

CHAPTER II: EXISTING CONDITIONS

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City of Santa Maria

Downtown

Specific Plan

CHAPTER II – EXISTING CONDITIONS



INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the built environment within the Downtown Specific Plan area. A brief historical overview of the Downtown Area is provided as well as significant historical structures and features in the area. The chapter also details the existing conditions with the Plan area in terms of circulation and mobility, land use and zoning, and economic conditions.

HISTORIC RESOURCES

The Santa Maria Valley first attracted European settlers in the late 1700's after the establishment of Mission San Luis Obispo and Mission La Purisima in Lompoc. Many settlers were the recipients of land for settlement from the government, and the area's rich soil available for various agricultural processes continued to attract settlers to the area through the mid 1800's.

In the late 1870's, four of the valley's well-known settlers (Rudolph Cook, Isaac Fesler, Isaac Miller, and John Thornburg) each donated a section of their land to be used as the location for a new town known as Grangerville. Today's intersection of Broadway and Main Street marks the corners of these four pieces of land. Grangerville eventually took on the name Central City but was renamed Santa Maria in 1885 because mail from this Central City kept going to Central City, Colorado.

The discovery of oil led to a population surge that finally resulted in Santa Maria becoming incorporated as a general law city in 1905. Oil exploration began in the valley in the late 1800's. By 1901, William Orcutt and his company, Union Oil, were leasing more than 70,000 acres of land for oil exploration and processing. At the time of incorporation, the City population was estimated to be 1,000 persons, and presumably, 97 percent of the population was dependent on agriculture for survival. The first U.S. Census showed that rapid (126%) population growth occurring during the five-years between the incorporation and the 1910 Census.

The near simultaneous construction of U.S. 101, the Twitchell Reservoir, and the Santa Maria River levee were also major historic milestone events for Santa Maria. The design of U.S. 101 bypassed the Downtown with a 4-lane highway ribbon that skirted down the eastern edge of the City's 4 square mile boundary. The road gave travelers four interchanges, but the bypass became detrimental to many Downtown businesses. The Reservoir, on the other hand, stabilized the groundwater basin to a point where the aquifer never felt serious damage from saltwater intrusion. Furthermore, the levee

prevented most of the flooding in the City and opened up areas to development that were otherwise ruined regularly by the Santa Maria River flooding. These engineering marvels opened new land areas for development because they removed natural constraints (access and flooding) to the land located north of the City.

In the 1970s, great deliberation and heated discussions led to the Redevelopment of the old Downtown. The U.S. 101 bypass of the City business districts of Main Street and Broadway had started a long decline in the central business districts. As the decline affected local businesses, the Urban Renewal policies of the 1960s enabled the City to form a Redevelopment Agency to stop the decline and transform the “blighted Downtown” into a “state of the art” enclosed shopping mall. Consequently, in 1975, the Santa Maria Town Center Mall (SMTC) opened with three levels of free parking, a Sears, and Gottschalks anchoring about 400,000 square feet of retail space on 16 acres. Then, in 1989-1991, the Town Center West (TCW) added a 3rd and 4th major tenant space with a second free parking structure, a bridge over Broadway connecting the SMTC to the TCW, and plans for a 5th major department store.

In August of 1954, the City began to annex surrounding portions of land, spilling over its original four square mile boundary. By the year 2005, the Santa Maria City limits had expanded to cover more than 21.4 square miles. Since 1957, the City’s population has more than doubled, with the 2000 Census reporting the population as 77,423 persons. As of January, 2005 Santa Maria’s population is over 85,300 persons.

Now, with an increase in population comes an opportunity to capture a larger share of retail trade, thus repositioning Santa Maria as a destination shopping and entertainment attraction. As the City develops the Downtown Specific Plan, Santa Maria seeks to redefine the economic conditions and reshape the urban form. Application of hard-learned lessons about short-term decisions and long-term consequences reinforce a certain urgency. The City’s adopted Economic Development Element (2004) and Mixed-Use Ordinance (2004) precede the Downtown Specific Plan to help reshape the City along a sustainable path outlined in the Downtown Vision (Chapter I).

Historic Structures in the Study Area

Several historical structures are located within the planning area and provide context and reference for the Specific Plan area's architectural and cultural character. The following describes the principal structures and their features (See Figure II-1 - Historic Structures Map for locations):

The First United Methodist Church

Built in 1922, the architecture of this Church at 311 South Broadway is representative of the Spanish Renaissance period and remains the home of the church bell salvaged from the ship Anna Lyle on December 25, 1876, at Point Sal by the Charles Clark family.

Saint Peter's Episcopal Church

Completed in 1932, this Church is located at 402 South Lincoln Street. The committed efforts of the Women's Guild raised money to build this English Country style building over a twenty-year time period. Originally, the church had only four stained glass windows, but throughout the years, parishioners donated the remaining windows, deciding on their theme as each donation was made. In many ways, these windows represent the community, their spirit, and beliefs.



First United Methodist Church



The Tunnell Home may be the oldest home still standing in Santa Maria

The Martin Luther Tunnell Home

Built in 1868, this Home at 428 South Lincoln Street is believed to be one of the oldest homes still standing in Santa Maria. Originally, this two-story house stood on the 160-acre Tunnell Homestead that has now become the campus for Allan Hancock Community College. The home was moved to its present location in 1905 after George Tunnell sold it to the Crakes family.

The Minerva Club

Designed by Julia Morgan (the architect responsible for the design of Hearst Castle) in 1927, this craftsman style building has served as a clubhouse for the women of Santa Maria throughout the decades. The building includes many of the typical design elements of Julia Morgan's work: natural dark wood; large decorative hardwood trusses on the ceiling; long, narrow windows; and colored handcrafted tiles.

The Santa Maria Inn

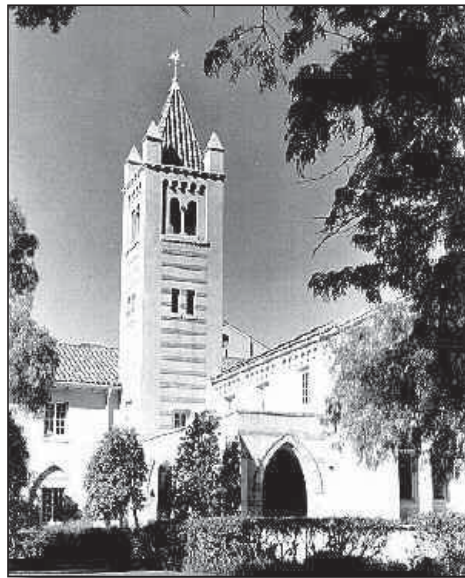
Opened in May of 1917 at 801 South Broadway, the Inn originally offered 24 rooms, 24 baths, a dining room, and a kitchen. Today, the Inn has 166 rooms and includes the Tap Room and an old English pub. The Inn still evokes the old country inn feel that Frank J. McCoy envisioned for his business almost a century ago.



The Santa Maria Inn has a long history

The Santa Maria Valley Railroad

Constructed in 1911 at 625 South McClelland Street, the original railroad ran from Guadalupe to the Cat Canyon oil fields. The existing building was built in 1925 by Captain G. Allan Hancock, and at one time contained the Little Theatre and KSMR, the first radio station in Santa Maria. The construction of this railroad to Guadalupe led to the distribution of the Santa Maria Valley's crops throughout the rest of the country via the Union Pacific Railroad.



Santa Maria High School Bell Tower

Santa Maria High School

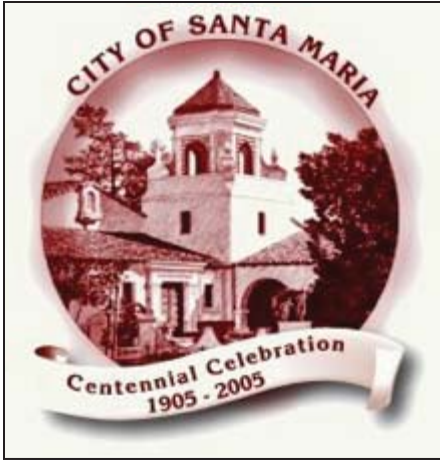
Located at 901 South Broadway, this school opened in 1925. Considered one of California's oldest school buildings, the building has many Spanish architectural elements. Unfortunately, much of the façade of the building and the 100-foot tall bell tower have been removed due to the Fields Earthquake Act.

The Reuben Hart Home

Built in 1877 at 412 South McClelland Street, this vernacular-Greek revival style Hart Home has been moved twice from its original location at the corner of Broadway and Church Street. Hart is often considered the father of Santa Maria, and today his home houses the Natural History Museum.

The Landmark Building

Originally built in 1907 for Henrietta Louise Newlove Martin, her husband Robert Franklin Martin, and their 8 children, this two-story, thirteen-room home was purchased by the Santa Maria Club in the 1920's. It has been said that the original Santa Maria Style Barbecue can trace its origin to the annual Stag Barbecue, put on by the Santa Maria Club at this Landmark Building. The building traded hands and was completely renovated in 1981. Since then, it has served primarily as a restaurant.



City Hall

After the 1933 Santa Barbara earthquake, the City commissioned this new City Hall to comply with stricter requirements for public buildings. Designed in 1934 by Santa Maria's first architect, Louis N. Crawford, Santa Maria's City Hall blends Moorish influences into the California mission style. Located at 110 East Cook Street, the building, with its distinctive blue and yellow tiled tower, arched entrances, clay-colored roof, and wood-beamed ceiling, was featured in the April 1940 issue of Life Magazine.

The Haslam Building

This building on the corner of Main and Lincoln was originally built for the I.O.O.F, the Odd Fellows of Santa Maria, in 1906 in the distinctive style typical of Odd Fellows Lodge buildings of that time. William Haslam was the first tenant, and he occupied the ground floor. In 1977, the W. Haslam Co. purchased the building from the Odd Fellows. Currently, it is still owned by the family, although there is no longer a Haslam's Store and the ground floor at 126 W. Main is commercial retail use.

The Coca Cola Bottling Company

Built in 1938, this Company is located at 120 East Jones Street. Built in the art-deco/art modern style, the building has glass block façade, very modern and advanced for its time. Serving as a bottling facility for the Coca Cola Company until 1976; the building today is a center for non-profits serving Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo counties. The site includes the Children's Discovery Museum, constructed in 2005.

The Heritage Walk

The Coca Cola Bottling Company was ahead of it's time in 1938



The project of Westside Senior Planner Barbara Hutchins, construction for this walkway began in early 1990, with a grand opening ceremony in November of 1990. The Walk is just south of Main Street, stretching from Broadway to Pine Street. The corridor is 30 feet wide and is furnished with special benches, a special street sign, and bordered by large paved terracotta tiles which have been privately purchased and custom imprinted. As part of the opening ceremony of Heritage Walk, a time capsule was buried and is to be uncovered in the year 2040.

City of Santa Maria
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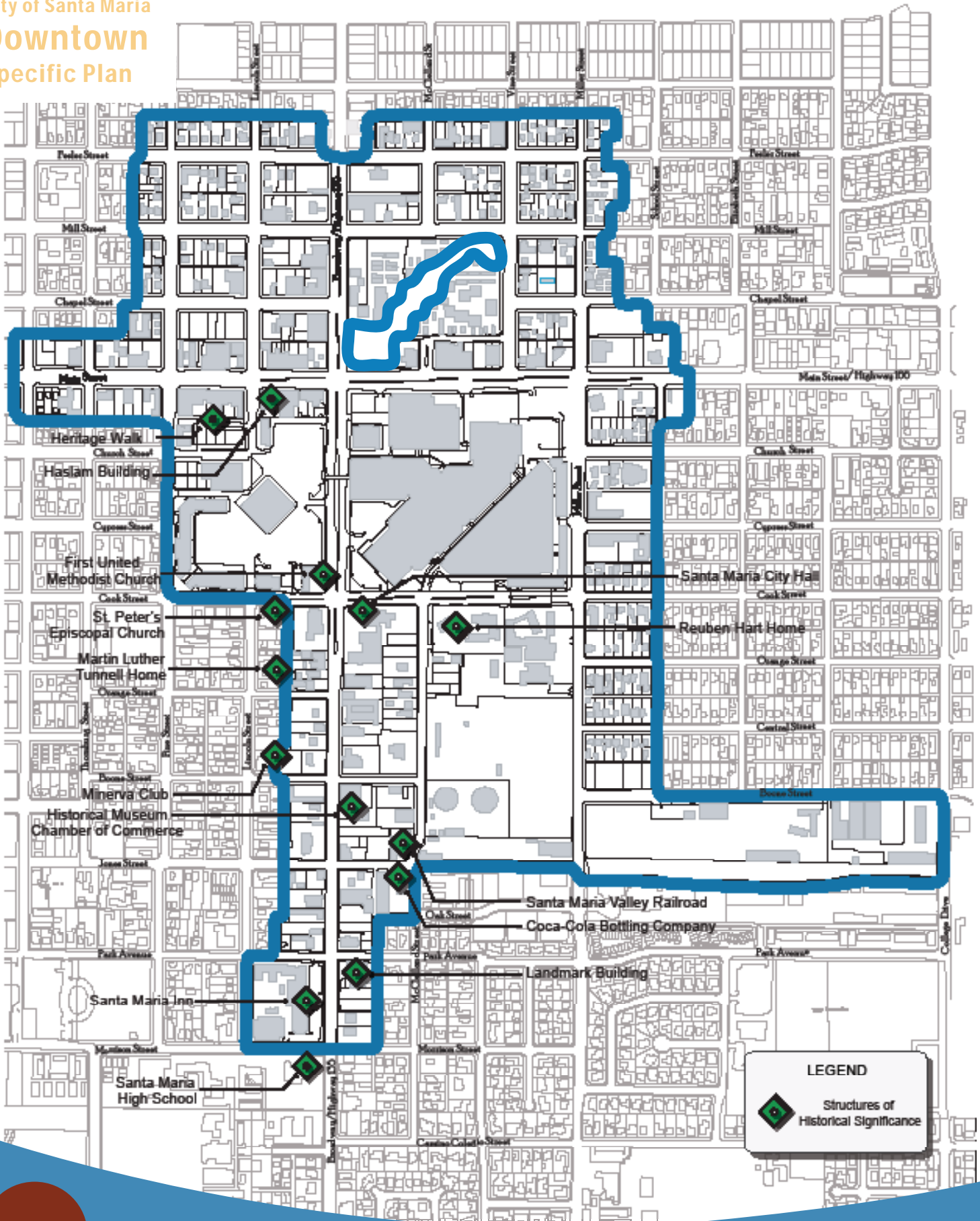


FIGURE II - 1 HISTORIC STRUCTURES MAP

How Historic Information Will Be Used

The inventory of existing historic resources lends important reference for new development in the Specific Plan area. While the Plan in its entirety does not require strict application of traditional historic architectural styles, historic influences nonetheless shall be honored and retained where possible. The design guidelines encourage the use of building elements or features typically found on historical structures. The Development Standards emulate the form, massing, and relationship of building to sidewalk of these historical structures. The degree to which historic structures influence the design direction within the Specific Plan districts may vary; however, protection of existing noteworthy structures and respect for the City’s heritage is a theme that will guide new development.

CIRCULATION AND MOBILITY

Downtown Santa Maria is noted by the intersection of two prominent streets: Main Street/State Route 166 and Broadway/State Route 135. Both of these streets are state highways and, as such, owned and operated by Caltrans. These streets serve as important regional streets conducting a high volume of both vehicle and truck traffic through the Downtown Area. Main Street/Route 166 provides direct connection between Highway 101 and Guadalupe to the west, making this street especially attractive to both local and regional agricultural truck traffic. Broadway/Route 135 connects the community of Orcutt south of Santa Maria to Highway 101 in the northern area of the City, serves as a main access route to Vandenberg Air Force Base, and functions as a parallel route to Highway 101 through town, conveying much local business and residential traffic.

The General Plan and Specific Plan both focus on increasing the opportunities for multiple travel modes in this area, reducing the effects of truck traffic, and protecting the adjoining neighborhoods from pass-through impacts. The Specific Plan addresses these issues and suggests ways to calm the behavior of this traffic with the objective of creating a more friendly pedestrian environment.



Main Street in the 1950s

Street Network Characteristics

The existing road configurations are as follows:

Main Street: This four to six-lane arterial/state highway forms the primary east/west “spine” through the study area connecting Highway 101 to Guadalupe.

Broadway: This four-lane arterial/state highway forms the primary north/south “spine” through the study area connecting the community of Orcutt to the south with Highway 101 in the north.

McClelland Street: This two-lane local street is an important road providing access to many civic facilities including the Abel Maldonado Youth Center, City Library, City Hall, Police, and other facilities.

Cook Street: This four-lane local street currently serves as primary access between Broadway and Miller Street, with access to the Town Center East mall and the Civic Center area. It also serves as the principal transit stop for the Downtown Area.

Miller Street: This arterial street varies from two to four-lanes throughout the study area and serves as a primary access to the planned City Transit Center at Miller Street and Boone Street, the Town Center East mall and Main Street.

Pine Street: This two to four-lane local street serves as an important connection to the surrounding residential neighborhoods west of the study area and as an access to the Town Center West area.

Intersection geometry data (number of lanes and turns for each approach) were documented in the field along with data on signal configuration, peak-hour turn movement counts, and average daily trips for selected study area street segments. All intersections within the study area operate at a level of service (LOS) C or better except Main Street and Miller Street, which operates at a LOS D. Refer to Chapter III for a complete discussion of study area mobility issues.

Study Area Transit Access

The study area is served by public transit through the City of Santa Maria Engineering Division under the name Santa Maria Area Transit (SMAT). The Engineering Division provides SMAT system administration, planning, and oversight while enlisting the services of private contractors for the following:

- Bus operations
- Bus maintenance
- Bus stop janitorial
- SMAT marketing
- SMAT advertising revenues

SMAT operates seven days a week and offers reduced fares to students, seniors, and the disabled. Unlimited usage monthly passes are also available. SMAT serves all ages and is wheelchair and TTY accessible. The City is currently planning for a new transit facility proposed to be located at Miller and Boone Street. See Figure II-2: SMAT Citywide Transit Map for a map of the existing public transit service lines.

MAP NOT TO SCALE

LEGEND

- Route 1-A
- Route 1-B
- Route 10S
- Route 2
- Route 20
- Route 3
- Route 4
- Route 45
- Route 5
- Route 7
- Guadalupe Flyer
- RTA
- Route 10
- Proposed Transit Route
- Time Points
- Bus Stop
- Transfer Point
- Orcutt Service (OS) Weekends
- School
- Shopping
- Downtown Core

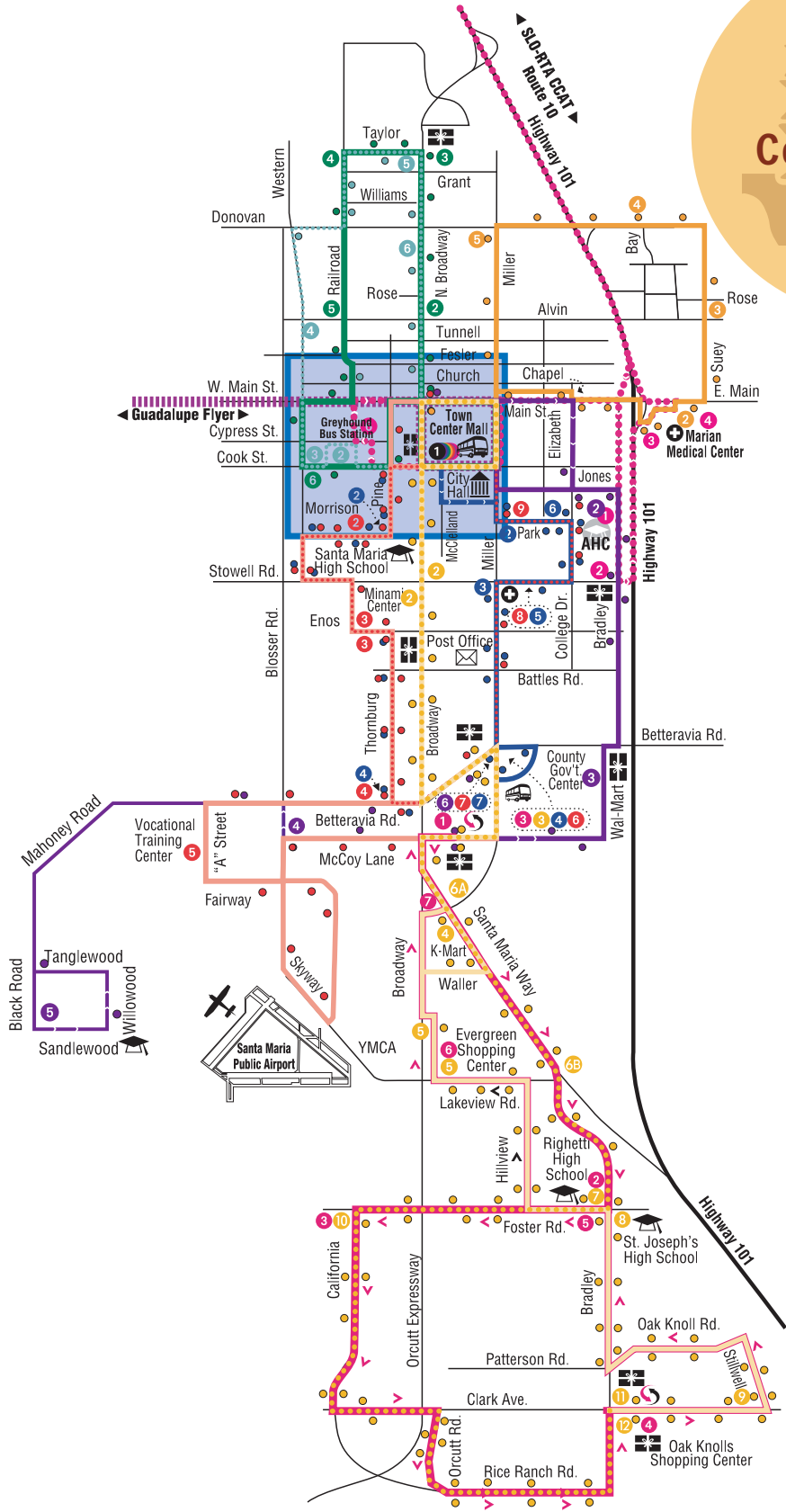


FIGURE II - 2: SMAT CITYWIDE TRANSIT MAP

EXISTING ZONING AND LAND USE

The majority of the Specific Plan area is designated for commercial uses. The districts include Community Commercial, Central Districts I & II, and Commercial Professional Office. The central core of the Downtown Area, including Town Center East and Town Center West, is designated Central District I (CD-1). This district allows for a broad array of retail shops, department stores, entertainment, restaurants, and some conditionally permitted uses such as lodging, clubs, drive-through services, etc.

More intensive commercial uses radiate outward from the core along the main thoroughfares of Broadway and Main Street, which are oriented toward service commercial uses and have a designation of Central District II (CD-II). This designation allows everything in the CD-1 but expands the permitted uses to include furniture sales, home improvement sales, and auto-related services such as muffler, brakes shops, etc. The City has recently adopted a Mixed-Use Ordinance that allows residential uses within these commercial districts subject to certain standards. Some high-density residential designations are found within the commercial core in pockets.

Surrounding the commercial core are medium- and low-density residential areas mixed in with commercial/professional office. These are primarily located to the north, west, and east of the Downtown core where they merge with traditional neighborhoods. For example, the Miller Street area contains a concentration of professional office space to support the County Court facility. The entire Downtown is also generally bounded by established residential neighborhoods where some measure of protection is warranted to minimize impacts from more intensive commercial activities and development.

The Specific Plan contains areas currently designated for industrial uses such as the Santa Maria Railroad facilities and other industrial uses located north of Jones Street and south of Boone Street. There are two areas designated for open space uses within the Specific Plan area: Simas Park and Central Plaza.

Public facilities are generally located along McClelland Street between Cook and Jones Street. These facilities house the Abel Maldonado Youth Center, City Hall, City Library, Santa Barbara County Courts, and Police Department.

A primary objective of the Specific Plan is to focus pedestrian-oriented retail and entertainment uses in the Downtown core and minimize the amount of auto-oriented uses. Allowing residential and office uses to mix above retail shops will form a traditional downtown environment where living, working, shopping, and entertainment all coexist together.

See Chapter I for relationship between the Santa Maria General Plan and Zoning Ordinance with this Downtown Specific Plan. See Districts, Land Use and Development, Chapter IV, for new zoning districts in the Specific Plan area.

Nonconforming Uses

The Santa Maria Municipal Code currently provides that existing land uses which are not specifically allowed in the applicable Downtown Specific Plan District may continue in operation on the same land area and on the same floor area and/or land area as occupied on the effective date of these regulations provided that the degree of nonconformity is not increased. The land area or floor area of the structures shall not be increased except to the extent that the increase is used solely to bring the use or property closer or into conformance with the Downtown Specific Plan, as determined by the City of Santa Maria Zoning Administrator or Planning Commission. The Downtown Specific Plan proposes no change to this business-friendly treatment of nonconforming uses but rather contains incentive programs to encourage property owners and businesses to move toward conformity when individual circumstances allow.

Nonconforming Structures

The Santa Maria Municipal Code also currently provides that existing structures which are not specifically allowed in the the Downtown Specific Plan may continue except for structures which are classified unsound by the Building Code. Such structures which are damaged or destroyed may be rebuilt provided that the structure or use is located on the same site, is not enlarged or intensified and complies with the current Uniform Building Code.

ADVANTAGES: Following adoption of the Downtown Specific Plan; existing land uses and structures which are not specifically allowed (nonconforming) in the Downtown would be allowed to continue in operation and encouraged to move toward conformance with the Downtown Specific Plan.

The Zoning Administrator or the City of Santa Maria Planning Commission may determine that expansions to existing land area or floor area of nonconforming structures may be increased in size if the change brings the use or property closer into conformance with the Downtown Spcific Plan.

NOTE: Refer to Chater 12-31 of the Santa Maria Municipal Code for a complete explanation of Nonconforming Uses and Structures (including Lots and Parking).

ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

The following is a summary of economic conditions that will influence the type and quantity of new and redevelopment activity in the Downtown Specific Plan area. Refer to the Market Feasibility Study included in Appendix B.

Overview of Regional Economic Conditions

Existing market conditions in the region include the following highlights:

- Santa Maria currently serves as the retail center for north Santa Barbara County and south San Luis Obispo County, attracting retail customers from a very large trade area (approximately 30 miles for some types of goods).
- As the other communities within this larger trade area develop additional retail facilities of their own, Santa Maria's "drawing power" of regional demand will potentially diminish over time. However, although some reduction in the City's market share would appear inevitable, the size of the overall "pie" is growing enough that Santa Maria can still expect to carve out sizeable development opportunities.
- Current development and economic trends present challenges to positioning Santa Maria as a full service destination urban center. Employment in Santa Barbara County has concentrated in the southern/coastal portion of the County, and relatively affordable housing is available in the northern/inland portions of the County. Similarly, Santa Maria receives many new home-buyers from the City of San Luis Obispo and southern San Luis Obispo County.
- With continued rising housing costs in southern/coastal Santa Barbara County and San Luis Obispo County, Santa Maria will likely improve its status as an employment center over time. This is due to the fact that employers will look to Santa Maria as a good location for businesses because of relatively affordable housing for their work force. This change will have a direct impact on demand for office and industrial land uses and an indirect affect on demand for other land uses such as housing and retail.
- Housing in Santa Maria is still "relatively" inexpensive when compared to coastal Santa Barbara or San Luis Obispo, creating opportunities for enhancing the Downtown's attractiveness as a housing location. As housing affordability decreases, trends are likely to shift markedly in favor of the higher density residential products appropriate for a Downtown setting. This fact, coupled with the overall increase in urbanization that will occur as Santa Maria becomes more of an employment center, will in turn create development opportunities for product types such as residential lofts and live/work units that are typically found in more urban settings.

Overview of Existing Downtown Market Conditions

Existing market conditions in the Downtown Area include the following highlights:

- Over the past decade or so, new retail development in Santa Maria has been largely concentrated along the Highway 101 corridor, and traditional retail facilities in the Downtown (most notably the Santa Maria Town Center East mall) have suffered substantial tenant losses. Although at least one of the major retail tenants (Gottschalk's) is reportedly performing satisfactorily, the mall space itself is on the verge of reaching vacancy levels so high that the entire center is vulnerable to being abandoned by retailers. The mall space is 20 to 25 percent vacant (20 percent on the lower level and 25 percent on the upper). The mall has a number of tenants that are not national/regional chains, which are generally preferred by mall owners.
- The entire Town Center East mall property is reasonably attractive on the inside, but the outside suffers aesthetically, and to some extent functionally, from the relationship of the parking garages to the mall itself. Some people complain that the garages are not safe and not clean. The garages are essentially taking redevelopment receipts as their source of funds for debt retirement. The existing physical layout of the mall does not lend itself to developing relationships with the rest of the Downtown Area. Some areas for improvement are outlined in Chapter IV: Districts, Land Use and Development in the Town Center District section.:
- Parking structures, due to the debt service situation, must be leveraged to provide parking reserves to be used to support additional infill and mixed-use projects within reasonable proximity. In general, enclosed malls of this type are also subject to becoming obsolete as market venues. The inter-relationships of these problems make notions of "re-positioning" the mall a complicated challenge.
- The addition of a walkway to the Town Center West block that contains the Mervyn's store is a start but not a full solution. This public investment in the form of a pedestrian way called Heritage Walk at the back of the stores fronting Main Street has contributed to some outdoor dining, and makes some of the buildings in this area more attractive as office sites. However, the walkway has not yet been enough of a catalyst to give this area a special identity or cause a special, synergistic set of uses to occur.
- Along West Main Street (Broadway to Pine), the small strip of historic buildings need of rehabilitation, and many of the existing uses (such as, tire, appliance, computer and carpet stores) are generally not conducive to adding vibrancy to the Downtown retail scene. On Broadway north of Main Street and along Fesler, the variety of retail and service uses are typical of small downtown areas in general, and they do not generate a focus of activity that might help create a sense of destination. A number of houses along Fesler have been converted to office/retail uses adding to the vibrancy of this emerging mixed-use area.

- The residential block and park north of the Town Center East mall will be given enhanced status with the imminent takeover by local housing officials, but this will only marginally improve the willingness of local-serving retailers to be in the Downtown Area. Accommodations for the elderly in the former Holiday Inn at Broadway and Main Street add to the close-in residential base. Demographic data for the area immediately surrounding the mall indicates that this area has a combination of a) low-income, mostly younger, Hispanic households and b) non-Hispanic, mostly older households with average or above incomes. This suggests that neighborhood-serving retail in the Downtown Area will need to be a mix of establishment types, which to some extent already exists there.
- Although City Hall and the rest of the civic complex in the Downtown are attractive and becoming more so with the new library building and parking garage, none of these facilities provides a “town square” type of focus that would lend itself to enhancing the attractiveness of retail settings. The City has an interest in encouraging more intensive public access and use of McClelland Street, including the possibility of making the street a part-time pedestrian mall.
- New use redevelopment opportunities exist at the south end of the Downtown Area, where the railroad tracks cross the area, Santa Maria Valley Railroad owns some large parcels of vacant and underutilized land. This area is currently designated commercial manufacturing and is home to a number of warehousing and light assembly businesses. The significance of this “vacant and underutilized” area is the opportunity to redevelop large portions with new uses that support revitalization of Downtown, new uses such as loft housing, live-work units, selected services, assembly and miscellaneous uses compatible with residential uses, and a physical connection to Allan Hancock College.
- Opportunities to increase the frequency of Santa Maria style BBQ events could add another method to attract activity to Downtown. Santa Maria BBQ is used by many groups in fund-raising activities, and these organizations usually make arrangements with area businesses, many in the Downtown, to use their parking lots. Although there is no consensus that this activity brings direct new business to the Downtown, it does expose people to the area.
- The presence of Allan Hancock Community College to the east of Downtown is a positive factor in developing new markets for Downtown merchants and for developing uses. Functions for the school such as residences (which the school is pursuing development of) and perhaps even classrooms could be located in or closer to Downtown.