

BOOK III: CITY ACTIONS

The revitalization and success of Downtown will be supported by the city actions and investments outlined in this chapter of the *Downtown Precise Plan*. City actions and investments can be strategically timed, scheduled and directed to specific areas and projects to further revitalization, unlike private investment, the order or timing of which cannot be directly controlled or prioritized. The intertwining of regulatory control (contained in Book II) with the strategic investment of limited public resources (planned in this chapter, Book III) is intended to accelerate the revitalization process and add to the appeal and success of Downtown as a great place.

City actions will be guided by the *Goals and Principles* described in Book I, which are flexible enough to allow for opportunities that cannot be predicted, and clear enough to prioritize actions and investments on an ongoing basis. As vision becomes reality and Downtown is revived as the “heart of the City” and developed as the primary entertainment center of the Peninsula, new and different actions may be required and implemented. Planned projects will be undertaken as opportunities and resources permit.

It is important to note that none of the past or future projects should be considered silver bullets. No project on its own can create a dynamic, vibrant, economically sustainable urban district. If one notices that a record-breaking swimmer eats a high-protein diet, he cannot switch to a high-protein diet and expect gold medals to naturally follow. Just as there are many factors behind a champion athlete’s success, many factors must be present for Downtown’s ultimate potential to be realized.

Over \$50 million has been committed by the city and its Redevelopment Agency in the past several years to jumpstart the revitalization of Downtown. The developer of the Cinema Block expended an additional \$75 million to construct 85,000 square feet of new restaurant and retail uses as well as a 20-screen, 4,200 seat state-of-the-art movie complex. Book III begins with a brief look at some of the most important recent investments, and is followed by a detailed discussion of several projects and programs which can help Downtown along its path to revitalization.



SUMMARY OF RECENTLY COMPLETED AND POTENTIAL FUTURE PROJECTS

3.1. RECENTLY COMPLETED PROJECTS

While this plan reaffirms the commitment to the revitalization of Downtown, sharpens the vision, and takes a strong step toward making it a reality, it does not represent a dramatic change of course for Redwood City. The City’s commitment to Downtown is strong and long-running. In particular, the last twelve years have seen a series of well-designed and well-executed projects which have improved Downtown significantly. The dedication to Downtown has been steady, and can be expected to remain so.

The following projects were developed and implemented as part of the Downtown revitalization program, and were completed prior to approval of the Downtown Precise Plan.

3.1.1. PUBLIC OPEN SPACES

A primary community objective established in the Downtown Precise Plan is the integration of the public and private realm to provide a network of great public open spaces that connect to and complement Broadway and to offer up a sequence of unfolding places that inspire people to walk and to linger in the center of the city. The existing network of public open space is discussed in Section i.2.5, and proposed new public spaces are discussed in Section 3.2.1. The following Section contains a record of the recently complete projects which demonstrate a long-standing commitment to the creation of well-designed parks and plazas in the best locations and in meaningful quantities.

A) Post Office Paseo

The outdoor space adjacent to the post office on Jefferson Avenue, once a muddy and overgrown vacant lot, was improved in 2008 to function as a safe, well-lit pedestrian walkway connecting the Main Street parking lot to the Cinema block. The space includes a mini-plaza, an outdoor café, and a mini-park, as well as an innovative demonstration site for stormwater runoff best management practices. In addition, care was taken to preserve existing trees and incorporate them into the new design.



**POST OFFICE PASEO
(BEFORE)**



**POST OFFICE PASEO
(AFTER)**

B) Courthouse Square

In 2005, the City demolished the San Mateo Courthouse Annex building in order to restore the visibility and prominence of the primary iconic landmark of Redwood City, the 1910 San Mateo County Courthouse building. The renovation of the historic Courthouse Building, now occupied by the San Mateo History Museum, included the reconstruction of the historic portico of the 1910 San Mateo County Courthouse building, and the provision of a public open space in the same location as once existed in front of the Courthouse building. The new plaza, completed in 2007, is designed to accommodate formal and informal gatherings, and functions as the community’s primary “outdoor living room” in the center of the City.



COURTHOUSE SQUARE (BEFORE)

The plaza at Courthouse Square features a large, decoratively paved plaza at the foot of the Courthouse portico. Two semi-enclosed pavilions flank the central plaza space, framing views of the Courthouse and Fox Theatre, while providing shade and incorporating vendor kiosks which offer food service and other activity-generating offerings. The pavilions and kiosks are surrounded by comfortable tables and chairs, and are outfitted with night lighting to allow activity to occur on warm evenings. A series of ornamental fountain bowls featuring water cascading into two basins at the main plaza level define the edge of the central space along with stair-like “seating edges” and add the pleasing sound of falling water to the plaza experience.

Courthouse Square was the centerpiece of a group of Downtown projects which were awarded a *Charter Award* for Outstanding Urban Design by the Congress for the New Urbanism in 2007.



COURTHOUSE SQUARE (AFTER)

3.1.2. CIVIC ART

The public realm can be enhanced by well-sited civic art. Sometimes, civic art is purely for enjoyment, and sometimes it serves a utilitarian function in an attractive way. In either instance, civic art makes the city a more enjoyable place and is an important part of the urban fabric.

A) Wayfinding Program

The Wayfinding Program, completed in 2007, assists visitors in finding their way into and around Downtown. Giving equal emphasis to vehicles and pedestrians, signage unique to Redwood City directs visitors to key destinations and parking facilities within the Downtown. The program also directs visitors into the Downtown from perimeter roads, arterials, and freeway off ramps. “You Are Here” maps are also strategically placed throughout the Downtown to help orient people to their destinations in relation to where they have parked.

In addition, a “Path of History” self-guided walking tour was recently installed in 2010, featuring signage and plaques highlighting Downtown’s unique historic places and important past events.



WAYFINDING SIGNS

B) Gateway Arches

In the early to mid 20th Century, a gateway arch welcomed travelers on El Camino Real to Redwood City. In the 1990s replicas were installed on Broadway at both ends to serve the same purpose. The arches mimic the historic arch, with some modern twists, and are brightly lit with neon at night, contributing to Downtown’s image as an entertainment district.

The Theatre District arch was installed in 2008 on Middlefield at Marshall to welcome visitors into the “Core of the Core,” as well as to assist visitors parking at the County Center in finding their way to the center of Downtown. The arch is festively lit with red neon and white incandescent bulbs, and is intentionally one-sided, creating a feeling of being distinctly within, or outside of, the entertainment district.



GATEWAY ARCHES

C) Clock Tower

About 30,000 cars per day pass along the edge of Downtown on El Camino Real. While this represents a huge pool of potential customers for Downtown businesses, the peculiarities of Downtown’s configuration makes it difficult to capitalize on this potential economic resource. Broadway intersects El Camino at an odd angle, making visibility into the Downtown area difficult, and the deflected intersection of Broadway at the railroad tracks—coupled with the design of Arguello Plaza—creates the impression that Broadway’s commerce extends for only one block. The clock tower was installed in the late 1990s to announce Downtown’s presence to passersby and to entice them into the area.



CLOCK TOWER

3.1.3. COMPLETE STREETS

A “Complete Streets” approach to street design ensures that transportation planners and engineers consistently design and operate the entire roadway with all users in mind, including bicyclists, public transportation riders, and pedestrians of all ages and abilities, as well as motorists. This results in streets that are safer, more livable, and welcoming to everyone. Since streets make up about 31% of Downtown’s land area, they have a dramatic impact on its overall environment.

Several improvements have been made recently which improve the functioning of Downtown’s streets in all of these areas.

A) Pedestrian Connectivity, Safety, and Convenience

Broadway, 2600 Block

This segment of Broadway runs from the Caltrain railroad tracks on the east to El Camino Real on the west, and is an important gateway into Downtown. To enhance the Downtown experience along this street, several improvements were made to the roadway. The roadway was converted from four lanes to two lanes, and the parallel street parking was replaced with diagonal street parking. These changes created a smaller roadway with slowed traffic, improved conditions for bicycle travel, and made a more pleasant atmosphere for walking and outdoor dining. Painted bulb-outs and highly visible markings were also added to the crosswalks to improve pedestrian access and safety. Also, painted bulb outs were added along the outdoor cafes, creating a buffer between restaurant patrons and passing traffic.



BROADWAY, 2600 BLOCK

Broadway, 2100 and 2200 Blocks

As part of the improvements associated with Courthouse Square and the Cinema Block, in 2006 the City installed streetscape improvements along Broadway from Jefferson Avenue to Hamilton Street. On the Broadway side of the Cinema Block new sidewalks, street trees and streetlights have been installed, along with a palm tree-lined drop-off in front of the cinema.

The City has also installed streetscape improvements on Broadway between Courthouse Square and Fox Theatre. The improvements have created an integral public space between the Courthouse and Fox Theatre that compliments the plaza at Courthouse Square. The sidewalk in front of the Fox Theatre has been widened to provide sufficient space for pedestrian circulation, queuing, and gathering for the theatre. A row of mature Canary Island Date palms, a reference to similar palm trees that originally were planted in front of the historic Courthouse, line the block in front of the Fox Theatre. This line of palms combines with the palm tree display accenting the Cinema Block, Theatre Way, and Courthouse Square, to provide a dramatic focus for the center of the Downtown Core. An extra-wide mid-block crosswalk has been added to accommodate the natural pedestrian flow between the main entrance of the Fox Theatre and Courthouse Square.

These streetscape improvements were part of a group of Downtown projects which were awarded a *Charter Award* for Outstanding Urban Design by the Congress for the New Urbanism in 2007.

Middlefield Road

In 2003 Middlefield Road, between Main Street and Jefferson Avenue, was narrowed from 4 lanes to 2 lanes in order to calm traffic. This enhanced pedestrian safety in an area which is heavily walked due to adjacent uses, such as City Hall, the Library, and restaurants. In 2010 the street was enhanced further by the installation of mid-block bulbouts and a high-visibility mid-block crosswalk.



BROADWAY, 2100-2200 (BEFORE AND AFTER)

Theatre Way

Through a public/private partnership, in 2006 the City installed streetscape improvements on Jefferson Avenue, Middlefield Road, and Broadway around the Cinema Block. A portion of Middlefield Road between the Fox Theatre and the Cinema Block was converted into Theatre Way, a signature pedestrian street featuring a single lane of one-way traffic, palm trees, and attractive pavers. A wide sidewalk with custom-designed lighting columns and step curbs was installed on the Cinema Block side. The extra-wide sidewalk space features a dining terrace serving the restaurants and cafes in the ground-floor of the Cinema Block. Theatre Way provides daytime and nighttime outdoor dining opportunities and serves people coming to the theaters and other Downtown attractions.

Theatre Way was part of a group of Downtown projects which were awarded a *Charter Award* for Outstanding Urban Design by the Congress for the New Urbanism in 2007.

Theatre Way II

The improvements put in place on Middlefield between Broadway and Veterans Boulevard in 2007 focused on remaking Middlefield as an inviting gateway into the “Theatre District.” The intersection of Veterans and Middlefield has been improved with pedestrian-scale lighting, banners, and signage directing visitors to the theatres as well as to the free parking located at the County Garage during the entertainment peak hours. The walk from the garage to the theatres has been enhanced with pedestrian scale signage, improved access ramps, and “You Are Here” maps, as well as dynamic and festive lighting features.



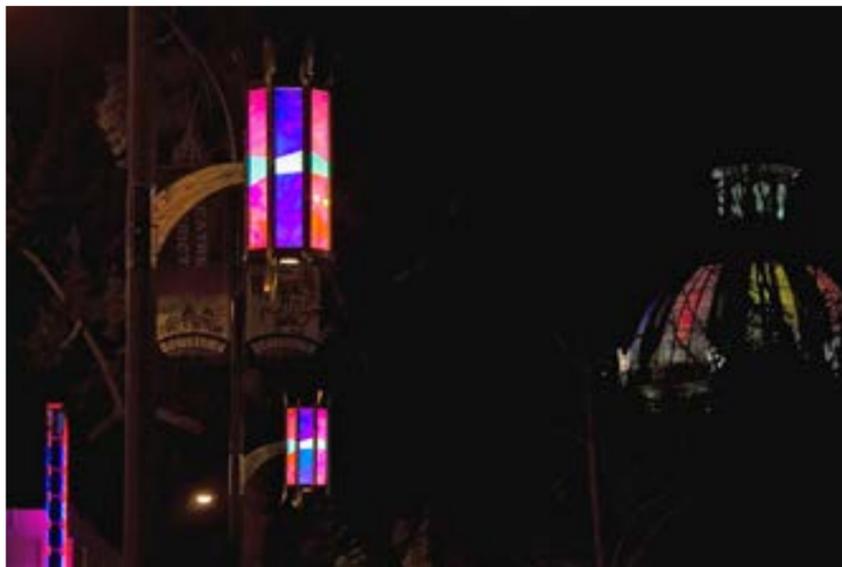
THEATRE WAY

El Camino Real, 700 Block

The Grand Boulevard Initiative is a collaboration of 19 cities, San Mateo and Santa Clara counties, and local and regional agencies united to improve the performance, safety, and aesthetics of El Camino Real. Redwood City is deeply involved in the effort, and has taken a leadership position by completing work on one of the first improvement projects in the county. The project, completed in 2010, included the narrowing of the roadway, widening of the sidewalks, the planting of three rows of Chinese Elm trees, new street lighting, bicycle parking, and benches, among other improvements. This block serves as a model for the entire Downtown Redwood City segment of El Camino, which the City hopes to improve similarly in the coming years.



EL CAMINO REAL, 700 BLOCK (BEFORE AND AFTER)



THEATRE WAY II

B) Traffic Calming and Bicycle Facilities

Jefferson Avenue

In 2006 the City implemented a reconfiguration of the Jefferson Avenue thoroughfare between Franklin Street and Marshall Street. Jefferson Avenue between Marshall Street and Middlefield Road was converted from its former four-lane configuration to a three-lane configuration with one driving lane for each direction and one continuous left-turn lane in the middle. The existing parallel parking on the east side of Jefferson Avenue between Marshall Street and Middlefield Road was converted to an angled-parking lane (resulting in an increase in parking spaces), high visibility crosswalks were added, and the mid-block crossing near the Post Office was upgraded with pedestrian-activated lighting embedded in the roadway which alerts motorists to stop.

Winslow Street

In 2009, Winslow Street—from Brewster to Broadway—was resurfaced and narrowed from four automobile travel lanes to two. In addition, full Class II bicycle lanes were added. These bike lanes tie in to a larger network in the area which has been incrementally growing over the past several years. Also, Winslow Street between Broadway and Middlefield was improved by the addition of on-street parking, and by converting parallel parking to diagonal where space permitted. Space was also reserved in the parking lanes of this section for the future addition of street trees.



JEFFERSON AVENUE (BEFORE AND AFTER)



WINSLOW STREET (BEFORE AND AFTER)

C) Automobile Connectivity Improvements

Jefferson Avenue Undercrossing

This undercrossing was completed in July 1999, funded from rail bonds passed in the 1980s. The undercrossing increased safety and improved travel time by creating a grade separation between the Caltrain, automobiles, and pedestrians. The Jefferson Underpass allows motorists, bicyclists, and pedestrians to move freely beneath the railroad tracks without delays due to trains. The Underpass provides both an aesthetic and functional facility that fits with the historical character of Redwood City.

In recognition of its design, the Jefferson Undercrossing received a Merit Award from the local chapter of the American Public Works Association.



JEFFERSON UNDERCROSSING

3.1.4. HOUSING

Encouraging the construction of housing, both market-rate and affordable, in Downtown has been a goal of the City for several years. The City and its Redevelopment Agency, along with private sector partners, oversaw the creation of 353 units between 1997 and 2009. These units were created through three quality projects which have set an excellent template for future housing in Downtown.

A) City Center Plaza

This mixed-use project was constructed in 1997 and has a total of 81 units, all of which are affordable. City Center Plaza residents have great access to many Downtown amenities including shopping, public services, and transportation. In addition to the excellent location, City Center Plaza also has onsite child care, a community room, and a computer room for homework tutoring and adult classes. This development's mixed-use design consists of ground floor shops and popular restaurants, which create an active pedestrian-oriented public realm. The residential units located above the ground floor shops help to keep eyes on the street, which increases safety and creates a pleasant Downtown streetscape.

The excellent design and location of this project has earned it the Gold Nugget Award from the Pacific Coast Builders Conference, and the 2000 San Mateo County Sustainability Award.



CITY CENTER PLAZA

B) Franklin Street Apartments

The Franklin Street mixed-use project was built in 2000 and fronts onto El Camino Real. This development contains 206 units with 15% affordable for very-low and moderate income households and 1,600 square feet of ground floor retail. The Franklin Street Apartments embraces the concept of Transit Oriented Development (TOD) by placing high density housing on the El Camino Real Corridor and within walking distance to the SamTrans bus depot, the Caltrain station, plus Downtown employment, retail, and entertainment services. In addition to having a good location, the mixed-use design of the Franklin Street Apartments creates an active ground floor by providing retail spaces fronting onto El Camion Real and Maple Street.

The Franklin Street Apartments is recognized with helping San Mateo County win the 2002 National Award for Smart Growth Achievement from the Environmental Protection Agency.



FRANKLIN STREET APARTMENTS

C) Villa Montgomery

Villa Montgomery is a 100% affordable housing mixed-use building, with 58 units and ground floor retail. This building is located directly across from the Franklin Street Apartments on El Camino Real, which creates a gateway feel when entering Downtown. Similar to the Franklin Street Apartments, Villa Montgomery's location on El Camino Real provides its residents with easy access to public transit and services within a short walk to the Downtown Core. Villa Montgomery has underground parking which allows the building to front right up to the sidewalk, creating an active ground floor with its shops. Other amenities offered within the building are a computer room, community room, and a courtyard with a play structure. Behind the primary building, 8 Habitat for Humanity townhouses were also constructed.

The overall design and location of this building has earned it multiple awards such as LEED NC Gold Certification, the 2007 Grand Boulevard Award, and Honorable Mention for Green Residential Building from Sustainable San Mateo.



VILLA MONTGOMERY

3.1.5. DOWNTOWN ANCHORS AND ACTIVITY GENERATORS

An “anchor” is a large retail or entertainment establishment which generates significant foot traffic for its neighbors. As a rule, anchorless retail centers are rarely successful. A downtown today, on one level, is a retail, restaurant, and entertainment “center.” Very well documented research and experimentation in the retail/restaurant/entertainment center (also known as “lifestyle center”) industry shows that anchors are essential to success. A Downtown without anchors remains vulnerable to a competing nearby center with such anchors. Cities must pursue both nighttime anchors and daytime anchors, and must insure that they are properly located and designed in the heart of the district.



THE CINEMA BLOCK

A) The Cinema Block

Completed in 2006, the Cinema Block has been a driving force behind Downtown Redwood City’s revitalization. This project consists of a single building that occupies the entire block and provides 85,000 square feet of retail. The building is anchored by Cost Plus World Market, several restaurants, and most notably a 20 screen, 4,200 seat, state-of-the-art Century Theaters cinema. The building itself is designed to be welcoming and accessible to pedestrians, as well as architecturally complimentary to nearby historic resources. An internal corridor is used for product delivery and waste storage, freeing the outside of the building to have active shop fronts on all four sides.

The Cinema Block was named the Best Commercial/Mixed-Use project on the San Francisco Peninsula in 2006 by the San Francisco Business Times.



B) Downtown Events Programming

Downtown Events Programming has been a major force in helping to revitalize Downtown and bring together the community. The summer programming is especially popular with events such as music, movies, dancing, art festivals, live theater, farmers markets, parades, and more. In addition to the busy summer programming, Downtown also hosts a number of events during the fall, winter, and spring; such as the Zoppe Family Circus, Latino Film Festival, Hometown Holidays, Fiestas Patrias, and a number of other cultural events. Since its inception in 2007 the Downtown programming has grown from 45 events and 29,000 attendees to 83 events and more than 100,000 attendees. With more than 75% of the attendees spending money at each event, the Downtown programming is a great asset to businesses within Downtown. The programming has brought positive media coverage to Redwood City through television, online, and newspapers and has begun to attract private sponsors.

The Downtown events programming has won several awards, including; the 2007 Diamond Award for the San Mateo Arts Council for Art programming; four awards in 2008 from the California Park and Recreation Society for economic impact, community solution, marketing plan and an overall award, which is their most prestigious of the year; and the 2009 Economic Impact award from the California Park and Recreation Society.



DOWNTOWN EVENTS

3.1.6. PUBLIC FACILITIES

The City of Redwood City and its Redevelopment Agency have been working diligently in recent years to provide attractive, well managed public facilities in Downtown. These facilities have been designed and located to serve the citizens of Redwood City and visitors to Downtown, in a comfortable, convenient manner.

A) Parking Management

During the construction of the Cinema Block and Courthouse Square, it was clear that parking demand would soon be rising. In a proactive manner, the City revamped the management of all public parking in the Downtown in order to better accommodate new levels of visitation. Parking occupancy surveys revealed that prime spaces, such as those on Broadway, were congested, while other areas, such as Marshall Garage and side-street areas, were underutilized. Prices were structured in a manner that enticed people into less-used parking areas with lower prices, while discouraging overcrowding in the most desirable areas with slightly higher prices. In addition to adding to the convenience of Downtown visitors by freeing up on-street spaces in the Core for those who wanted them the most, this also helps to reduce Downtown traffic congestion by eliminating the need to “cruise” while waiting for a space to become available. This is a benefit to pedestrians, diners, and cyclists, too. Finally, in the Core of Downtown, multi-space parking meters replaced the old single-space parking meters. This added convenient payment methods such as credit card and cell phone options, while also reducing sidewalk clutter.

The Downtown Redwood City Parking Management Plan, adopted in 2005 and fully implemented in 2007, was named 2008’s Parking Program of the Year by the California Public Parking Association.



MULTISPACE PARKING METERS

B) Jefferson Garage

In conjunction with the construction of the Cinema Block, a new underground public parking garage was completed in 2006 on Jefferson Avenue between Broadway and Middlefield. This facility consists of two subterranean levels of parking, for a total of 585 spaces. It features high ceilings, excellent lighting, and on-site attendants. The garage is punctuated by an attractive entrance with a tower feature and large neon signage. The garage was designed to help enliven Downtown, so no connections were placed between it and the retail or cinema spaces above, placing pedestrians on the sidewalk in the heart of Downtown upon their exit.



JEFFERSON GARAGE

C) City Hall

The roughly 50,000 square foot City Hall was completed in 1997. This new building replaced the previous City Hall, which was outdated, too small, and seismically unfit. The design of the New City Hall included architectural features which were complimentary to the nearby historic library, such as brick and terra cotta siding, matching cornice height, and a tile roof. A distinctive Council Chambers tower was included, which serves as a local landmark. The small open space at Jefferson and Middlefield was improved by providing mature landscaping and preserving heritage trees, which created a welcoming entrance for the public. A new hardscape plaza was also created to provide room for pedestrian access, outdoor cafes, and to serve as a venue for public events.



CITY HALL

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