

6 OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS

This chapter summarizes the most significant opportunities for Santa Cruz to reinforce and improve its community character over the next 20 years, as well as some of the key constraints that may limit what types of change can occur. The ideas in this chapter are drawn from recommendations developed by community members at the September 2006 Community Design Workshop, as well as the analysis in this Background Report. These recommendations will help Santa Cruz define the goals, policies and actions for community character in the General Plan 2025.

A. Natural and Recreational Amenities

Santa Cruz's character is closely tied to its natural amenities, including its coastal area and Greenbelt lands. There are several opportunities to enhance the city's connections to these natural features and provide new recreational opportunities within the city.

- ◆ **Connections to the San Lorenzo River.** The San Lorenzo River's levees often divide the river from its surroundings. New development near the river could overcome this issue by providing public areas on upper floors with views towards the river. Collectively, these buildings could form a new "Riverwalk" district adjacent to Downtown, with shops and restaurants that face the river.
- ◆ **Enhanced Access to Open Spaces.** By improving access to open spaces such as Arana Gulch, the City can provide new amenities that connect Santa Cruz residents with the natural environment. The benefits of accessing these areas must be balanced carefully against potential drawbacks, such as the disturbance of important habitats for plants and animals.
- ◆ **Greening the City.** In addition to enhancing natural open spaces, the community could use street trees and landscaping to further integrate the natural and built environments. New landscaping could include native plants that reflect Santa Cruz's natural heritage, as well as plants that will attract beneficial insects, birds and other wildlife. Stormwater runoff

could be managed in some locations using vegetated swales, which would filter pollutants from stormwater before it reaches the Monterey Bay.

- ◆ **Local Food Sources.** Santa Cruz's existing community gardens, such as the raised beds in Trescony Park, are very popular with local residents. The community could identify additional sites for community gardens, so people who live in apartments or have small yards can grow fruit and vegetables near their homes. In addition, private developers could include space for gardens alongside new residential buildings. The City could create another local food source by planting fruit trees along the street in selected areas.
- ◆ **Active Recreation.** Santa Cruz has a wealth of natural open space, including its Greenbelt lands, coastal area and Neary Lagoon. However, many neighborhoods have little space for active recreational uses, such as softball, basketball and skateboarding. As the city's population grows, the community should find suitable places to build facilities for these uses, especially where higher-density residential development is likely to attract many new residents.

B. New Development

Santa Cruz values the character of its existing built form, which includes finely-scaled residential neighborhoods as well as more intensive development in Downtown Santa Cruz and along major corridors. With careful planning, the next 20 years of development can further enhance the city's built form.

- ◆ **Citywide Design Guidelines.** To ensure the high quality of new development in all parts of the city, it may be appropriate to create design guidelines that would apply throughout Santa Cruz, not just within a specific location. The guidelines in Santa Cruz's area plans, especially the Beach and South of Laurel Comprehensive Area Plan, could serve as a starting point for citywide design guidelines.
- ◆ **Neighborhood-Specific Design Guidelines.** In neighborhoods where residents are especially concerned about the character of new develop-

ment, or where a great deal of change is expected to occur, the City could work with residents to create additional design guidelines that are specific to those neighborhoods. A collaborative process would allow neighborhoods to clearly define their vision for where they live, helping developers to understand what kinds of projects are most likely to be welcomed.

- ◆ **Intensified Development on Corridors.** Many of Santa Cruz’s commercial corridors have vacant and underutilized parcels, as well as buildings that lack historic character and are nearing the end of their useful lives. These corridors may be appropriate locations for more intensive development, such as multi-story, mixed-use buildings that combine ground-floor retail shops with office or residential uses on the upper stories. This change would make it more feasible to reduce maximum densities in smaller-scale residential neighborhoods such as Seabright, so those neighborhoods can retain their existing character.
- ◆ **Change in Industrial Areas.** Over the next 20 years, land uses in the Westside Industrial and Harvey West Districts are likely to change significantly, resulting in the construction of many new buildings. The community could take advantage of this change by deciding in advance what the character of these areas should become. Doing so would make it easier for developers to create projects that reflect the community’s vision.
- ◆ **Connecting Downtown with the Coast.** Although Downtown Santa Cruz is within walking distance of the coast and the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk, it is difficult for visitors to understand how they can get from one place to the other. New development on Lower Pacific Avenue could enhance this connection by extending the character of Pacific Avenue towards the coast, or it could define an entirely new character that creates a transition from Downtown.
- ◆ **Enhancing Development on Front Street.** Front Street has a large number of surface parking lots and underutilized parcels, providing an opportunity to create more intensive development that connects Downtown with the San Lorenzo River. New development on Front Street

could draw from Pacific Avenue’s existing character, or it could define an architecture and sense of place that is unique to Front Street.

- ◆ **Creative Solutions for Parking.** Some commercial buildings in Santa Cruz are set back from the street behind parking lots, which discourages pedestrian activity. New development could encourage pedestrian activity by putting buildings closer to the street, with parking behind or next to the building. Where development constraints force parking areas to be adjacent to streets, the City could provide detailed requirements for landscaped buffers between the parking area and public sidewalks or streets.
- ◆ **Form-Based Codes.** As described in Chapter 4, form-based codes enable cities to set strict design requirements for new development in a specific place. In locations where the existing character may change significantly, such as the Ocean Street Corridor or the Westside Industrial District, it could be appropriate to develop a form-based code that sets requirements for the form of new buildings in these important locations. Alternatively, the community might decide that it would rather create design guidelines for these places, since they give architects more flexibility to develop creative solutions for a particular site.
- ◆ **Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs).** The City has already prepared detailed guidelines and plan books for homeowners who want to build an ADU. By continuing to encourage new ADUs, Santa Cruz can gain new housing for people who do not need a large house, including young adults and seniors, without drastically changing the character of existing residential neighborhoods.

C. Streetscape Improvements

A community’s sense of place is defined in large part by its streetscape improvements. For example, the street trees, public seating, statues and sculptures along Pacific Avenue are part of the reason why Downtown Santa Cruz is a vibrant, lively gathering place. Many other parts of the city would benefit from streetscape improvements that reinforce or enhance their character.

- ◆ **Streetscapes on Major Corridors.** Santa Cruz’s commercial corridors tend to be strongly automobile-oriented, with few public improvements that make the streets more attractive and welcoming. Enhancements such as street trees, landscaping and enhanced paving could make these corridors more attractive for everyone who uses them, and they could increase pedestrian activity by creating more pleasant places to walk. In particular, the community has called for improvements on Ocean Street, Mission Street and Soquel Avenue, the corridors that bring people into Santa Cruz. Improvements to these corridors must take care to balance the needs of buses, cars, pedestrians and bicyclists. Enhancing Mission Street could be particularly challenging, since streetscape improvements would be subject to approval by the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans).
- ◆ **Improved Streetscape Guidelines.** Streets throughout Santa Cruz could be made more attractive by providing streetscape improvements, such as closely-spaced street trees and attractive street furniture, that also encourage pedestrian activity. By providing improved citywide guidelines for streetscape improvements, the City could ensure that new development is accompanied by high-quality enhancements to the public realm.

D. Movement Around the City

Many people enjoy Santa Cruz because its character is so varied—they can go for a hike in a natural open space, then travel a few minutes away and meet a friend in the city’s bustling Downtown. To benefit from this variety, people must be able to move around Santa Cruz quickly and conveniently; however, the city’s capacity for vehicular traffic is limited, and congestion is already common in some areas. The city could address this issue by making it easier for people to travel around the city without using a car.

- ◆ **Improved Bicycle and Pedestrian Connections.** Enhancements to the city’s network of bicycle lanes and sidewalks would encourage people to walk and ride their bikes more often. These enhancements would often require traffic lanes or parking spaces to be removed, so that bicycle lanes

and sidewalks can fit within existing street rights-of-way; the community should take care to balance the needs of pedestrians and bicyclists against the needs of drivers.

- ◆ **Bus Rapid Transit (BRT).** A new BRT system could connect the city's residential areas with popular destinations, such as Downtown Santa Cruz and the UC campus, making it more convenient for people to use transit. The community could also take advantage of a BRT system by allowing higher-density development near BRT lines, so that new development occurs in the locations that are best served by transit.
- ◆ **Personal Rapid Transit (PRT).** PRT systems are intended to provide the convenience of driving without a motor vehicle's negative effects on the environment. As this technology evolves, PRT systems could be evaluated as a new way for people to move around the city.
- ◆ **Automobiles in Tourist Areas.** The City has used one-way streets to discourage visitors from driving through the residential neighborhoods near major tourist areas, such as the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk. While this practice may be effective in some cases, it can also confuse drivers who enter these residential areas and cannot find their way out of them. As an alternative, the community could provide parking lots at the city's outskirts, with shuttles or trolleys that take visitors from the parking lots to Downtown and the coast.