

6 OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS

This chapter summarizes the most significant opportunities to revitalize Ocean Street as a major gateway into Santa Cruz, as well as some of the key constraints that may limit the types of transformation and development that can occur. The initiatives in this chapter are drawn from analysis of existing conditions, as well as background interviews with community members and City staff. These ideas will help to define the vision and goals for the Ocean Street Area Plan.

In addition, Figure 6-1 identifies key locations along the corridor where a specific opportunity exists. Some of these opportunities, such as potential gateway improvements, apply to the public realm. The map also shows locations where more intensive development may be appropriate in the future, based on existing uses and ownership patterns.

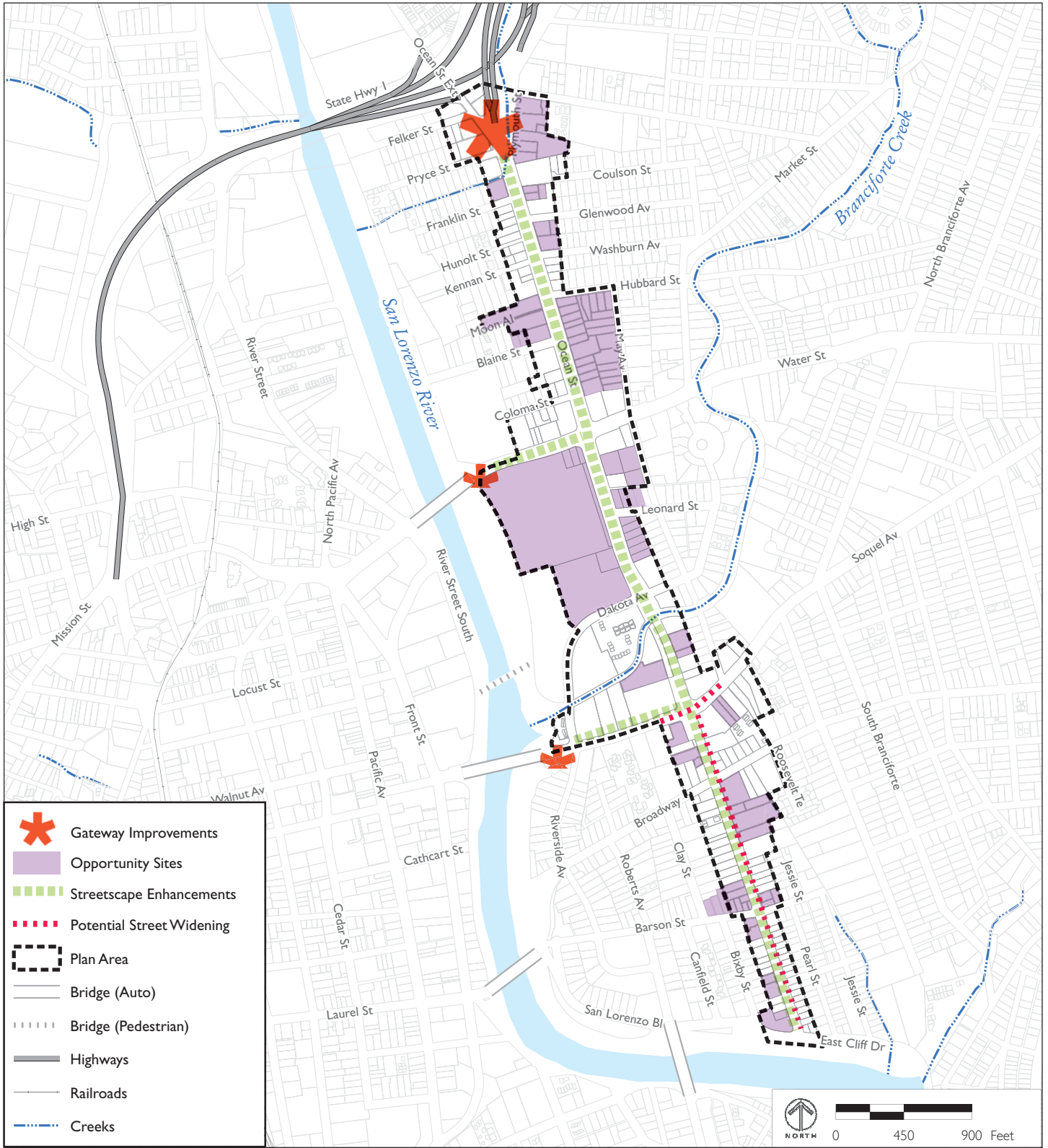
A. *Streetscape Enhancements*

As a vital gateway into Santa Cruz, Ocean Street's visual character should define the city's unique setting and sense of place. Streetscape enhancements along this corridor can make it more vibrant and attractive while balancing the needs of buses, cars, pedestrian and bicyclists. Similar enhancements can be applied to portions of Water Street and Soquel Avenue to create a consistent character at these major connections to downtown.

- ◆ **Gateway Improvements.** The northernmost portion of Ocean Street, at the exit from Highway 17, could be enhanced to create a strong sense of arrival in Santa Cruz. In addition, Water Street and Soquel Avenue are important gateways between Ocean Street and Downtown; streetscape improvements on these streets could strengthen the connection between these areas. Gateway improvements could be a combination of street trees and landscaping, signage, special street furniture, decorative paving and sculptural elements.
- ◆ **Lack of Streetscape Improvements.** Many streets in the Plan Area lack streetscape amenities that would make them attractive and inviting. Although there are redwoods and other street trees planted along Ocean

Street north of Soquel Avenue, existing sidewalk widths constrain the ability to provide a continuous canopy of street trees and other pedestrian amenities. There are opportunities to enhance Ocean Street as new construction occurs by requiring developers to dedicate land for a wider right-of-way, and to provide street trees, widened sidewalks and other improvements. Given the existing condition of the streetscape, creating a high quality streetscape in this way will take time.

- ◆ **Enhanced Landscaping.** Although Ocean Street’s current sidewalk widths prevent trees from being planted in many locations, new development in the Plan Area could use setbacks to provide additional space for street trees and landscaped areas. Bulbouts into the on-street parking lane could provide additional tree-planting space; however, bulbouts would drastically reduce the potential for improved transit service on Ocean Street, and they limit the effectiveness of street sweepers. Center medians could include aesthetically-pleasing paved surfaces; they could also include drought-tolerant plantings and low-maintenance landscaping, although this would create additional maintenance costs for the City.
- ◆ **Improved Pedestrian Amenities.** Design elements such as special paving, as well as amenities such as benches and trash cans, could help to improve the pedestrian experience within the Plan Area. Furthermore, crosswalk improvements, such as more visible paving, high-contrast striping patterns and warning lights for drivers, could help to increase pedestrian safety at major intersections and unprotected crosswalks. The City would need to identify a funding source for construction and ongoing maintenance before completing these improvements.
- ◆ **Distinctive Wayfinding Tools.** The Plan Area is supplied with numerous wayfinding signs to the beach, downtown and lodging areas. However, the existing road network can still be confusing to a first-time visitor. There may be opportunities to provide signage that is more visible to drivers, either as an improvement that is specific to Ocean Street or as part of a citywide update to wayfinding signage. Pedestrian-oriented wayfinding tools could help to direct foot traffic as well.



Source: City of Santa Cruz GIS, 2007; DC&E, 2007

FIGURE 6-1

OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS

- ◆ **San Lorenzo River Access.** Although the San Lorenzo River is an important natural amenity, there are many parts of the Plan Area, particularly north of Water Street, where it is not clear how to access the river. Improved signage could help pedestrians find their way to the existing access points to the river levee. In addition, there may be limited opportunities for future development west of the Plan Area to create new physical connections to the river.
- ◆ **Public Art.** Artwork could be used to enhance the public realm by integrating it into buildings and streetscapes, contributing to Ocean Street's identity. Artwork could also be installed at strategic locations such as gateways and bridge crossings. A public art program would create opportunities to involve local arts organizations and support Santa Cruz's arts and cultural community.
- ◆ **Funding for Improvements.** Because funding for streetscape improvements is a constraint, a mix of funding sources is needed, including development fees as well as funds from the City's Redevelopment Agency. Another potential source of funding is a business improvement district, in which property owners would agree to tax themselves in order to pay for street improvements and ongoing maintenance.

B. Land Uses

The Ocean Street Plan Area currently contains a diverse mix of land uses. The community's decisions about future uses on Ocean Street will help to reinforce its role as a place to live, work, shop and visit.

- ◆ **Intensified Development and Development Opportunities.** The City's General Plan 2030 will create opportunities for more intensive development in many parts of the Plan Area, especially on underutilized sites within the corridor. In addition, there are development opportunities on a number of large sites in the Plan Area, as well as the potential to consolidate parcels with common ownership for larger projects. The County Government Center site could potentially accommodate a shared

parking garage, along with ground-floor retail businesses, due to its large size and prime location on Ocean Street.

- ◆ **Downtown and Beach Connectivity.** One of Ocean Street’s greatest strengths is its close proximity to downtown and the beach. New and enhanced connections across the San Lorenzo River can increase accessibility to downtown from the Plan Area. As a connecting route to the beach, Ocean Street also has the potential for expanding businesses that attract visitors.
- ◆ **Mixed-Use Development.** In many cities, including Santa Cruz, mixed-use development has proven to be an effective means of accommodating new housing while preserving land for commercial uses. Recent development proposals for Ocean Street suggest that there is strong interest in building new mixed-use projects in the Plan Area. However, it will be important to ensure that new mixed-use buildings include retail spaces that are large enough and include the necessary amenities to attract tenants.
- ◆ **Job Opportunities and Neighborhood Services.** In keeping with the existing office uses in the Plan Area, there is an opportunity to provide a wide range of professional offices to increase job opportunities for residents of the area. In addition, mixed-use development could include a broad range of neighborhood-serving retail opportunities, which can benefit visitors and residents. Neighborhood-serving retail businesses would provide benefits for current residents by making it possible for them to do more of their shopping on foot.
- ◆ **Enhanced Visitor Lodging.** The development of new hotels and motels within the Plan Area provides an opportunity to diversify the city’s lodging choices. New hotels and motels could include a mix of national chains that offer relatively modest accommodations, as well as small boutique hotels that serve a higher-end market. Development of new hotels also has the potential to provide additional space for conferences, meetings and seminars.

- ◆ **Conference Center.** It may be possible to develop a new conference center on Ocean Street, if there is community and market acceptance for this concept. Small parcels and fragmented ownership patterns will limit the number of sites where a conference center can be located. However, one possibility is to redevelop the existing University Inn site, which currently includes a small conference center. While a conference center on Ocean Street would not have direct coastal access or views, Ocean Street's location near downtown could serve as an advantage.
- ◆ **Market for Visitor Lodging.** Many hotels and motels are already located on Ocean Street, and the Plan Area is a logical location to build additional visitor lodging. However, it is unclear how many additional hotel and motel rooms are needed over the long term. In addition, hotel occupancy rates in Santa Cruz are currently low outside of the summer months, creating a disincentive for new development. The City is currently preparing a market study that will help to characterize the long-term demand for visitor lodging on Ocean Street. There may also be opportunities to increase off-season tourism in Santa Cruz, which would help to reduce seasonal variations in the occupancy rate.
- ◆ **Market for Housing.** In spite of a nationwide slump in the housing market, Santa Cruz continues to attract many new residents, because of its high quality of life and the presence of UC Santa Cruz. The Area Plan could help to address the need for new housing by allowing higher-density apartments and condominiums on some parts of Ocean Street; new residential units could be developed as a single, standalone use, or as part of a mixed-use building. However, the demand for housing will need to be balanced against the need for commercial uses such as hotels, offices and retail stores.
- ◆ **Lower Ocean Neighborhoods.** The Plan Area south of Broadway consists of an established residential neighborhood with small parcel sizes and shallow lots. The parcel sizes and ownership pattern will be a constraint for new development in that area. In addition, there are several nonconforming hotels and motels in the Lower Ocean neighborhoods; the Area Plan will need to address the presence of these land uses. Fi-

nally, new development standards and design guidelines for Ocean Street will need to reflect the presence of residential neighborhoods adjacent to the corridor.

C. Architecture and Site Planning

Many of the City's Area Plans include design guidelines for both residential and commercial development and are critical in defining the intended character, form and function of buildings. The Ocean Street Area Plan can define its own specific architectural character for new development along the corridor.

- ◆ **Façade Improvements.** A façade improvement program, coordinated with the Redevelopment Agency's existing program, could help to enhance the appearance of existing buildings along Ocean Street. The façade improvement program could provide low-interest loans to property owners who wish to improve their buildings. It could also include design assistance from architects identified by the City.
- ◆ **High Quality Architecture and Urban Design.** The Plan Area's architecture and urban design should create an enjoyable space for pedestrians and drivers alike, and it should present a positive image of Santa Cruz as people arrive in the city. In general, Ocean Street's current built form does not achieve these goals. Design guidance in the Area Plan can help to ensure that new development contributes positively to Ocean Street's urban form. Some recent development, such as the new Fins Coffee building, could potentially serve as models for new development.
- ◆ **Rehabilitation of Existing Motels and Hotels.** The Plan Area is home to many of the city's motels and hotels due to its proximity to Highway 17, downtown and the beach. However, many of the existing motels and hotels are in disrepair and provide few visitor amenities, in spite of their high summer rates. The existing inventory of motels and hotels could be rehabilitated to make them more desirable to visitors. To achieve this, the City may need to provide incentives such as reduced-interest loans.

- ◆ **Enhanced Pedestrian Experience.** Although Ocean Street will continue to be the primary vehicular corridor in the Plan Area, new development could include street frontages that encourage foot traffic. For example, buildings could be located near the street, so pedestrians can easily see into the store from the sidewalk; the primary entrances to buildings could be located at the street; and buildings could include human-scaled architectural details on the ground floor, such as awnings and decorative materials.
- ◆ **Attractive Signage.** Exterior signs have a strong effect on a business' overall appearance. There are opportunities in the Plan Area to provide enhanced signage that is visible to both pedestrians and drivers, and to customize signage so that it complements buildings' architectural character.
- ◆ **“Green” Design.** New development on Ocean Street could incorporate green building techniques from the City's Green Building Standards into construction and site planning, and existing buildings could be retrofitted to increase energy efficiency. These techniques can provide safer indoor environments for occupants, lower operating costs by reducing energy consumption, reduce waste and water consumption, and help mitigate negative impacts on the environment.

D. Circulation

The Plan Area includes several major corridors that provide vehicular, transit, bicycle and pedestrian connections to surrounding neighborhoods and cities. New development and streetscape improvements can take advantage of the presence of these corridors, while helping to accommodate parking needs and enhance pedestrian connections.

- ◆ **Parking Solutions.** There may be opportunities to replace surface parking lots on Ocean Street with shared multi-level parking structures, which would provide additional parking and serve multiple businesses and destinations. The parking structures could also include retail busi-

nesses on the ground floor, such as restaurants and laundry services, that would serve the area's residents and workers. The County Government Center is one potential location for a parking structure that could serve surrounding businesses and weekend visitors, as well as meet the parking demands of County employees.

- ◆ **Bicycle Sharing.** San Francisco, Paris and other cities around the world are experimenting with new, high-tech bicycle-sharing systems that require users to pay by credit card; this allows users to be charged a fee if a bicycle is not returned. Ocean Street could be a suitable location for testing this type of citywide bicycle-sharing program. However, there may be other locations, such as Downtown and the beach, that have more potential users for a bicycle-sharing program. More significantly, it is not clear whether this type of program would be financially feasible in Santa Cruz.
- ◆ **Expanded Bus Service.** The bus routes serving the Plan Area currently have long headways, and connections to most parts of Santa Cruz, including the UCSC campus, are limited. There may be opportunities to provide more frequent service on existing bus routes, or to identify new transit routes that could be provided in the Plan Area in the future. Limited funding for transit operations is likely a major constraint on improvements to bus service.
- ◆ **Visitor-Serving Shuttle.** A visitor-serving shuttle system could connect the hotels and motels along Ocean Street to other destinations, such as Downtown, the beach and the UCSC campus. However, a shuttle system would need long-term funding sources to be viable. In addition, many visitors to Santa Cruz's major destinations, especially the beach, bring picnic lunches, recreational equipment and other bulky items with them; it would be difficult for a shuttle system to accommodate these needs.
- ◆ **Pedestrian Crosswalks.** Pedestrian crossings on Ocean Street are limited to signalized intersections, along with two unprotected crosswalks near the County Government Center. As a result, pedestrians must often walk a considerable distance before they can cross the street. There may

be the potential to provide new unprotected crosswalks in some locations, and to add safety features to existing unprotected crosswalks. However, Ocean Street is a high-volume traffic corridor, and it may not be possible to create new unprotected crosswalks that would provide adequate safety for pedestrians. Also, additional crosswalks could create unacceptable delays in traffic flow for automobiles and buses.

- ◆ **Ocean Street Widening.** Ocean Street's right-of-way becomes narrower south of Soquel Avenue, and narrower still south of Barson Street. As a result, these parts of Ocean Street can accommodate only limited traffic volumes, narrow sidewalks and no bicycle lanes. Widening this portion of Ocean Street would make it possible to address these deficiencies. The City already requires a setback for new development along this part of Ocean Street, which will facilitate the future widening of the street. However, widening Ocean Street would be a costly capital improvement, and it would require some existing buildings to be moved or replaced.

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