



Los Altos



***Downtown Design Plan***

*C i t y o f L o s A l t o s*

**Downtown Design Plan**

*revised April 1993*



**DAVID GATES & ASSOCIATES**  
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE - URBAN DESIGN - LAND PLANNING

**Table of Contents**

Updating the Village .....	1
Goals.....	1
Process.....	1
Purpose .....	2
Understanding the Special Character .....	3
Design Concepts .....	7
The First Steps .....	10
Downtown Entries .....	13
Recommendations .....	13
Downtown Edges.....	17
The Core .....	20
Recommendations .....	20
Public Open Space.....	23
Recommendations .....	24
Pedestrian Friendly Environment .....	29
Recommendations .....	29
Commercial Infill and Rehabilitation .....	32
Facade Improvements.....	32
Signing .....	33
Service Areas.....	34
Special Study Areas.....	34
Parking.....	37
Parking Plazas .....	37
Parking Garages .....	38
Downtown Landscaping .....	40
Streetscape Recommendations .....	40
Improving Private Landscaping .....	41
Conclusion .....	42
Appendix.....	43

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# 1.

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## Updating the Village

It is a paradox that, while the wonderful, vital Downtown Los Altos has evolved without the benefit of a master plan and design guidelines, these tools have become essential to manage and protect its future quality. Many small towns realize too late that the marketplace is failing to ensure the continued vitality of their downtown. It was in recognition of this possibility that a group of concerned Los Altos citizens, merchants, and decision-makers came together to develop this strategy to update, and protect the "village" qualities of the Downtown.

### Goals

A common goal of many small towns is to enrich and preserve the character of their downtowns. This involves more than improving the quality of downtown buildings. It is the quality of life downtown - the place where people can meet, see others, and be seen - that is in need of improvement. These opportunities for social interaction in a public setting are rare in the suburban environment that is dominated by mini marts, gas stations, shopping malls, and wide, efficient roadways. The goals of this plan are to reinforce the identity of downtown as a retail center, to improve the visual quality of the area, and to create an attractive pedestrian environment. It is important to avoid losing the unique and distinctive qualities that make the Downtown a successful public, memorable place, while also accommodating development and the changing economics of the area.

### Process

Over the years, the City of Los Altos has been in the position of reacting to various development proposals in Downtown, rather than leading the development process. Recognizing the importance of the downtown to the community, the City formed a committee, made up of downtown

merchants, decision-makers, and residents, to formulate ideas and concepts for improving the area.

The locations for the special areas studied in this plan came out of Downtown Committee discussion and their understanding of the priorities and possibilities for the area. Plans such as this will probably be carried out over a period of time as economic conditions allow, rather than all at once. It should be interpreted as explorations of the latent potential hidden in the Downtown to become a more special and meaningful place.

## Purpose

The purpose of this document is to establish a vision of Downtown to implement over time. It will assist Downtown merchants, property owners, and designers in creating projects and improvements that are consistent with the essential character of Los Altos. City Planning Staff and Planning Commission will also use this Plan as a conceptual basis for evaluating the merits of new projects and proposed rehabilitation projects. The Plan is further intended as a beginning point for City sponsored streetscape and landscaping improvements.



## 2.

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### Understanding the Special Character

The *Los Altos General Plan 1987-2005*, discusses the relationship of Downtown to the rest of the City:

"From the standpoint of community identity, the most important of the commercial areas is the 'Downtown triangle' or 'Downtown village.' "

The General Plan also recognizes the special distinctive qualities of the Downtown:

"It is well-defined, with retail uses focused on State and Main Streets. Tree-lined Main Street curves, and is thus even more distinctive - as Downtown streets go. One- and two-story buildings predominate, and combined with the large parking plazas (with many mature trees) at the rear of the stores, they give the Downtown a low density atmosphere."

The General Plan Review Committee concluded that:

"The Downtown 'village' is an important part of the Los Altos identity/image. Downtown is perceived as the center and the heart of the community. It owes its unique appearance to the combination of:

- Small parcels laid out before World War I along streets perpendicular to the Southern Pacific Railroad (now Foothill Expressway);
- Some 15-20 sixty and seventy-year-old buildings remaining from that period;
- Newer stores constructed to cater to the suburban market that developed primarily in the 1950's and 60's;

- Confinement of the commercial area to the triangle bounded by Foothill Expressway, Edith Avenue, and San Antonio Road;
- Parking plazas; and
- Trees."

One of the greatest problems in suburban communities is that opportunities for public life are spread so thin that successful places that attract groups of people are rarely created. Studies of pedestrian behavior show that people tend to seek out concentrations of other people when they can. This may explain why today's teenagers now go to the shopping mall to hang out. The Downtown has enjoyed the benefits of a concentration of people for years. The rules about walking distances and concentration of uses that are being applied to shopping malls were really pioneered by small downtowns like Los Altos. Besides this important people concentration, Downtown has several other assets:



- the unique, small town "village" character, a character that cannot be duplicated in a modern shopping mall,
- a number of architecturally and historically interesting buildings that contribute greatly to the sense of Downtown as a unique place,
- a number of restaurants, cafés, and grocery stores that draw people to the area,
- the presence of the Civic Center and Post Office contribute to both downtown usage and activity,
- the presence of a diverse mixture of land uses in proximity to the downtown retail core, ranging from single-family residential to hardware stores, to office buildings, to retail stores.

Downtown also faces some problems:

- the potential loss of the pedestrian concentration at the core of Downtown, with pressure for retail commercial to spread to the southern service commercial oriented end of the Downtown triangle,
- the lack of impression and visibility from San Antonio Road, Edith Avenue, and Foothill Expressway,
- the lack of a central focus or open space downtown,
- the lack of regional awareness from Interstate 280 and El Camino Real,
- a parking availability problem during peak shopping periods,
- a lack of awareness of public parking resources and low visibility of these resources from Main and State,

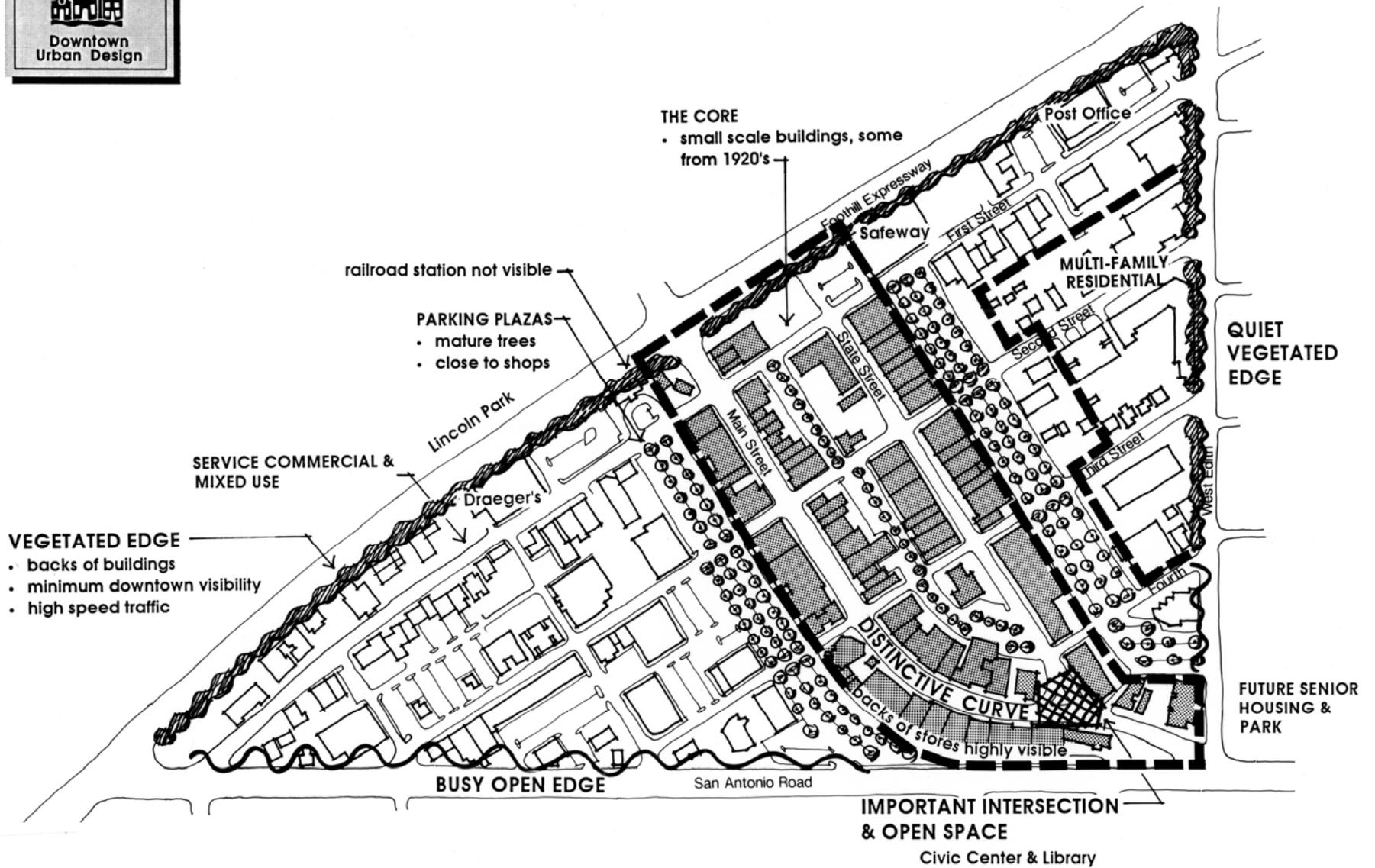
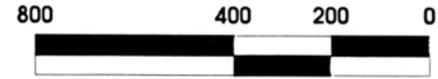
- rear building facades facing parking lots do not project an inviting image,
- building facades need updating to become more contemporary,
- commercial signing needs modernization,
- public streetscape and parking lot improvements need to be enhanced and updated.

These assets and problems are summarized in the following diagram.





# Existing Downtown Features



# 3.

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## Design Concepts

This Plan proposes to achieve the goals by carrying out a series of design concepts. These concepts have provided a frame for evaluating the existing environment and should provide a guide to the design of new development. An important note regarding the overall approach to Downtown should be emphasized - an attempt to compete with commercial development elsewhere in the City by creating a marketing "theme" is not desired. The problem with establishing such a theme is that it leads to the tendency to create vanilla architecture and a controlled "shopping mall" environment that does not reflect the varied character and history of the community.

Instead, this plan focuses on the actions and physical design concepts that are most important to the continued vitality of Downtown, including increasing the visibility of downtown, maintaining the pedestrian vitality of the area. The concept plan establishes the goals for a particular area, and sets the general tone and character. The following design concepts are the main ideas that guide all subsequent recommendations for design and implementation. These concepts were shaped by Downtown Committee discussions, as well as the policy framework established by the General Plan.

- Improve Downtown Los Altos' first impression at its edges.
- Create legible, recognizable entry points into the Downtown Area.
- Externalize the character of the Village to increase awareness of Downtown character and resources.
- Create strong pedestrian linkages to the Civic and residential areas adjacent the Downtown.

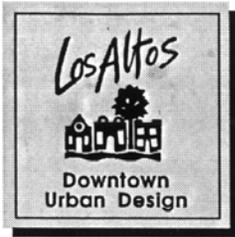
- Develop pedestrian walkways, or "paseo" system, to better link rear parking plazas to the stores along State and Main Streets.
- Promote pedestrian oriented activities and the ability to walk, rather than drive, from one place to another.
- Provide additional public outdoor plazas and eating areas, visible from the street, to enhance the ambiance of the downtown.
- Ensure the continued concentration of pedestrian retail in the downtown core area, and the continued provision of community-serving uses such as grocery stores, hardware stores and the Post Office at the perimeter of the core.
- Preserve the historic character of Downtown Los Altos by renovating and restoring existing historic buildings.
- Enhance the character of storefronts and service uses such as the Post Office, to add life to the overall streetscape as well as portray

the store's image and character to the auto and pedestrian traffic.

- Enhance existing retail development and promote highly visible, vital activities within the downtown core area.
- Plan for additional parking facilities.
- Decrease the visual prominence of parking lots.
- Improve the appearance of signage.
- Increase the identification of businesses and buildings.

The following diagram illustrates these concepts.





# Design Concept Diagram



## LEGEND

- Sense of Entry
- Arrival Zone
- Plaza Open Space
- Parking Plaza
- Pedestrian Link
- Node
- Special Study Area

Mixed Use / Parking Garage Site

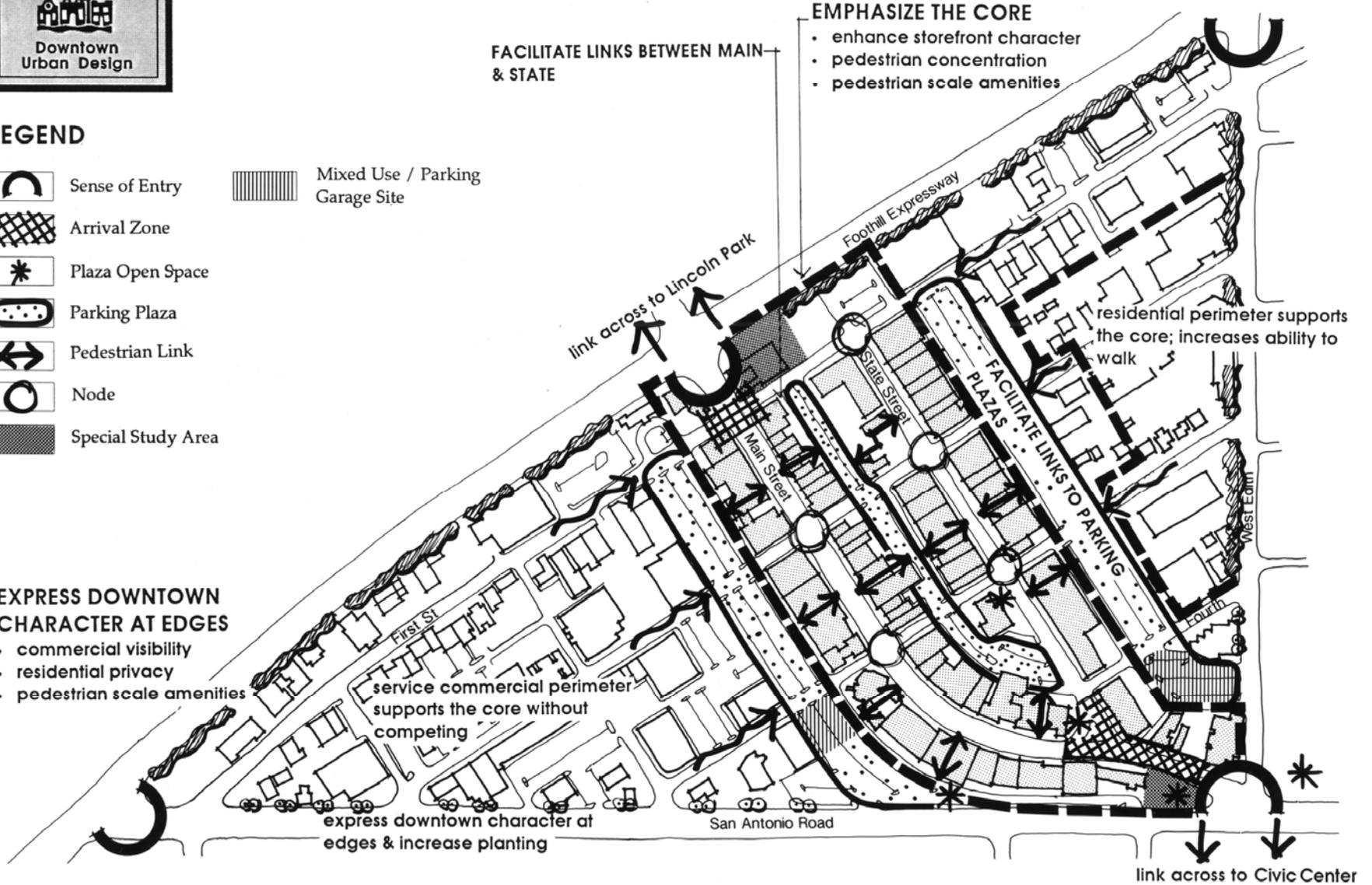
**FACILITATE LINKS BETWEEN MAIN & STATE**

### EMPHASIZE THE CORE

- enhance storefront character
- pedestrian concentration
- pedestrian scale amenities

### EXPRESS DOWNTOWN CHARACTER AT EDGES

- commercial visibility
- residential privacy
- pedestrian scale amenities



# 4.

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## The First Steps

The first steps toward carrying out the design concepts and strategies presented in the previous section will be critical to the overall success of the Downtown enhancement effort. As a result of Committee priority directions, the focus of this Plan has become the following "building blocks":

**Downtown Entries:** Entries give an important first impression for visitors, as well as becoming a symbol of "home" for residents on a daily basis. Thus, they are significant symbols that reflect the character of the City. Major entries to the Village triangle from San Antonio and Foothill could be denoted with a series of entry statements, using special planting, monoliths, walls, and signing. Although buildings and traffic patterns already exist at each entry, future development should be designed so as to enhance the entry intersections, and give a distinct identity to the Village.

**Downtown Edges:** The edges of the Downtown triangle, Foothill Boulevard, Edith Avenue, and San Antonio Road, define the overall character of the area for those that pass by. Although these streets are dominated by automobile movement, they can increase awareness of Downtown resources and present an outward appearance consistent with the small-scale, pedestrian core.

**The Core:** The Core of Downtown, the area along Main and State Streets between First and San Antonio, is the destination for most Downtown visitors. This area has the greatest pedestrian density, as well as a concentration of retail stores and restaurants. Efforts to improve the distinctive physical appearance and small scale pedestrian qualities of the core can help to improve the quality of life in Los Altos.

**Public Open Space:** A number of plazas and open spaces have been identified as important to the image and character of the Village area. These include the Rotary Tree Plaza, the Costume Bank plaza, Edith / San Antonio Plaza, the San Antonio Plaza and Walk, and the street corner extensions on Main and State Streets.

**Pedestrian Friendly Environment:** A system of pedestrian pathways, or "paseos," is intended to provide a connection between the parking plazas and Main Street in a pedestrian-friendly, small scaled manner. The scale of these pedestrian paseos is seen as a contrast with the character of both the commercial areas along Main Street, and the auto-dominated Foothill Expressway and San Antonio Road. Other pedestrian-friendly elements include colorful planting, pots, tree grates, banners, and other site amenities.

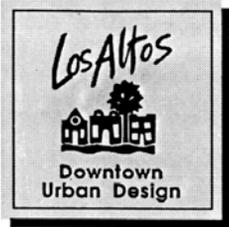
**Commercial Infill and Rehabilitation:** The Plan explores several ways to improve the character of the area through infill and rehabilitation. As rehabilitation becomes an economically viable option, several methods will become feasible, including creating a greater architectural presence with towers, enhancing store entry plazas, and improving the outdoor pedestrian environment with walkways and activities. Buildings facade rehabilitation might include further articulation and detailing with display windows, and awnings, as well as signage improvements.

**Parking:** Adequate and accessible parking is an imperative element in downtown development without transit services. This Plan envisions the addition of several parking garages in the parking plazas to handle long-term parking and peak parking demands. These garages would be conveniently located, but set away from Main Street to avoid the visual problems of massive parking facilities within a low-rise streetscape. Potential locations for these structures include the parking plaza at State

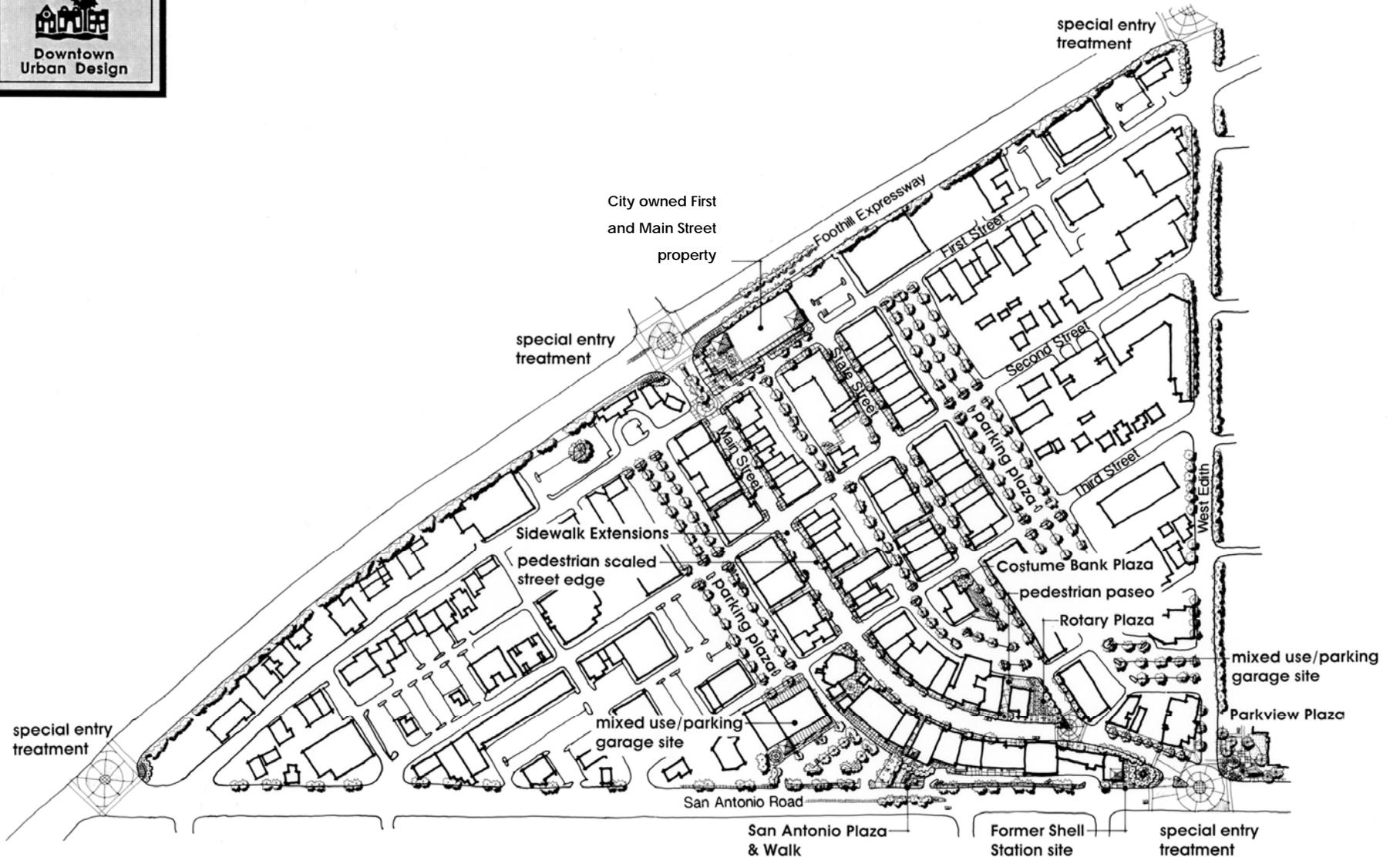
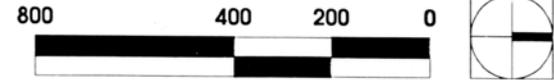
and Fourth, and a portion of the parking plaza at Third and San Antonio. Most of the existing parking plazas would remain as they are, providing the easily accessed parking lots that are so convenient for shoppers.

**Downtown Landscaping:** Landscaping in the Village would generally be more urban and public in appearance, with a greater proportion of paved surfaces than other areas. Colorful perennial planting could become a feature at entry areas and in street medians. New and replacement trees could be located in tree grates, thus providing a walkable surface while still allowing ample air and water to reach the soil.

The following illustrative plan presents a vision of how the village could look after taking these first steps.



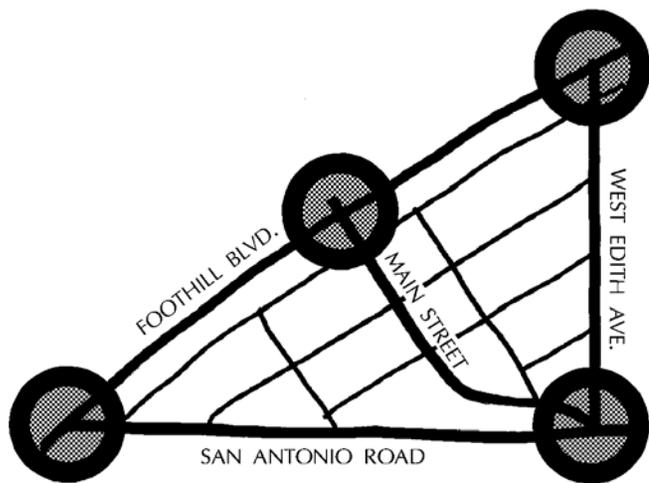
# Illustrative Plan



## Downtown Entries

As the initial points of visibility and access, the entries to the Downtown Village strongly influence its image. Like the front door of a house, entries can dramatically announce the character of what is beyond, and effect a meaningful transition from "outside" to inside. Entry locations include:

- San Antonio Road and Main Street
- Foothill Boulevard and Main Street
- Foothill Boulevard and West Edith Avenue
- Foothill Boulevard and San Antonio Road
- El Monte Road and I-280



key map, entry locations

## Recommendations

The design of entries into the Downtown will be most unifying if all are a variation of a strong concept and theme. Common elements such as monoliths, signing, special intersection paving, and special planting can be combined in varying ways to produce a pleasing sense of entry.

### San Antonio and Main Entry

The San Antonio and Main Street intersection acts as one of two entries to the core of Downtown. It has the potential to become a memorable point along San Antonio Road, and link the Downtown with the Civic Center. Edith / San Antonio Plaza and the rehabilitated Shell station site will introduce an active Downtown atmosphere.

Design features might include:

- small flowering accent trees
- flowering perennial plants at corners and in medians
- improved Downtown signing
- special street paving
- an overhead banner system for holidays and special events
- outdoor corner plazas
- a fountain or other focal element

### Foothill and Main Entry

The Foothill and Main Street intersection serves as the other of the two entries to the core of Downtown. It has the potential to become a focal point along Foothill Boulevard, introducing urbane elements that contrast strongly with the green, park-like street edge.

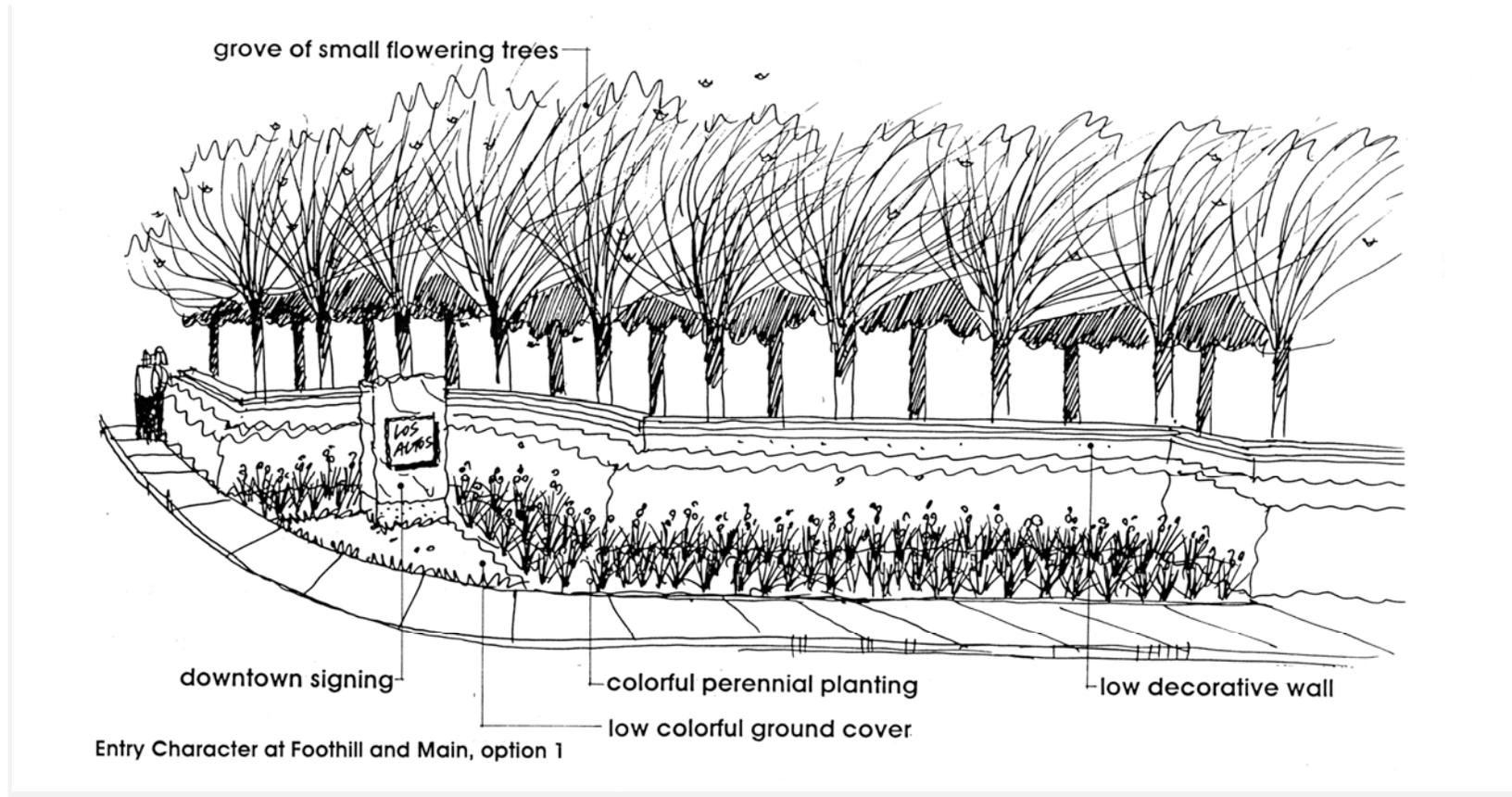
Design features might include:

- small accent flowering trees
- flowering perennial plants
- improved public entry signage that reflects the urbane, small scale qualities of the Downtown
- monoliths, walls, or other architectonic elements that define the entry space
- views of active, vital Downtown uses, such as cafés or retail establishments

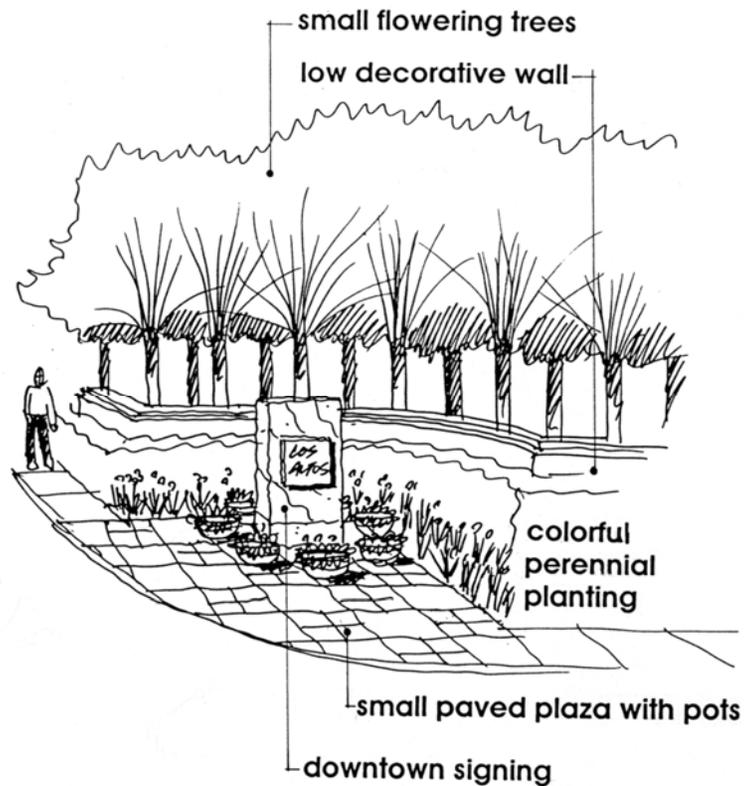
- special street paving

### Foothill and Edith Entry

The Foothill and Edith intersection is an entry to the residential portion of Downtown. As such, privacy should be a primary design determinant. The character proposed for other Downtown entries should be modified to suit the less formal, quieter nature of this entry.



Entry Character at Foothill and Main, option 1

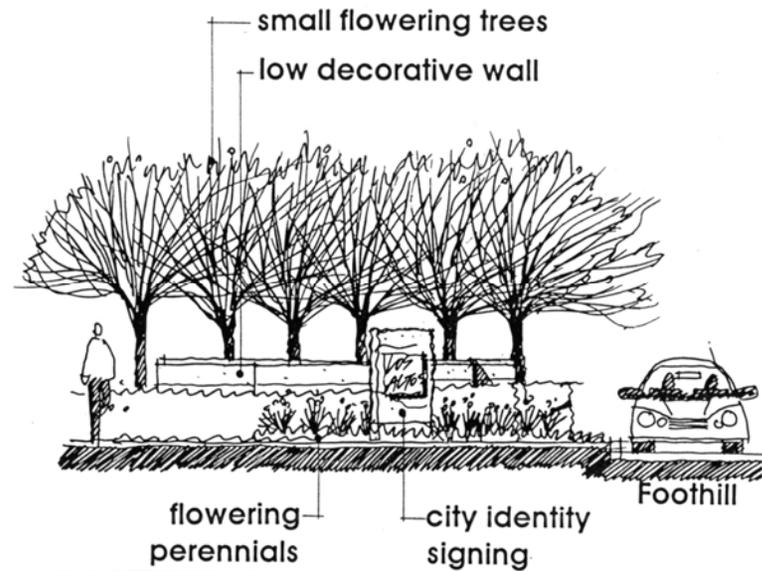


**Entry Character at Foothill and Main, option 2**

As with the Foothill/San Antonio entry, limited space is currently available; efforts to secure additional space for the entry feature will be needed.

Design features might include:

- small flowering accent trees
- Downtown identity signing
- flowering perennial plants



**Entry Character at Foothill and Main, section**

- a low hedge of evergreen plants
- special street paving

**Foothill and San Antonio Entry**

McElroy's lumberyard dominates the Foothill and San Antonio intersection. This service commercial use is a visible reminder that Downtown Los Altos is a working downtown, with a diverse mixture of uses. For this reason, the Downtown Committee wished to create an entry that filters views rather than blocking views of the lumberyard.

The entry design should be consistent with the elements established for the Main Street entries, but less formal in character. Efforts to obtain a

corner easement or acquire land for the entry will be necessary, since only limited space is currently available.

Design features might include:

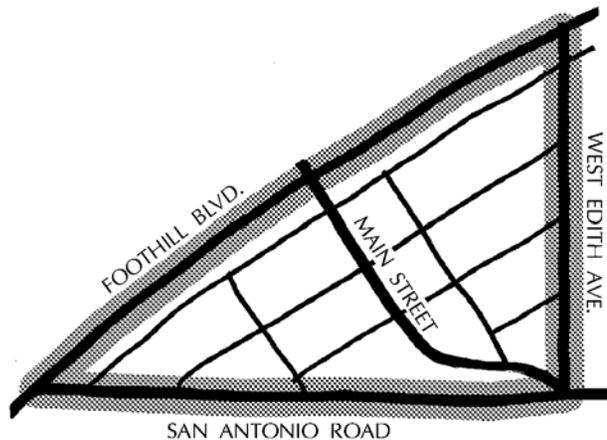
- small flowering accent trees
- special street paving
- an evergreen hedge
- Downtown identity signing
- flowering perennial plants

### **I-280 and El Monte Road Entry**

While not entirely under City control, the ease of finding Downtown Los Altos is influenced by the appearance of signing and planting at the Freeway and along El Monte Road. While the Downtown Committee developed no specific recommendations for this entry, the issue was raised as an area of concern. Future efforts should be undertaken to address the legibility and ease of finding the Downtown from a city-wide and regional perspective.

## Downtown Edges

Edges are another important component of the first impression that passers by and visitors perceive. Much of the pleasant character of the Downtown is currently restricted to internal streets, and is thus never seen by those that stay outside. Externalizing the elements that make the Village special by introducing them along Foothill Boulevard, San Antonio Road, and Edith Avenue would help to increase awareness and appreciation of Downtown resources. All streets surrounding the Downtown are the major automobile circulation routes, and are appropriate for an urban "boulevard" streetscape treatment including continuous tree planting and street amenities.



key map, edge locations

## West Edith Avenue

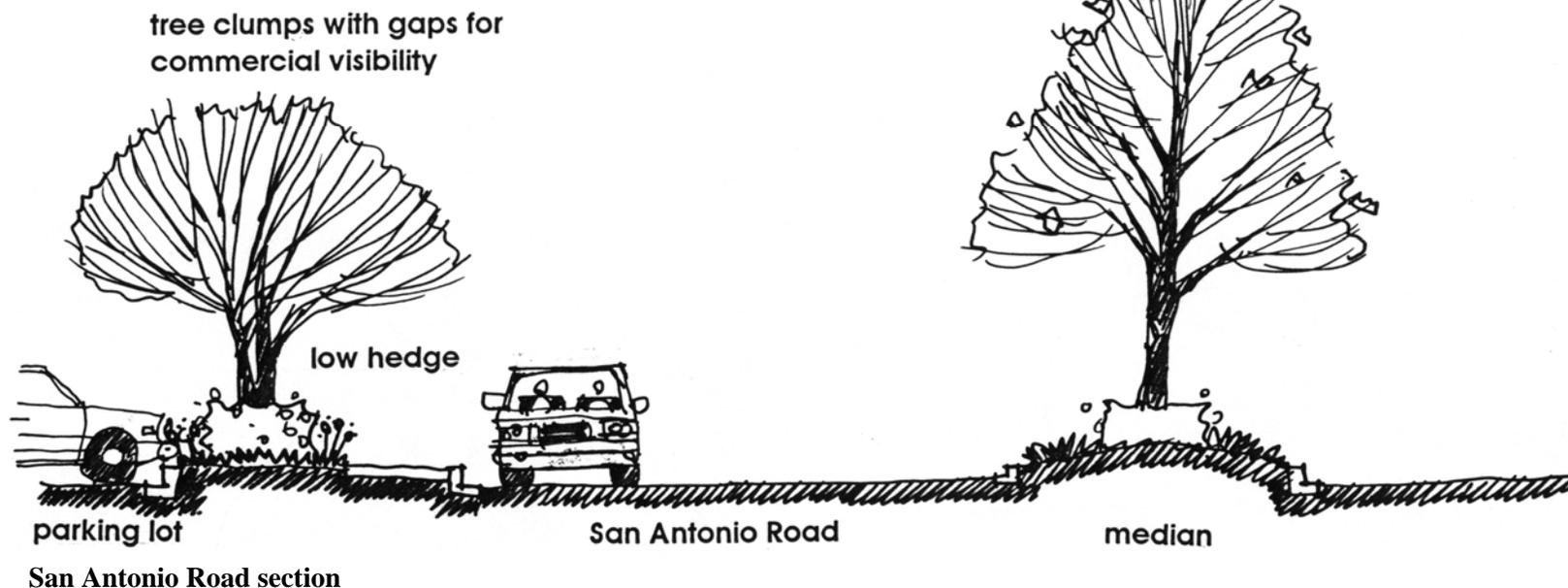
West Edith Avenue, while not specifically discussed by the Downtown Committee, could also benefit from a higher degree of visual consistency with the Downtown. Because of the residential character of the street, plant materials are the most appropriate way to achieve this consistency. Introduction of the parking plaza tree, the Chinese Pistache (*Pistacia chinensis*) would indicate to passing motorists that they have entered the Downtown.

## San Antonio Road

The perimeter of the Downtown is highly visible from San Antonio Road. Urban design goals for this street edge include maintaining the commercial visibility, increasing the continuity of the street edge, and expressing the unique elements of the core.

Street tree plantings are an effective means of creating a sense of continuity. Group street trees in close clumps of two trees, with a break between each clump. This treatment would help to break up the large amount of paved surface, while also allowing a continuous commercial visibility. Several elements could be borrowed from Main and State Streets to help to externalize the character of the core.

Among these elements are:



- the parking plaza tree, Chinese Pistache (*Pistacia chinensis*);
- special holiday decorations, such as the "twinkle" lights;
- repetition of selected pedestrian amenities, such as pots, fountains, colorful planting, and special paving;
- repetition of Downtown banners and light fixtures.

## Foothill Expressway

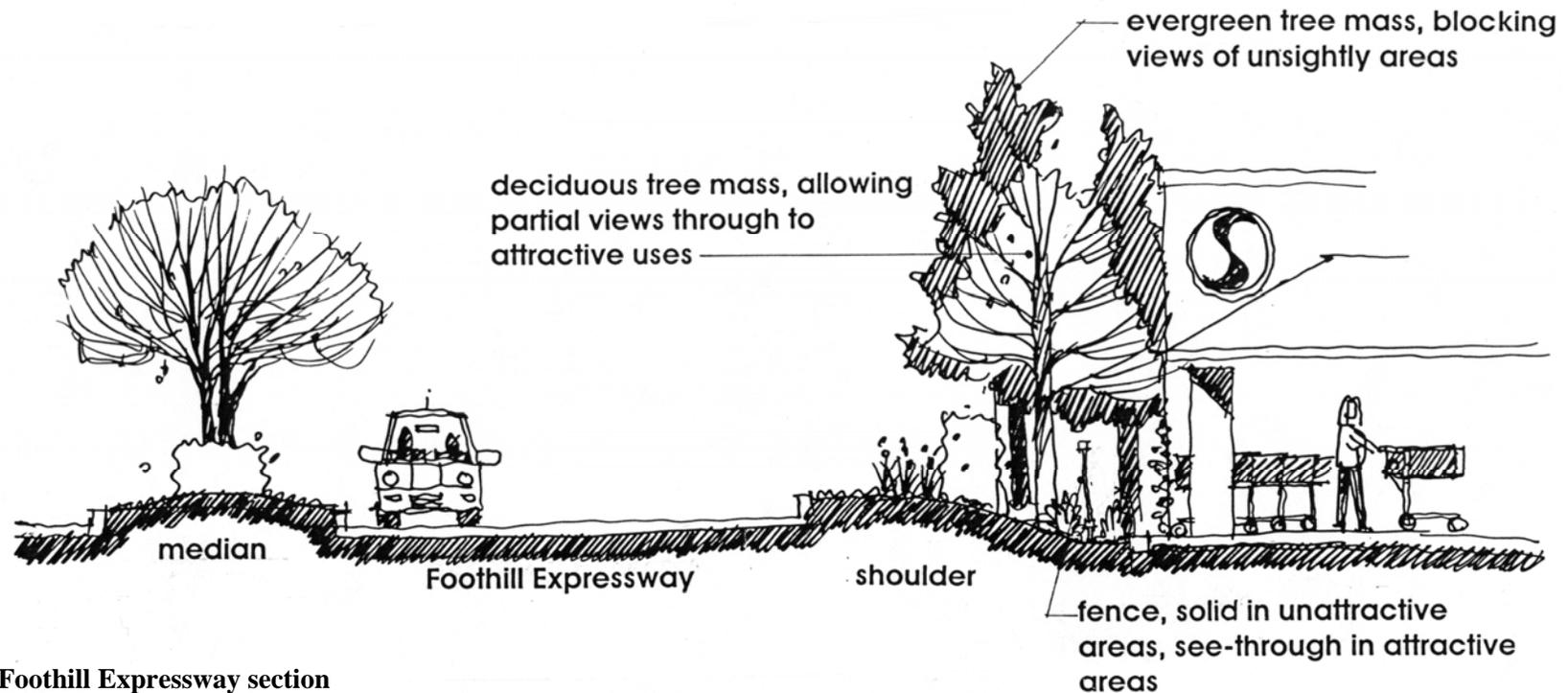
Foothill Expressway, once the railroad right-of-way, is a major north-south link lined with large mature trees and residential uses. The street currently turns its back on Downtown.

The frost of December 1990 severely damaged the tree planting along Foothill. The City has made replacing these trees a high priority. Rather than completely blocking motorist views of Downtown, the current replanting plans have selectively allowed filtered views to commercial uses with the goal of increasing awareness of the Downtown from this important street.

Future phases of replanting along Foothill will focus on improving the median appearance. Plant materials appropriate to this section of Foothill are those with a large, loose, informal character and seasonal interest.

The existing dilapidated chain link fencing is under the jurisdiction of Santa Clara County. The City should initiate discussions with County Staff to explore replacing the chain link fence with a more attractive

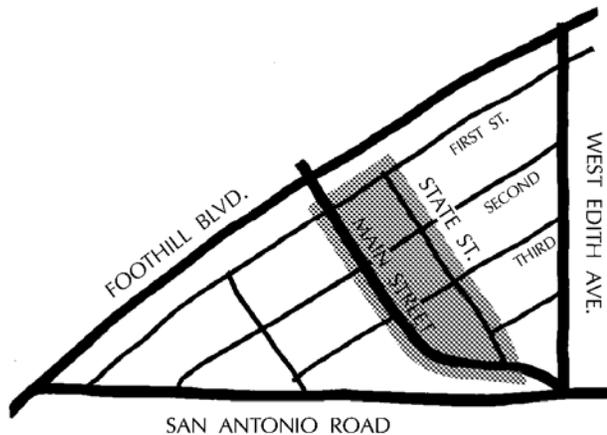
fence reflective of the Downtown's importance as a business location.



**Foothill Expressway section**

## The Core

Centering on Main and State Streets, the Core is the activity hub that attracts people and sustains the Downtown. An important challenge for the future will be to reinforce the importance of the Core in a way that will ensure the continuing economic vitality, while preserving its intrinsic, valuable urban design qualities.



**key map, the core**

Many of the special characteristics of the overall Downtown can be attributed to the Core, including the historic, intimate scale of buildings, the pedestrian friendliness of the street environment, and the concentration of pedestrians. The following recommendations explore ways to strengthen these special characteristics.

## Recommendations

Several strategies can be used to unify the core and emphasize it as an important pedestrian destination, including:

- reinforcing physical links between Main and State Streets
- drawing people to the area with anchor stores
- concentrating active land uses within the core
- heightening the pedestrian scale of the streetscape
- creating memorable landmarks

## Physical Links

Main and State Streets, the two major linear circulation paths, define the core of Downtown Los Altos. Right now, these streets are separate entities, with little sense of interconnection. The experience of walking or driving between these two streets could be a unifying element of the core, if the side streets (First, Second and Third) and pedestrian walkways present a level of intensity and amenity consistent with Main and State.

The desired consistency along First, Second, and Third Streets, as well as the pedestrian walkways (also called paseos), can be achieved in a number of ways. These include:

- initiating facade improvements to remove blank walls and enhance displays, awnings and signing
- providing a higher level of streetscape amenity in the form of benches, banners and landscaping

These methods are discussed further in the sections on *Pedestrian Friendly Environment* and *Commercial Infill and Rehabilitation*.

## Anchor Stores

An anchor, in the language of the shopping mall developer, is a store that has a strong customer attraction and good marketing, thus drawing people to a location. Anchors are valuable in that these people may potentially stay and finish their shopping in the area, rather than traveling to another location. This concept can be applied to the Downtown, as well as the shopping mall.

Anchors can be of a variety of land uses and sizes, including restaurants, grocery, or drug stores. Anchors are not necessarily large square-footage chain stores, but can also be small high-profile, high-interest establishments that cater to local needs. From an urban design point of view, the best location for an anchor would be one that supports the vitality and image of the Core and promotes the village atmosphere. Such locations include street corners on Main or State, on the curved portion of Main along San Antonio, or other visually prominent places in the Core. Creating additional anchors outside the Core may dilute the pedestrian concentration, and fragment the environment, rather than unify-

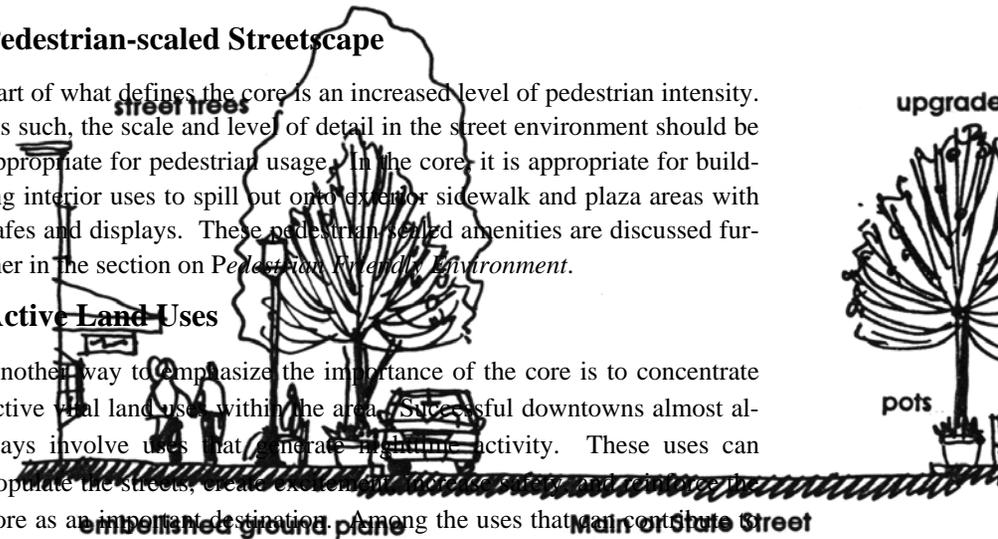
ing it.

## Pedestrian-scaled Streetscape

Part of what defines the core is an increased level of pedestrian intensity. As such, the scale and level of detail in the street environment should be appropriate for pedestrian usage. In the core, it is appropriate for building interior uses to spill out onto exterior sidewalk and plaza areas with cafes and displays. These pedestrian-scaled amenities are discussed further in the section on *Pedestrian-Friendly Environment*.

## Active Land Uses

Another way to emphasize the importance of the core is to concentrate active land uses within the area. Successful downtowns almost always involve uses that generate high-density activity. These uses can populate the streets, create excitement, and make the core as an important destination. Among the uses that contribute to nighttime activity are retail shops, drug stores, restaurants, video stores,



bars, record shops, and cultural facilities.

In addition to active nighttime uses, the importance of the Core can also be reinforced by emphasizing the mixture and intensity of uses that occur there, including retail, housing, office uses, and especially those uses that attract many pedestrians, such as small storefront shops and restaurants. The Core is particularly appropriate for a vertical mixture of uses, for example, a situation where office space is located on the second floor above a retail store.

The perimeter of the Downtown to the north and south of the Core is best suited to service commercial support land uses, such as banks and hardware stores.

### **Landmarks**

Many commercial buildings in Downtown Los Altos have distinctive architectural qualities that make important contributions to the "village

character" of the core. In many cases, these qualities could be further improved upon or emphasized to the benefit of the Downtown image.

The historic Railroad Station near the intersection of Foothill and Main is an example of an existing landmark in need of emphasis. Opening up views from Foothill Expressway and highlighting the building from First Street would draw attention to the importance of the core.

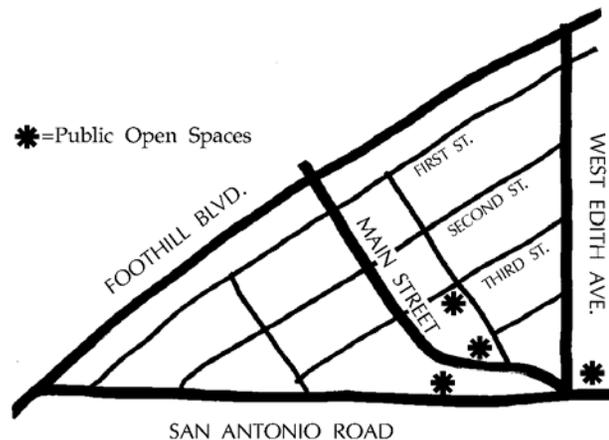
The addition of new landmarks in the process of infilling the Downtown should also support the importance of the core. The best location for taller building elements and towers would be on street corners on Main or State. Non-buildings can also be landmarks. Prominently located decorative fountains can also be memorable pieces in the fabric of the core.



## Public Open Space

Public outdoor use spaces such as plazas, corner extensions, and courtyards provide opportunities for gatherings and public events to occur in the Downtown. These open spaces can provide areas for a variety of activities, including resting, waiting, meeting, or eating. They can convey both the festive and urban qualities of the Downtown. To encourage usage, each open space should be comfortable, in terms of solar exposure and wind protection. Locate outdoor use areas on the sunny exposure of buildings. The design of these spaces should offer choices to the visitor; with places to sit in both sun and shade. Shade can be provided by trees, umbrellas and awnings.

The open space should provide physical form, scale and design that accommodates pedestrians. Each should be a multi-purpose space with a potential location for many diverse public activities. Seating flexibility



key map, public open space

is important. Arrange seating to accommodate various numbers of individuals, from a person sitting alone to four friends chatting.

The open space should seem to be spatially defined, with clear boundaries, what designers call "creating an outdoor room." Ways to accomplish this definition include a change in paving materials, walls, overhead structures, level changes and planting.

Views seen while using the open space are also significant. Use planting or attractive screening to block undesirable views and provide privacy or separation where required.

Potential uses to consider when designing a public open space include:

- eating
- sitting
- lunch time & evening use
- gatherings of large groups of people
- holiday events and ceremonies
- starting point for parades, races, and civic events
- outdoor street entertainers, for example, a juggler
- location for concerts

Design features might include:

- seating
- public art
- "Welcome to Los Altos" signing, planting, and structures
- a decorative fountain
- a mixture of planted and paved areas
- a tree bosque for shade
- colorful planting in pots
- an outdoor vendor cart
- paved space for 20 to 30 people to gather
- colorful banners for special events

- special lighting, including colored lanterns and tree uplights
- a stage or amphitheater
- a covered structure, such as a gazebo or trellis
- a public toilet
- newspaper and bicycle racks
- night time lighting

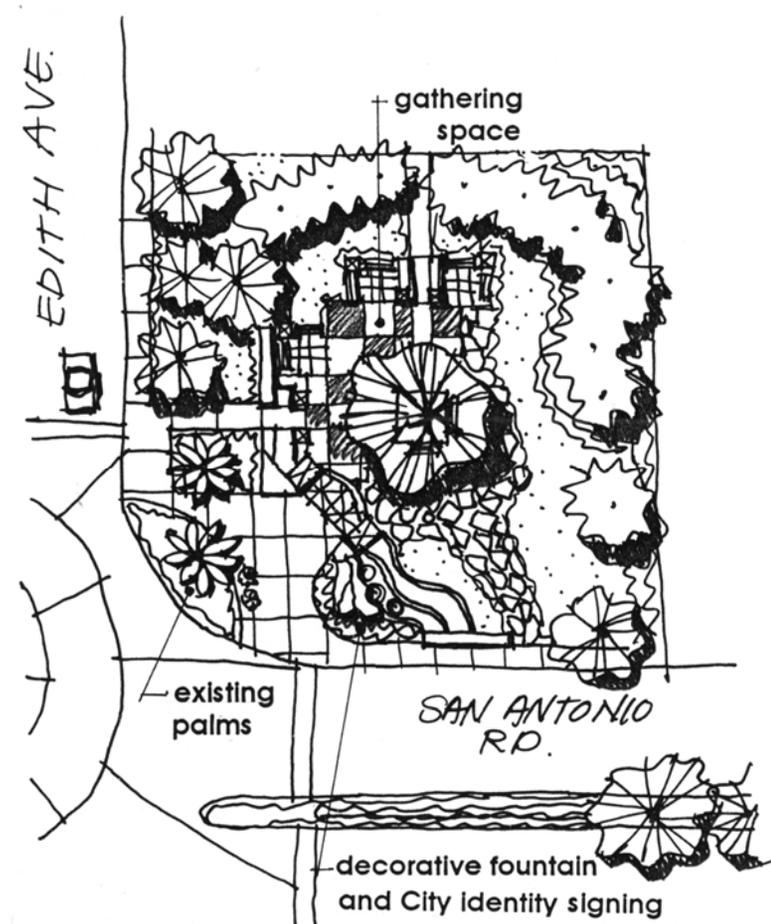
Several important public open spaces have been identified through the process of preparing this plan, including:

- Edith / San Antonio Plaza
- Rotary Tree Plaza
- San Antonio Plaza and Walk
- Costume Bank Plaza
- Main/San Antonio Plaza, on the old Shell station site
- Street corner extensions at the corners of Main, and State, at First, Second, and Third Streets

## Recommendations

### Edith / San Antonio Plaza

Set at the corner of Edith Avenue and San Antonio Road, Edith / San Antonio Plaza has the potential to become a Downtown entry symbol, as well as a link between the Downtown and the Civic center complex across San Antonio Road. It can also provide a gathering space for residents of the future senior housing complex.

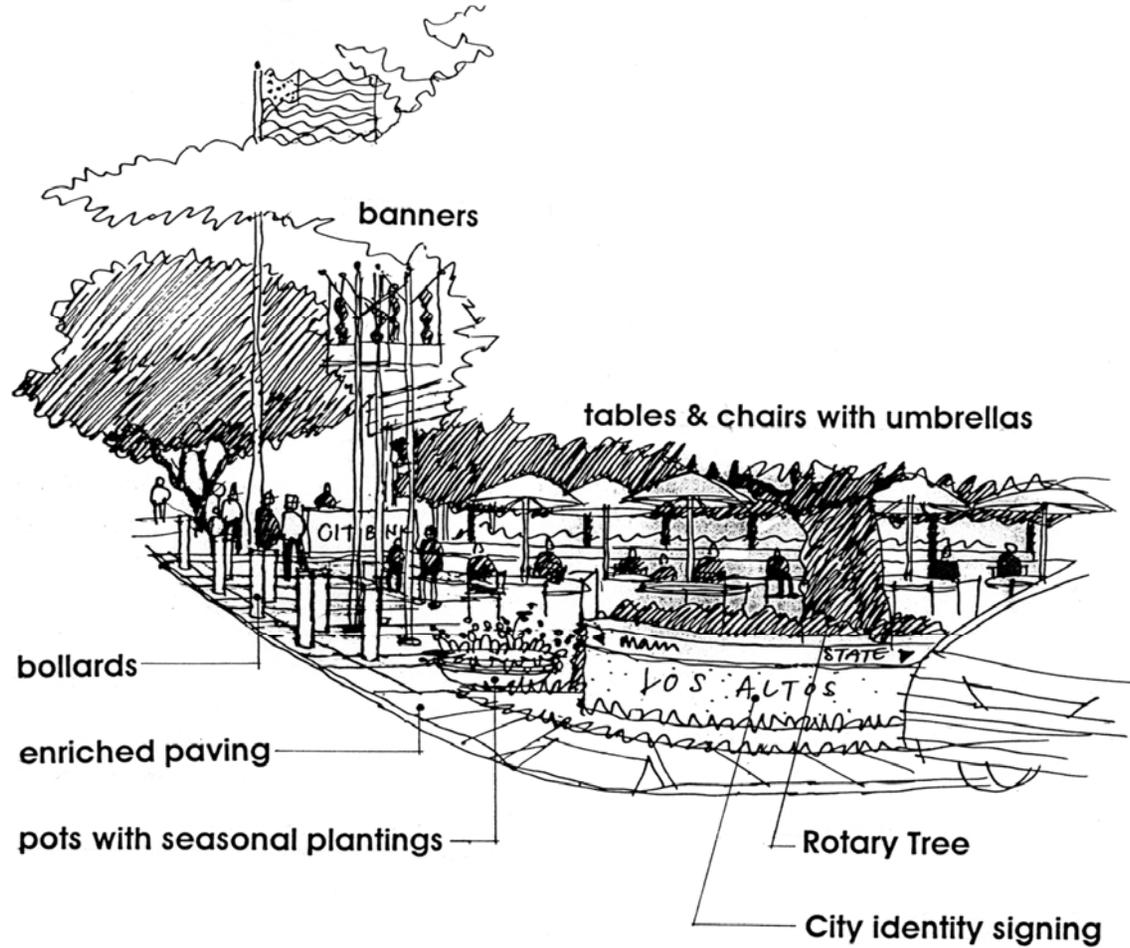


Plan of Edith / San Antonio Plaza

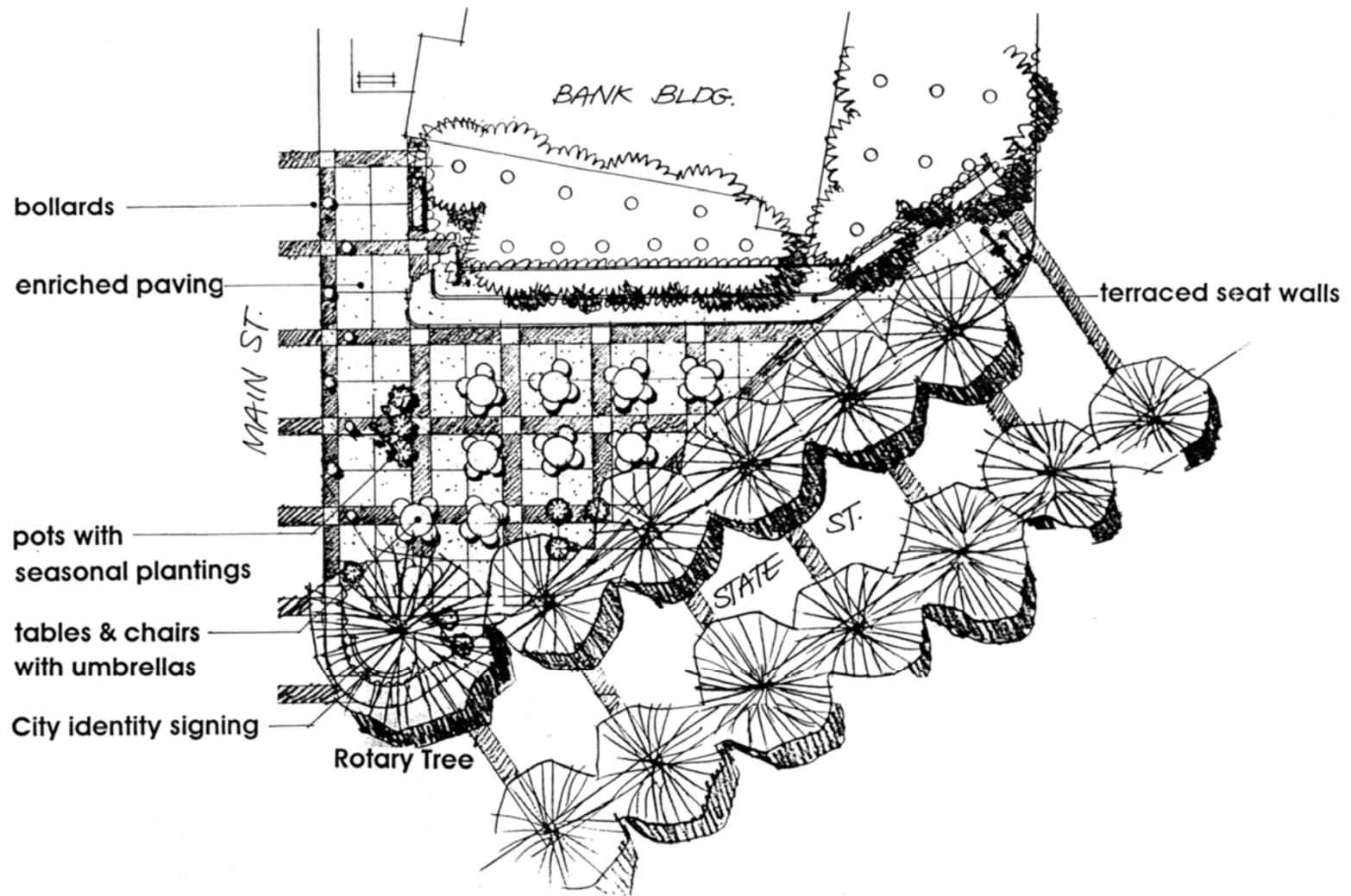
## Rotary Tree Plaza

The Rotary Tree Plaza area has the potential to become the gateway to the pedestrian core from San Antonio Road. Located at the split of Main and State Streets, the existing space is often used as a focus for Downtown special events, closing the existing rig

enlarged to create a significant Downtown amenity.



Rotary Tree Plaza

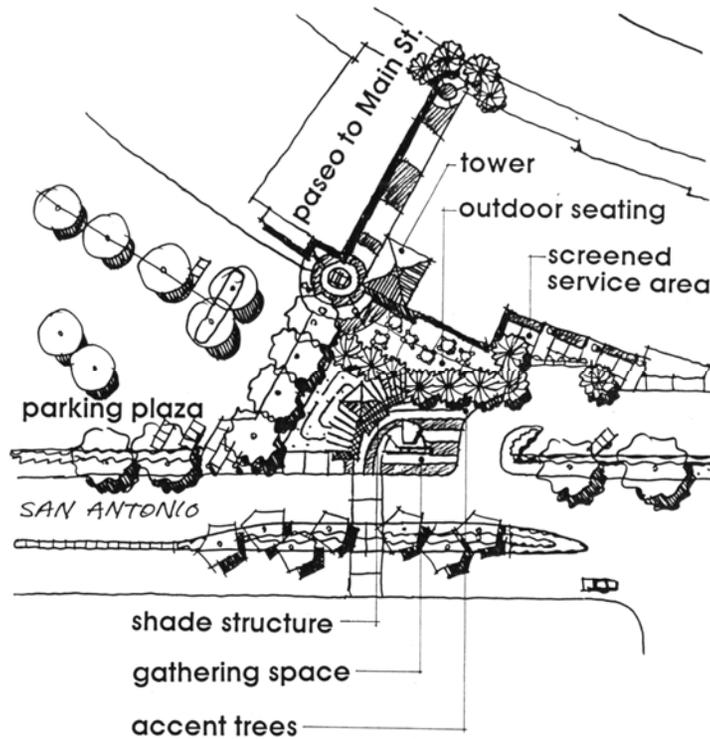


**Rotary Tree Plaza Plan**

### San Antonio Plaza and Walk

San Antonio Plaza and Walk is located at the east end of the parking plaza behind Main Street, where the curved rear building facades of Main Street are visible from San Antonio Road. The space for this open space would be carved out of the existing parking lot, where the curve reduces the circulation efficiency. The parking spaces lost would be easily made up with the creation of a parking garage in the vicinity.

The development of a public plaza space at this location can help to externalize the Village character, as discussed in the preceding section on



San Antonio Plaza & Walk, plan

Edges. The image of the rear building facades will need improvement with the addition of displays, awnings and signing. Garbage and service areas will also need enhancement.

### Costume Bank Plaza

Located at the corner of Third Street and State Street in front of the Costume Bank, this plaza could be a focus for activity along State Street.

### Street Corner Extensions

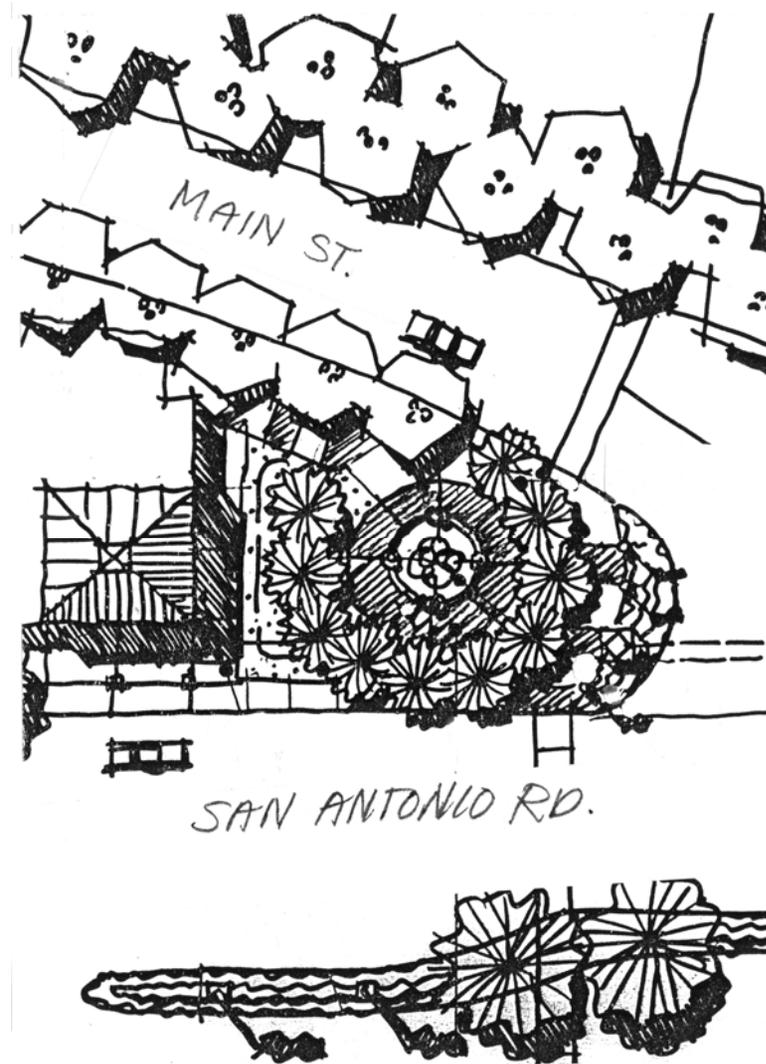
Street corners within the Downtown core, specifically Main and State Streets at First, Second, and Third, act as important nodes, or points of concentrated activity. Creating small plaza extensions by widening the sidewalk at these points can add needed pedestrian-friendly open space to the Downtown.

Street corner extensions have many safety benefits as well. They provide a shortened pedestrian path and increased visibility for both pedestrians and drivers on side streets, without constricting the actual traffic flow.



### Main/San Antonio Plaza

The street corner of the old Shell Station site has been identified as another desirable location for a public open space. This site is a prominent part of the Downtown entry at the end of Main Street. The character of this plaza might draw upon the proximity to City Hall as well as the entry, creating a civic, public landmark along San Antonio Road. The *Special Study Areas* section shows a sketch of a possible plaza design at this location.



Plan, Main/San Antonio Plaza

## Pedestrian Friendly Environment

Much of the special character of Downtown Los Altos comes from its pedestrian-friendly environment. This environment, where people can walk from place to place, can be strengthened with the addition of an improved pedestrian paseo system, as well as a heightened level of visual richness and amenity.

Visual richness can be created through the use of special plantings, flowering trees, and a variety of furniture elements such as bollards, benches, pots and trash receptacles. Other small-scale street furniture that can create visual richness includes:

- tree grates and guards
- lighting
- sculpture
- decorative fountains
- detailed paving

### Recommendations

#### Pedestrian Paseo and Circulation System

Pedestrian paseos can be a vital part of a pedestrian environment. These narrow walkways are intended to provide a sense of mystery and discovery away from the automobile. A common occurrence in European cities, the paseo is designed as a retail-lined walkway with small scale colorful planting, pots, seating, lighting and signing. The design of these walkways should encourage activities typical to a

small town, village environment: people-watching, resting, waiting, meeting, etc.



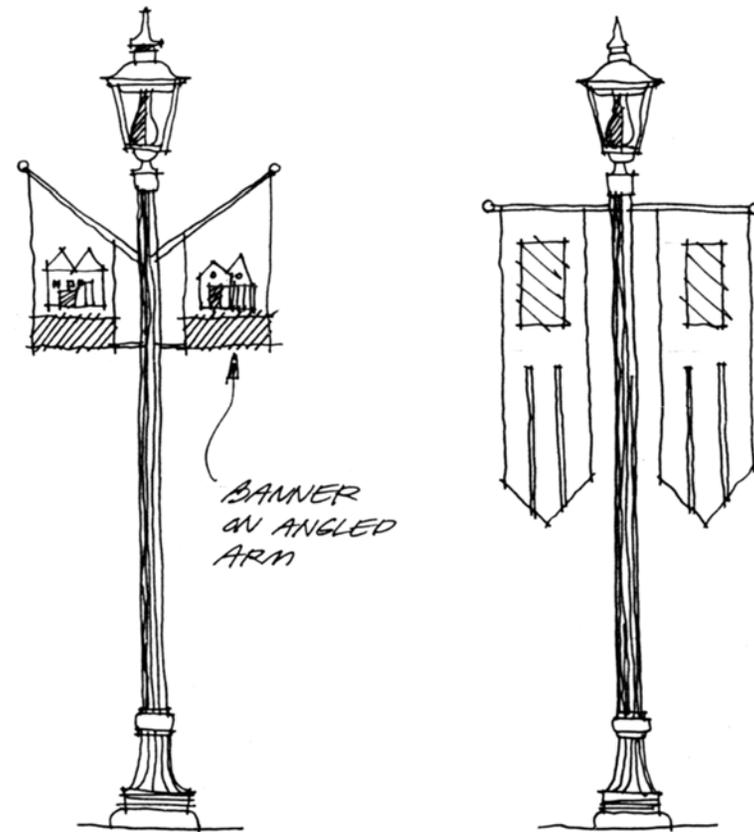
#### Pedestrian Paseo

Paseos can supplement the street circulation system providing another connection to the parking plazas behind the street-front commercial establishments. The following items should be considered when designing the pedestrian pathways:

- Convert existing unused outdoor spaces located between buildings or adjacent to parking areas into pedestrian ways. Add new walkways in conjunction with new development in locations that will improve circulation links to the parking plazas and San Antonio Road.
- Locate window displays, signage, and secondary entries to businesses along these pathways to add interest and reinforce the retail environment.
- Provide pedestrian-scale lighting, decorative paving, colorful planting and planters to create pleasant walkways. Each pedestrian way should be designed to have its own unique identity. Incorporate Downtown streetscape elements such as paving pattern or light fixtures into the pedestrian way design, visually linking them to the overall circulation system.
- Where feasible, create entries to the rear of the building, adjacent to the parking lots, to facilitate pedestrian accessibility.
- Where feasible, align paseos with each other as they cross streets.

### Street Furniture

Street furniture also strengthens the pedestrian scale of outdoor spaces and further defines and enhances special use areas, entries and circulation patterns. Select street furniture and site furnishings to harmonize with the public streetscape components. This might include benches, tables and chairs, trash receptacles, lighting fixtures, bicycle racks, pots, planters, tree grates, banners, awnings, privacy fences and screens.



**Pedestrian Friendly Lighting Poles**

## Special Paving

Special paving can strengthen the pedestrian scale of outdoor spaces and further define and enhance special use areas, entries and circulation patterns. The pedestrian circulation system throughout the downtown core should be unified by the use of similar paving materials, as can crosswalks. Interesting color and score line patterns should be used in the design of pedestrian walkways and plazas. Subtle earth tones should be selected for the overall color for pedestrian ways to create a contrast to the asphalt in the roadways and parking areas. Possible materials include color-toned concrete paving, accent tiles, brick and interlocking pavers.

Except for plaza areas notes, a study should be initiated to further explore potential locations, material options, and cost implications of a va-



riety of special paving types.

## Commercial Infill and Rehabilitation

Changes to the commercial environment will most likely take place in the form of remodeling and restoration. As uses change and remodeling projects are proposed, owners are encouraged to upgrade their property in a manner consistent with the scale and character of the Downtown. Minor improvements, such as exterior painting, landscaping additions, street tree planting, mechanical equipment screening, sign upgrading, and display window improvements, are also encouraged. These minor steps can have a positive visual and marketing impact.

As redevelopment projects occur, improvements recommended in this plan, such as designing buildings with outdoor spaces, providing street furniture, implementing paseos and other measures, can occur.

### Facade Improvements

Storefronts, window displays, and awnings can all be improved to increase the image of the Downtown streetscape as well as the retail environment. One of the most effective ways to attract attention and encourage shopping is to create an attractive, well-designed storefront and building entry. The image projected from the building becomes, in effect, a sign in itself. Storefronts can be emphasized by the use of recessed entries, window displays, awnings, signage, color and by highlighting architectural details. Walls facing pedestrian ways and parking lots are encouraged to have elements of interest, such as fenestration, displays, signage or landscaping. These elements help to identify the store as well as enrich the streetscape character for the pedestrians. When considering such improvements, the following criteria should be used as a guide:

- Exterior building surfaces should be cleaned and repainted as necessary;
- Color schemes should be harmonious with surrounding structures and consistent with the original time period of the building;
- Deteriorated siding, trim, doors, windows, awnings and roof materials should be repaired or replaced;
- Interesting architectural features, fixtures and hardware should be retained or replaced with compatible elements;
- Highly visible, non-original attachments to the building should be removed (e.g., antennas, unused air conditioners, electrical conduit, etc.);
- Applied trim and accents, such as siding or awnings, should be consistent with the basic design of the building style and period of construction, as well as being compatible with other buildings in the vicinity. Proposed changes from the original design of the building should be carried out consistently throughout the project in a manner that complements the original design.



## Signing

Well-designed signs enhance the streetscape environment as well as the retailer's business message. Few outward features of a business display the owner's confidence and quality as well as signage. Replacement of inappropriate signs is one significant way to improve the image of the downtown and storefronts. Inappropriate signs are those that are out of scale, unsuitably located, in deteriorated condition, outdated, or that do not sufficiently convey a quality business image. Imaginative and creative designs that emphasize the unique features of Downtown Los Altos are encouraged. Various types of small scaled signs are appropriate for storefronts in Los Altos, including wall signs, projecting blade signs, window signs, and awning signs.

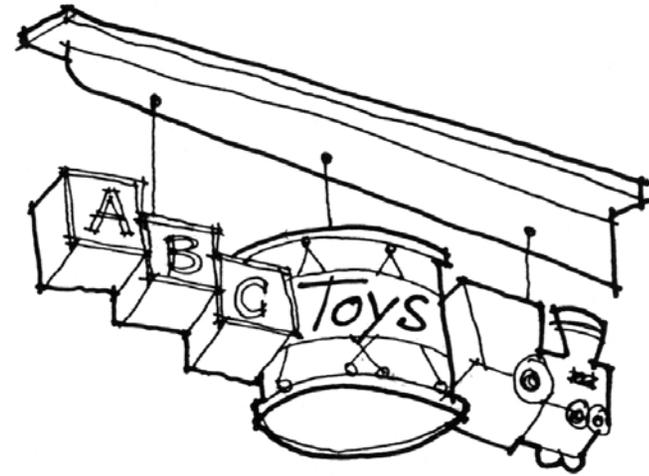
When considering signage improvements, the following criteria should be considered:

- The primary goal of the project sign system is to provide informa-



tion and identification. Simple graphic logos for identity are appropriate.

- Each sign should take into consideration visual compatibility with the Downtown Area.
- Each sign should emphasize, promote and complement the store's image in a creative, legible fashion as well as be compatible with the architectural style of the building and storefront facade.
- The scale of signs, letters, and symbols should be appropriate to their use, whether to catch the eye of a passing motorist or strolling window shopper.
- Color should be used carefully. Limited use of several colors with strong contrast between background and signage is recommended to make the signs easily readable.
- Lighting should be used to tastefully highlight signage and identify buildings during evening hours.



**Projecting Blade Sign**

- Temporary signs applied to announce sales or special events are to be avoided unless tastefully designed specifically for the occasion.

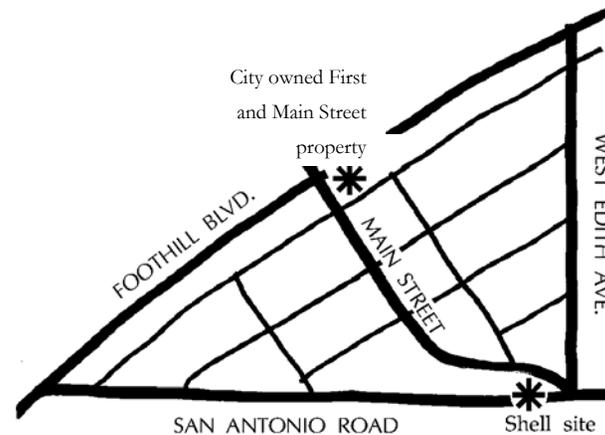
### Service Areas

The image area of back and side yards and service areas, included in or viewed from pedestrian walkways, can add to the image of the area if well designed.

All property owners are encouraged to share curb cuts into parking and service areas and to consolidate trash receptacles. All trash receptacles, and utility structures should be enclosed in a structure or screened from view. Design of new or rehabilitated buildings should include interior collection areas. All screening devices should relate to the architectural design of the surrounding buildings. All exposed air conditioner wall units should be screened from view or relocated to less visible areas. Utilize plant materials to screen down spouts, utilities and other unsightly elements on the buildings that can not be relocated.

### Special Study Areas

Several key sites have been discussed by the Downtown Committee as possibilities for commercial rehabilitation, including the Shell Station site at Main Street and San Antonio Road, and the City owned First and Main Street property site. Both of these sites are located at highly visible points adjacent to Downtown entries.



key map, special study areas

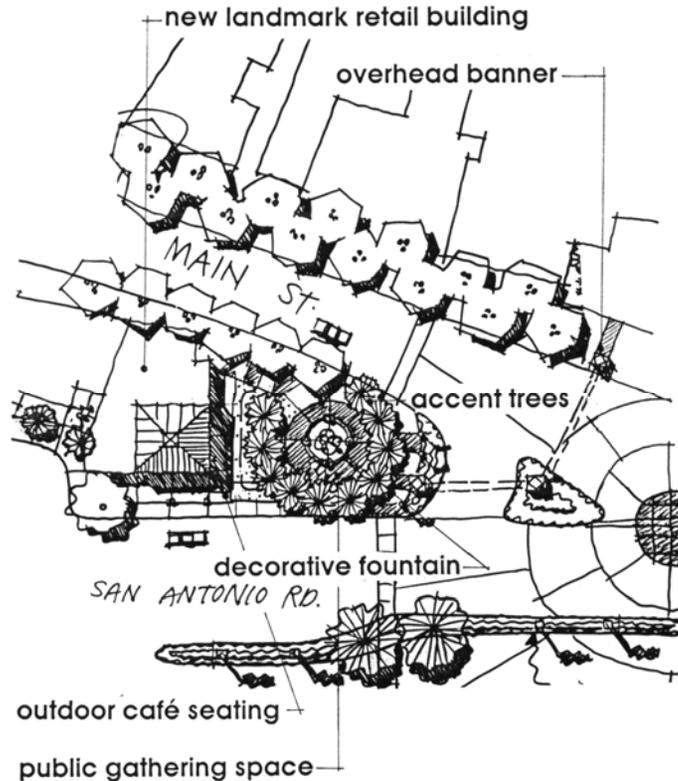
### Shell Station Site

The former Shell Station site is located adjacent to the Downtown entry at Main Street and San Antonio Road. In this highly visible location, future commercial rehabilitation would be expected to support the sense of entry and act as a landmark for motorists along San Antonio Road. The development would be expected to respond to the presence of the City Hall across the street. Lastly, the development would be expected to continue the established Main Street development patterns.

Elements that might be incorporated into the site plan to meet these expectations include:

- a clock tower, fountain, or other civic public landmark;
- a public plaza at the street corner;
- an outdoor café, vendor, or other active, visible, pedestrian oriented outdoor use;
- a well articulated, well designed building facade, with an equal level of design treatment on all sides;

- a provision for location a City gateway element and City identity signing at the street corner;
- a street edge setback and character consistent with other sections of Main Street. This character should be continuous on all sides of the site.



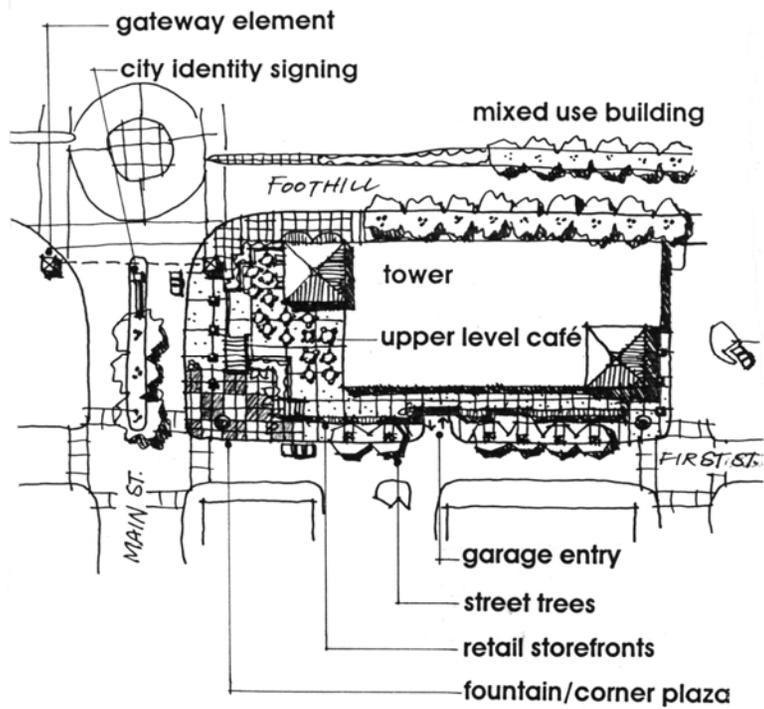
Site Plan, Former Shell Station Site

### City Owned First and Main Street Property Site

The City owned First and Main Street property site, located at Main Street and Foothill Expressway, has also been identified as an important location. When commercial rehabilitation becomes feasible, the resulting development would be expected to support the sense of entry and act as a landmark for motorists along Foothill Boulevard and Main Street. The development would also be expected to continue the established Main Street development patterns.

Elements that might be incorporated into the site plan to meet these expectations include:

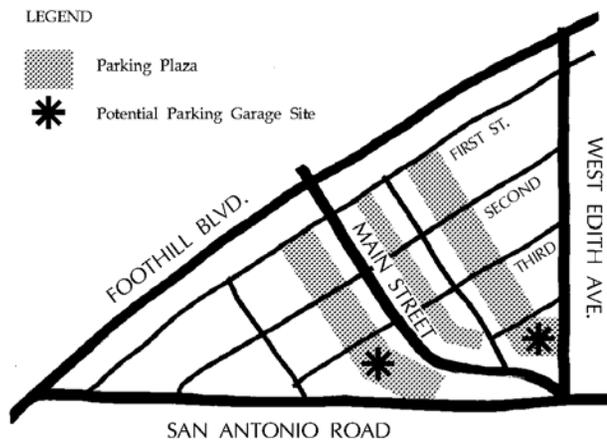
- a mixture of land uses, with retail on the ground floor;
- a tower or other highly visible building component that acts as a public landmark;
- a public plaza at the corner of First and Main Streets;
- an outdoor café, vendor, or other active, visible, pedestrian oriented outdoor use located adjacent the street corner;
- a well articulated, well designed building facade, with an equal level of design treatment on all sides;
- a provision for location a City gateway element and City identity signing on the site;
- a street edge setback and character consistent with adjacent streets. Along Main and First Streets, the character should be consistent with that of Main Street, with its buildings close to the street, awnings, and display windows. Along Foothill, the character should be consistent with other sections of Foothill, with its wide planted setbacks and numerous large street trees.



**Possible Rehabilitation at City Owned First and Main Street Property Site**

## Parking

Parking is a necessary feature of the Downtown area. It should be safe and easily accessible, but not allowed to dominate the entire Downtown fabric. Main and State Streets provide diagonal and parallel parking spaces for the Downtown shoppers. Additional parking areas are located in the parking plazas, to the rear of the buildings.



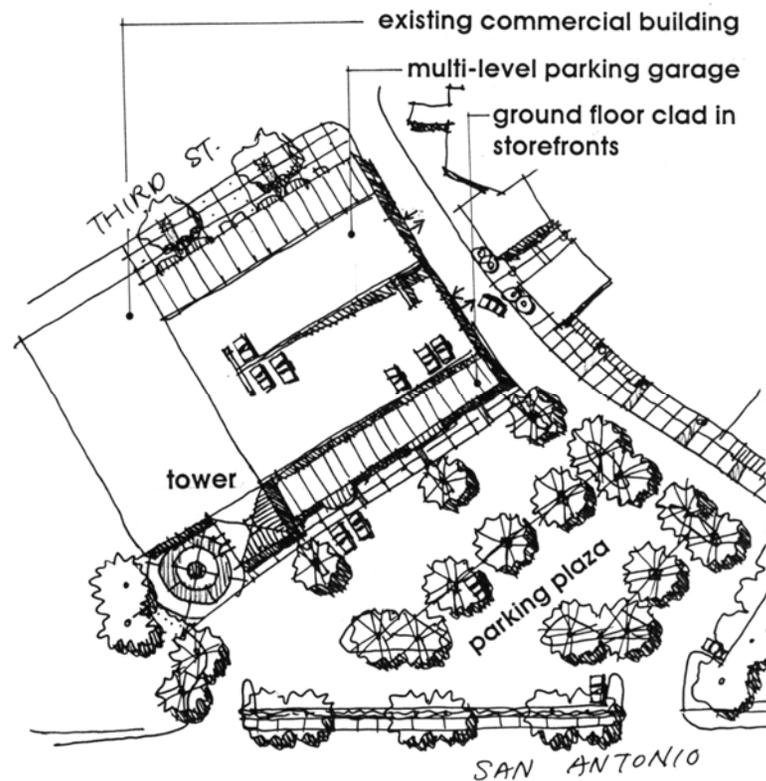
key map, parking facilities

### Parking Plazas

- Continue to use the Chinese Pistache (*Pistacia chinensis*) as the parking plaza shade tree.
- Study parking stall striping patterns and reconfigure as necessary to achieve maximum efficiency.
- Clearly define pedestrian movement through parking areas. At pedestrian crossings, changes in paving, use of overhead structures,

and narrowing of roadways can alert drivers to pedestrian traffic and allow safe crossing.

- Provide access from parking areas to the shopping streets via sidewalks and paseos that allow access at mid-block.
- Create windows and displays opening onto the parking plazas to enliven the building facades.
- Screen and buffer service use areas facing the parking plazas with



Prototypical Parking Garage Plan

planting or architecturally attractive materials.

- Establish a street edge treatment at parking plazas that uses an "urban" material, such as a wall. Such a device will reduce the visibility of the "sea" of cars, as well as defining an edge to the street where there would otherwise be a gap. Integrate public informational signing into the edge treatment.

On-street parking will also continue to be provided throughout Downtown, which will enhance the street energy and retail visibility so necessary to successful retailing.

## Parking Garages

Adequate and accessible parking is an imperative element in mixed-use development without transit services. To avoid the inherent problems of massive parking facilities within low-rise streetscape, the parking is best disguised with stores and clad in buildings, so that the only evidence of parking visible is the vehicular and pedestrian entrances to the facility. While they can be a valuable solution in situations with limited space, parking garages can often become a foreign element in small town settings, especially in terms of scale and massing. They should be carefully designed to be compatible with the detailed, pedestrian-friendly environment that typifies downtown Los Altos. Two locations have been discussed as suitable for future parking garage construction, as shown on the key map.



## Parking Garage Concepts

- Garage elevations at the street should be harmonious with the pedestrian street environment. Consider fronting garages with ground floor retail uses or cladding with mixed uses. At the South Parking Plaza location, consider cladding the structure in ground floor retail uses, with a mixture of office and commercial uses on the upper floors. At the State and Fourth Street location consider cladding the parking structure in residential uses, fitting the quieter character of this part of Downtown.
- Design garage facades to respond to the small scale of the context, in terms of structural bay size, materials, and window details. Reduce the scale of the cave-like vehicle entrance by setting back from the street, and treating with planting or architectonic elements.
- Signing within garages should be carefully examined, as motorists and pedestrians are not always accustomed to finding their way through a garage environment.

## Downtown Landscaping

Planting materials should be used to support and enhance the overall design and sequences of spaces, from the active public streets to the quiet pedestrian paseos. Use plants to keynote entries, contrast with or reinforce building lines and volumes, and soften the hard lines of architecture. Most appropriate are plants that are in scale with the Village character.

### Streetscape Recommendations

#### Main St. and State St.

Landscaping along Main and State Streets should be designed to convey an urbane, small-scale image suited to the core of the Village. As such, Downtown landscape maintenance resources should be focused on this area. Regularly maintain street trees and shrubs. Small-scale, high maintenance plantings, such as colorful annual and perennial flowers,



are also appropriate.

Replacement of the boxwood hedges around trees along Main Street was discussed by the Committee. It was felt that the hedges block the flow of pedestrian traffic and create an unnecessary maintenance load. Possible replacements for the hedges would be tree grates or other water-permeable, walkable surfacing.

#### Foothill Expressway

Foothill Expressway, one of the important edges of the Downtown, was originally landscaped twenty-five years ago. This street is mainly experienced by motorists at a fast speed of travel, in this case 40-45 mph. This higher speed means that landscaping and other streetscape elements will need to be of a larger and bolder scale to make the desired impression.

The landscaping along Foothill Expressway should be designed to reflect the soft, residential, park-like character, while making the Downtown edge special and distinctive from other sections of the street. Landscaping objectives include opening up filtered views into retail uses and the train station, and replacing frost damaged street trees.

#### San Antonio Road

San Antonio Road, another of the important edges, is the location of many commercial and community services near the Downtown. As with Foothill Expressway, this street is mainly experienced by motorists at a fast speed of travel, in this case 35-40 mph.

The landscaping along San Antonio should be designed to communicate this civic and commercial image. Trees and shrubs should be placed in formal massings, with view openings for motorists to see through to commercial uses.

## **Improving Private Landscaping**

When considering private landscape improvements, the following criteria should be considered:

- Where landscaping exists, dead and obsolete plant materials, irrigation equipment and planter boxes should be repaired or replaced.
- Unnecessary or inappropriate pavement in landscaped areas should be replaced with plant material.
- Deteriorated fencing, retaining walls, and trash screens should be repaired where necessary.
- Landscaping should be integrated with parking wherever possible. A more efficient circulation and parking layout along with the addition of compact spaces can increase parking spaces and generate usable areas for landscaping to help screen and beautify parking.

# 5.

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## Conclusion

Downtown Los Altos enjoys a small-scale, historic character that no mall or shopping center can match. This plan capitalizes on this advantage by providing for, and the installation of selected streetscape improvements, including paseo access points, street trees, special intersection paving, and pedestrian scale amenities, as well as the sensitive rehabilitation of existing buildings, and properly designed infill buildings.

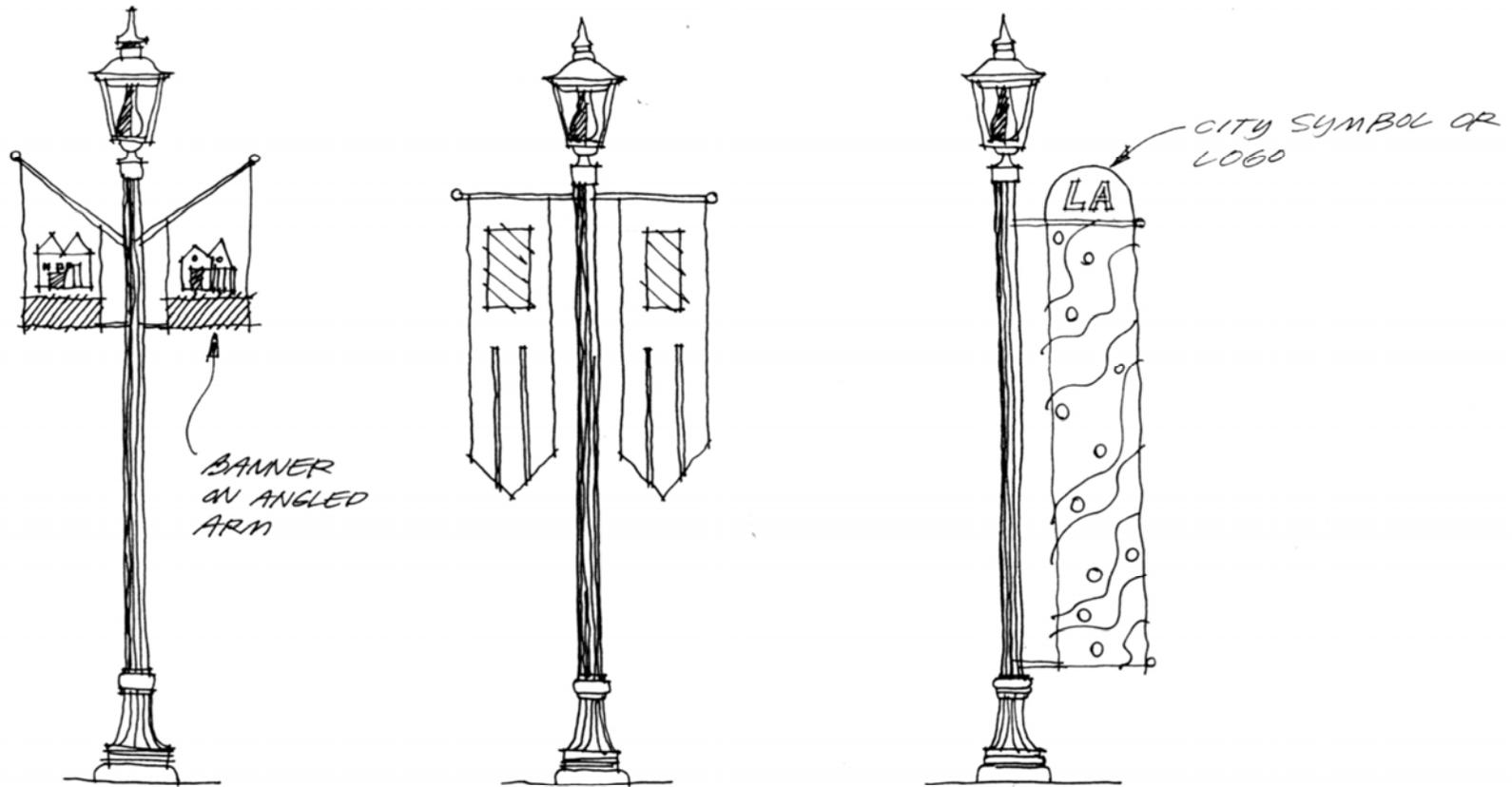
The concepts presented in this Plan provide a framework for updating the Village. Success will require a focused effort on the part of City decision-makers, Downtown merchants, as well as continued support by the community.

# 6.

## Pot & Banner Study

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### Appendix

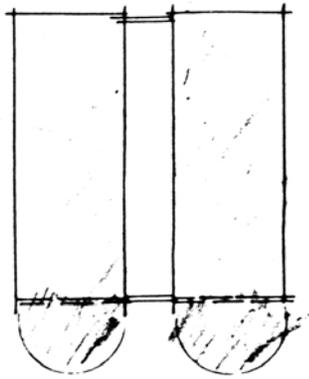


EXISTING LIGHTPOLES WITH BANNERS

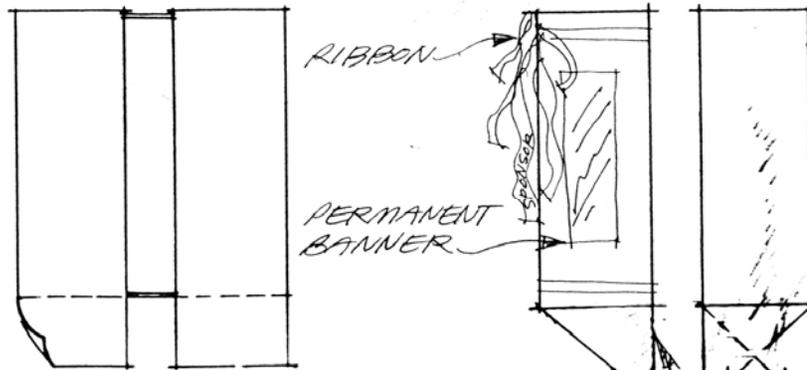
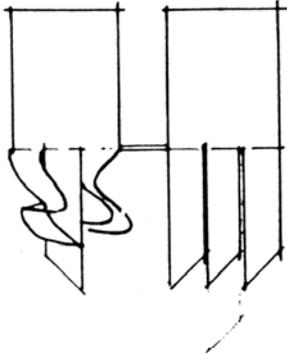
PRICE: APPROX. \$75<sup>00</sup> - \$100<sup>00</sup>  
 FOR (2) BANNERS IN  
 QUANTITY OF 30 OR MORE.

■ LOS ALTOS DOWNTOWN ■  
 URBAN DESIGN PLAN

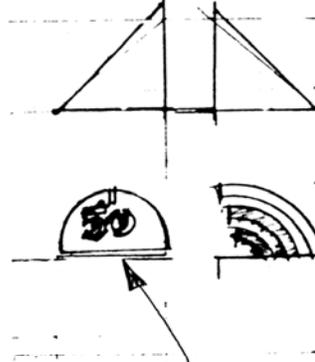
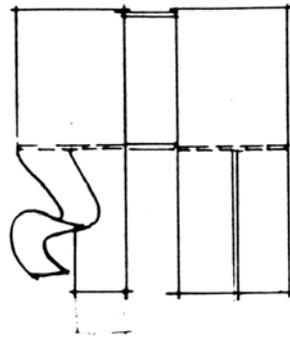




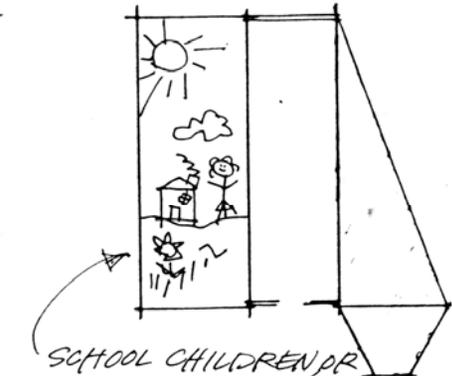
FUNDING IDEAS →



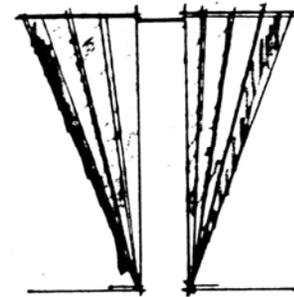
MERCHANTS BUY BANNER AS SPONSOR FOR I.E. "DRUG-FREE" PROGRAM AND KEEP RIBBON TO SHOW SPONSORSHIP



METAL PANEL TOPS WITH ENAMEL FINISH APPROX. \$50.00 EACH



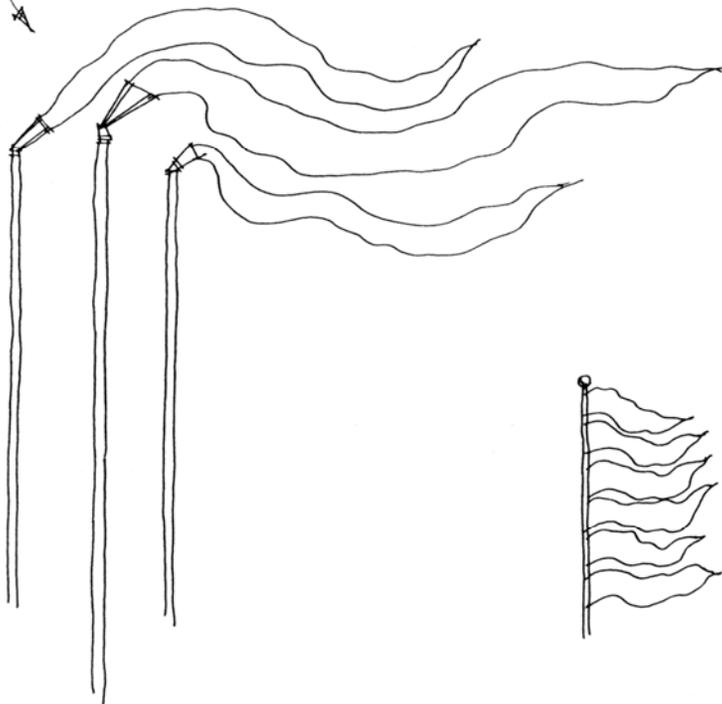
SCHOOL CHILDREN OR MERCHANTS CAN PAINT THEIR OWN FOR ART FAIRS, SPECIAL EVENTS, ETC.



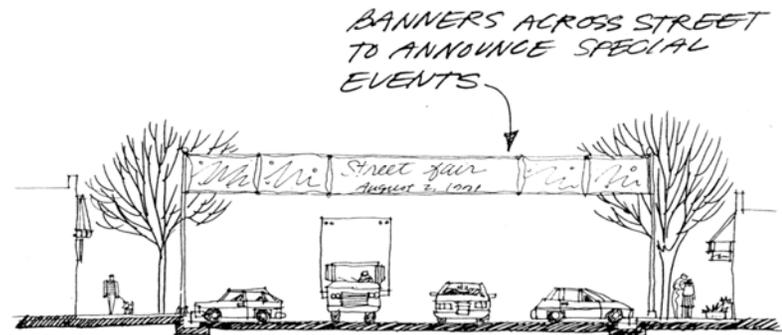
## BANNER OPTIONS FOR STREET LIGHT POLES

# LOS ALTOS DOWNTOWN URBAN DESIGN PLAN

PRICE: SEMI-PERMANENT DORI POLE WITH HINGED BASE APPROX. \$150.00 EA.  
 PERMANENT DORI POLE, LARGER WITH TAPERED END APPROX. \$1,000.00 EA.



DORI POLES

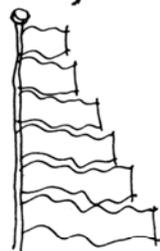


BANNERS ACROSS STREET TO ANNOUNCE SPECIAL EVENTS

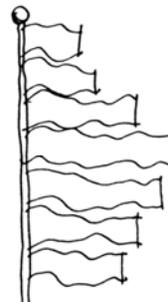
MAIN STREET

PRICE: APPROX. \$7,000.00  
 NOT INCLUDING INSTALLATION

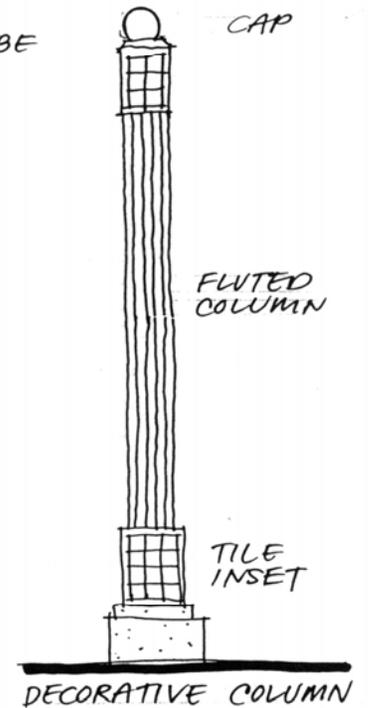
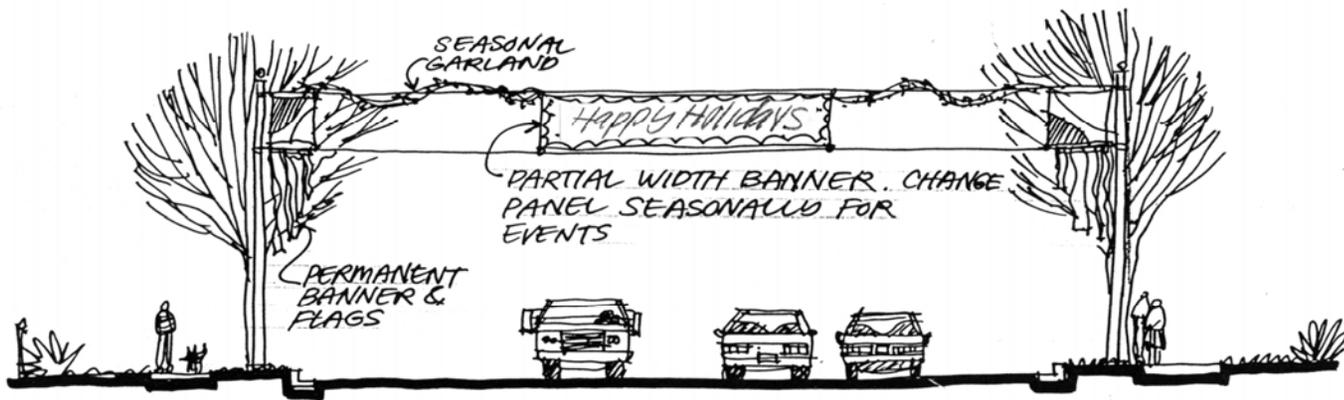
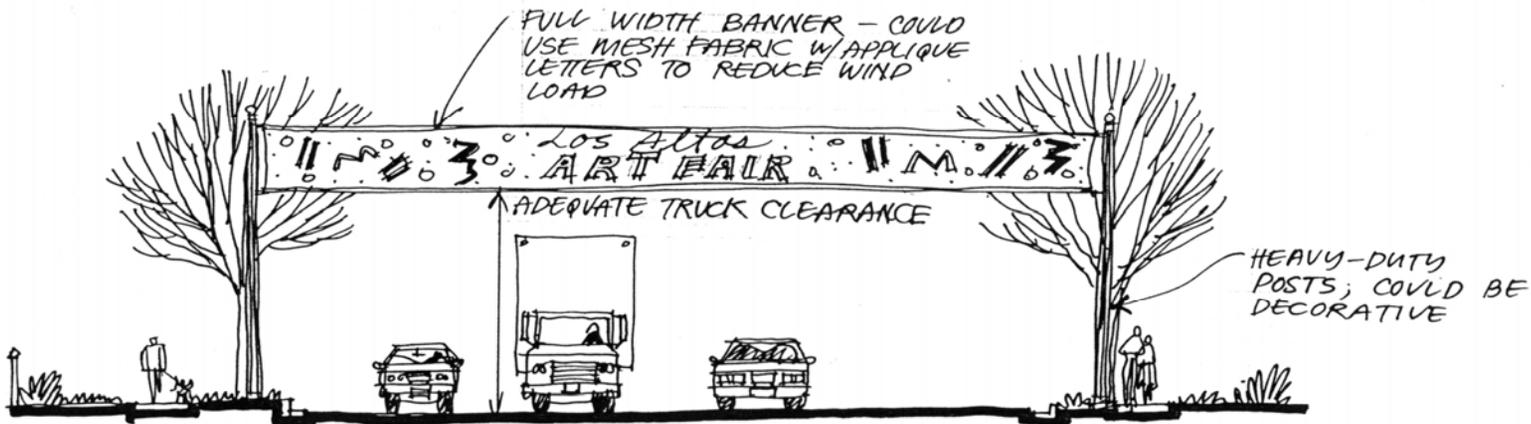
PRICE: STACKED FLAGS ON DORI POLE APPROX. 450.00 EA.



STACKED FLAGS ON REGULAR FLAGPOLE APPROX. \$2,000.00 EA.



LOS ALTOS DOWNTOWN  
 URBAN DESIGN PLAN

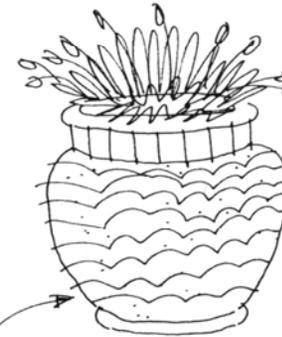


# LOS ALTOS DOWNTOWN URBAN DESIGN PLAN

1.2.92

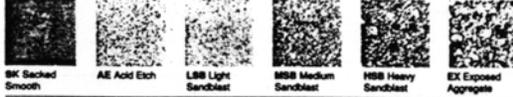


CONCRETE POT  
WITH REVEAL FOR  
TILES PRICE: APPROX.  
\$600<sup>00</sup> - \$900<sup>00</sup> EACH.  
(DOES NOT INCLUDE  
TILE OR TILE  
PLACEMENT)



POT WITH TEXTURED FINISH  
PRICE VARIES DEPENDING ON  
MANUFACTURER.

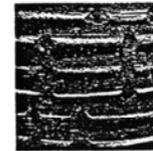
Finishes / Cast Stone



Finishes / Glascrete™



Arç



Staccato



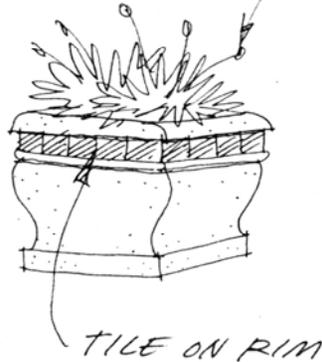
Ribbed

■ LOS ALTOS DOWNTOWN  
URBAN DESIGN PLAN ■

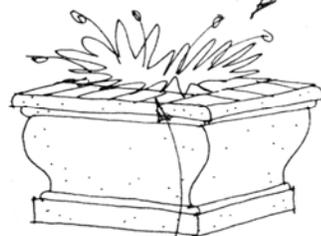
CUSTOM POTS - NEW MOLD  
 REQUIRED @ APPROX \$2,000.±  
 FOR LARGE QUANTITIES OF  
 POTS DOES NOT ADD TOO  
 MUCH TO UNIT COST



STANDARD CONCRETE POTS  
 BY DURA ARTSTONE  
 PRICE: \$250.± - \$500.± EA.  
 PLACE ON FIELD OF  
 CUSTOM TILE - SEE  
 BELOW.



TILE ON RIM



TILE ON TOP



STANDARD CONCRETE POT  
 WITH RECESSED TILE  
 APPROX \$600.± - \$900.±  
 NOT INCLUDING TILE

TILE CRITERIA:



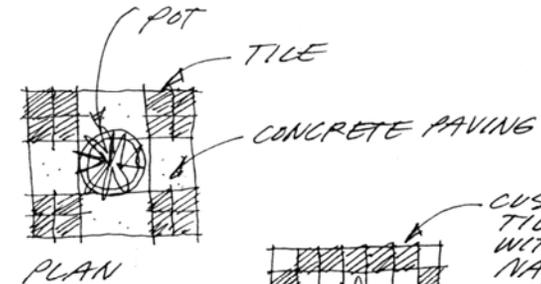
- CERAMIC
- HIGH-FIRED
  - GLAZED
  - LETTERING/INSCRIPTION  
 PRIOR TO FIRING



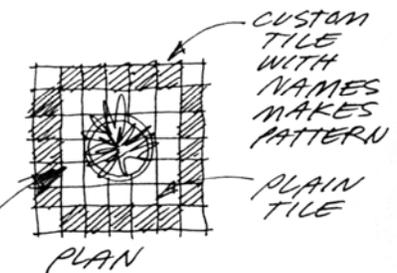
- STONE / SLATE / GRANITE
- ETCH NAME INTO GRANITE OR  
 OTHER
  - SEAL FOR EASE OF CLEANING



- DECORATIVE TILE
- HANDPAINTED



PLAN



PLAN

PERMANENT POTS WITH  
 IRRIGATION AND DRAINAGE -  
 REMOVE AND REPLACE  
 EXISTING PAVING WITH  
 TILE, ADD IRRIGATION, ETC.  
 TILE MUST BE SKID  
 RESISTANT.

LOS ALTOS DOWNTOWN  
 URBAN DESIGN PLAN

