

## Context Map

Figure 1.1



## Context

Oakley was founded as an agricultural community and it remains crisscrossed by vineyards, rolling orchards, and country lanes. The San Joaquin Delta borders the community on the north, and small local marinas offer boating access to the Sacramento River and San Francisco Bay. Mount Diablo provides a dramatic backdrop on the west. These rural and natural features are key aspects of Oakley's community character and identity.

Over the last 20 years, however, Oakley has experienced dramatic growth, as housing prices in the inner Bay Area push those in search of affordable housing further from the region's population and employment centers. Oakley is located along State Highway 4, one of Contra Costa County's major east-west circulation routes and an urban growth corridor that includes the cities of Pittsburg, Antioch and Brentwood (refer to the Context Map for further detail). This corridor is one of the fastest growing areas in the Bay Area and in the State of California. Between 1990 and 2000, Oakley's population increased by approximately 40%, from 18,000 to 25,000. In response to the increasing population and the desire for local control of growth and development decisions, Oakley incorporated as a City in 1999. The Oakley 2020 General Plan (2002) estimates community buildout, including potential expansion areas, between 50,000 and 70,000.

Downtown Oakley straddles an older at-grade portion of Highway 4, which was relinquished to the City and is known locally as Main Street, and abuts the still-active Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) rail line. Historically, the highway and the railroad served local agriculture, and over the years both have had a strong impact on Downtown's businesses and patterns of development. In its heyday in the early 1900's, Downtown was a small yet bustling commercial center, with storefront shops, a local cinema, and a central role in the life of the surrounding community. However, Downtown's role diminished as farms were replaced by residential subdivisions and outlying suburban shopping centers. Commercial centers in competing locations have taken market share, and heavy truck-and through-traffic levels have made the district inhospitable to the pedestrian-oriented storefront businesses that characterize a thriving downtown commercial area.



*Buildings and street frontages in Oakley do not create an attractive downtown today.*



*Narrow walks and heavy truck traffic deter pedestrian activity on Main Street in Oakley.*

Regional growth projections for Oakley and adjacent communities indicated that Highway 4 would not adequately serve development anticipated in coming decades. As a result, a Highway 4 Bypass planned by Caltrans and local communities was constructed in 2008. The Bypass is a 4-lane limited access highway aligned along Oakley's westerly border with Antioch and Brentwood. It shifts highway access closer to growth areas in these three cities. However, significant new development is anticipated east of Downtown Oakley as well over the next 20 years, at Bethel Island and along the Cypress Road corridor, with accompanying auto and construction-related truck traffic on Main Street. In fact, even with the Highway 4 Bypass in place, Main Street through-traffic is projected to increase to levels requiring widening from two to four lanes through Downtown.

In response to the need for downtown reinvestment and the challenges posed by through-traffic, the community began downtown revitalization planning in the early 90's while an unincorporated part of Contra Costa County. The County adopted the Old Town Oakley Specific Plan in 1996. Following incorporation, the community revisited major recommendations from this earlier effort as part of the Oakley Downtown Design & Development Plan process.

## The Vision for Downtown

As Oakley has grown away from Downtown, the community's desire for it to be the City's social and symbolic heart has increased. To become this kind of district once again, Downtown needs to benefit from Oakley's growth and development rather than suffer from it, as it has in the past. Through-traffic, construction-related trucks, and competition from local shopping centers and mini-malls have all taken a toll on the viability of Downtown businesses. A concerted revitalization effort is needed to effectively tap the City's growth, particularly Downtown's central location relative to future development areas and recreational destinations. Unwavering local desire for a vibrant downtown is an important indicator of the district's potential.

Oakley residents envision a downtown that has many of old Oakley's characteristics, but also provides a more innovative image for their community: Specialty shops, restaurants, cafes, civic facilities, and infill housing that make Downtown a lively place that is a destination throughout the day and into the evening. Safe street crossings, street

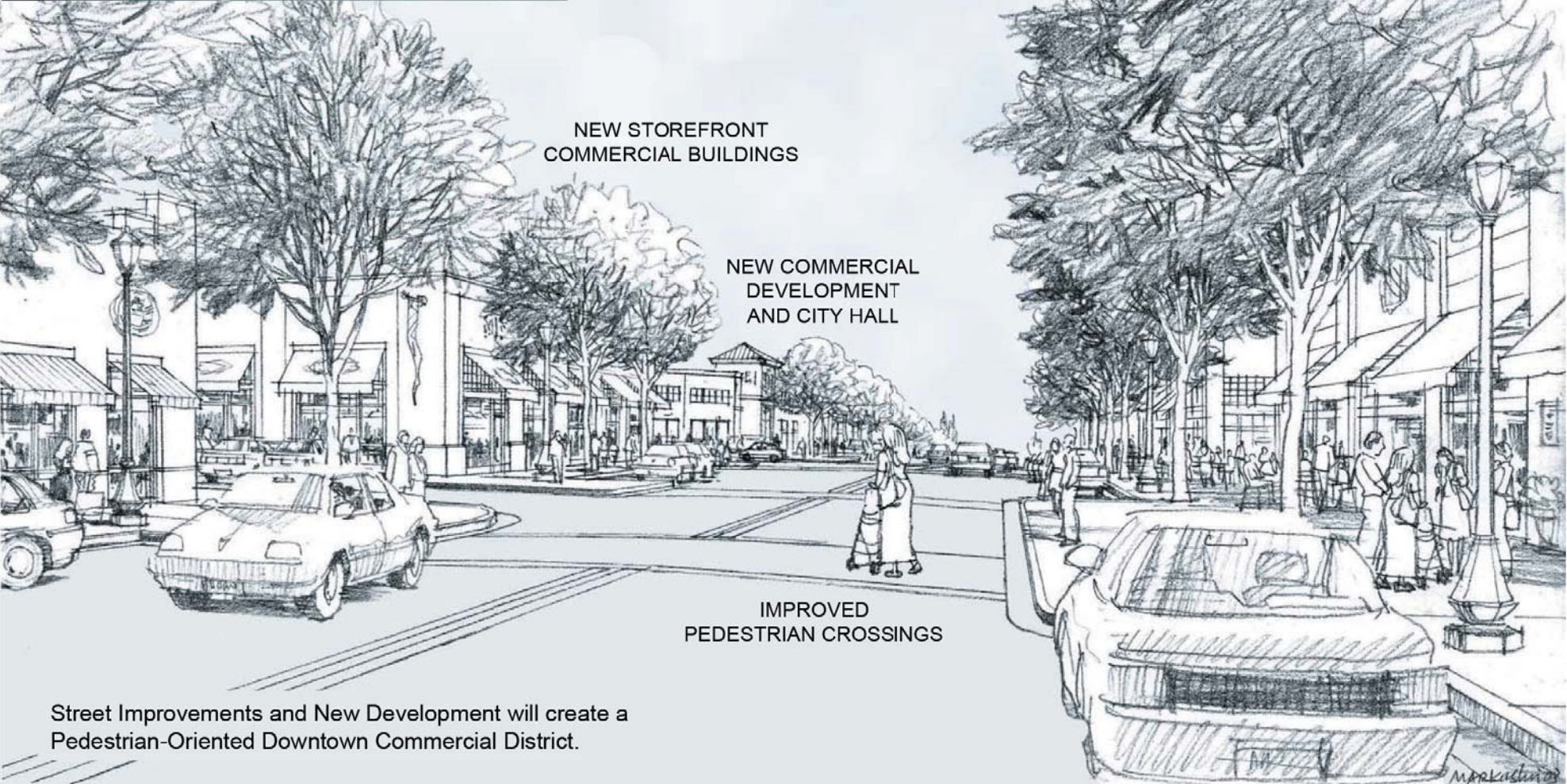


*Wide sidewalks and slow traffic in downtown Santa Cruz encourage pedestrian activity.*



*Recent development in Walnut Creek is shaped to create a pedestrian oriented commercial district.*





Street Improvements and New Development will create a Pedestrian-Oriented Downtown Commercial District.

## View West along Main Street

Figure 1.2

trees, pedestrian-oriented street lights, and furnishings will encourage residents to make Downtown an important part of daily life. Thriving storefront businesses, a bustling sidewalk environment, and attractive new and renovated buildings will be signs of community prosperity and pride. These concepts are depicted by the Main Street Illustration (Figure 1.2).

As illustrated by the Downtown Development Concept Plan, redevelopment of existing properties and new development on vacant sites would create the critical mass of destinations needed to draw residents and visitors to the district. Continuous storefronts along Main Street could create a core of up to 150,000 square feet of first floor commercial space. Infill housing on upper floors, adjacent frontages, and the Vintage Parkway Site could provide up to 500 dwelling units. Attractive streets, public spaces, and civic facilities would encourage residents and visitors to leave their cars behind and walk to destinations throughout the district.

## Downtown Conditions

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The Downtown Specific Plan area encompasses approximately 80 acres, formerly within the boundaries of the Oakley Redevelopment Area Planned Unit District (RDA PUD). The northern boundary is the BNSF railroad right-of-way, extending from just east of Miguel Drive/ Gardenia Avenue on the west to the Contra Costa Canal on the east. The southern boundary tracks Main Street-fronting properties in a saw tooth fashion, with a segment extending along Ruby Street between Norcross Lane on the west and Fourth Street on the east. These boundaries are depicted by the Downtown Conditions Map.

Downtown has the land and the location to support a substantial increase in development. However, it needs basic improvements to create the kind of environment that attracts new private sector investment. For example, curbs and sidewalks need to be installed along the northerly frontage of Main Street. Existing buildings and properties need maintenance or major renovation to reflect the increase in property values that has occurred throughout the City of Oakley as a whole. Vacant sites should be developed to consolidate Downtown as a viable commercial area.

The Downtown Specific Plan focuses on the properties along the Main Street frontage, which is approximately 4,800 feet in length. As indicated by the Downtown Conditions map on the following page, there are two basic subareas: the “Downtown Core,” located between Vintage Parkway and Fourth Street; and “East Main Street,” extending from Fourth to the Contra Costa Canal. Development in both areas range from traditional, older storefront commercial buildings to small-scale highway commercial developments; light industrial- and auto service-related structures are concentrated along East Main Street. Vestiges of the old Downtown district remain from Oakley’s heyday, most notably the Oakley Hotel and storefront commercial buildings along the southerly frontage of Main east of Third Street. In general, however, highway-oriented commercial development has replaced storefront buildings. There is little continuity in the current development pattern, with buildings and parking lots alternating from property to property along the frontage. There are a number of highly-visible vacant properties within the Downtown Specific Plan area as well, totaling approximately 30 acres, or almost 40% of the area. These vacant properties negatively reflect on the area, but provide “opportunity sites” for new development; these are described in more detail in Chapter 2.

Vacant properties, buildings in poor condition, and long segments of window frontage without curbing, sidewalks or streetscape amenities of any kind present an image of disinvestment. There are a variety of reasons for these conditions, including a general lack of attention to the area by Contra Costa County in the decades prior to the City’s incorporation. However, the single most important factor cited is uncertainty over the ultimate configuration of a widened Highway 4. Property owners, business owners, and potential property buyers have been reluctant to invest without knowing which properties will be affected and to what extent.

In addition to Main Street, there are several other notable streets within the Downtown Specific Plan area. Acme and Ruby Streets run parallel to Main Street. Acme contains a mix of commercial and residential properties; on Main Street, a number of properties with frontage buildings have access and parking on Acme. Ruby is the boundary between Downtown and neighborhood areas to the south. It has a mix of owner-occupied and rental residential properties that is transitional in character.





## Downtown Development Concept Plan

Figure 1.3





*View of platform and new infill development (top) and view north across Main Street (bottom).*

Source: City of Oakley

## Downtown Transit Center Concept

Figure 3.1