raised platforms, or it could be replacing light rail service on K Street with new street car service.

### Retail Urban Design Recommendations

1. To support retail viability, identify priority retail streets and districts, and require minimum retail frontages to ensure well-defined, identifiable retail zones with enough substance and diversity to establish the retail synergy needed to be successful.
2. To support retail viability, integrate residential uses into the Central Core area and into new infill projects in identified retail districts.
3. To promote active foot traffic in the retail areas, storefronts should have windows facing the street that provide a high degree of transparency to entice customers in and encourage window shopping.
4. Support a variety of retail, including destination retail that serves the region and local-serving retail within walking distance of each neighborhood.
5. The current inward orientation of the Westfield Downtown Plaza is at odds with the vision for an interconnected, walkable downtown. This pattern of development should not be permitted elsewhere in the Central City. In the long term, the recommendation for the Downtown Plaza is to reinstitute through streets and re-orient retail uses to face both internal and external streets.
6. In order to further advance the revitalization of the K Street Mall as a vibrant mixed use retail street, low-volume, low speed automobile traffic should be re-introduced to K Street.
7. In order to re-introduce automobiles to K Street, transit solutions that are less disruptive to the function of the street for cars and pedestrians (e.g., at-grade accessible light rail vehicles, shorter rail cars, and/or replace light rail with street car service) should be implemented.



It is important to support existing retail streets such as J Street



Existing mixed uses along Broadway

**B: Urban Design Framework Concepts****13. A Well-defined Public Realm**

Sacramento's public realm consists of its streets and public places, squares, parks, courts and alleys. These in turn are defined by the buildings that surround them and the "street-walls" that the buildings collectively create. The street-wall is the line of buildings along a street edge that establishes the predominant definition of the public space. Street-wall character is primarily concerned with providing guidance for how buildings should interface with the sidewalk, and the quality of the enclosure they provide to the street and other public spaces. The placement, scale and design quality of the building's street-wall determines the nature and character of the streetscape and reinforces desired pedestrian or broader public realm objectives. Generally, a consistent street-wall contributes to a clearer public realm identity and a more comfortable pedestrian experience. Two critical issues related to street-wall character are placement and height. The responses to both will vary with the specific neighborhood context. The street-wall is generally located at the edge of the public right-of-way (typically the back edge of the public sidewalk) in higher density commercial zones such as the Central Core and along key urban corridors such as 16th, J, K, and R streets. Buildings tend to be setback a specific distance from the right-of-way in lower density residential districts, such as Alkali Flat or Boulevard Park, in order to enhance privacy or maintain the tree canopy, for example.

The older historic commercial buildings in the Central Core generally maximize utilization of street frontage and site coverage to create well-defined street walls and visually accessible ground floor uses. This is less true along the corridors, where development patterns are more mixed and surface parking lots are more typical. Buildings that do not hold the street wall, in order to accommodate the automobile (parking, driveways, etc.) or in pursuit of architectural distinctiveness, detract from the definition and quality of the public realm. Adhering to guidelines for setbacks and build-to-lines, even as architectural fashions and technical innovations come and go, will maintain the continuity of the street-wall and ensure the character and stability of the public realm over time. A build-to-line can be

at the right-of-way line or setback from it. The build-to-line requires that a specific percentage of the building frontage be built to that line, depending on the type of street and neighborhood.

The height of the street-wall at the setback or build-to-line is also an important element in shaping the character of the public realm. In combination with the width of the public street right-of-way, it is a primary factor in giving scale to the public realm and ensuring a comfortable human-scaled street enclosure. In the more urban areas such as the Central Core, the street-wall height of the major historic buildings is typically 60 feet. This has established the predominant height of buildings subsequently developed and the height above which step-backs or some other architectural treatments are required to preserve a consistent scale. Above the 85-foot height, bulk controls will take affect defining the massing and configuration of towers. In the more residentially-oriented Central City neighborhoods, the street-wall height at the front setback is typically 25 to 35 feet, establishing a more intimate scale than in the Central City's more urban areas.



The streets surrounding Cesar Chavez Plaza are built up with consistent street walls and zero setbacks that are appropriate for this downtown location.

## **B: Urban Design Framework Concepts**

### **Well-defined Public Realm Urban Design Recommendations**

1. In order to maintain the continuity and consistency of the street-wall on individual blocks, and ensure the character and stability of the public realm over time, guidelines for consistent setbacks and build-to lines must be established and enforced.
2. In order to support a pedestrian-oriented public realm, retail and commercial streets should be framed by buildings uniformly placed at the sidewalk with no setback. In other areas that are more residential or institutional in character, street-wall setbacks should reflect the predominant historic development pattern.
3. Breaks in the street walls within a development block or site, should employ plantings, walls, archways, fences, or other features to maintain the spatial definition of the street edge.
4. The height of the street-wall at the setback or build-to line is also an important element in shaping the character of the public realm. Buildings which are taller than the preferred street wall height in their particular neighborhood should be stepped back, or articulated at the top of the street wall, in such a way as to ensure the visual primacy of the street wall.

C: The Context

# C. The Context

The physical form and identity of the Central City is the product of many factors, including not only physical design, but also factors such as climate, topography, cultural history, and regulatory environment. The character of the Central City as it exists today reflects the particular way many factors have come together throughout the city's history to influence the area's urban form and character. In effect, these factors represent the building blocks, or "DNA", that underlie the Central City's urban form, and together provide a context and conceptual framework for future urban design decisions. The unique way in which these various factors influence and affect each other gives the Central City its unique character, distinguishing it from other parts of Sacramento and from other city centers. In order to maintain and enhance the Central City as a unique and distinctive place to live, work, and visit, future urban design decisions need to be informed by and responsive to those factors that originally shaped it. This section outlines the vision for the Central City; the physical, cultural, and regulatory context that will influence future development; and key urban design concepts that will guide that development.

## 1. Physical and Historic Context

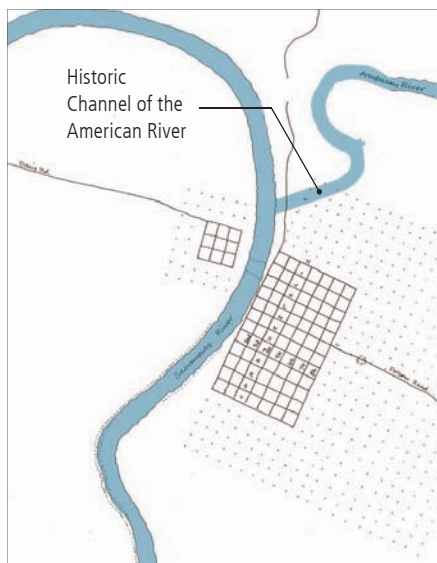
Sacramento's Central City, which is roughly 2.5 miles square, extends from the Sacramento River east to approximately 33rd Street to include the Alhambra Boulevard corridor, and from the American River south to include the Broadway corridor. Altogether, the Central City area includes approximately 4,395 acres.

### Natural Landscape

Historically, Sacramento's landscape has played a significant role in shaping the Central City's urban form, and continues today to influence its character.

Sacramento emerged at the confluence of the Sacramento and American rivers—with first settlements possibly as early as 14,000 B.C., starting with the Nisenan people who inhabited the area thousands of years before European exploration. In the 19th century, the seeds of today's downtown were planted on the Sacramento River because the river provided an important inland port for the Central Valley. Early development of the Central City started with shipping and commerce at the Sacramento River's banks and gradually extended inland. It was only later with the introduction of rail lines, levees, and freeways that the City began to turn its back on the river.

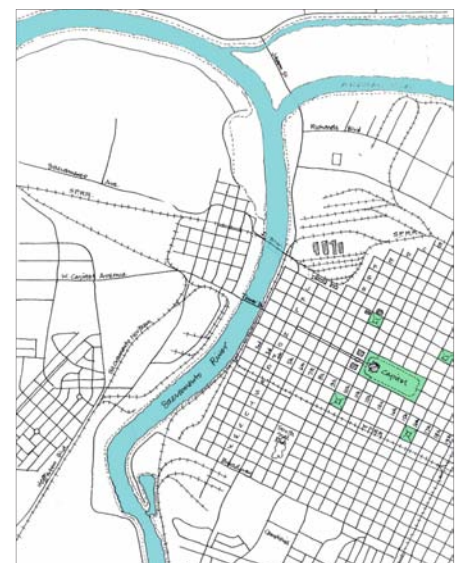
### Sacramento Central City's Historical Development



1850



1900



1960

**C: The Context**

The Central City's location at the confluence of the Sacramento and American Rivers has several implications for its form and character. The two rivers now create permanent, well-defined physical boundaries for the Central City to the north and west. The natural, riparian corridors establish physical breaks in the pattern of development that provide visual contrast and relief to urban development and serve as important aesthetic and recreational elements within the urban pattern.

The rivers also serve as barriers that influence the form and function of the Central City. The high cost and environmental issues associated with bridging the rivers results in the Central City having a limited number of access points from the north and west. Thus, the bridges and street corridors that provide access across the rivers become significant gateways to and from the area. In addition, the levees that have been built to protect the Central City from flooding form vertical walls that impede visual and physical access to the rivers.

Located on a broad river plain, the Central City has little topographic variation. Poverty Ridge, at 22nd Street between S and W Streets, is one of the highest natural elevations in the downtown, at 43', while filled areas on the north edge of the Railyards have elevations of 35 to 38 feet. The average elevation in the Central City is approximately 25 feet above sea level. The flatness of the landscape creates a striking visual contrast with the urban silhouette of downtown high-rises. This is particularly true of the view of Sacramento as one approaches from the west and north, with the downtown skyline becoming visible miles before one enters the city limits. The openness of the landscape setting also allows for distant views east to the foothills and snow-capped Sierra Nevadas and north, south, and west to the surrounding river valley and agricultural lands.



As evident in this view from southbound I-5, Sacramento's skyline is accentuated by the flatness of the terrain.



Sacramento grew up on the banks of the river as an inland port, shown in this 1849 view of the city from the east.



By 1857, Sacramento's street grid was well established, and J Street was an important route from the port to the gold fields.



By the early 1900's K Street was already established as a burgeoning commercial corridor.



Sacramento's 1906 skyline was dominated by the spires of the Capitol Building and Cathedral.



C: The Context

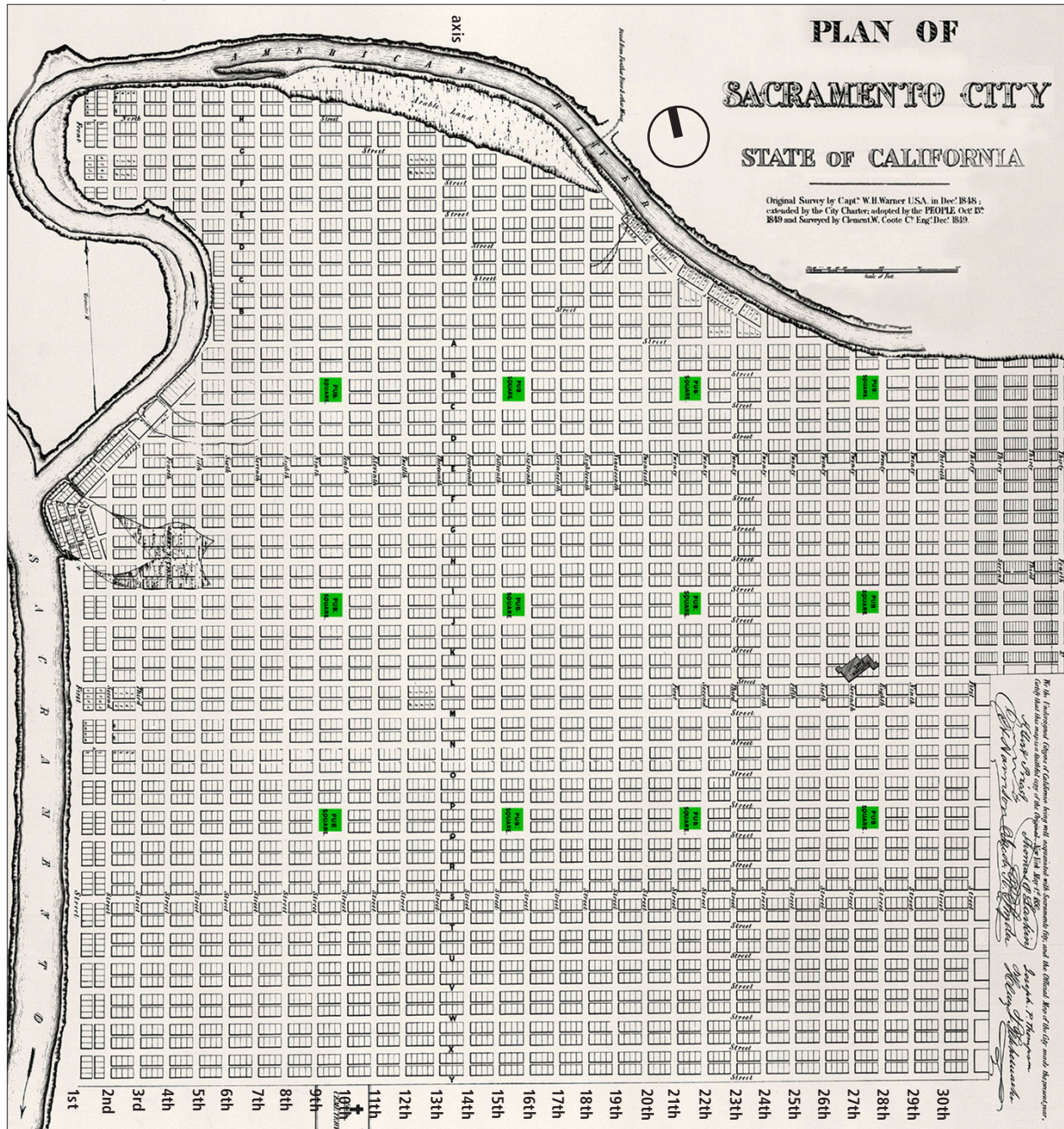
The Sutter Plan

Although John Sutter founded his fort here in 1839, the form of today's Central City was established in 1849 when John Sutter, Jr. had an official plan for the city prepared and a city charter was adopted. The original city platting established the rectilinear grid of streets that now forms majority of the Central City street system south of the Union Pacific

Rail Road (UPRR) mainline, including the east/west-oriented lettered streets North B through Y (now Broadway), and the north/south-oriented numbered cross-streets First through Thirty-Fourth.

Sutter's grid plan is organized around a regular pattern of blocks and streets that have an underlying set of dimensions. Each typical block measures 320' x 340' (The exception to

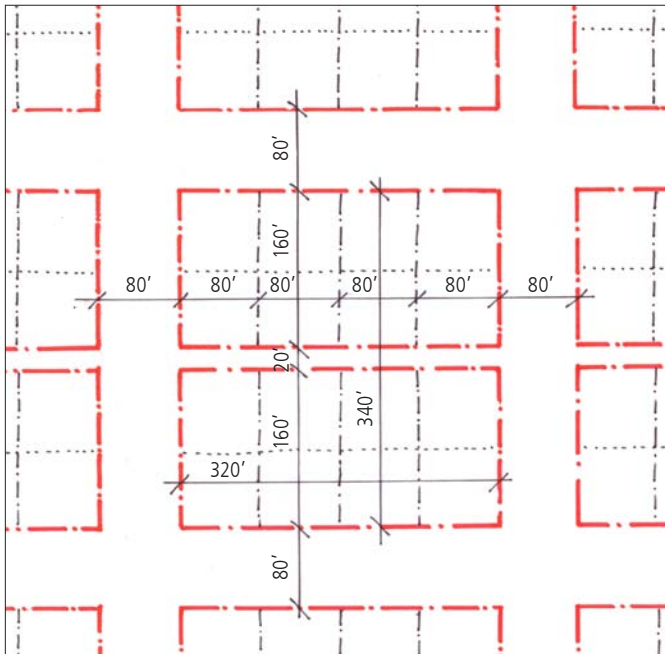
Sacramento Plan, 1848



## C: The Context

this pattern occurs in the blocks between 12th and 13th streets, which are 400' x 340'.) and is subdivided by a 20-foot wide alley, running east west. Each typical half block is subdivided into 4 equal parcels measuring 80' wide x 160' deep and in some cases 8 parcels 40' wide x 160' deep. Street right-of-ways within the historic grid are 80' wide, except for the former M Street, now Capitol Mall, which is 120 feet wide, and Capitol Avenue which is 90 feet wide. Sutter's plan also includes a series of 12 "public squares" or parks, each of which occupies a full city block, and are evenly distributed at seven-block intervals between 9th and 10th Streets, 15th and 16th Streets, 21st and 22nd Streets, and 27th and 28th Streets.

### Sutter's grid



Typical blocks measure 320' x 340' and are subdivided by 20' wide alleys that run east-west. Exceptions include the blocks between 12th and 13th Streets which are 400' long and Capitol Avenue which is 100' wide.

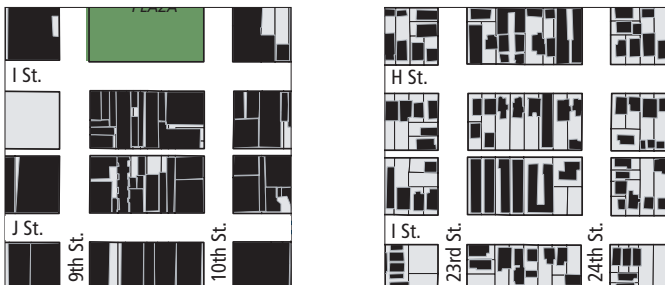


Figure 1 ground plans of typical blocks (areas in black show the extent of building footprints)

The only significant differences between the layout of today's Central City and the original platting are:

1. the Railyards and River District areas (i.e., the area north of the originally platted North C Street) did not build out as platted due to flooding problems;
2. in 1860, a 10-block area of the grid was reconfigured to build the State Capitol building and Capitol Park;
3. certain railroad right-of-ways were developed;
4. three of the platted public squares (J Street and 15th, J Street and 21st, and P Street and 21st) have been developed, rather than preserved as parks;
5. some blocks have been consolidated by development, including the Westfield Downtown Plaza, Capitol Towers, the Convention Center, East End, and Cal PERS; and
6. in the 1960s, new freeways (I-5, US 50, Business 80) were developed.

The development of the Capitol complex introduced the Capitol Mall, which now forms the Central Core's major east/west axis, extending from the Tower Bridge to the Capitol building.

Unlike many western cities whose streets respond to the north-south/east-west orientation of the United States Geological Survey's township and section lines, the city's original street grid was oriented to the Sacramento River in recognition of the importance of the riverfront to the new city. As a result, the north-south (i.e., numbered) streets are aligned 18.5 degrees east of true polar north.

With the discovery of gold in 1849, Sacramento quickly became a transportation hub for prospectors and supplies on their way to the gold fields in the Sierra foothills. Early drawings show First (or Front Street) as a bustling embarcadero paralleling the riverfront with buildings on the east side of First Street facing out onto a waterfront lined with docks and ships. All of the lettered streets extended down to the waterfront without interruption. In addition to developing along the waterfront, the City's earliest businesses established along J Street, which was the main route from the river to the gold fields.

## C: The Context

### The Railroad

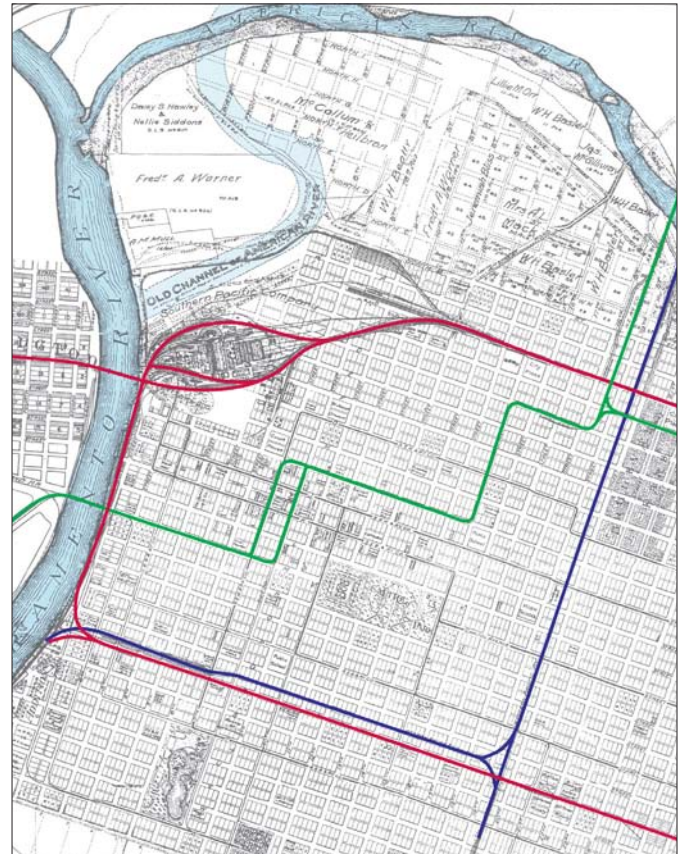
Although water transport helped establish the city, rail transportation soon became a more significant element in the city's growth. In 1856, Sacramento became the first California city to have a railroad with the establishment of the Sacramento Valley Railroad which ran from the waterfront east along R Street, and roughly parallel to what is now Folsom Boulevard, to Folsom. In 1869, Sacramento became the western terminus of the nation's first transcontinental railroad. From that date the city became a major railroad town with the associated infrastructure and large scale works for building locomotives and equipment.

The original Central Pacific Railroad ran parallel to the alignment of B Street and left the city to the northeast. The Southern Pacific Railroad (which became a holding company for the Central Pacific) located its railyards atop the filled American River slough, adjacent to the Sacramento River where passengers and goods could transfer to riverboats to San Francisco. When the line was first extended to serve the Bay Area, it went along R Street via Lathrop and the Altamont Pass. Later, a more direct line via Davis and Martinez was extended across the Sacramento River by means of the first wooden 'I' Street bridge. The Southern Pacific Railroad's Sacramento Station, located at 4th and I Streets, was rebuilt in 1926, reinforcing this alignment.

Other railroads entered the city over time. The main competitor to Southern Pacific was the Western Pacific, whose transcontinental tracks traversed the Sierras via the Feather River and entered the City from the north, continuing south to Stockton and the Bay Area. Western Pacific built their north/south tracks between 19th and 20th Streets and a passenger depot at J Street, with a spur out to the waterfront along the alley between Q and R Streets. Part of this latter right-of-way is now used by the Regional Transit (RT) light rail line.

The Sacramento Northern Railroad was the third player in Sacramento. Its high-speed inter-urban electric trains from Oakland entered the city across Tower Bridge traveling on city streets before continuing north to Chico across the American River between 18th and 19th Streets. The Sacramento Southern short line ran along the top of the levee from Old Sacramento to Isleton and is the line of the present

Railroads, 1913



— Southern Pacific      — Western Pacific      — Sacramento Northern

day tourist railroad from Old Sacramento's State Railroad Museum.

In addition to these heavy rail facilities, Central California Traction ran inter-urban service from Sacramento to Stockton via 8<sup>th</sup> Street, X Street, 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, Stockton Boulevard, and 21<sup>st</sup> Avenue. Sacramento's extensive street car network provided convenient transit connections that facilitated the development of the new suburban neighborhoods to the east and south.

While a boon to the city's growth, the introduction of rail traffic and infrastructure has affected the form and character of the Central City in a number of ways, including: increased industrialization of the waterfront, discontinuity in the platted pattern of streets and blocks, and resulting conflicts with all circulation modes, but particularly pedestrians and bicyclists. As part of its planning for the Riverfront and the Railyards areas, the City has been working to overcome the physical barriers that rail alignments have created within the Central City.

**C: The Context**

**Flood Control Improvements and Realignment of the American River**

An important element in Sacramento’s evolution was the aftermath of major flooding in 1850 and 1852. This led to the construction of levees along both sides of the Sacramento and American Rivers and a 13-year process between 1864 and 1877 to raise the city street grid by 10 feet to prevent further inundations. The area raised was roughly bordered by H and L streets at the north and south, and extended from the river on Front Street to about 12th Street at the east.

To raise the level of the streets, the city built 10-foot-high brick walls on either side of the existing roads and then filled the space in between the walls with dirt. This created a gap between the existing buildings and the new, higher street, and also effectively transformed the original ground floors into basements, and second floors into new first floors for some buildings; others were raised to the new street level.

Bridging the gap between the building and the raised street was left to business owners to resolve. Typically new sidewalks were constructed that bridged, but did not fill, the opening between the street and the storefront. The results are the hollow sidewalks, many of which remain, in downtown and are now fondly referred to as Sacramento’s “underground”. It is still possible to see vestiges of the original street grade by traveling the path of the alleys which rise and fall as they cross the city fabric.

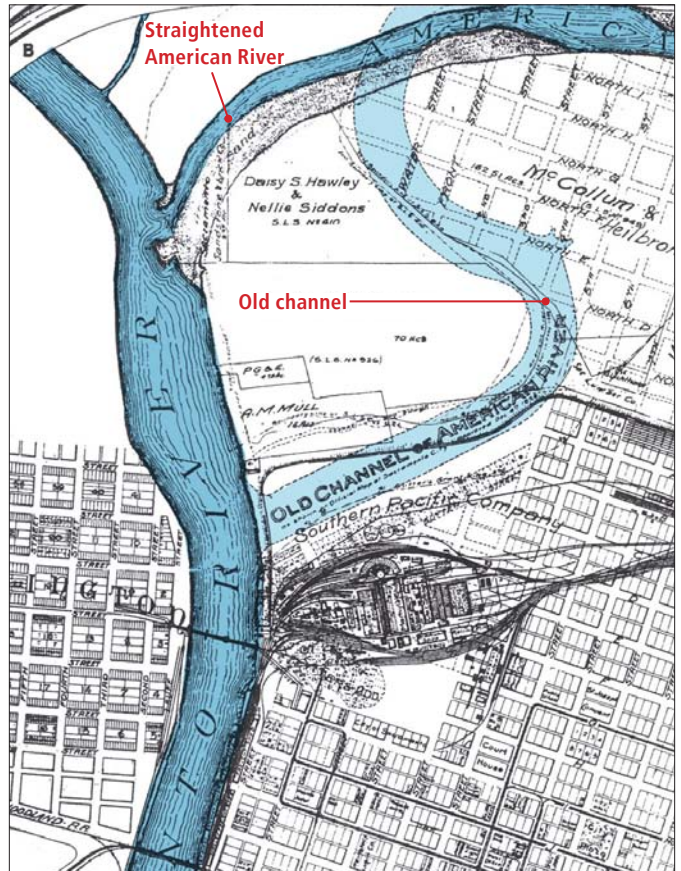
Between 1864 and 1868, in an attempt to create faster flows that might scour out mining debris and reduce flooding, Sacramento officials straightened the last two miles of the American River, and in the process moved the confluence with the Sacramento River about a mile upstream of its old location. The previous estuary was filled to accommodate development of the Southern Pacific railyards and create new developable land.

**Flood Damage**



Flood damage in 1861 along K Street near Front Street

**Realignment of the American River**



Between 1864-68, Sacramento officials straightened the last two miles of the American River in an attempt to reduce flooding, and filled the old channel.

## C: The Context

### Highways and Freeways

Before freeways were constructed, Sacramento's Central City was accessible by surface highways that fed into its street grid. The main transcontinental highway from the west, Highway 40, crossed the Sacramento River via the historic Tower Bridge on axis with the Capitol and continued east via Folsom Boulevard. The landmark Tower Bridge replaced the utilitarian M Street swing-bridge in 1932. The main north/south route, Highway 160, crossed the American River via N. 12th Street and continued south via Freeport Boulevard.

Starting in the 1960's, Sacramento's physical structure was transformed by the construction of the Interstate freeway system and its intrusion into the fabric of the city. Today, the Central City is physically defined by three major freeway corridors, two north-south corridors and one east-west corridor. The elevated U.S. 50/Business Route 80 slices through Sacramento in an east-west direction, skirting the southern edge of the Central City, and taking out an entire row of blocks between W and X streets. Similarly, the north/south alignment of Business Route 80 demarcates the Central City's eastern boundary, taking out a row of blocks between 29th and 30th Streets. Interstate 5 was even more destructive of the urban fabric of the Central City, cutting a swath between Front and 3rd streets through large parts of Sacramento's historic downtown and what was Chinatown, severing the CBD's connection with parts of downtown, now referred to as Old Sacramento, and the Sacramento River as it elevates above grade to cross the former Southern Pacific tracks and north of that at the American River. South of J Street, it then dips below grade to cut beneath Capitol Mall, rising back up as an elevated freeway to Broadway.

In addition to changing the fabric of the downtown, the introduction of the freeways altered circulation patterns downtown. The location of freeway on- and off-ramps resulted in the conversion of a series of two-way streets into one-way couplets (e.g., P & Q Streets, I & J Streets, 15<sup>th</sup> & 16<sup>th</sup> Streets) that facilitated the higher volumes moving to and from the freeways.

### Damage to Urban Fabric



Freeways significantly altered urban patterns. Route 80 displaced an entire row of blocks between X and Y (now Broadway) streets and 29th to 30th streets.

### Highways and Freeway Networks, 2007



Freeway corridors serve as boundaries and barriers along the east, west and south sides of the Central City.

**C: The Context**

Each of these freeway corridors is a multi-lane, limited-access roadway that carries high volumes of traffic. These roadways are generally elevated or depressed below grade, and accessed by numerous on/off ramps. In addition to the obvious physical and visual barriers that these corridors create, the traffic noise and air emissions generated from these corridors makes them generally inhospitable elements to which adjacent uses generally turn their backs. The combined effect of these freeway corridors is quite destructive of the physical pattern and social integration of the Central City with the Sacramento River and surrounding neighborhoods. Even when elevated to allow for access between neighborhoods, the looming overhead structures and the deserted sub-structure rights-of-way have created “dead zones” in the social vitality and pose not only physical, but also psychological barriers that divide rather than unify the Central City to the surrounding neighborhoods.



Capitol Park serves as a visual centerpiece for the Central City.



Southside Park



Roosevelt Park

**Parks**

Parks play a major role in the character and structure of the Central City. The 10-block Capitol Park forms a centerpiece for the Central City that acts as an organizing element and major visual feature within the urban fabric. The eight full-block parks that have been realized from Sutter’s 1849 platt for the downtown (i.e., Roosevelt, Chavez Plaza, Fremont, Muir, Grant, Winn, Marshall and Stanford) also contribute to the perceived structure, scale and identity of the Central City neighborhoods. For example, Cesar Chavez, Roosevelt, and Fremont parks are regularly used for weekday farmer’s markets as well as other special events that attract residents and downtown workers.



Sacramento’s parks play a key role in the structure and identity of the Central City.



While not a city park, the American River Parkway contributes greatly to the character of the Central City.

**C: The Context**

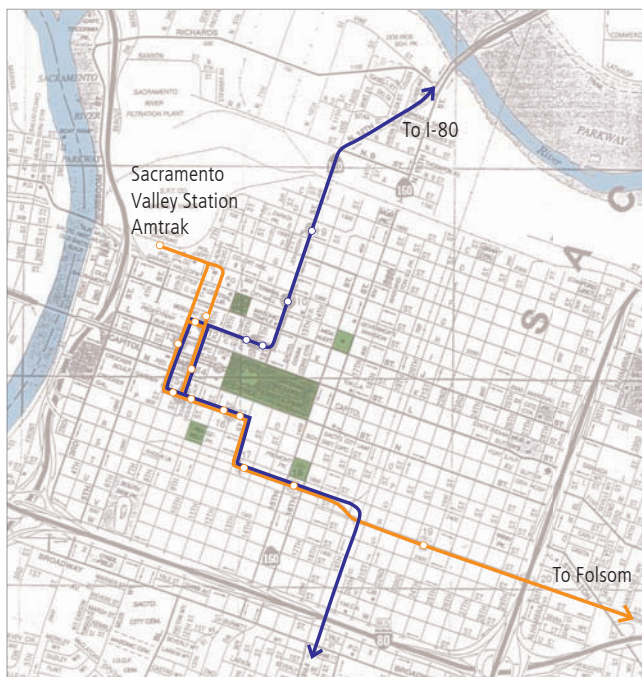
Additional Central City parks that contribute to the area’s form and character include the 6-block Southside Park located between 6th and 8th, and T and W Streets; Crocker Park north of the Crocker Museum between 2nd and 3rd, and N and O Streets; Marshall Park between I and J, and 26th and 28th Streets; and three smaller parks (Washington, Zapata, and Johnson) in the Alkali Flat/Washington Park neighborhoods. The City also has purchased land at the corner of 19th and Q Street for creation of a small public park.

Complementing these more formal, urban parks are the three regional open space facilities that provide the interface between the Central City and the two rivers, and create a more natural frame to the north and west sides of the Central City. These facilities include: the American River Parkway and Sutter’s Landing Regional Park along the American River, and the incipient Sacramento River Parkway which ultimately will extend along the length of the Central City’s riverfront with the Sacramento River. The future development of the Railyards and River District will embrace the river parkways and provide linkages to the riverfront.

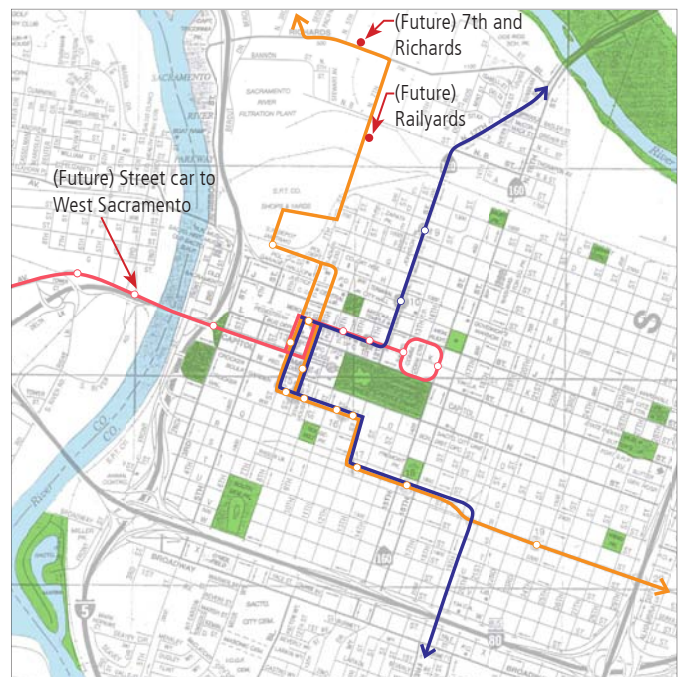
**Light Rail Transit**

The 1980’s saw a dramatic turnaround in attitudes towards transit. Beginning in 1987, the same year as the adoption of the CBD Urban Design Plan, Sacramento, like many other West Coast cities, such as Portland, San Francisco, San José, Los Angeles and San Diego, began developing a new light rail network that would promote the revitalization of its downtown and provide a viable alternative to the private automobile and freeway construction.

The first line from I-80 ran down 12th Street from the north before looping around the Capitol via K Street, 7th, 8th, and O Streets and back east via the former Western Pacific tracks on an alley parallel to R Street. Subsequent extensions have taken the line east to Folsom and south, parallel to the former Western Pacific (now Union Pacific) main line towards Elk Grove (see figure below). Most recently a new stub has been extended up 7th and 8th Streets to the Amtrak station at 5th and H Streets as part of the new DNA line (Downtown-Natomas-Airport) that will extend north through the River District, across the American River, through Natomas and out to the airport. The first phase of the DNA line, to 7th Street/Richards Boulevard, is projected to begin in 2010.



Existing Light Rail Network



Proposed Light Rail Network and conceptual street car line.

## C: The Context

Unlike heavy rail lines that have created edges and barriers within the Central City, Sacramento's light rail facilities are more integral to the urban fabric, located as they are within the public street right-of-way. As public transit facilities, the light rail lines function as magnets or focal features around which development will intensify. Since the City's three light rail lines are aligned along existing and former heavy rail corridors, the transition from edge condition to focal feature is only partial at this point in time, but new development has begun to locate near the light rail lines in the Central City.

Although not formally adopted, the City is currently exploring proposals to introduce a streetcar line, similar in scale to Portland's successful service, which would augment the light rail system, connecting West Sacramento via Tower Bridge with Downtown and the Railyards (See figure below). Ultimately, the streetcar network is projected to connect to the Intermodal Station in the Railyards and with future north-south lines and a line on Broadway.

### Bus Service

The Sacramento Regional Transit District (RT) operates 97 bus routes and 36.87 miles of light rail covering a 418 square-mile service area. The Central City is served by a combination of regular bus routes that run throughout the day, peak-period bus routes, and shuttle routes. Altogether 27 different bus routes provide service to the Central City. Broadway, Q Street, L Street, Capitol Avenue, J Street, F Street, North B Street and Richards Boulevard serve as the primary east/west service corridors. The primary north/south service corridors include the one-way couplets formed by 3rd and 5th streets, 8th and 9th streets, 15th and 16th streets, 19th and 21st streets in the area south of J Street, and 7th and 12th streets as two-way corridors north of J Street.

Three shuttle routes provide looped service to the Capitol complex and surrounding office areas, with two lines looping north-south between I Street and Broadway, and one route looping east-west from the Capitol to West Sacramento.

RT is in the process of preparing a Transit Master Plan for the next 30 years. While RT services in 2008 represented a very low share of all regional transportation trips (1% of all trips, 2% of commute trips), it provided for approximately 20% of commute trips into the Central City. At present, transit in Sacramento is seen as providing "lifeline services for transit dependent members of the community." In an effort to have transit (bus and LRT) fulfill its role in implementing the region's Smart Growth future, RT believes that transit use must become a "lifestyle choice" for a greater proportion of the community, in which people will use transit because they want to, not just because they have to.

Greyhound Bus Lines currently provides regional and national bus service into the Central City from its terminal at 7th and I streets. However, the bus terminal is ill-served in its present location due to access constraints related to bus movement conflicts with light rail trains and traffic volumes in the area. Furthermore, crime and public safety in the terminal vicinity have been a consistent concern. Greyhound is slated to move to an interim location at 5th and Richards until the Sacramento Valley Station facility is ready to accept Greyhound into the intermodal terminal. Infrastructure improvements are being finalized and the design of the bus station is moving forward. The move of Greyhound to a new facility is anticipated to ease safety concerns in the K Street and 7th Street area and aid in attracting new tenants to this area.



**C: The Context**

**Capitol Corridor Amtrak Service**

In 1990, California passed Propositions 108 and 116, providing \$3 billion for transportation projects, of which a large portion went to rail service. As a result, new locomotives and passenger cars were purchased, existing inter-city routes expanded, and one new inter-city route, the Capitol Corridor, began operation. The Capitol Corridor service now serves 16 stations along a 170-mile rail corridor, offering a convenient way to travel between the Sierra Foothills, Sacramento, the San Francisco Bay Area and Silicon Valley/San Jose. With 32 trains a day running between Sacramento and the Bay Area, and 14 daily direct trains to San Jose, the Capitol Corridor train provides a convenient alternative to traveling along the congested I-80, I-880, and I-680 freeways.

Trains on the Capitol Corridor route carry passengers to and from the Sacramento Valley Station located at 5th and I streets. Annual ridership levels have grown by 300% since the service began operation in 1998. May 2007 marked the highest monthly ridership total in the history of the Capitol Corridor service with 141,789 passengers. The Capitol Corridor is now the third busiest Amtrak-operated route in the country. Passenger fares cover nearly 50% of the cost of service, among the best recovery ratio for public transportation in the country.

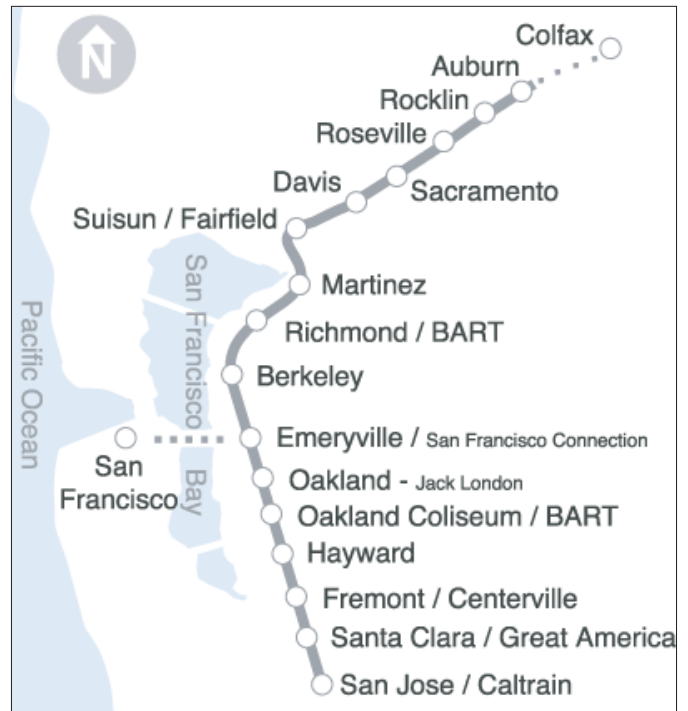
In addition to the Capitol Corridor, several other Amtrak routes connect into the Central City, including: the California Zephyr which runs daily between Chicago and San Francisco, coursing through the plains of Nebraska to Denver, across the Rockies to Salt Lake City, and then through Reno and Sacramento into Emeryville/San Francisco; the Coast Starlight links the key West Coast cities with daily trips between Seattle and Los Angeles via Portland, Sacramento, the San Francisco Bay Area and Santa Barbara; and the San Joaquins with daily trips that connect San Francisco and Sacramento to

Central Valley communities of Stockton, Modesto, Merced, Martinez, Fresno, and Bakersfield.

**Landmarks**

In addition to the linear infrastructure associated with the area’s transportation, buildings and other manmade elements can serve as landmarks that inform City character. Through their scale and/or distinctive design, landmarks become reference points within the City that provide structure and orientation, and contribute to the design character of the surrounding area.

Certainly the State Capitol Building and Tower Bridge are two key landmarks in the Central City, and their juxtaposition at either end of Capitol Mall serves to enhance their significance and memorability. Together, Tower Bridge, Capitol Mall and the Capitol Building create a dramatic gateway entrance to the Central City that establishes a unique sense of place that has a graciousness of proportion and civic formality that



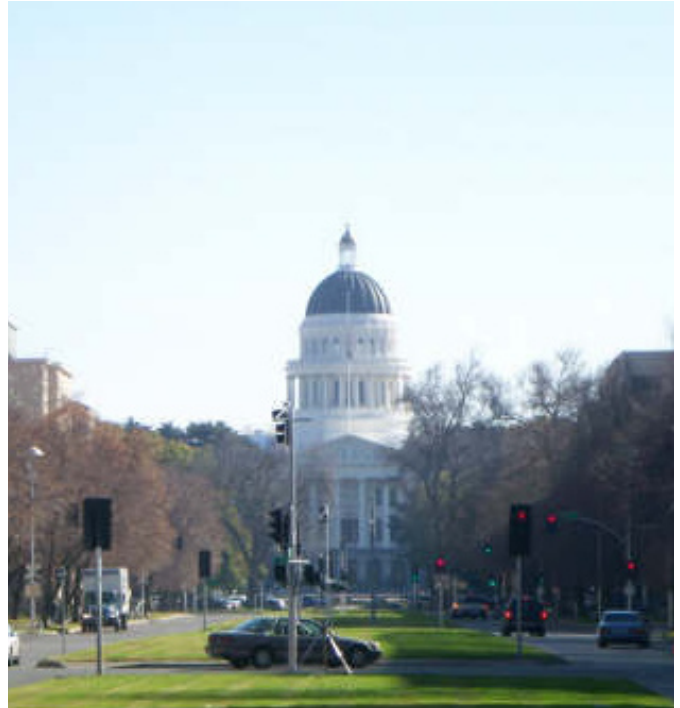
Capitol Corridor Route Map

### C: The Context

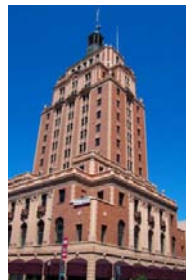
is appropriate for the State Capitol. Although the Capitol Mall axis has been maintained, others, such as the original 4th Street axis to the Southern Pacific Depot/Sacramento Valley Station, have been lost over the years. Opportunities may exist to improve orientation and design character in the Central City by creating, reinforcing, and possibly re-opening at least for pedestrian access, other axes that link key elements or destinations such as:

- 13th and 14th Streets with Convention Center as south terminus
- 4th Street through Chinatown with the Southern Pacific Depot/Sacramento Valley Station as terminus
- 7th Street to the American River through Township 9
- Crocker Museum to Old Sacramento along 2nd Street (with capping of I-5 freeway)
- Vista Park and Boxcar Park Blocks in the Railyards
- Vista Park and Performing Arts Center.

In addition to the State Capitol, numerous other historic buildings in the Central City serve as memorable landmarks, including City Hall, Memorial Auditorium, the Elks Building, the Tower Theater, Crest Theater, Sutters Fort, Stanford Mansion, Crocker Museum and the historic train station in the Railyards. Contemporary buildings also serve as landmarks, with the Federal Courthouse on J Street being the most obvious example. In addition to Tower Bridge, the I Street Bridge and the two water in-take structures on the Sacramento River are other distinctive infrastructure landmarks. Future bridges proposed in the Riverfront Master Plan at the western termini of Broadway, R Street, and north of Richards Boulevard have the potential to establish new connections between the Central City, West Sacramento, and Natomas, and also be designed as ‘works of art’ that create distinctive new landmarks at these new gateways to the Central City.



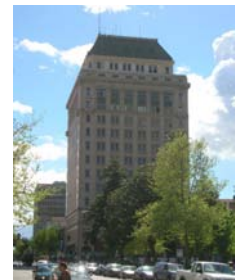
Capitol Mall forms a dramatic axis with key landmarks including the State Capitol building.



Elks Building



Courthouse



926 J St.



Old City Hall



Veterans Memorial Auditorium

C: The Context

Neighborhoods and Special Districts

The Central City contains fifteen distinct areas within the historic street grid (see figure below). Each area has its own identity and character with its own scale and variety of building types that reflect their individual histories, but they also share an underlying urban framework provided by the original street grid planned by Sutter. Of the

numerous distinct areas that comprise the Central City, the CBD and the Capitol Area are clearly the most different in form and character, with dense mid- and high-rise development reflecting their predominant orientation to business and government respectively. The neighborhoods that surround these two areas to the north, east and south,

Sacramento Central City Neighborhoods



The Central City contains sixteen distinct neighborhoods.

## C: The Context

share a strong residential character and scale, a significant street tree canopy, numerous historic neighborhoods, and thriving commercial corridors. Old Sacramento, with its concentration of historic resources, represents a distinctly different character. Although nearly built out, redevelopment projects are underway or planned in Old Sacramento, including the redevelopment of the Orleans and Ebner hotels and Empire Building. The Sacramento Housing and Redevelopment Agency (SHRA) is providing land and partial financing to make the projects possible with the intent of enhancing the vitality of the Old Sacramento Historic District, reinforcing it as a heritage tourism, dining, and specialty-retail destination, and adding new residential uses to the area.

In addition to these well-established districts, Central City areas, such as the Railyards, River District, and Docks Area are poised for redevelopment that will generate a series of new neighborhoods. All three areas are scheduled for redevelopment and are currently characterized by the presence of vacant and under-utilized land, a lack of character defining features, and their separation from the other Central City neighborhoods by rail or freeway infrastructure. Redevelopment of the 244-acre Railyards area in accordance with its adopted Specific Plan offers a unique opportunity to reinforce and expand the role of the Central City as Sacramento's regional center for business, commerce,

government, entertainment, housing, retail, education and culture, creating a transit-oriented mixed-use district as an integral extension of the Central Business District and as a key heritage tourism destination. It also will facilitate the preservation and re-use of the numerous historic structures in the Depot and Central Shops areas, and implement City policies to create more mixed-use, transit-oriented places within the Central City.

Similarly, redevelopment of the 748-acre River District, for which the City is preparing a new Specific Plan, is intended to create a cohesive mixed use district with a combination of residential, commercial, industrial, public, and open space uses that will: complement the current mix of industrial, office, and government service uses; take advantage of the planned light rail extension to create a more transit-oriented and walkable district; and enhance the Central City's connection to the American River Parkway.

Redevelopment of the 29-acre Docks Area is planned to create a new residential mixed use neighborhood on the riverfront, with office and retail components complementing the new residential uses. The plan also provides for creation of major riverfront parkland and promenade improvements, and a new pedestrian and bicycle connection to the rest of the Central City via the R Street Bridge.

**C: The Context**

**Retail**

In the 1960’s, like several Central Valley cities struggling to enhance the viability of their downtown shopping districts, Sacramento implemented two related strategies that altered the character and the function of the downtown. The first was the closure of a section of K Street to traffic and created a pedestrian retail mall. Unfortunately, the K Street mall, which extends 6 blocks from 13th Street to 7th Street, like other downtown pedestrian malls, has had a troubled history and continues to have many empty buildings and storefronts, even with the introduction of the RT light rail line through the mall. A number of redevelopment projects are currently underway along the mall, and the City is investing in a related series of enhancements in the public realm in an effort to resolve this ongoing problem.

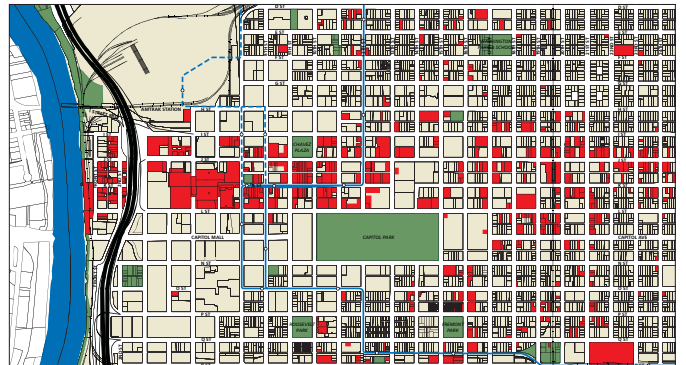
The second, but similar action taken by the City was to approve the construction of Westfield Downtown Plaza, a retail mall that occupies the 6-block area between 7th and 4th and J and L streets. This action not only extended the traffic-free K Street mall concept an additional 4 blocks, but also effectively removed K Street as a public right-of-way between 7th and 3rd Streets and closed 4th and 6th streets to through traffic between L & J Streets. While it has

proven to be a more effective retail strategy than the K Street pedestrian mall, the Westfield Downtown Plaza is an inward-facing facility whose scale and orientation has a deadening effect on surrounding street life and retail businesses and creates a significant barrier to north-south movement between Capitol Mall and the Sacramento Valley Station. Future modifications may reconfigure Downtown Plaza in an outward manner.

While most of the Central City’s retail continues to cluster along J and K Streets, new neighborhood-serving retail and entertainment uses have begun to establish themselves along corridors where new residential development is occurring, including 20th Street between H Street and Capitol Avenue, Capitol Avenue between 17th and 20th, and R Street between 10th and 19th. Broadway and Alhambra Boulevard are also retail corridors that serve the Central City and surrounding neighborhoods. The Broadway Corridor “Tower District” is a one-mile section of Broadway which serves as the retail focal point for the Land Park and Curtis Park neighborhoods. Broadway is one of the City of Sacramento’s oldest commercial corridors, which has been able to maintain its economic vitality by meeting the needs of regional and area residents.



K Street in the early 20th Century.



Central City retail areas (shown in red) are clustered primarily along the J and K Street corridors.



K Street in the early 21st Century.



Exterior view of the Downtown Plaza retail mall.

**C: The Context****2. Planning Context**

In addition to the physical and historic contexts, this document and the future character of the Central City are greatly influenced by a number of planning initiatives underway at the time of this writing. This includes a number of long-range policy initiatives, as well as several area-specific redevelopment plans within the Central City. The most significant of these include the following:

**SACOG Blueprint**

The Blueprint is long-range regional plan undertaken by the Sacramento Area Council of Governments to help guide the pattern of growth within the region. The highly interactive public process was designed to achieve a consensus of policy makers and citizens in the six county region on their preference for how to accommodate the nearly one million new people expected to reside in the Sacramento region by 2050. The final “Blueprint” strategy adopts a smart growth, transit-oriented strategy that focuses significant growth within the borders of existing cities and their immediate adjacent areas, rather than continuing sprawl outwards into agricultural lands and open spaces. High priority is placed on urban infill development, redevelopment of brownfields, and higher density development, particularly near transit. A product of the Blueprint process was the identification of fair share distributions of projected growth to each area of the region. As the largest city in the region, Sacramento was logically delegated with accommodating the largest share of regional jobs and housing.

Although it is a regional strategy, implementation of the Blueprint smart growth strategy is the responsibility of local jurisdictions. Thus, it is up to Sacramento to determine how to best implement what are known as the Blueprint Planning Principles: housing options, compact development, transportation choices, mixed land uses, conservation of natural resources, using existing assets, and quality design. The City used its 2030 General Plan update process (see following discussion) to address how these principles can be implemented in Sacramento.

**2030 General Plan Update**

The City completed a comprehensive update of its General Plan in 2009. The plan provides a strategy for accommodating an additional 200,000 residents and 140,000 new jobs by 2030. Following the lead of the Blueprint process, the General Plan establishes a smart growth strategy that directs the majority of this new residential and employment growth into opportunity areas throughout the city that can accommodate infill development, redevelopment of brownfield areas, and increased density around transit. Given the Central City's higher intensity development patterns, access to transit, and extensive brownfields, the area will play a critical role in the citywide growth strategy and is targeted for significant growth and redevelopment.

The overarching vision for the new General Plan is to make Sacramento nothing less than “America’s most livable city.” To realize this vision, the General Plan calls for the creation of a vibrant downtown, expanded transportation choices that emphasize transit and walkable neighborhoods, energized commercial corridors, safe and livable neighborhoods, and sustainable new development. Toward this end, the General Plan emphasizes the importance of promoting new development that creates a pleasing physical form and attractive community character while accommodating projected growth and higher densities.

**Climate Change Policy**

The State of California has passed several laws in recent years that mandate action on climate change. In addition, it is anticipated that the Obama administration will introduce further legislation to address this issue. Currently, the principal state legislation is the Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006, commonly referred to as Assembly Bill 32 (AB 32). AB 32 requires that statewide Green House Gas (GHG) emissions be reduced to 1990 levels by the year 2020. The bill requires the California Air Resources Board (CARB) to adopt rules and regulations in an open public process to achieve the maximum technologically feasible and cost-effective GHG reductions.

In September 2008, Governor Schwarzenegger signed into law Senate Bill 375 (SB 375), which establishes more

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specifically how local and regional governments will reduce GHG emissions. The bill directs CARB to establish regional targets to reduce GHG emissions from cars and trucks. CARB will work with regional governments in California to establish new plans that integrate land use, transportation, and housing in order to meet the targets. AB 32 makes it clear that addressing mobile sources and stationary sources is not enough—land use is an essential element of achieving the climate change goals set by the bill. By tying transportation funding to land use planning, 2008’s Senate Bill 375 (SB 375) promotes regional land use planning that will be implemented at the local level to reduce vehicle use and related green-house gas emissions. Clustering and mixing land uses, particularly around transit, has been shown to reduce the number of vehicle-miles-traveled (VMT), and thus is a key climate protection strategy. SB 375 will also reward projects that are consistent with a preferred regional growth scenario (i.e., SACOG’s Blueprint) by limiting environmental review (CEQA) requirements for those projects. Regulations implementing AB 32 and the subsequent SB 375 are still being developed, but the intent is that SB 375 will provide incentives for local governments to comply with those plans that integrate land use and transportation and create more walkable and sustainable communities. Local land use and housing policy will need to be updated as state and federal legislation evolves.

### Sustainability Master Plan— Creating a Sustainable City

In response to concerns about the long-term implications of issues such as climate change, drought-related water shortages, clean air and water on the quality of life in Sacramento, the City adopted a Sustainability Master Plan in December, 2007. The Master Plan is a long term document that will guide the City’s sustainability practices for the next several decades with the goal of using natural resources efficiently; preventing pollution, and improving the economic, environmental and social well-being of current and future generations.

The Sustainability Master Plan provides a policy framework that ensures that sustainability concerns will be incorporated into the City’s decision making processes. As a major landowner, employer, building manager, fleet operator,

utility owner and operator, consumer of goods and services, and service provider, the City has both the opportunity and the capacity to bring about significant improvements in environmental quality in and around the region. To guide this effort, the plan sets forth a series of goals and targets related to energy independence; climate protection; air and water quality; material resources; public health and nutrition; urban design, land use green building and transportation; parks open space and habitat conservation; water resources and flood protection; and public involvement and personal responsibility.

### Sacramento Pedestrian Master Plan

The Sacramento Pedestrian Master Plan (September 2006) strives to make Sacramento a model pedestrian-friendly city—the “Walking Capital”—by providing a comprehensive vision for improving pedestrian conditions. The two primary objectives of the Plan are to institutionalize pedestrian considerations and to improve current deficiencies. Procedural recommendations include new review criteria for measuring the performance of new development, revisions to the General Plan, and modifications to transportation performance measures.

The plan used a methodology to prioritize capital investment in pedestrian improvements in areas with supportive land uses, and overall pedestrian improvement needs throughout the city were mapped. Three levels of pedestrian improvements—“basic,” “upgraded,” and “premium”—are classified based on level of need. The Plan identifies



Sidewalk cafes and pedestrian-only streets promote pedestrian activity

## C: The Context

the Central City as a series of walkable neighborhoods that should receive “premium” improvements, meaning that pedestrian improvements in the area should include all of the improvements in the “basic” and “upgraded” categories, plus additional elements such as extra-wide sidewalks, pedestrian-scaled lighting, outdoor seating and street furniture.

The guidelines and recommendations of the Central City Urban Design Guidelines embrace the goals of the Pedestrian Master Plan and provide a more detailed look at how those goals should be implemented in the Central City.

### Sacramento Central City Neighborhood Design Guidelines

The Sacramento Central City Neighborhood Design Guidelines (September 1999) were written to help the City implement its Central City Housing Strategy, adopted in 1991. The primary purposes of the Central City Neighborhood Design Guidelines, as stated therein, were to provide design guidance for public and private projects in the central city neighborhoods in a manner that respects and enhances existing neighborhoods; promote places where people can safely live and interact with each other; ensure that building design is compatible with its context; and to incorporate preferred elements of prevailing architectural styles in those neighborhoods. As the title implies, the Central City Neighborhood Design Guidelines (see Section 4) are geared toward residential design and development, and are limited to designated areas within the Central City. The Guidelines were revised in 2006 to include a new section addressing the R Street corridor from 10th Street to 19th Street.

### Preservation Development Standards

The City is currently in the process of finalizing a new document—Preservation Development Standards—to provide a user-friendly guide to the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties. The Preservation Development Standards have been developed specifically to promote preservation of the historic, cultural and architectural resources that reflect the history and identity of Sacramento. These resources are finite and vulnerable to inappropriate alteration and additions. The



Sidewalk improvements such as benches, pedestrian-scaled lighting, and sidewalk dining enhance the pedestrian environment.

proposed standards have been developed to assist property owners and any design or construction professionals by providing information that will help them identify an appropriate approach to the treatment of historic properties or in the design of alterations or new construction involving historic properties or within Historic Districts. For historic resources in the City of Sacramento, the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties are specified in the City Code as the standards to be used for rehabilitation and development projects involving Landmark and Historic District properties. The initial element of the Preservation Development Standards will apply primarily to traditional 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century residential historic properties and districts.

### Central City Parking Master Plan

The Central City Parking Master Plan is a set of policy recommendations designed to guide the City in its management of the Central City parking supply over which it has control or influence. The Plan is designed to be a blueprint for how to manage the supply, price and restrictions of city owned or operated parking. Policy recommendations in the Master Plan also provide support for alternative modes and the reduction of vehicle trips. The Master Plan also recognizes that different people who travel to the Central City have different needs and identifies the priorities of these different groups of travelers for parking



## C: The Context

Satisfying the numerous goals for parking in the Central City requires balancing the needs and interests of many different stakeholders – Central City residents, business owners, employers, developers, government agencies, shoppers, tourists and other visitors. Most people who come to the Central City must rely on the automobile, either as the driver or as a passenger, and so parking is a necessary element of the economic vibrancy and livability of the area. However, conditions are changing with redevelopment in the Central City. Densities are increasing and there is a greater mix of uses. These changes are making transit, ridesharing and other alternative modes of travel more feasible. How parking is managed can have a significant impact on the viability of alternative modes. Most people who come to the Central City have choices about how they travel and, if they drive, they have a choice about where they park. Parking supply, price and restrictions are important determinants of how people choose to travel.

The City's Parking Division is going through a number of ordinance changes and updates to standards and to the Central City Parking Master Plan to respond to the more urban demands on parking. They are examining issues such as stall widths and aisle standards, shared parking standards, and valet and car share accommodation in public parking. The Parking Division is also looking to focus resources on reducing parking demand without increasing supply wherever possible.

### Redevelopment Projects

In addition to these citywide policy documents, the Central City is also experiencing a tremendous amount of redevelopment planning. The following represent the most significant of the redevelopment efforts underway at this time.

### The Railyards Master Plan

Ever since the former Southern Pacific railyards and locomotive sheds were closed in the 1980's the City has been exploring how best to reuse this important part of Sacramento's cultural heritage. The 240-acre brownfield site, which stretches from the Sacramento River east to 12th Street, and from I Street north to North B Street, is the largest urban infill site in the region and presents Sacramento with a significant opportunity to accommodate future growth utilizing sustainable and smart growth principles.

Several generations of plans have been produced over the years with little result. However the major difference today is that the Railroad no longer owns property. Thomas Enterprises and the City now jointly control the Railyards assets. The City worked with Thomas Enterprises to revise and update the previous Railyards Specific Plan and in December 2008 the City adopted a plan. The new Thomas Enterprises Railyards Plan proposes the creation of a mixed-use neighborhood that includes a new retail district centered on the former locomotive works, part of which will become a Museum of Railroad Technology, a high density, high-rise residential district structured around park blocks similar in scale to those in Portland, and a new park adjacent to the existing City Municipal water treatment facilities.

The Railyards' relative isolation from the downtown will be overcome by the construction of two new streets bridging

### Railyards Land Use Plan



Artist's conceptual rendering of the redeveloped Railyards District.

### High Speed Rail



Visual simulation of the California High Speed Rail Authority's conceptual design for the high-speed train station and adjoining development.

## C: The Context

over the tracks connecting with 5th and 6th Streets, as well as a new pedestrian/bike underpass beneath the tracks on 3rd Street. The RT light rail line, now terminating at the Amtrak station, will extend up 7th Street to Richards Boulevard and then cross the American River towards Natomas and the Airport.

As of the beginning of 2009, most of the soil remediation is complete and the base level of Vista Park has been established with new capped fill. The Railyards received State Proposition C funding and is poised to proceed with those monies. The track realignment and platform design, and new grade-separated crossings at 5th and 6th Streets, are at 30% completion for Construction Documents. The Design Guidelines for the Railyards are in Section 5 of these Guidelines.

### River District Plan

The River District is located at the northern edge of the Central City in the area bounded by the Sacramento River on the west, American River on the north, the Railyards and mainline tracks on the south, and Sutter's Landing Park on the east.

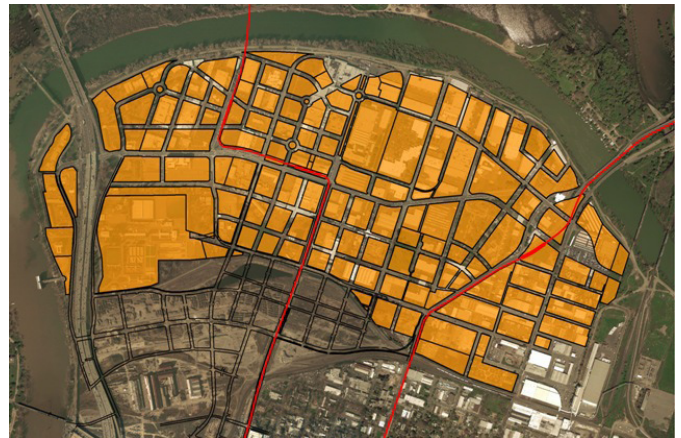
The City of Sacramento established the Richards Boulevard Redevelopment Area in 1990, and adopted the Richards Boulevard Area Specific Plan in 1994, with the intent of transitioning the area from an industrial district to a diverse, urban mixed-use district. Since that time, the area has established a strong State of California office presence with over 3,000 state employees now working in the area. A low-rise hotel and restaurant district has emerged at the confluence of the American and Sacramento rivers, and the district continues to attract service and distribution businesses that desire a downtown location at affordable rents.

Limited redevelopment is beginning to take shape in the area. The Township 9 project, proposed for the area between Richards Boulevard and the American River, and 5th and 7th Streets, is the largest and most advanced. The 65-acre site is planned for up to 2,981 units of high density housing in low- to mid-rise buildings (up to 15 stories), 146,194 gross square feet of neighborhood-serving retail

and restaurant uses, 839,628 gross square feet of office use, and a light rail station. The key features of this project include an axial extension of 7th Street north to the river, a landscaped Parkway that connects Richards Boulevard to a new park adjacent to the American River Parkway, a grid block pattern of streets, and a new light rail station on Richards Boulevard.

The River District Specific Plan process is currently on-going. It encompasses the area north of North B Street to the American River, and from the bank of the Sacramento east to 16th Street—an area of approximately 748 acres—but does not include the Blue Diamond Almond Growers property. There is also early planning moving forward for Sutter's Landing to the East with the inclusion of a possible relocation of the Sacramento Zoo to this area.

### River District Block Pattern



River District Specific Plan block diagram showing the proposed street system and the alignment of the two Light Rail lines that will serve the area (shown in red). Specific Plan is estimated to be completed in early 2010.

## C: The Context

### Sacramento Riverfront Master Plan 2003

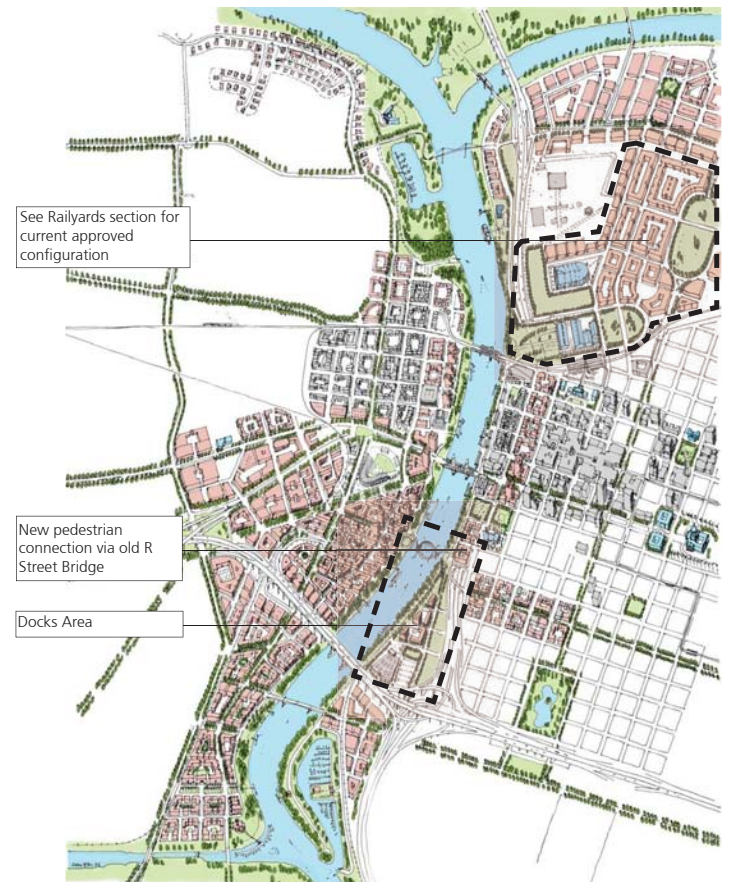
The Riverfront Master Plan was a joint effort by the Cities of Sacramento and West Sacramento to plan for the future of the Sacramento Riverfront. The focus of the plan is on reconnecting both cities to the riverfront and to each other, promoting the development of new high quality urban neighborhoods, and creating high-quality and accessible public open space along the riverfront. The vision for the riverfront builds on four guiding principles:

1. Integrating adjoining neighborhoods and districts to the riverfront, emphasizing a mix of residential, commercial, and office uses that maximize the value of the river for the community while creating compact, vibrant, pedestrian-oriented neighborhoods;
2. Creating and enhancing connectivity between adjoining neighborhoods and the river through improved open space, pedestrian, bicycle, transit, vehicular, and visual corridors;
3. Establishing a strong public open space or “green” backbone along the river that provides a variety of active and passive recreational opportunities along the river; and,
4. Providing places and opportunities for celebration, including public spaces, cultural destinations, interpretive features, and public art.

More specifically, the master plan calls for the development of the Docks Area with a combination of public open space and an active new mixed use, riverfront neighborhood. The plan also calls for the construction of three new bridges to improve access between both sides of the river, including: a new low-level vehicular/pedestrian bridge at Broadway; a new pedestrian/bicycle bridge between R Street and Garden Street in the West Sacramento Triangle District; and a third bridge at the end of Richards Boulevard connecting with the Lighthouse District in West Sacramento. Finally, the plan proposes major new riverfront parks at Jibboom Street and the Docks Area, expansion of the Riverfront Promenade along the length of the riverfront, and the creation of tree-lined parkway boulevards that connect the Central City neighborhoods with the river. Since no environmental

impact report was prepared for the Sacramento components of the Plan, as was done in West Sacramento, the City Council accepted, rather than formally adopt the Master Plan.

### Sacramento Riverfront Master Plan, 2003



The Riverfront Master Plan envisions attractive and accessible public open space along the River that is linked to vibrant new urban neighborhoods along both sides of the river.

**C: The Context**

**Docks Area Plan**

The Docks Area is approximately 29 acres of mostly undeveloped former industrial land that is located on the river south of Old Sacramento, and is separated from the Central Core district by the I-5 freeway. Pursuant to being identified as a development opportunity site in the Riverfront Master Plan, a Specific Plan was prepared that calls for redevelopment of the area north of the Pioneer Bridge and west of Front Street as a high-density, mixed use neighborhood that includes housing, office, and retail as well as riverfront parks that adjoin the Riverfront Promenade. The development concept calls for up to 1,155 residential units in low-, mid-, and potential high-rise buildings, 50,000 square feet of retail, and 500,000 square feet of office. In order to reflect the pattern, scale, and character in the Downtown,

the Docks Area streets are oriented as an extension of the Central City grid. Vehicle access to the Docks Area will be from O Street and Front Street, and pedestrian and bicycle access will be provided via the R Street bridge.

In December 2006, the City selected a developer team to exclusively negotiate the development of the Docks Area. In 2008, the Redevelopment Agency of the City of Sacramento completed the preparation of a Draft Specific Plan for the Sacramento Docks Area. Subsequently, the Development Services Department, Environmental Planning Services, completed and circulated the Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Sacramento Docks Specific Plan and Planned Unit Development Guidelines.

**Docks Area Master Plan**



A mix of low-, mid-, and high-rise buildings will optimize visual access to the Riverfront.



River-oriented retail and residential uses will engage and help activate the Riverfront Promenade.

**Docks Area Master Plan**



Redevelopment of the Docks Area will replace former industrial lands with a new mixed use neighborhood.

C: The Context

Docks Area Context

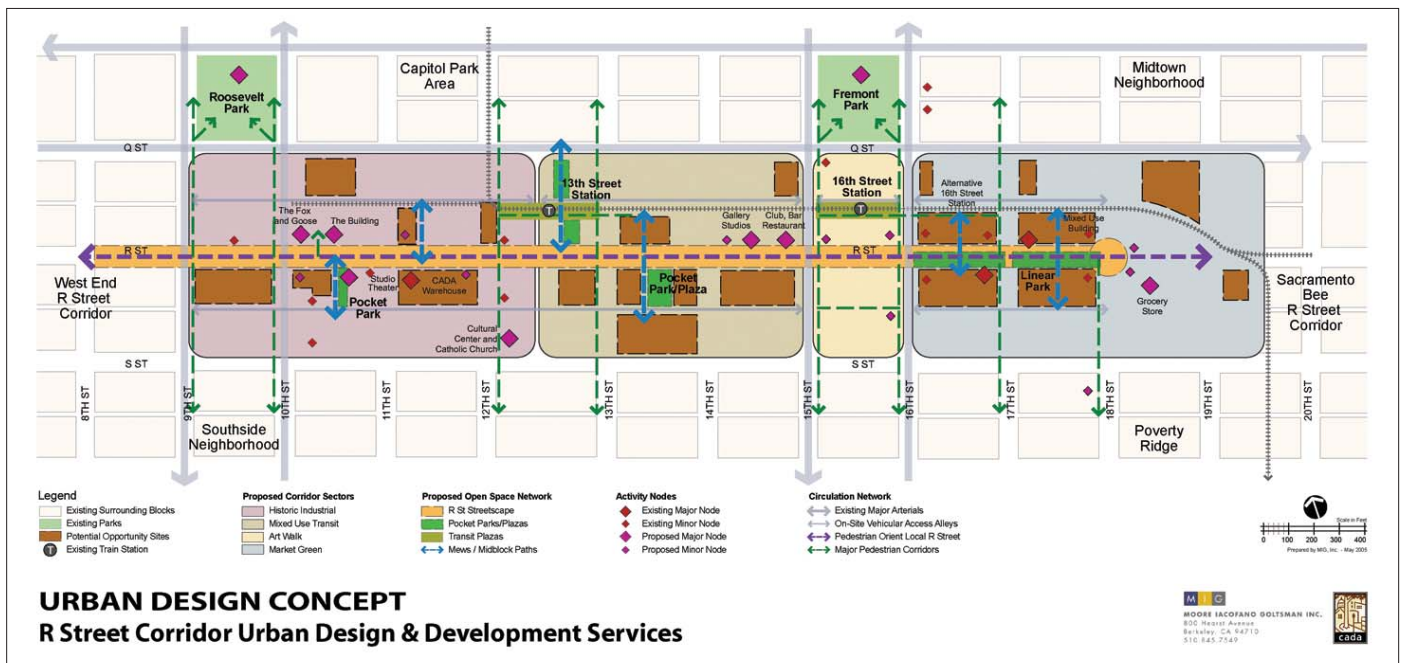


R Street Corridor Plan

The R Street Corridor is a 27-block long, two-block wide special planning district which was once a thriving warehouse district located along a former rail line. The R Street Master Plan, which was adopted in 1996 in conjunction with the Capitol Area Development Authority (CADA), envisions R Street as a new mixed use, transit oriented neighborhood that is sensitive to the needs of the surrounding neighborhoods and districts of the Central City.

A number of planning efforts have been initiated to update and advance the redevelopment of R Street. The "R Street Corridor Improvements-10th to 13th Street" project was the first in a series of planned streetscape projects to enhance the vehicular and pedestrian environment in anticipation of redevelopment of adjoining properties. In addition, City planning staff has proposed a number of amendments to the R Street Corridor Special Planning District related to land use, height, setbacks, density, and parking that are intended to facilitate development of the Corridor (refer to Section 4).

R Street Corridor Improvements



2006 Capitol Area Development Authority- Urban Design Plan from 9th St to Railroad

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