



# OPPORTUNITY HILL MASTER PLAN AND DESIGN GUIDELINES

CITY OF VACAVILLE



March 2008

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Prepared for:

City of Vacaville  
Redevelopment Agency

40 Eldridge Ave., Suite 1-10  
Vacaville, CA 95688

Prepared by:

EDAW, Inc

2022 J Street,  
Sacramento, CA 95811

Contact:

David P. Tuttle

Allen K. Folks

916/414-5800

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EDAW | AECOM

# Acknowledgments

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## **CITY COUNCIL/REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY**

Len Augustine, *Mayor*

Chuck Dimmick, *Vice Mayor*

Pauline Clancy, *City Council Member*

Steve Wilkins, *City Council Member*

Curtis Hunt, *City Council Member*

## **PLANNING COMMISSION**

Brett Johnson

Dan Broadwater

Frank Crim

Ella Marie Kallios

Joe Niccoli

Eric Williams

Shannon Nadasdy

## **HOUSING AND REDEVELOPMENT COMMISSION**

Patricia Gideon

Steve Kappel

Denise Suihkonen

Robert Meador

Suzanne Clark

Benjamin Amos

## **AGENCY STAFF PROJECT TEAM**

David J. Van Kirk, *Executive Director*

Laura L. Kuhn, *Assistant City Manager*

Cyndi Johnston, *Housing and Redevelopment Director*

Brenda Clyma, *Housing and Redevelopment Manager*

Emily Cantu, *Housing and Redevelopment Project Coordinator*

Denise Malvetti, *Housing and Redevelopment Project Coordinator*

Scott Sexton, *Community Development Director*

Fred Buder, *City Planner*

## CONSULTANT TEAM

### **EDAW, Inc.**

Urban Design, Planning, and Economic Analysis, Prime Consultant

*Allen Folks, Vice President*

*Paul Tuttle, Senior Urban Designer, Project Manager*

*Alexander Quinn, Senior Economic Planner*

*Anh Thai, Urban Planner, Assistant Project Manager*

*Naren Veeranna, Urban Designer*

## DEVELOPER PANEL TEAM

### **Special thanks to our developer team panel participants...**

Mark Rutheiser, Pyramid Construction

Curt Johannsen, Triad Communities

Ray Nalangan, New Faze Development

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# 1. INTRODUCTION





# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Purpose of the Opportunity Hill Master Plan and Design Guidelines

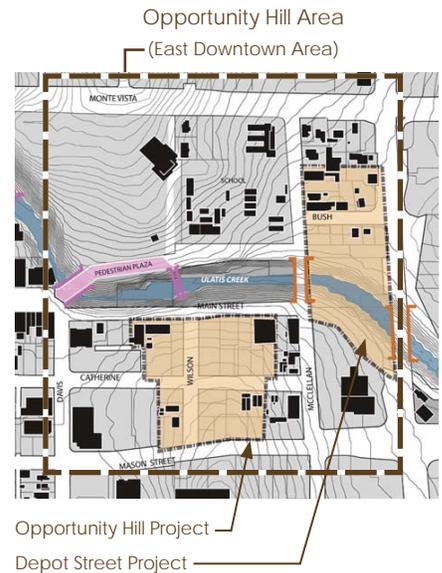
The *Opportunity Hill Master Plan and Design Guidelines* (Master Plan) sets the vision and action strategies for the revitalization of the East Main Street and Bush Street areas (the Opportunity Hill area). The collective work of the City of Vacaville (City), business owners, and active citizens of Vacaville has made the downtown area what it is today—a successful and vital center for Vacaville. As part of the ongoing revitalization of downtown Vacaville, the City of Vacaville Redevelopment Agency (Redevelopment Agency) has strategically assembled two opportunity sites just east of the historic Main Street district to target for new mixed-use infill development and revitalize the eastern part of the downtown area. The two sites, known as the Opportunity Hill project and Depot Street project, are planned for a mix of new residential, office, commercial, and entertainment uses (see Figure 1-2, “Project Context Map”).

As in many other cities, regional and commercial centers located in the suburban locations and along freeways compete for the downtown area’s retail businesses. However, downtown areas provide a different kind of shopping experience than suburban and highway commercial centers by attracting visitors to their fine restaurants, specialty shops and services, cultural amenities, and entertainment venues.

This Master Plan builds on the plans, traditions, and collective energy that have boosted the vitality of downtown Vacaville and serves as a blueprint for the Opportunity Hill area. The Master Plan provides a guiding framework and specific action-oriented steps for the continued revitalization of the downtown area.



*Downtown Vacaville Town Square*



## 1.2 Project Context

### REGIONAL CONTEXT

The City of Vacaville is located in north, central Solano County, along Interstate routes 80 (I-80) and 505 (I-505), between Sacramento and San Francisco (see Figure 1-1, “City and Regional Context Map”). Vacaville is approximately 27 square miles in size and is bordered by rolling hillsides, fruit orchards, and fertile farmland. The City’s proximity to major highways provides easy local and regional access to the downtown area.

Vacaville has one of the largest shopping districts in the region including the commercial centers along I-80 and the Vacaville Premium Outlets. It is home to several successful biotechnology companies—Genentech, Alza, and Novartis. Vacaville is also centrally located for day trips to destinations such as Lake Tahoe, the Napa and Sonoma Valleys, San Francisco, and the beaches of Northern California. Affordable housing, quality schools, and a wide array of youth activities and community events make Vacaville a family-friendly destination and a desirable place to live.

### HISTORIC CONTEXT

The area now encompassed by the City of Vacaville was originally settled as farm land and was one of several land grants presented by the Mexican government to Juan Felipe Peña and Manuel Cabeza Vaca in 1841. In 1851, William McDaniel purchased one square mile of land from Manuel Vaca to create the township of Vacaville. The City of Vacaville was incorporated in 1892 and quickly evolved to become an agricultural producer of fruit and nut products shipped throughout the nation. Vacaville also served as a roadside stop on the major highway to Sacramento and was known for the Nut Tree restaurant, which catered to travelers journeying between the San Francisco Bay Area, the Sacramento Valley, and Lake Tahoe.

Vacaville’s greatest rate of growth occurred between 1960 and 1990, partly due to the expansion of the Basic Vegetable Products Company, the construction of Travis Air Force Base, and the construction of the California Medical Facility and California State Prison. Although the Basic Vegetables site and the Nut Tree Restaurant have since closed, Vacaville today has a more diversified economy than ever and is one of the fastest growing areas in the nation.

### LOCAL CONTEXT AND EXISTING CHARACTER

Vacaville is easily accessed from the I-80 freeway gateways at Monte Vista Avenue, Mason Street, and Davis Street. The downtown area is defined by Monte Vista Avenue on the north, I-80 on the south, Depot Street on the east, and West Street on the west. The Main Street Historic District is a five-square-block area of downtown Vacaville lining Main Street and Merchant Street. The Opportunity Hill area is located downtown, east of the Main Street Historic District, and is defined in this Master Plan as the area bounded by the Old Town Hall near Davis Street on the west, Depot Street on the east, Monte Vista Avenue on the north, and Mason Street in the south (see Figure 1-2, “Project Context Map”).

Although new commercial centers have developed around the highways outside downtown Vacaville, much of the original character of the downtown area has been preserved. Old Vacaville still feels and looks like a small town and residents take pride in the character, the family-friendly destinations, entertainment, and numerous community events that downtown Vacaville has to offer.



*Historic context: Vacaville’s Downtown Main Street, circa 1880-1900  
(Source: Images of America—Vacaville, by Jerry Bowen)*



*Old Town Vacaville today, with new and old buildings juxtaposed, still feels and looks like a small town*



*The Town Square, framed by offices and restaurants, serves as a central gathering place for the community*

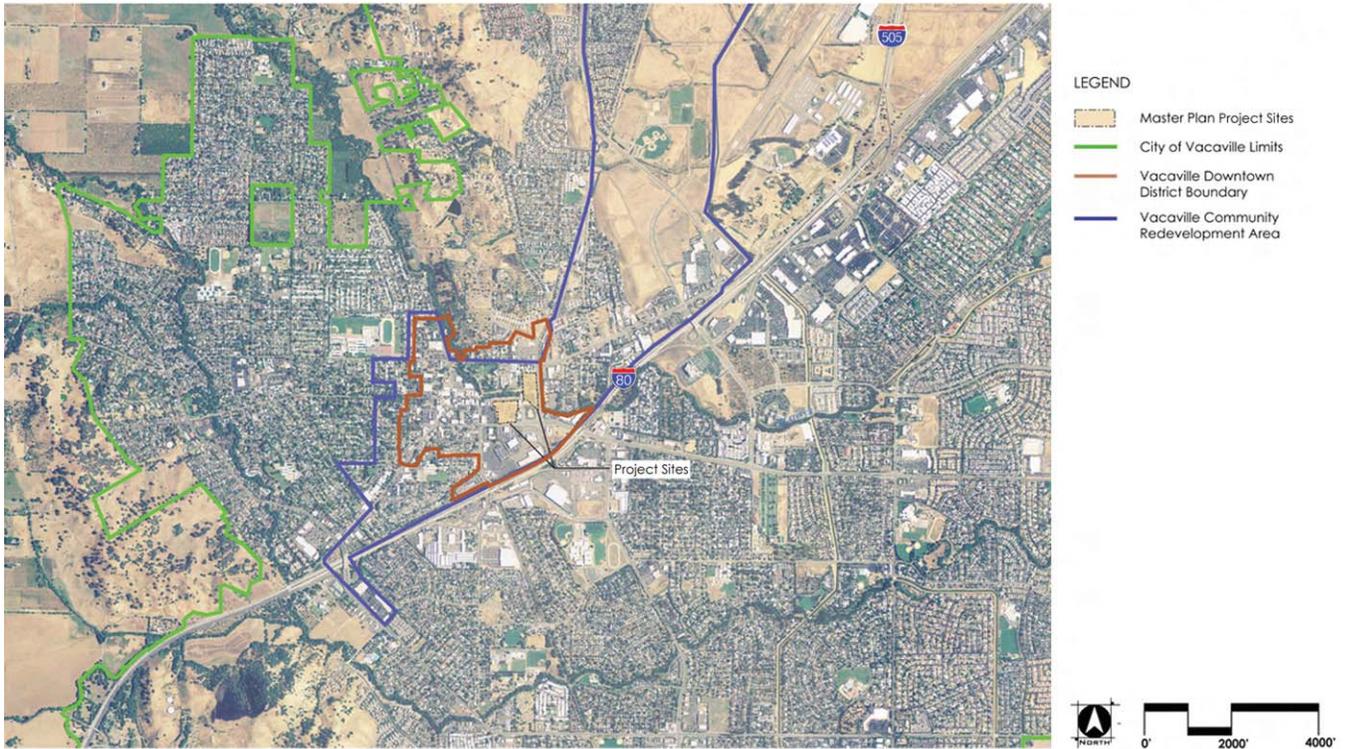


Figure 1-1: City and Regional Context Map

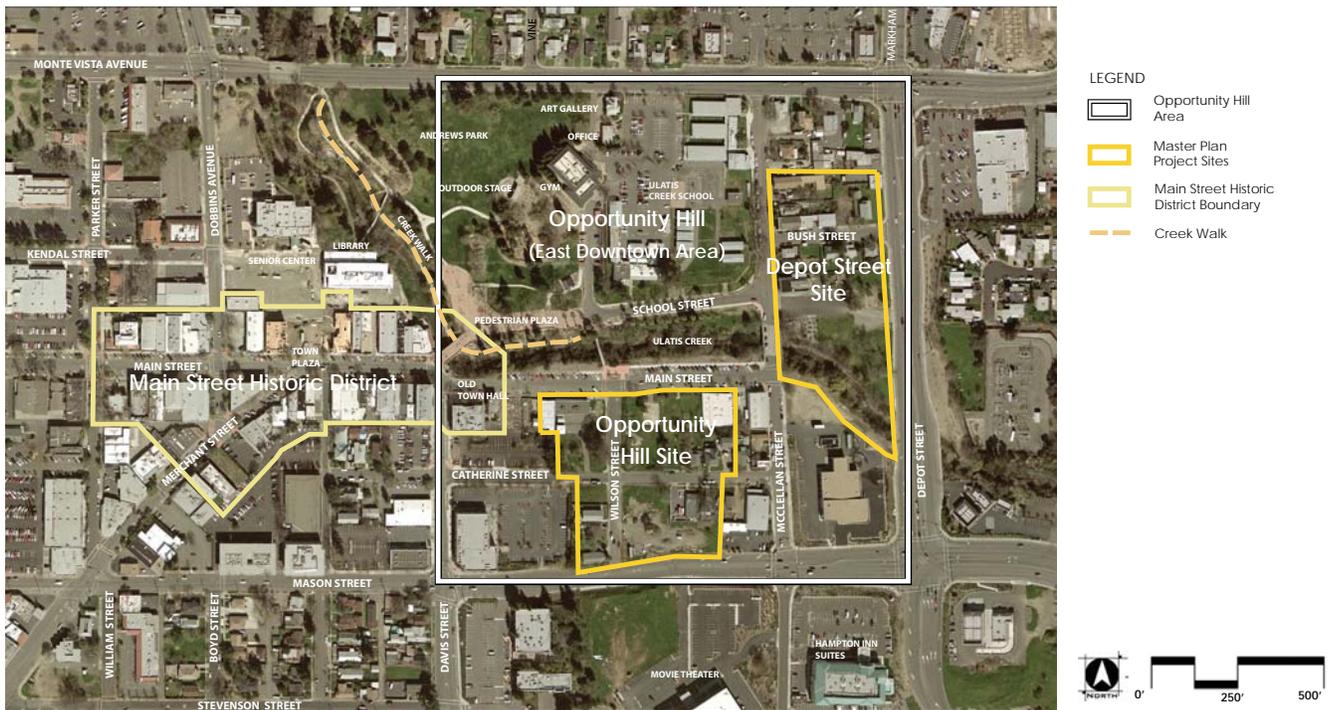


Figure 1-2: Project Context Map

### The Redevelopment Agency's Contribution to Downtown Improvements

The Opportunity Hill project is one of several action plans and projects identified by the Redevelopment Agency (Agency) in its *Downtown Area Economic Development Strategy*. Downtown Vacaville is located in the Vacaville Community Redevelopment Area. This redevelopment area includes the historic downtown area and Opportunity Hill; it also includes the areas extending from the Putah South Canal and I-80 on the west to Browns Valley Road and East Monte Vista Avenue on the east, and to Vaca Valley Parkway on the north (see Figure 1-3, "Redevelopment Area Map"). In 1982, when the Redevelopment Agency was formed, downtown Vacaville was described as "a classic redevelopment area, characterized by older housing stock, a distressed downtown area, vacant parcels, deteriorating trailer parks along former U.S. Highway 40 (now Monte Vista Avenue), and an underutilized vegetable dehydrating plant."

Since its formation 25 years ago, the Redevelopment Agency has actively invested in revitalizing downtown Vacaville and has brought a new renaissance to the downtown area. Many successful downtown area projects have been realized due to these efforts including: the completion of the Town Square, development of the Ulatis Creekwalk, and improvements to Andrews Park with the addition of a playground and the Georgie Duke Sports Center, to support outdoor community events and entertainment. Other successful projects include funding for streetscape, public art, and infrastructure improvements, increases to the number of parking spaces in the downtown area, and the formation of the Downtown Vacaville Business Improvement District (DVBID) in 1999.

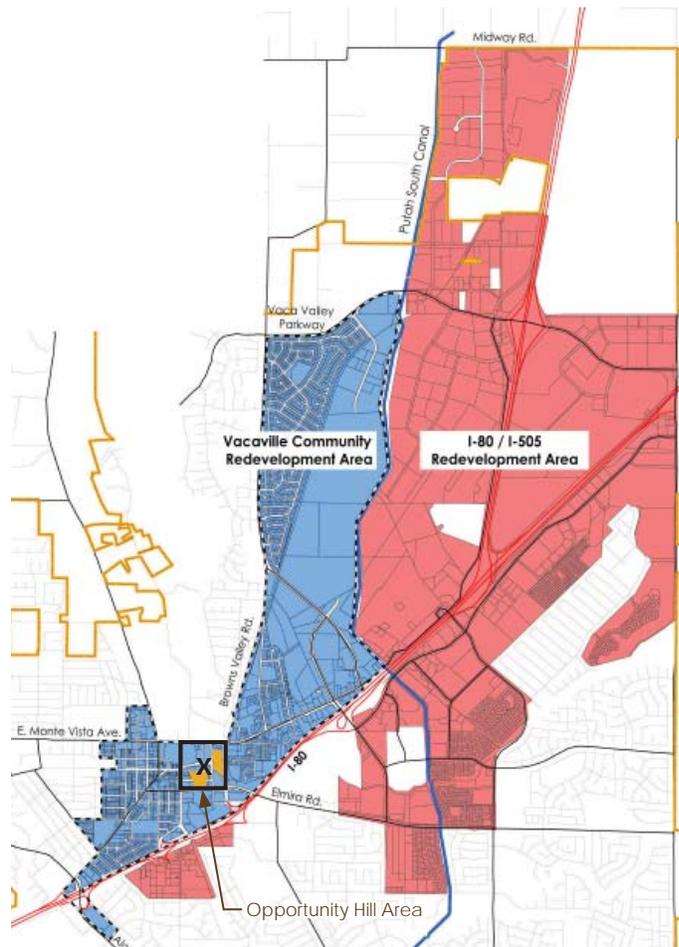


Figure 1-3: Redevelopment Area Map

### 1.3 Master Plan Organization

This Master Plan is organized into the following six chapters:

- **Chapter 1**, “Introduction,” describes the purpose and organization of the Master Plan; the regional, historic, and local context; and summarizes the planning process for the Opportunity Hill area.
- **Chapter 2**, “Existing Conditions, Assets, Opportunities, and Challenges,” summarizes the existing site conditions and identifies the key opportunities and challenges for Opportunity Hill.
- **Chapter 3**, “Vision,” presents the community vision for downtown Vacaville, as described by participants in the planning process, and summarizes these concepts as a series of goals.
- **Chapter 4**, “Strategy for Downtown Development,” presents the strategic framework for revitalization efforts in the Opportunity Hill area. The strategic framework highlights the major land uses that will continue to build on the success of downtown Vacaville. This chapter introduces the opportunity projects anticipated to have the most significant impact on transforming the character of the east downtown area. Supporting strategies that assist in the development of the primary land uses and opportunity projects are also presented.
- **Chapter 5**, “Implementation,” summarizes recommendations for realizing the goals and strategies described in the Master Plan. This chapter is organized into discussions of top-priority actions and potential financing tools.
- **Chapter 6**, “Design Guidelines,” provides direction on the quality of development desired for the Opportunity Hill area.

### 1.4 Planning Process

The initial planning process for the Opportunity Hill area was led by the Redevelopment Agency who conducted community meetings to gather input on the vision, issues, and opportunities for Opportunity Hill. EDAW was hired by the Agency to assist with an additional public outreach meeting and the development of the *Opportunity Hill Master Plan and Design Guidelines*. Preparation of the Master Plan was coordinated with water infrastructure studies prepared by Nolte Associates and sewer infrastructure studies conducted by West Yost Associates. One of the key objectives of the planning process was to facilitate community consensus on a shared vision for the Opportunity Hill area and to determine the steps needed to transform Opportunity Hill into a vibrant, mixed-use area of downtown Vacaville. The planning process used to develop the Master Plan is briefly presented in the phases described below.

- **Phase 1: Project Initiation and Existing Conditions Analysis**

This phase involved a site visit; an analysis of existing site conditions, including the streetscape pattern and urban form; a review of relevant planning policies and documents; and the preparation of project base maps. It also included several meetings with the City’s project team and a meeting with the DVBID to understand local concerns and visions for the downtown area.



*A public visioning workshop was held on September 10, 2007 to confirm the community's vision for the downtown area*

- **Phase 2: Testing of Site Development Scenarios**

Three different land use scenarios, based on different housing and circulation configurations, were developed for the two project sites to test the development potential of each site.

- **Phase 3: Downtown Visioning Meeting and Site Analysis**

EDAW and the Redevelopment Agency co-facilitated a public visioning workshop on September 10, 2007. The purpose of the workshop was to confirm the community's vision for downtown Vacaville. Building and site design options and place-making elements were presented to the public. The community members who were in attendance at the community meeting expressed an overwhelming preference to develop housing and mixed uses, bring more cultural arts and entertainment facilities downtown, and to make the downtown area more pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly.

- **Phase 4: Prioritization of Development Strategies**

This phase focused on identifying fundamental design concepts and economic development strategies for the Opportunity Hill area. A concept diagram was created to highlight key sites for opportunity projects and to identify concepts for organizing the sites.

After the community meeting, the site scenarios were reviewed by a panel of developers experienced in mixed-use development in the Sacramento and Bay Area markets. In addition, a pro forma analysis was performed for each site scenario to evaluate the impact of different land use combinations and parking strategies on land values.

- **Phase 5: Opportunity Hill Master Plan and Design Guidelines**

The last phase of the project consisted of refining the strategies and graphic illustrations for the Opportunity Hill area to convey the preferred concepts which are summarized in the Master Plan.

## 2. EXISTING CONDITIONS, ASSETS, OPPORTUNITIES, AND CHALLENGES





## 2 Existing Conditions, Assets, Opportunities, and Challenges

Downtown Vacaville is already a popular and vibrant community destination, as exemplified by the well-attended events held regularly in Andrews Park and the success of the downtown area businesses. This chapter of the Master Plan describes the existing conditions, assets, opportunities, and challenges for the Opportunity Hill area.

### 2.1 Existing Conditions

Information on existing land uses, pedestrian circulation, parking and traffic, and infrastructure conditions in the Opportunity Hill area were studied or surveyed and are briefly presented in this section.

#### Land Uses

- Existing Land Uses

Existing land uses in the Opportunity Hill area are commercial uses (auto parts and service shops, an antique shop, a deli, and a thrift store); service uses (a bank, auto insurance office, real estate office, and other office uses); industrial uses (a steel fabrication shop and glass shop); public/institutional uses (religious uses, a gymnasium, a homeless facility, and the Vacaville Heritage Council and Solano County Genealogical Society, both of which currently occupy the Old Town Hall). Refer to Figure 2-1, "Existing Land Uses."

- General Plan Designations

General Plan land use designations for the Opportunity Hill area in the Vacaville General Plan are represented in Figure 2-2, "General Plan Map." The General Plan designates the Opportunity Hill area as General Commercial, in a large area that includes portions of the Depot Street site north of Ulatis Creek; Urban High Density, on the Depot Street site north of School Street; Public Park and Open Space, at Andrews Park and in the portion of Opportunity Hill occupied by Ulatis Creek; and School, on the parcels north of School Street (currently occupied by the Vacaville School District).

- Zoning Designations

Zoning designations for the Opportunity Hill area (see Figure 2-3, "Zoning Map") are Downtown Commercial (CD), General Commercial (CG), and Community Facilities (CF). The Opportunity Hill area is also located within the Residential Urban High Density Overlay, which allows development of residential units in the downtown area at a density of up to 36 dwelling units per acre (du/ac).

#### Pedestrian Circulation

The pedestrian circulation study for the Opportunity Hill area (see Figure 2-4, "Pedestrian Circulation") located sidewalks and pedestrian paths, identified where they did not exist, and identified the main traffic intersections shared by traffic and pedestrians. Sidewalks proved to be continuous in this area, except at vacant parcels along Wilson Street and Bush Street.



*View of the School Street site*



*Opportunity House homeless facility*



*Auto body shop adjacent to the New Hope Christian Fellowship church*



*The Ulatis Creekwalk trail, a unique pedestrian circulation feature in Downtown Vacaville*



Figure 2-1: Existing Land Uses Map



Figure 2-2: General Plan Map

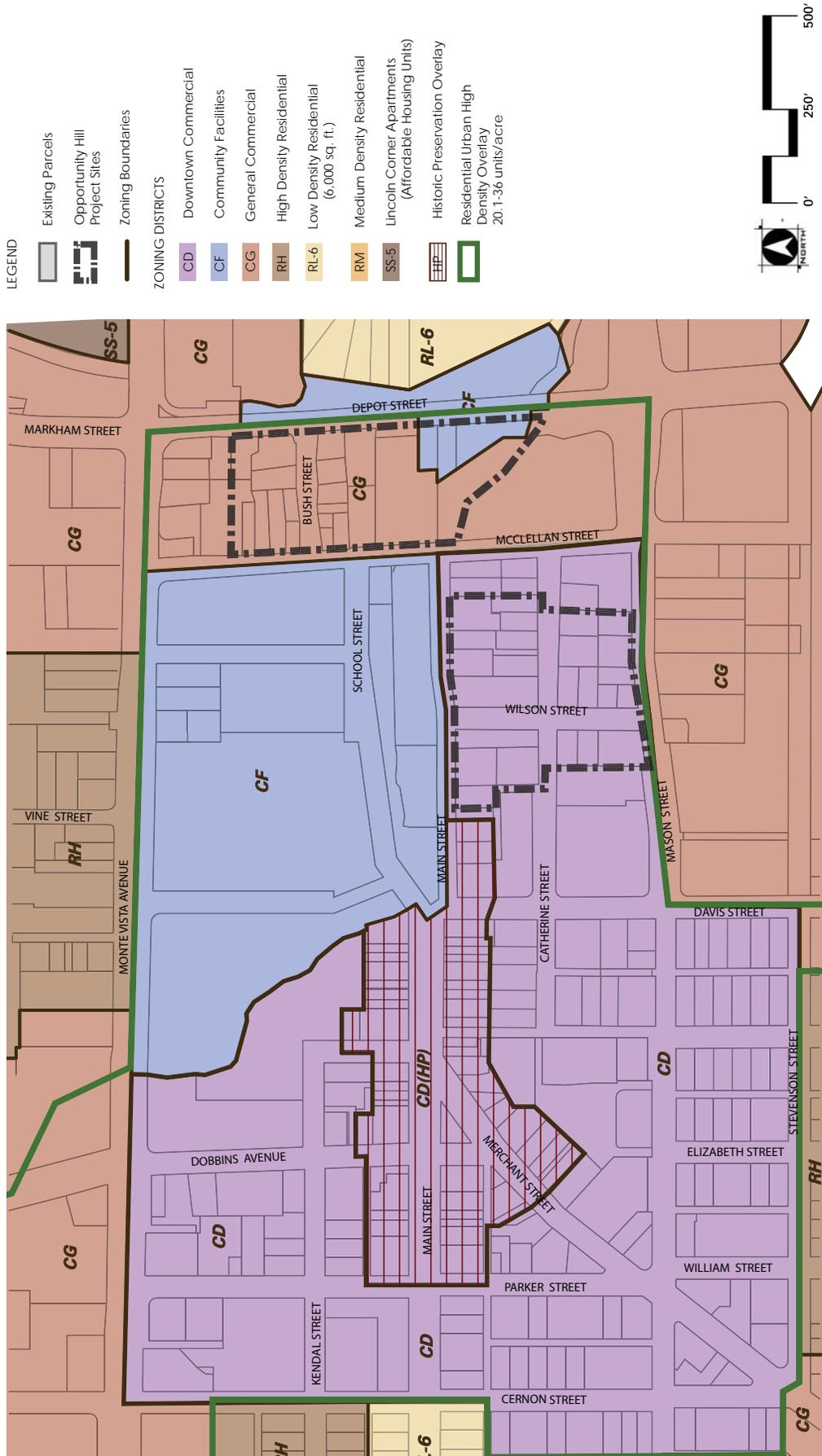


Figure 2-3: Zoning Map

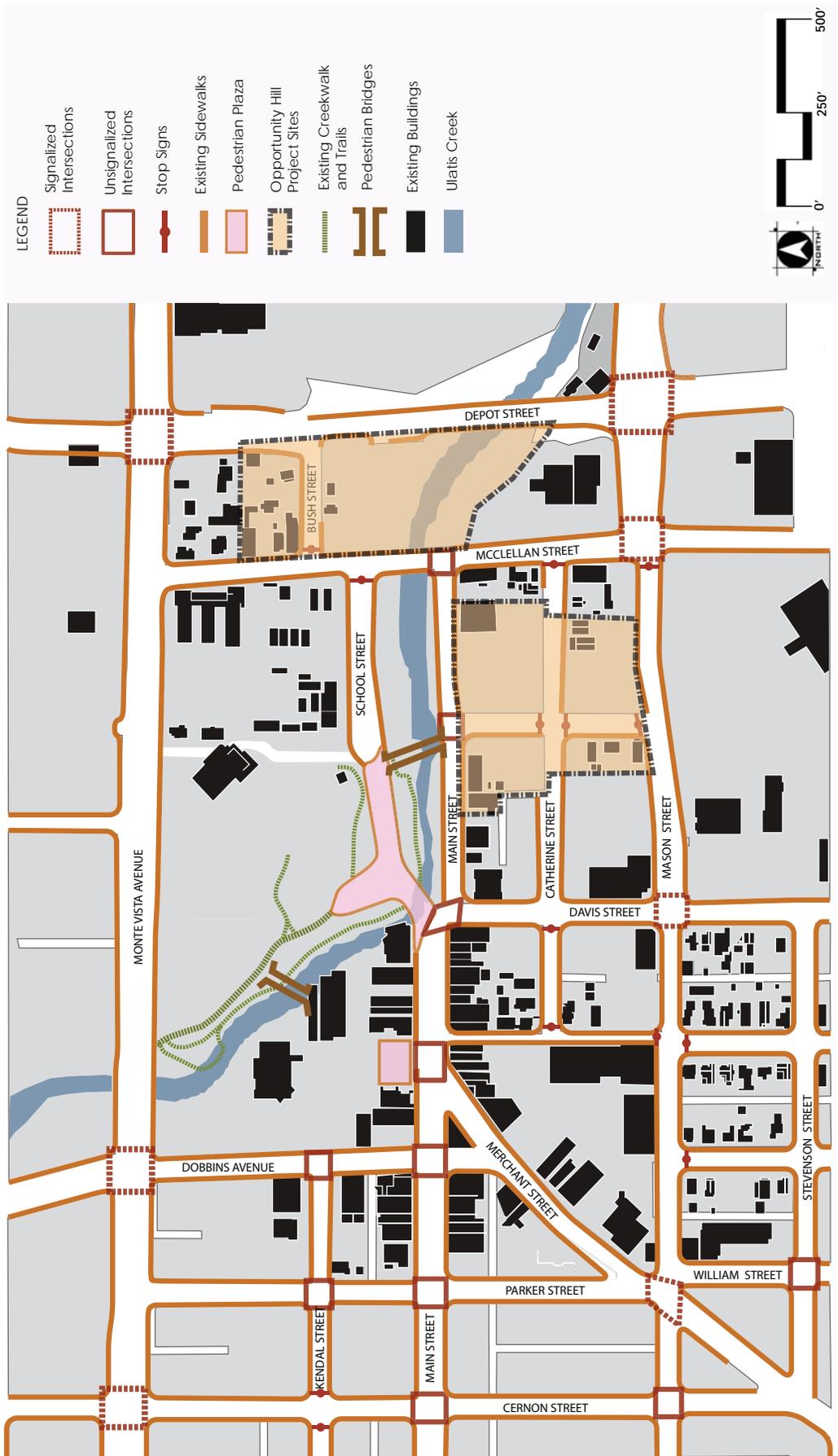


Figure 2-4: Pedestrian Circulation



*The approach to Main Street heading north from Davis Street*



*Diagonal parking on Main Street*

### Traffic and Parking Analysis

- Traffic Analysis

Data for peak-hour intersection traffic, between 4:00-6:00 p.m., was collected for the Opportunity Hill area. The busiest traffic intersections occur at the main freeway approaches into the downtown area—Monte Vista Avenue and Depot Street, Depot Street and Mason Street, and Monte Vista Avenue and Dobbins Avenue—and at the approaches into the Historic District from eastbound Main Street and northbound Davis Street.

- Parking Analysis

On-street parking and surface parking lots are located in various areas of downtown Vacaville. Currently, on-street parking is available in the Opportunity Hill area but no surface parking lots exist. Additional parking will be needed to serve future, new development in the Opportunity Hill area.

### Infrastructure Analysis

The existing capacity for the Opportunity Hill area for water and wastewater services at General Plan buildout was analyzed.

- Analysis of Water Service

*The Opportunity Hill Water System Analysis—Phase 1 study, prepared by Nolte Associates (October 2007), found existing water mains on East Main Street, Catherine Street, Mason Street, Davis Street, McClellan Street, and Bush Street. In general, the Opportunity Hill area is served with water mains that are 12-inch diameter and smaller including 4-inch and 8-inch water mains on Wilson Street, Catherine Street, McClellan Street, and Bush Street. The existing water system is illustrated in Figure 2-5, “Existing Water System.” The existing 4-inch and 8-inch water mains are insufficient to provide adequate fire flow at General Plan buildout.*

- Analysis of Wastewater Service

The baseline conditions of the wastewater system in the Opportunity Hill area was analyzed by West Yost Associates in November 2007. The study evaluated sewer service that will accommodate General Plan buildout and also the physical condition of the collection mains that have substandard diameters (less than 8 inches). The study found that the baseline conditions could be served by existing collection mains, however, two sewer segments, segments 5 and 6 (see Figure 2-6, “Sewer Study Map”), were recommended for replacement because they were in poor physical condition and had substandard diameters.





## 2.2 Assets and Opportunities

Downtown Vacaville possesses many existing assets that will be instrumental in shaping its future. These assets are described below (see Figure 2-7, “Opportunities and Constraints Diagram”).

- **Historic Amenities**

In 1984, the Main Street Vacaville Historic District (Historic District) was established to help stimulate economic activity and growth in the area while preserving the unique variety of structures in the downtown area. Buildings in the Historic District were constructed between 1890 and 1935. The historic landmarks and structures in the Historic District make the community a unique location to live, work, and play. Local residents and business owners take pride in preserving the old-town character of the downtown area.

- **Public Amenities**

The newly completed Town Square, the Ulatis Creekwalk, and Andrews Park, all within walking distance of each other, serve as downtown hubs for community activities and gatherings. The downtown area is also supported by a library, senior center, gymnasium, museum, and art gallery.

- **Pedestrian-Scale Urban Form**

The pedestrian-scale, tree-lined streets, and compact development pattern create a pleasant and comfortable ambiance for Downtown Vacaville. Generous sidewalks, quaint alleyways, a sense of enclosure created by the rhythm of two- and three-story buildings, street trees, street furniture, and public art along Main Street contribute to the pedestrian-friendly character of the downtown.

- **Retail Commercial, and Entertainment Hub**

One of the strengths of downtown Vacaville lies in the synergy and variety of community, retail, business, recreational, and entertainment uses. Specialty retail shops and many different restaurants line Main Street. These one-of-a-kind retail and entertainment establishments distinguish the downtown area from other suburban retail centers.

- **Scenic Views**

The scenic views surrounding the downtown area are another key asset. Downtown Vacaville is well located for views to the hills, Andrews Park, Ulatis Creek, and the Historic District. The Opportunity Hill project benefits from its raised topographic location and proximity to many of the downtown area’s amenities, allowing the opportunity to take advantage of these scenic views.

- **Committed Leadership and Diverse and Engaged Community**

Downtown Vacaville also benefits from the dedicated work and leadership of the City, the DVBID, and the active involvement of the local community—all committed to ensuring the continued success of the downtown area. The support, enthusiasm, and stewardship of the community will be instrumental in ensuring the implementation of the *Opportunity Hill Master Plan and Design Guidelines*.



*Preservation of the variety of historic structures in the downtown is a priority for residents and business owners*



*A new public library located adjacent to the Town Square and Andrews Park serves as a community amenity*

## 2.3 Challenges and Opportunities

While downtown Vacaville has many positive attributes, it also has room to develop and improve (refer to Figure 2-7, “Opportunities and Constraints Diagram”). Some of the challenges of the downtown area are described below.

- **Development at the Periphery**

Residential development in the outlying suburbs and the growth of new commercial developments along arterial streets and freeways such as I-80 can be competition for downtown businesses. These developments attract new and returning visitors to the regional shopping hubs. The opportunity exists to also draw these visitors to the unique retail shops and entertainment functions in the downtown area.

- **Specialty Retail**

Retail, especially specialty retail, is encouraged in downtown Vacaville. Specialty retail or one-of-a-kind uses contribute to the unique shopping experience of the downtown area; therefore, development of such uses as infill within existing vacant spaces is encouraged. Extending specialty retail uses into the Opportunity Hill area should also be considered.

- **Office Uses and Jobs**

A specific goal expressed by the Redevelopment Agency is to attract higher paying office jobs to ensure the continued revitalization and growth of the downtown area. Office uses and new employment can bring more patrons to the downtown area and can serve as a catalyst for other supporting uses, including retail and service uses.

- **Housing Opportunities**

The community expressed an overwhelming interest in the development of new housing, especially condominiums and smaller ownership units. The Opportunity Hill projects are underutilized and are prime locations for the development of housing downtown. Bringing new residents into the Opportunity Hill area can bring a permanent population of patrons to the downtown shops, restaurants, and businesses.

- **Affordable Housing Opportunities**

Community members expressed concerns regarding the need to provide affordable housing in the downtown area. Affordable housing will provide fair opportunities for residents of all income levels to live in the downtown and ensures that housing is made available for retail workers, active adults, and persons with disabilities.



*Boutiques, cafes, restaurants, and speciality retail uses in historic buildings create a unique shopping and living experience in downtown Vacaville*

- **Permanent Entertainment and Restaurant Uses**

A goal of the Redevelopment Agency, echoed during community meetings and developer interviews, is to facilitate more entertainment and restaurant uses downtown to further promote the area as a community and visitor destination.

- **Parking**

Parking presents a special challenge to the community. An inventory of parking does exist, however, parking can be a challenge during special events and peak flows of activity. Downtown merchants have expressed concerns that convenient parking is needed in the downtown to vie with suburban locations that have abundant and convenient parking. The community has also expressed concerns regarding providing adequate parking for new development in the Opportunity Hill area.

There is a need to ensure adequate parking for future development in the Opportunity Hill area and to conveniently accommodate the special events in the downtown. Parking solutions will need to balance these concerns against the goal to promote higher density infill development and the preservation of the character of the downtown area. The creation of too much parking will detract from the special character of the downtown landscape.

- **Traffic Noise**

Traffic noise may also present a challenge to developing attractive residential developments in downtown Vacaville, especially if buildings and development sites are not carefully designed to address noise issues caused by traffic from major arterial streets such as Depot Street and Mason Street.

- **Signage and Wayfinding**

Currently it is difficult to find downtown Vacaville unless one is familiar with the City and the local street pattern. A successful and well-designed signage and wayfinding program will help visitors find the downtown area and inform them when they have arrived. Signs should attract and help direct visitors from the freeway, to the main arterial streets, to the Downtown, and then to find the main commercial streets, stores, and parking areas they seek.

**Freeway Signage:** Signs along I-80 identifying the historic downtown main street are small and few. Once the signs are noticed, travelers can easily miss the freeway exits and may have difficulty finding the downtown area.

**Downtown Signage:** The downtown arch on Davis Street is particularly effective as a landmark. However, signage at most other primary entries into the downtown area (from Mason Street, Depot Street, Monte Vista Avenue, Cernon Street, and Parker Street) are obscure and need to be more visibly marked.



*More restaurant establishments such as the Creekside Bar and Grill support the role of the downtown area as an entertainment destination*



*On-street angled parking provided along Main Street help establish the streetscape character of the downtown area and slow traffic*



*Entry monumentation along Davis Street marks the entrance into the Vacaville downtown district*

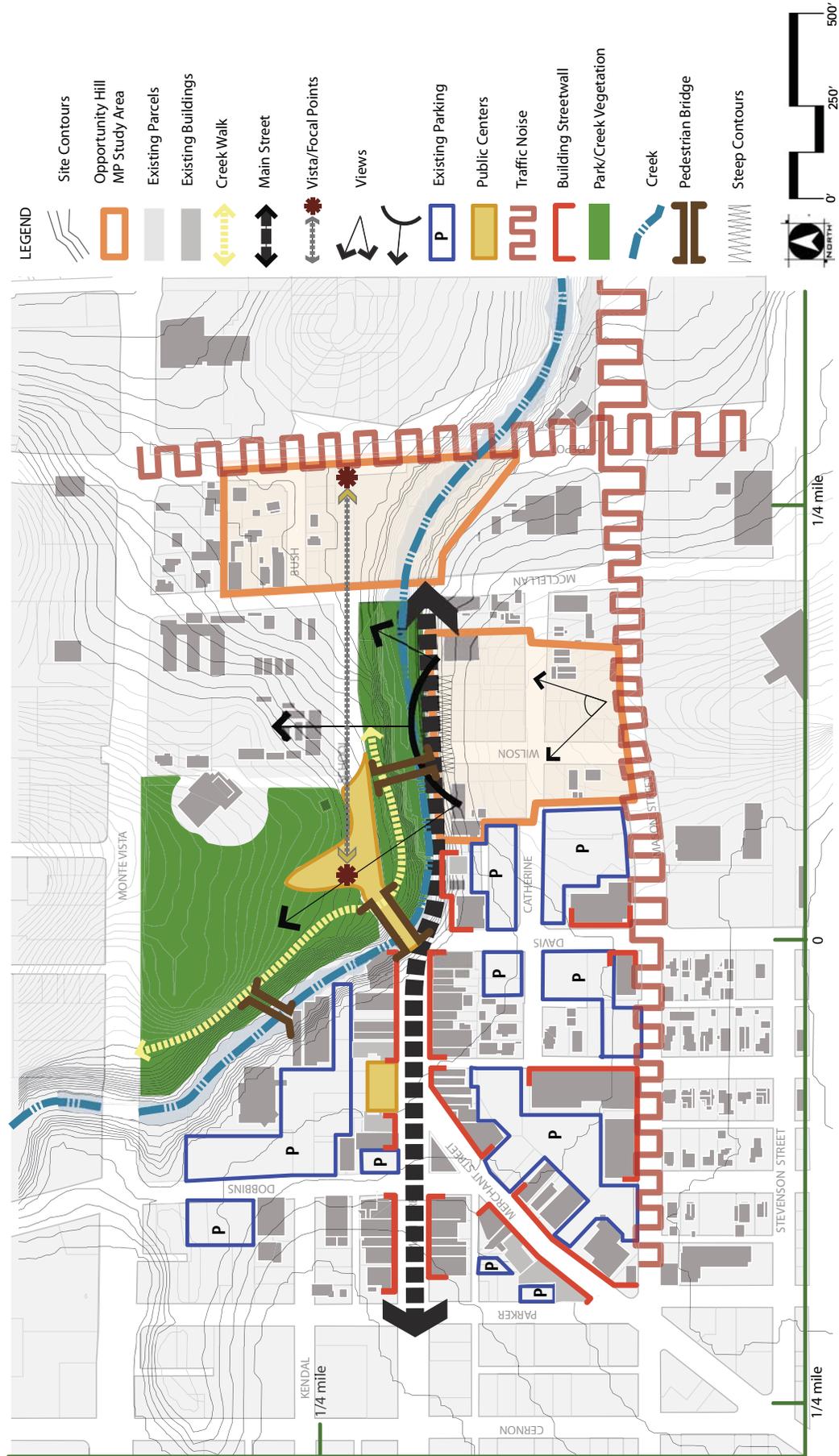


Figure 2-7: Opportunities and Constraints Diagram