

CITY OF COTATI  
DOWNTOWN SPECIFIC PLAN

Adopted August 26, 2009



TOP: LA PLAZA PARK  
BOTTOM LEFT: NORTHERN GATEWAY AROUND THE VILLAGE SQUARE  
BOTTOM RIGHT: NEW DEVELOPMENT AROUND LA PLAZA





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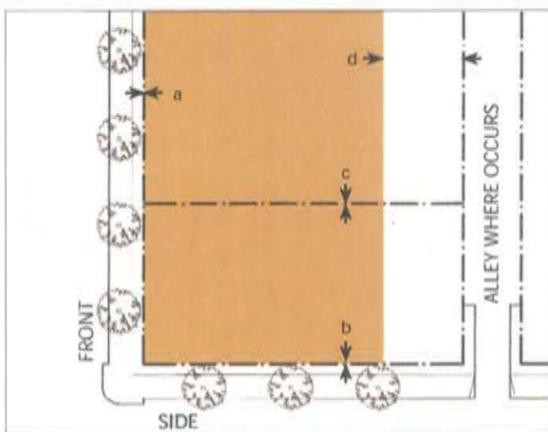


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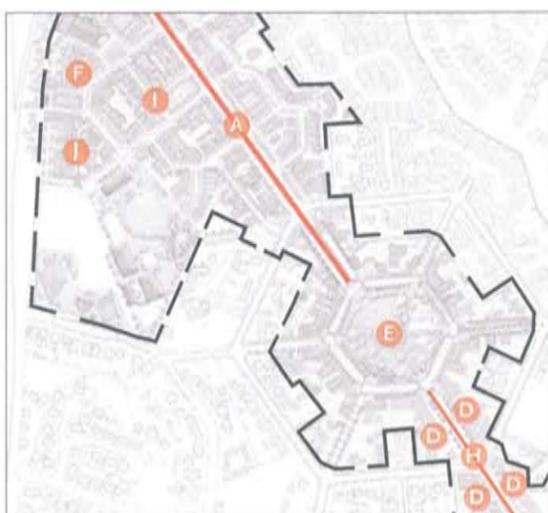


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## CHAPTER 1 : INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 - Plan Purpose

#### Why prepare a Specific Plan?

Cities are dynamic and ever-changing places that experience many cycles of growth and change over time. Cities with distinguished histories and contexts such as Cotati, often find themselves needing to guide this change so that existing strengths can be reinforced, enabling appropriate change to be realized. One of the tools that cities use to guide such change is a Specific Plan. A Specific Plan is intended to provide a coherent road map for a geographically defined area. This road map further implements the General Plan for the area by providing tailored goals, strategies and tools with which to achieve the intended outcomes.

The purpose of this Specific Plan is twofold:

**Vision** - The first is to translate the community vision for the Specific Plan area into goals, policies, regulations and standards that guide daily decisions for the plan area over its 20-year planning horizon.

**Goals** - The second and related purpose of this plan is to enable revitalization of the plan area based on the needs, opportunities and constraints identified through the planning process.

### KEY GENERAL PLAN POLICIES

The following General Plan policies are particularly relevant to the plan area and therefore inform this Specific Plan.

#### Community Development

##### Policy 2.2.1

Establish and maintain continuous clearly identifiable bicycle routes and facilities on Old Redwood Highway, East Cotati Avenue, Gravenstein Highway, and West Sierra Avenue.

##### Policy 2.2.2

Maintain and develop a network of walkways and sidewalks along arterial and collector streets to provide for safe and efficient travel.

##### Policy 2.2.9

Enhance the safety of pedestrian crossings in the Hub area while ensuring a delightful downtown experience.

##### Policy 2.3.3

Encourage the use of multi-purpose parking lots that serve both multi-family residential and commercial uses.

#### Quality of Life

##### Policy IP 2.2.2

Increase the amount of developable, high density residential land.

##### Policy 11.1.1.b

Mixed uses shall be encouraged in the Hub area.

##### Policy 11.1.4

Provide safe walking areas for pedestrians, allow safe on-street parking and provide adequate street width for fire safety vehicles in the Hub.

##### Policy 11.2

Ensure that adequate parking in the Hub area is available.

##### Policy 11.3

Establish a downtown character which preserves the historic "Old Town" feeling of the Hub and promotes new development which is compatible in scale with existing structures.

##### Policy 11.3.5

Preserve existing structures with designated historic value.

#### Community Identity

##### Policy 14.

Maintain the hub as the principal social and cultural center of the community.

### 1.2 - Plan Authority

This Specific Plan is enacted pursuant to Government Code Section 65450 et seq., to apply to all property within the plan boundaries. This plan and its contents work in concert with the Cotati Municipal Code.

### 1.3 - Relationship of this Specific Plan to the General Plan

California Government Code Section 65451(b) requires that each specific plan " . . . include a statement of the relationship of the specific plan to the general plan." This section describes the most important aspects of the relationship between this Specific Plan and the Cotati General Plan.

The Downtown Specific Plan implements a variety of goals and policies in the Cotati General Plan by providing a renewed vision, and standards for the continuing enhancement of the Downtown, and adjacent areas extending north to Gravenstein Highway. Of course, no specific plan can implement every policy in a General Plan because General Plan policies cover many aspects of community life and its future that a specific plan would not appropriately address. Therefore, the key General Plan policies that are implemented by this Specific Plan are in the Land Use and Urban Design Elements of the General Plan. A discussion of the relevant General Plan goals and policies in relation to the provisions of this Specific Plan is provided as applicable.

### 1.4 - SPECIFIC PLAN GOALS

The following goals embody the overall direction of and inform this Specific Plan. Each goal is intended to generate objectives and policies that individually work toward the ultimate intention to revitalize the Specific Plan area.

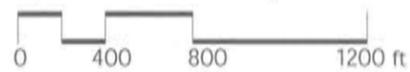
- **GOAL 1:** Enhance Old Redwood Highway as the downtown, mixed-use center of Cotati community life.
  
- **GOAL 2:** Maintain the historic character which makes Cotati unique, and achieve a high level of design quality to reinforce this character.
  
- **GOAL 3:** Improve the walking and bicycling system through downtown Cotati as well as the interconnections between Cotati and the region.
  
- **GOAL 4:** Promote a street system that is safe for all modes of transportation within a successful commercial mixed-use environment.
  
- **GOAL 5:** Design housing to accommodate a diversity of income levels, ages and needs.
  
- **GOAL 6:** Encourage development that is sustainable: energy efficient and conserves resources.



Aerial of Downtown Cotati with approximate 5-minute, 1/4 mile walkable radius from La Plaza Park

Specific Plan Boundary

SP Map 1



Key

- — — Specific Plan Boundary
- - - City Limits between Cotati and Rhonert Park

## 1.5 - Existing Conditions

### 1.5.010 - Project Location and Boundaries

This Specific Plan involves 59.5 acres [a] generally bounded by US 101, north city limits, Arthur and Page Streets. The plan-boundary includes the areas commonly referred to as 'downtown', La Plaza Park and Old Redwood Highway.

### 1.5.020 - Constraints and Opportunities

Through the public participation and planning process, the following were identified as the salient constraints and opportunities influencing the plan:

#### Constraints

- Several community-wide and regional connectors traverse the plan area
- La Plaza Park serves as a community focus but is significantly bisected by wide thoroughfares that dilute its potential
- Lack of open space beyond La Plaza Park
- Discontinuous bicycle and pedestrian circulation
- Adaptive re-use of historic buildings not currently regulated
- Other, competing commercial attractions reduce the area's spending power
- Redevelopment Agency has limited funding

#### Opportunities

- Historic La Plaza Park Hexagon in tact along its edges
- Immediate proximity to US 101 (100,000 average daily vehicles)
- Laguna de Santa Rosa and a class 1 bike path traverse the eastern edge of the planning area
- Large amount of mature trees
- Substantially intact urban fabric and character
- Existing historic buildings
- Golden Gate Transit plans to expand bus service in the planning area
- Substantial weekend population through tourism
- Substantial amount of available spending power in area
- Relatively large vacant and underutilized land in northern planning area

[a] The net developable area exclusive of rights-of-way is 54 acres from an overall 59.5 acres identified in chapter 4 'Development Potential'.

CHAPTER 1 : INTRODUCTION

1.5.030 - Regional Conditions

**Existing Conditions** - Cotati is a small historic town located 40 miles north of San Francisco, in the southern region of Sonoma's wine country. Cotati has a population of 7,800 and was established in 1892 by the Page brothers acting as The Cotati Company on an 1877 Spanish land grant. The city became incorporated in 1963. Sonoma County has nine incorporated towns and cities with a population of about 500,000, which is projected to increase to 540,000 by 2015 at an average annual rate of 1.5%. Over the past decade, Windsor and Santa Rosa have grown at a higher pace of 2.9% and 2.1% respectively.

The majority of the area's jobs are in nearby Santa Rosa, Petaluma and at Sonoma State University producing a commuter-type of pattern in Cotati and the surrounding area. Downtown Cotati is one of several historic downtowns within a 20-mile radius putting it in direct competition with better known and more developed downtowns such as those in Sonoma, Healdsburg and Petaluma.

Sonoma County as a region covers 1604 square miles, including Pacific Ocean beaches and wine country hillsides. The county enjoys a strong international tourism industry that generated over \$1.02 billion in visitor spending in 2003. Median household incomes in the region rose in the past decade, with Petaluma at the top of the range at \$61,679, and Cotati above neighboring Rohnert Park at at \$52,808, but slightly below the county average of \$53,076.

**Housing**

Cotati houses 2% of Sonoma County's population which is projected to grow to 558,000 by 2030. In 2005, the County's median home value was about \$550,000 with Cotati's in the area of \$425,000. Cotati is projected to grow slightly faster than the county over the next 20 years, although a limited land supply within its Urban Growth Boundary will slow the City's growth in the long term. Sonoma county will add 80,000 new residents over the next 25 years, with growth primarily in Santa Rosa and Petaluma.

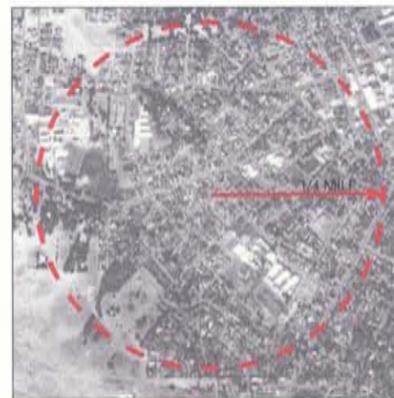
**Transit and Transportation**

The 101 Freeway carries over 100,000 average daily vehicles through the region along its frontage with Cotati. The freeway bisects Sonoma County in a north-south direction providing access to the west half along the Pacific Ocean and the eastern half toward the Napa Valley. Originally, the main north-south route was along the alignment of what is now Old Redwood Highway until 1955, when the State established the 101 Freeway to the west. Gravenstein Highway is a State Route (116) providing east-west access between Cotati and western Sonoma County. East Cotati Avenue provides access to Sonoma State University to the east.

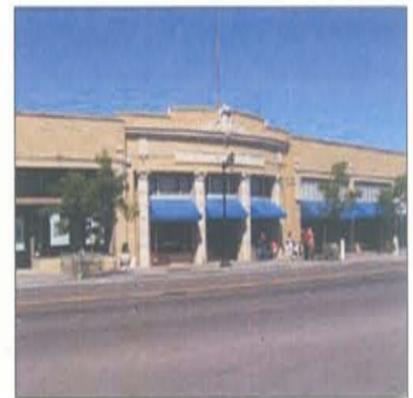
While 30% of the county's employed residents work in the place they live, this is true for only 10% of Cotati's employed residents. Sonoma County Transit operates four routes through the city: 10, 11, 26 and 48. These routes operate in Cotati between 6am and 8pm, with weekend service only on Route 48. Ridership has increased since 1999 on Route 10, where almost 60 percent of riders in 2004 were students, and almost one-third of Route 26 riders were disabled. Golden Gate Transit also serves Cotati with daily bus service between Santa Rosa and San Francisco. Daily, about 125 Cotati passengers took weekday round-trips in 2005. Covered bus shelters are provided at several stops along Old Redwood Highway, East Cotati Avenue, and West Sierra Avenue. Carpoolers utilize Caltrans park-and-ride lots southeast and southwest of the Highway 101 and Gravenstein Highway interchange.



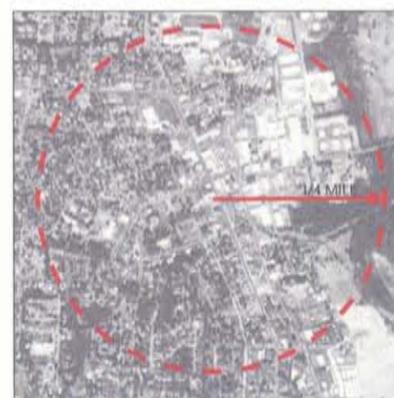
Cotati in the context of Sonoma County



Downtown Petaluma  
Aerial View



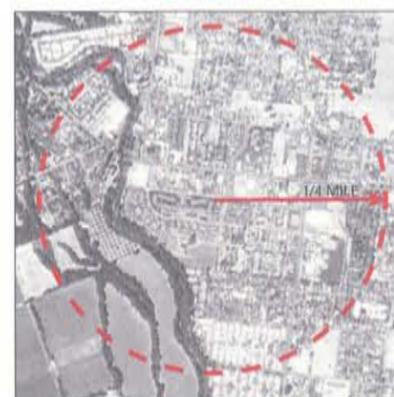
Traditional architecture and materials



Downtown Sebastopol  
Aerial View



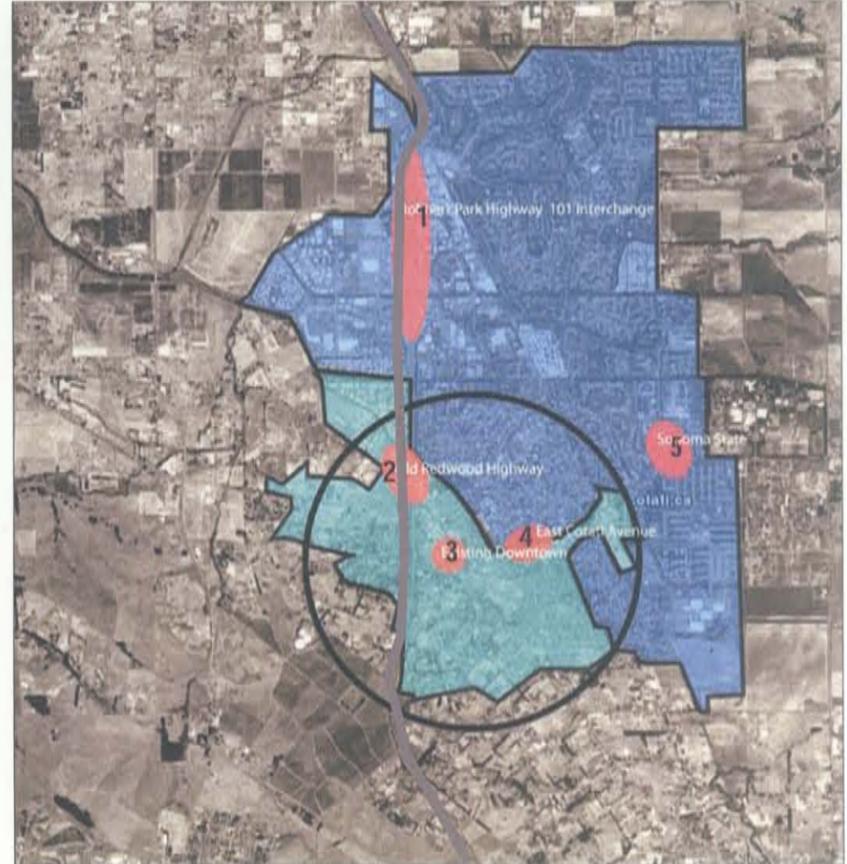
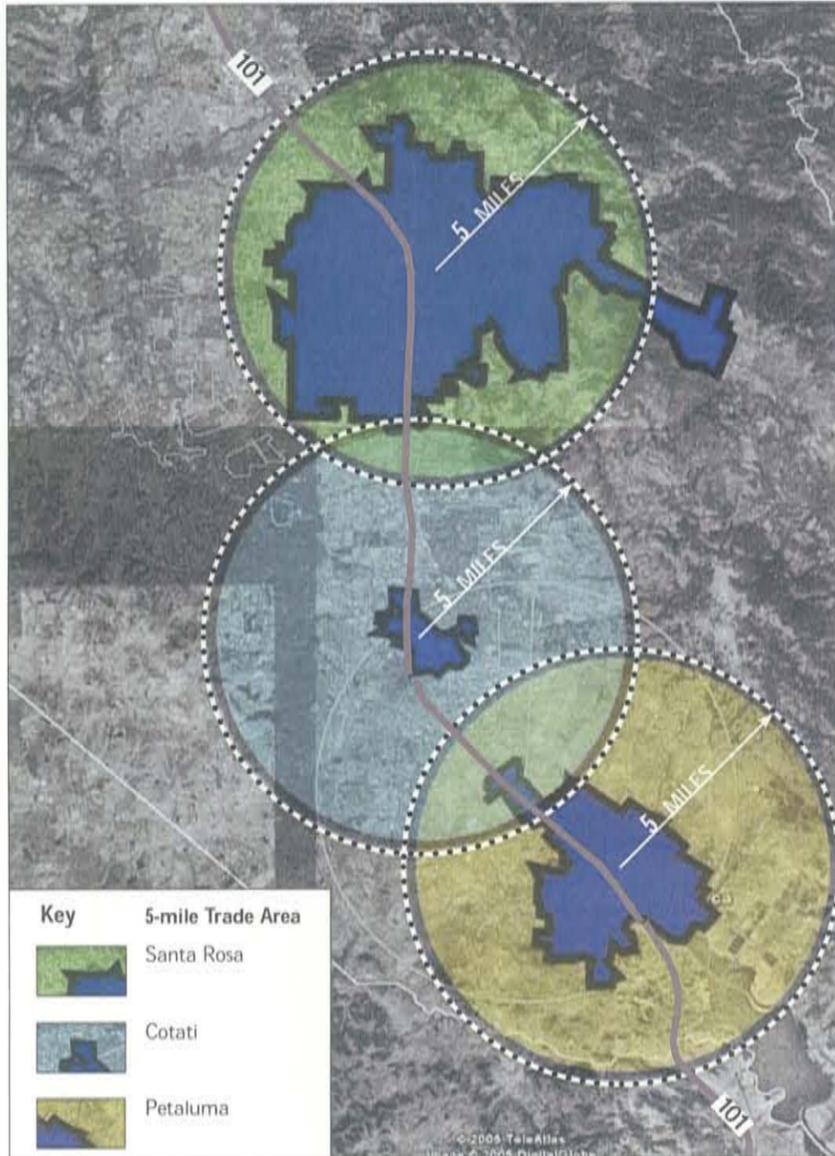
Distinctive community building



Downtown Sonoma  
Aerial View



Well-defined public realm



- Key** Existing Business Nodes
- 1 Rohnert Park/ Highway 101 Interchange
  - 2 Old Redwood Highway / Gravenstein Highway / Highway 101
  - 3 Existing Downtown (Historic Core)
  - 4 East Cotati Avenue
  - 5 Sonoma State University

### 1.5.040 - Local Economic Conditions

Strategic Economics completed an analysis of the short and long term market potential for commercial uses in the Downtown plan area. The Downtown was evaluated in terms of two primary trade areas: a) the more immediate neighborhood area consisting of the cities of Cotati and Rohnert Park, from which local purchases are made; and b) the larger regional area consisting of a five mile radius from the site, from which more occasional purchases are made.

**Regional Trade Area** - The rural nature of Cotati's 5-mile regional trade area limits the possibility for regional retail, particularly when compared with Santa Rosa's regional trade area with five times Cotati's regional population, and Petaluma's trade area with average incomes that are \$20,000 higher than Cotati's.

**Neighborhood Trade Area** - As most of the area's neighborhood retail is concentrated at the intersection of Highway 101 and Gravenstein Highway, the neighborhood trade area includes both Rohnert Park and Cotati. This area includes approximately 18,600 households. These households tend to be younger than average for the County, and have a smaller share of college degrees. Household incomes are similar to the County median of \$53,000.

#### Housing

Cotati's population of 7,800 is housed in 2,545 dwellings of which 1,497 are single-family detached houses and the other 1,048 are in a variety of multi-family type of buildings. Approximately 78% of this housing stock is less than 35 years of age.

#### Retail

Residents of Cotati and Rohnert Park are relatively young with modest but increasing incomes. In the last five years, both cities have captured new homes in the strong housing market, which is having the effect of accelerating general growth in the area and shifting average income and age characteristics upwards.

Discount retail tenants have been drawn to Rohnert Park because of the area's more modest incomes relative to Santa Rosa and Petaluma, creating one of the few discount retail destinations in the County. Its recent household growth and slow history of retail development enable Cotati to distinguish both neighborhood and regional retail from the discount-oriented and big box retail identity of Rohnert Park, and to fill an unmet niche for smaller, independent, and boutique retail tenants.

Currently, the unmet demand for retail space in Cotati and Rohnert Park is a relatively small increment at 50,000 square feet. However, projected household growth over the next 20 years could more than quadruple the unmet demand for space.

#### Office

There is a strong presence of small and home-based businesses in Cotati that may offer some additional long-term demand for office space in the Downtown. New office space should accommodate the special needs of smaller businesses by offering smaller suite sizes, simple fee rents, or ownership options, or live-work options.

Given regional weaknesses in the office market over the last five years, the introduction of office space in Downtown Cotati may occur in a longer term than residential or retail development. Mixed-use buildings will be a more desirable option for providing office space in the shorter term, particularly by reducing the overall risk in providing office space in a relatively untapped market.

#### Implications for the Downtown Specific Plan

The market analysis shows that Cotati is well positioned to play to its strengths in attracting further retail investment to its Downtown.

These strengths include Cotati's identity as a unique and small town community:

The presence of the existing Historic Core as the only pedestrian-oriented retail area in Cotati and Rohnert Park;

The plan area's proximity to Highway 101, and alignment on Old Redwood Highway; and

Community and developer interest in building a quality retail-oriented downtown that targets local and regional tenants.

The strategy for repositioning Downtown Cotati will take advantage of the ongoing market for residential growth, be flexible with the market and phase in retail and office space more slowly over time, and develop and enhance Cotati's unique identity in order to ultimately create a regional destination with a wide variety of tenant types. In the short and mid-term, Downtown Cotati will serve its own residential base, meeting neighborhood and subregional retail needs including Sonoma State University.

CHAPTER 1 : INTRODUCTION

1.5.050 - Local Physical Conditions

Downtown Cotati is characterized by 1 to 2-story buildings in a village-scale environment organized around Old Redwood Highway and La Plaza Park which date from 1892. The 59.5-acre planning area contains enough area for two pedestrian sheds: an area that is measured by an approximate 5-minute walk from center to edge or a 10-minute walk across. The plan area consists of the following places and characteristics:

**Commerce Avenue:** Being adjacent to and visible from US 101, automobile-oriented services and retail predominate in primarily 1-story buildings that are set back from the street with off-street parking. The landscape is suburban in character with a discontinuous streetscape.

**North Old Redwood Highway:** This area is the one most in transition with older buildings interspersed among more recent suburban type of 1-story strip development and major areas of vacant and underutilized land. Regional distribution lines for PG&E are located along the east edge of Old Redwood Highway. The landscape is discontinuous, ranging from suburban to rural with many mature trees scattered throughout the area.

**La Plaza Park:** The historic hexagon visibly anchors the community and through weekly and seasonal events in the park. However, the park is bisected by Old Redwood Highway, West Sierra Avenue and East Cotati Avenue, resulting in four small areas circumscribed by high capacity roads that carry regional and community traffic. Development around the park is primarily historic, 1-story buildings with some 2-story buildings near downtown. This public park is the site of the seasonal farmer's market and has a bandstand that is used for several events such as the annual Accordion Festival and other events throughout the year. This public space which was initially built as a hexagonal park in response to the town plan of 1892, is currently bisected by regional traffic in two directions: north-south by Old Redwood Highway and east-west by West Sierra Avenue/East Cotati Avenue.

**Downtown:** The historic core is positioned on Old Redwood Highway and continues the tradition of businesses fronting on this 90-year old thoroughfare. North of the historic core is La Plaza Park.

Downtown has a variety of buildings ranging from the simple, false front commercial buildings to 1-story commercial shop front buildings and 2-story office/housing over commercial buildings. Interspersed among these are various fine examples of residential and commercial buildings dating from as far back as the early 1900's.

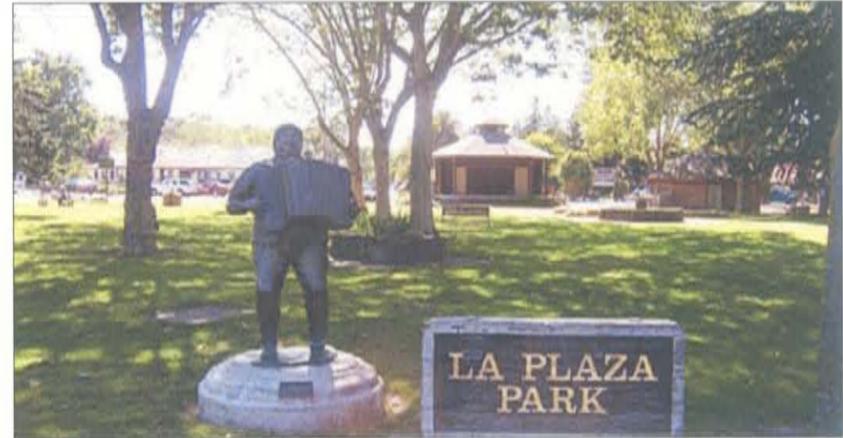
Downtown's landscape is characterized by informal plantings of oaks, sycamores, and several types of conifers. Cotati's rustic and agricultural roots are still very present and visible throughout Downtown and the adjacent neighborhoods.



Commerce Avenue 'north city limits' Automobile-oriented development



Old Redwood Highway 'north' Old Redwood Highway (north of La Plaza)



La Plaza Park The Park is a community-wide amenity



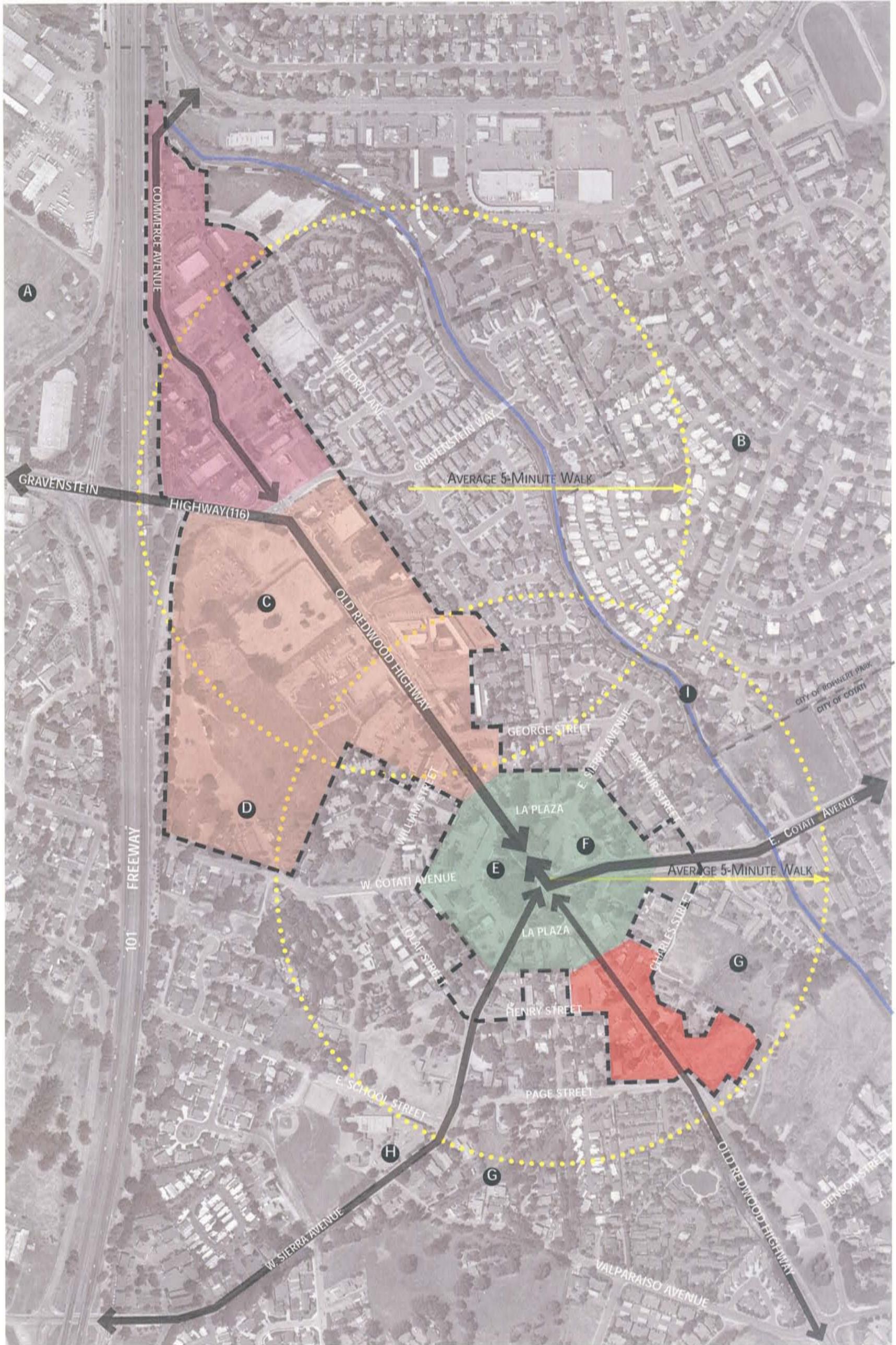
Historic Downtown Historic buildings fronting Old Redwood Highway south of La Plaza Park

Right and Above: Each of the four places in the planning area is generally identified within the boundaries of the planning area.

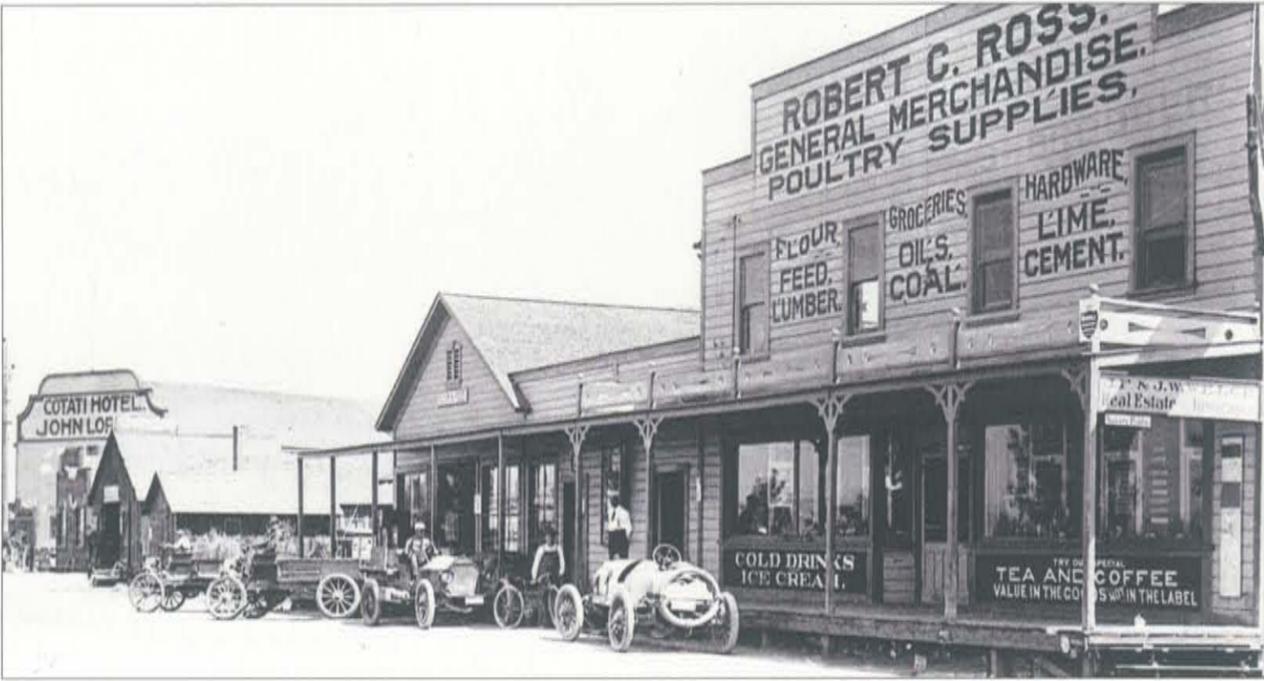
Key

- — — Specific Plan Boundary
- - - City Limits between Cotati and Rhonert Park
- Laguna de Santa Rosa
- ● ● ● Pedestrian Shed: Avg 5-minute walk radius  
Note: these sheds are for mainly evaluating proximity and access within a comfortable 5-minute walk. The southerly shed is centered on La Plaza Park as this encompasses both the park and the historic core. The northerly shed addresses the expansion area to the north and is defined on the west by the US 101 freeway which except at Gravenstien Highway, prevents pedestrian, bicycle or automobile access. For this primary reason, the walking radius is centered further east.
- ➔ Community-wide circulation Pattern

- A South Sonoma Business Park anchored by Lowes (160,000 total square feet)
- B Adjacent Rohnert Park neighborhoods
- C Large, contiguous vacant and underutilized land
- D St. Joseph's School Campus
- E La Plaza Park Bandstand and site of weekly Farmer's Market
- F Cotati Fire Station
- G Cotati Creek
- H City Hall and Police Station
- I Laguna de Santa Rosa Class 1 Bike Path



Aerial View of Specific Plan Area - SP Map 2



left:  
The Ross Store  
circa 1910

**1.6 History and Context**

The following is a brief chronology of the city's history. Cotati's history is rich and diverse with influence from Native Americans, Spanish and Mexican settlers and Northern European immigrants. Cotati has retained its agricultural roots which began with initial settling of the area and was highlighted by major poultry production during the 1920's. While Cotati has remained relatively small, it aspired to be the site of what is now Sonoma State University and became a city to protect itself from the pace of development activity of neighboring Rohnert Park [1]. Cotati has a proud history of nurturing a sophisticated, yet rustic type of culture known for its tolerance. Below, is a timeline summary of this history.

**5,000 years ago:** Coast Miwok Indians lived in the Cotate Valley for about 5,000 years until Spanish settlers arrived

**1826:** English-speaking settlers begin making their homes in the area

**1844:** Spanish land grant given to Captain Juan Castaneda who later sold the claim to Thomas O. Larkin, the American Consul at Monterey in 1846. Larkin sold the claim in 1849 to Joseph S. Ruckle who sold it two months later to Dr. Thomas Page of Valparaiso, Chile.

**1877:** Page land grant confirmed by the U.S. District Court for the 17,238-acre land

**1892:** Cotati Company formed by the Page brothers, Rancho Cotate is surveyed and a hexagonal town plan is established.

**1915:** State chooses Cotati Blvd as main Highway between Petaluma & Santa Rosa

**1944:** Page family ownership ends

**1955:** State moves the highway west to a new freeway: 101, the poultry business becomes unprofitable for small family farms, as major traffic bypasses downtown

**1960:** Sonoma State College established

**1962:** Rohnert Park incorporates as a city

**1963:** Cotati incorporates as a city

**1965:** Cotati's population is 1,382

**1975:** Cotati's population reaches 2,860

**1980's:** Downtown sidewalks installed between La Plaza and Page Street.

**1990:** Cotati voters adopt urban growth boundary

**1991:** Traffic signal installed at Old Redwood Hwy/W. Sierra/East Cotati; Bandstand is replaced; Cotati Accordion Festival established

**1998:** Cotati voters adopt urban growth boundary

**2000:** Walkable Cotati visioning process is undertaken

**2001:** Downtown streetscape improvements installed

**2005:** General Plan Update and Downtown Specific Plan underway. Cotati's population is 7,800.

[1] Images of America: Cotati Prudence and Lloyd Draper 2004



La Plaza view north c.1915



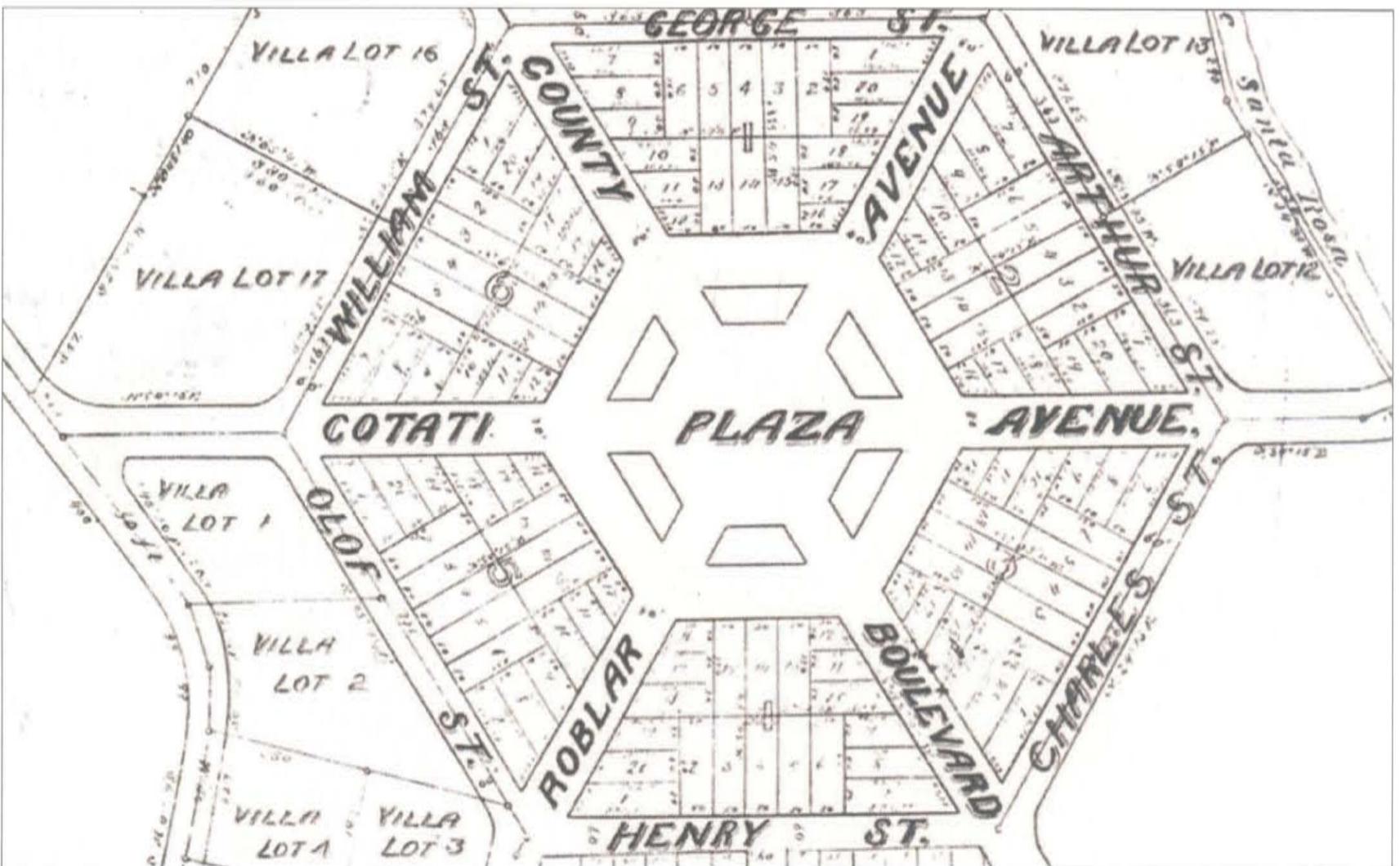
The Page Home c. 1895



Cotati countryside c. 1890

below:

Aerial view of hexagon street layout and La Plaza Park from southeast toward the northwest. Historic Downtown can be seen at left with Old Redwood Highway going from left to right diagonally across the photo, circa 1950's



The Hexagon - Platting Map



above:  
Cotati Plaza, circa 1892 identifying the Page family sons' names on the streets forming the hexagon: William, George, Arthur, Charles, Henry and Olof.

County Boulevard would later be renamed "Old Redwood Highway" and Roblar Avenue would become West Sierra Avenue and East Sierra Avenue

## CHAPTER 1 : INTRODUCTION

### 1.7 Historic Cotati

This chapter is for the purpose of providing an understanding of Cotati's historic context and character. Historic preservation, as a strategy for overall revitalization of Downtown Cotati shall be considered in planning and development actions in the plan area.

**Objectives** - Through the following, it is possible to provide for sensitive and meaningful adaptive reuse of the plan area's historic resources:

- H1 • Respect and celebrate the area's heritage through careful restoration and addition to buildings and sites identified as historically meaningful;
- H2 • Provide a meaningful background of historic buildings with which to sensitively complement with new development;
- H3 • During the development review process, analyze subject buildings/sites for restoration and reuse strategies and feasible preservation strategies;
- H4 • Inventory cultural and historic resources appropriate for restoration and reuse

The following sites and/or buildings have been identified as meaningful and potentially worthy of restoration and adaptive reuse (see map on next page for locations). This list is not intended to be exhaustive.

**A. Loyal Cotati Lodge** - This Mission style, single-story meeting hall was built in 1911. The building ceased use as a meeting hall in 1957 and was extensively remodeled in 1969 for office uses.

**B. St. Joseph's Church** - This Italianate style, 150-seat church was built in 1908 and continues in use as the Korean Baptist Church.

**C. Frengle Metal Shop** - This Mission style commercial building was built in about 1930 by the Frengle family for their metal shop and uses decorative tin metal that simulates stone, a popular technique in this period. The building continues to house retail and service uses.

**D. Cotati School** (current City Hall) - This site was the location of the previous school building built in 1913 by Penngrove contractor Al Hermann and designed by Petaluma architect Brainerd Jones. The 1913 building was destroyed by fire in 1921 which caused the need to build the current structure in 1922. The building was designed in the Greek Revival style and served as the Cotati school until 1971 when the school district abandoned it for a larger building. Shortly after, the building became Cotati City Hall and is still in use today for the civic and administrative functions of the city.

**E. The Congregational Church** - This redwood structure was designed in the Gothic Revival style and built in 1907 after the Congregational church outgrew its space in the rear of a local store. Today, the church is known as the Church of the Oaks.

**F. Women's Improvement Club** - This Craftsman style, single-story building was built in 1909 with additions shortly afterward. The building is in use today as a synagogue.

**G. La Plaza** - This public space resulted from the 1892 design for the town in the shape of a hexagon per the wishes of the town founder, Thomas Page as communicated to the surveyor and designer, Newton Smyth. This plan is unique in the United States. Over the years, Old Redwood Highway, Cotati Avenue and Sierra Avenue have bisected the plaza to produce 4 individual places within the original plaza space. In 1975, the Plaza was officially recognized as a California State Historic Landmark (SHL 879) and listed on the California Register of Historic Resources.

**H. Cotati Inn** - This building is on the former site of the Cotati Hotel. The Cotati Inn was built in 1932 in response to Redwood Highway becoming the state route through the area. The Spanish style architecture is the result of encouragement by the state to design commercial buildings in this style. The building currently houses retail, restaurant and tavern uses.

**I. The Ross Home** - This Queen Anne (Free Classic) style, 2-story residence was built in 1907 for the Ross family which owned and operated nearby businesses. The building is still used as a residence.



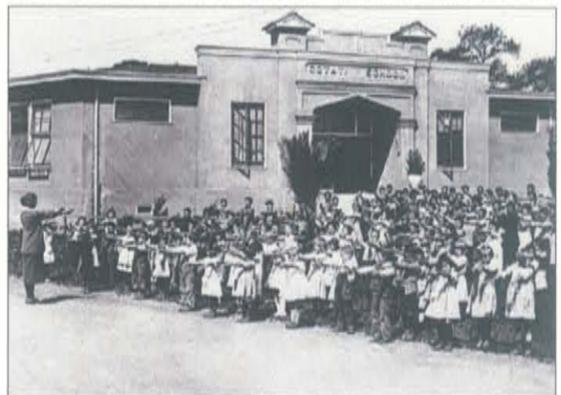
A. Loyal Cotati Lodge Hall c. 1911



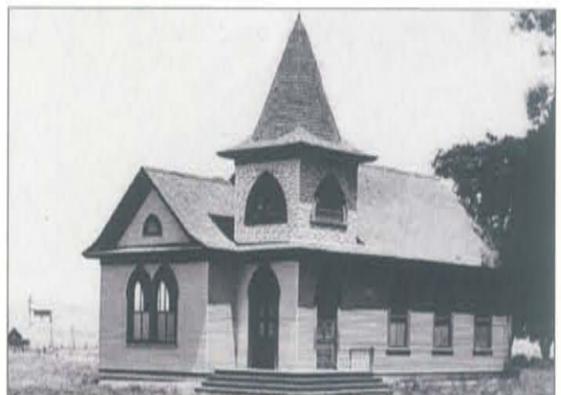
B. St. Joseph's Church c. 1908



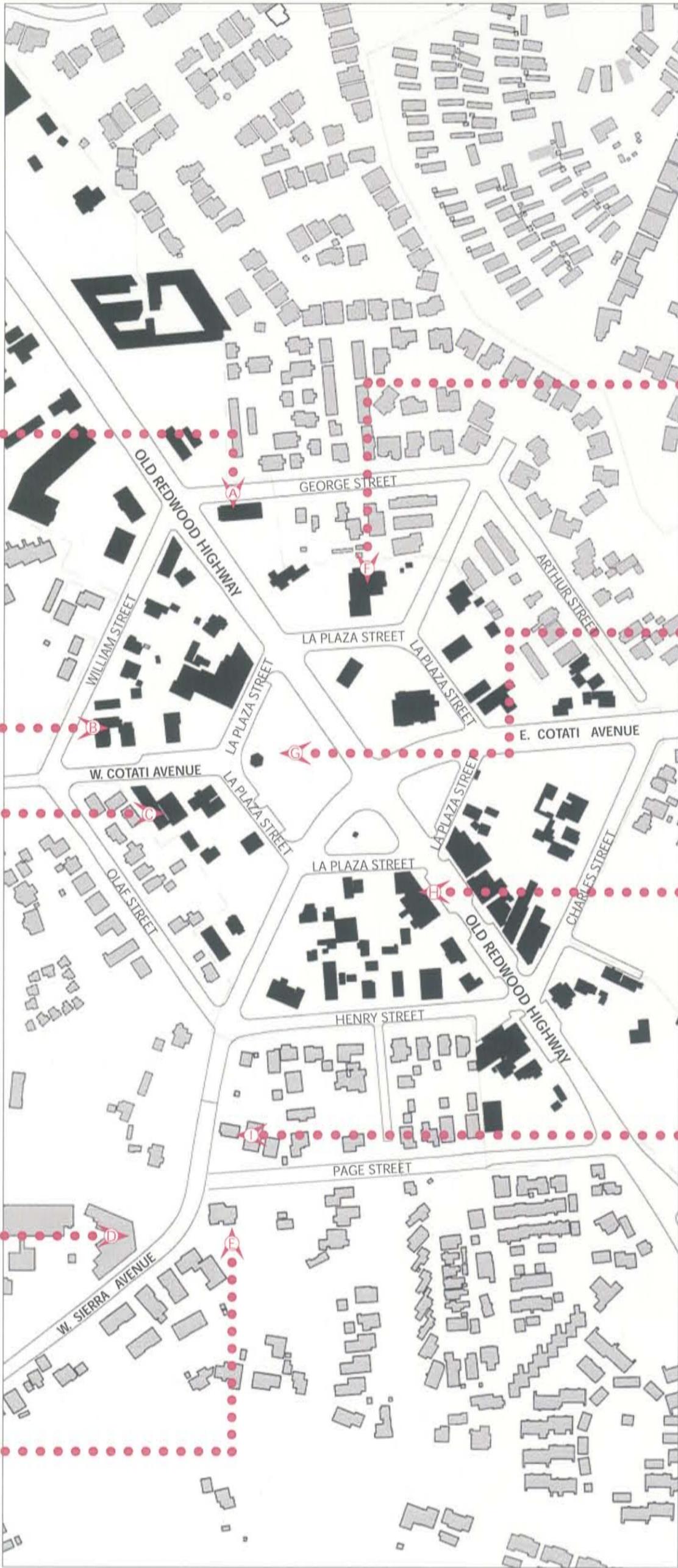
C. Frengle Metal Shop c. 1930, also The Hub Cyclery in 1990's



D. Cotati School c. 1922



E. The Congregational Church c. 1907



F. Women's Club c.1909



G. La Plaza view north c.1915



H. Cotati Inn c. 1932



I. The Ross Home c. 1907

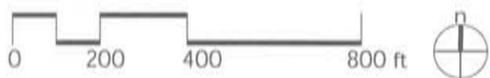
**Key**

- Within Specific Plan boundary
- Not within Specific Plan boundary

Historic Resources - SP Map 3

DOWNTOWN COTATI SPECIFIC PLAN 1:10

August 26, 2009



## CHAPTER 1 : INTRODUCTION

### 1.8 - Public Participation and Plan Preparation

This Plan is the result of an intense public process that involved the community of Cotati through a series of public meetings and a 5-day charrette in July 2005. The evolution of this plan was based on information and confidence gained by the consultants and the community in cooperation as the process unfolded.

The following objectives guided the public participation and plan preparation:

- Engage with the community about downtown's future;
- Involve the community in visioning downtown's future;
- Produce a visionary yet realistic plan that reflect's Cotati's desired future

**Previous Plans and Documents** - Prior to the preparation of this Specific Plan, the following documents were prepared for the City and were being applied to properties within the boundaries:

Land Use Code  
1998 General Plan  
2006 General Plan Update Background Report  
La Plaza Specific Plan

#### June - July 2005: Consultant Team Analysis of Downtown and Community -

The consultant team visited the community and documented various subjects such as traffic and circulation, building form, architecture, landscape and public realm patterns, drainage patterns, pedestrian access, bicycle access and others. This information was shared among the consultant team in preparation for the charrette.

#### June 22, 2005: Community Workshop on General Plan / Downtown Specific Plan

Members of the overall consultant team facilitated a visioning workshop with the community to identify overall desires, dislikes and comments about the community as a whole and then for the Downtown Plan area. This workshop produced many commonalities in perception and understanding among the participants that provided good direction for City staff and the consultant team. Among the major comments received were the following:

- Strengthen La Plaza Park as a community focal point
- Encourage Mixed-Use Development
- Locate parking behind buildings
- Scale buildings appropriately to positively frame streetscapes
- Avoid homogeneity in building design
- Improve walkability and bicycle circulation
- Encourage small, locally-owned businesses
- Accommodate more night life through entertainment venues and gathering places other than bars

The consultant team then entered the charrette based on this information.

#### July 17-22, 2005: Charrette Week

With the initial field research and preparation combined with the workshop results, the consultant team worked with City staff to facilitate a 5-day public charrette. The charrette produced several land use and circulation alternatives (see pages 2:3-2:4).

#### August 16, 2005: Joint Cotati City Council and Planning Commission Meeting-

At this public meeting, the consultant team presented the following for review:

- The July 2005 Charrette recommendations
- Form-Based Code to guide future development
- Process for preparing the Specific Plan and Environmental Impact Report

#### September 28, 2005: Meeting of the Cotati City Council

At this public meeting, the consultant team presented two general pieces of information for review and direction in preparation of the administrative draft Specific Plan:

- a) Park Alternatives for resolving the space and regional circulation needs at the existing La Plaza Park,
- b) Place-Making Alternatives for the overall plan expressed for each of the four proposed zones within the Plan.



Charrette presentation



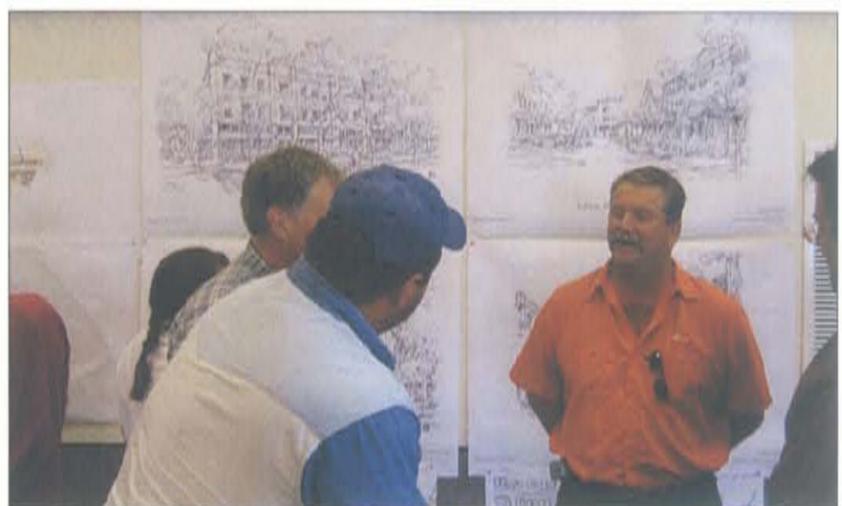
Public participation



Community members reviewing historic restoration proposals



Retail consultant Bob Gibbs in one of several progress meetings



City staff and community members in a discussion at one of several progress meetings



Charrette work in progress



Public participation



Charrette work in progress



Consultant team at work

**The Charrette Process** - This method of public participation brings all interested parties together for 5 days where everyone with a stake or interest of any kind participates directly with the consultant team to develop and review ideas, from their beginning to finalization. This charrette process was selected to allow for greater community input and the sharing of ideas.

The Charrette process is completely interactive and sees each of the design components developed simultaneously in response to issues and needs posed by participants. City staff are involved throughout and help facilitate participation from a person or group that needs to provide input on a particular subject. In addition, focus sessions are held throughout the day with particular groups such as a Merchant's Association, property and business owners, Historical Society, Chamber of Commerce and sometimes private parties that have pending developments in the area that might be affected or benefit from the Plan. In this way, the 'feedback' loops are ongoing and immediate. At the end of each 10-hour day, the consultant team summarizes what the consultant team, City staff and the participants studied, achieved and decided that day for the community's review and comment. Through this highly visual and interactive process, participants have the opportunity to become aware of and help shape the direction and intent of the evolving Plan that is based on clear, physical and desired outcomes.



Charrette presentation

Below is a summary of the charrette schedule for July 17-22, 2005.

**Sunday, July 17**

Ice Cream social with City Council, Planning Commission, Design Review Committee, staff and the community to review the week's objectives and the process.

**Day 1: Monday, July 18**

Vision and Frameworks with public briefing on traffic and parking  
Community Presentation 1

**Day 2: Tuesday, July 19**

Design Development / Refinement / Evaluation with public briefing on retail  
Community Presentation 2

**Day 3: Wednesday, July 20**

Design Refinement / Preliminary Code / Implementation / Evaluation with public briefing on economic development  
Community Presentation 3

**Day 4: Thursday, July 21**

Design/Code Summation / Implementation / Final Evening Presentation

**Day 5: Friday, July 22**

Open House and Design Team Summation



Cotati charrette design team



Cotati charrette cookies

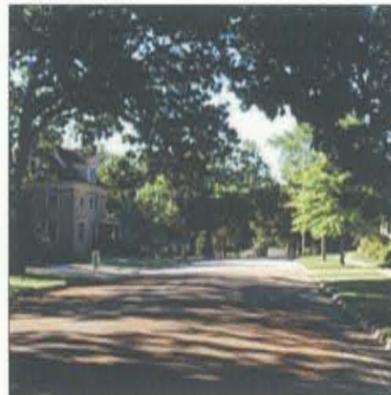
1.9 - Plan-Wide Policies

Conventional suburban development is the form of growth which has produced large-scale sprawl throughout California over the last fifty years. Sprawl development is characterized by homogeneous single-use zones, with the housing tract, the shopping center and the business park as its basic elements. These segregated use areas are connected by a discontinuous system of wide thoroughfares designed for the rapid movement of cars.

As a clear departure from conventional suburban practices, this Specific Plan works in every way to recognize traditional neighborhood development and enable it through appropriate vision, policies and regulations. The best physical patterns that exist in Cotati are maintained and reinforced over time. This Plan is based on a set of integrated principles that have produced the best places in both Cotati and other cities throughout the world. These are adapted to the task of directing the growth of downtown to successfully serve the city over the long-term. The principles are summarized into seven policies identified on these two pages. These policies shall guide development decision-making pursuant to this plan.



Great mixed-use street: 1-3 stories, wide sidewalks, on-street parking, shade



Great neighborhood street



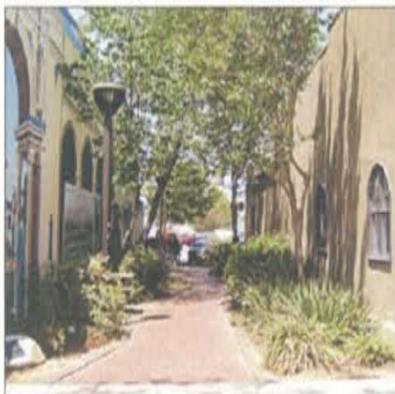
Great retail street



Square framed and activated by buildings and their individual activities

**SP2 Ensure that streets are designed to be multi-modal: Make Great Streets**

Street design dictates the form of individual blocks and buildings that enclose each streetscape. Downtowns are structured on individual blocks and a network of interconnected thoroughfares, which encourage pedestrian movement. This network provides multiple routes that diffuse traffic, increasing the options for people to walk and bike to various destinations and for emergency access. Streets of varying types, or primary purpose (e.g., main street, parkway, residential street), provide equally for pedestrian comfort, bicycle safety and for automobile movement according to their location and necessary function in the overall plan. Where needed, streets have landscaped center medians, to reduce apparent street width. Finally, where possible, streets have on-street parking in order to provide a buffer between the moving traffic and the pedestrian, thus diminishing perceived and actual danger.



Paseo connecting parking to stores



Connections to and through parks

**SP1 Ensure that public open space is integrated into the Downtown: Make Great Public Places**

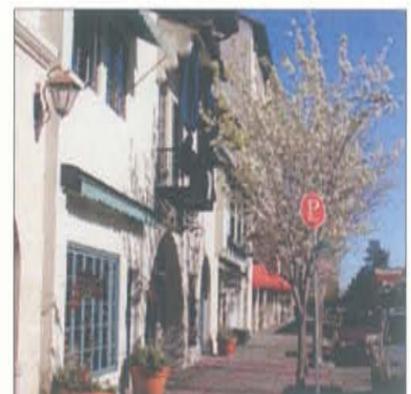
The highlight of a downtown's public life is its center. Its civic buildings enhance community identity and foster civic pride. Its shops and workplaces provide convenient access to goods and services without need for a car trip. These public places are the visual punctuations along the greater public realm of streets that give access and identity to the community and Downtown. A set of great public places that serve the greater Downtown and the focused areas within it, will distinguish Downtown Cotati from other towns and contribute to its unique and genuine character.



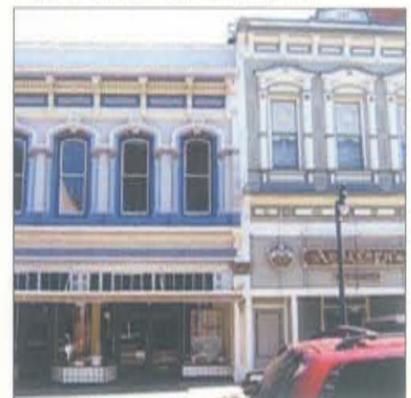
Paseos providing additional business opportunities while appropriately activating the public realm



Apartments over Main Street stores



Flats and Lofts over commercial



Lofts over Main Street stores

**SP3 Ensure that vertical mixed-use is the primary focus of development within the downtown: Live Above Stores**

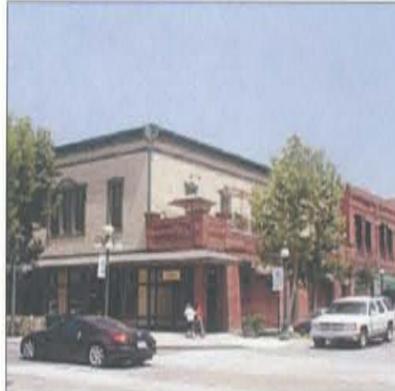
A downtown is a district defined by the same general qualities as a neighborhood, with one major exception: commercial activities predominate instead of residential. Yet, the quality and amount of housing in a downtown determine its particular character. Townhouses, lofts or flats allow for a variety of households to live near diverse services, while providing a constant 24/7 rhythm of use.

**SP4 Ensure variety of building types, styles and sizes are constructed within downtown: Build a Variety of Buildings**

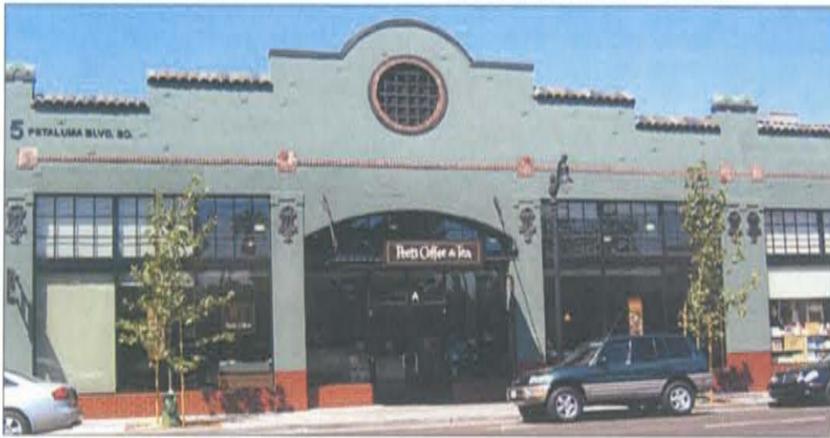
The buildings, blocks and streets of a Downtown are interdependent while contributing to an overall pattern of unique and related places. Each one contains in part the ingredients of all the others. Buildings of a particular quality can define the block that contains them and the street that surrounds them. Design is the matrix that helps either to create or destroy the quality and character of a place. Buildings are the smallest increment of growth. A variety of architectural types and their relationship to each other, largely determine the character of a downtown as they define the streets and open spaces they face.



Contemporary architecture



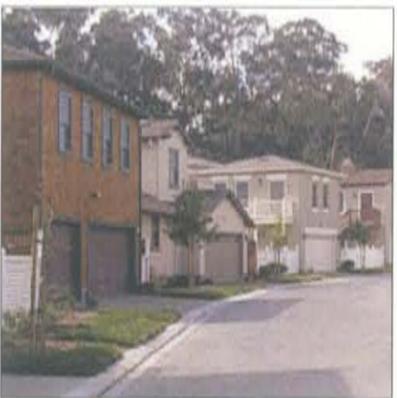
Buildings responding to climate



Traditional architecture

**SP5 Ensure a mix of housing types to serve all economic segments of the community: Create a Variety of Housing Choices**

As a downtown matures and its livability and economic value increase, a more diverse set of housing choices attract an increasingly varied resident population housed in rental or ownership configurations. The variety is necessary for vitality over the long-term and is enabled by the various building types and blocks in the Plan.



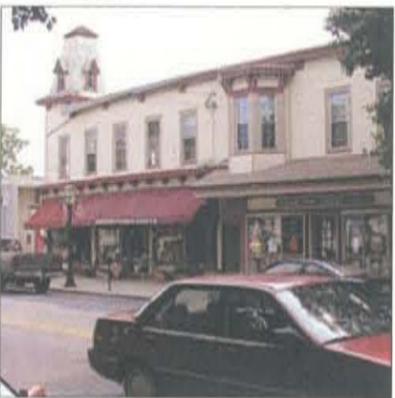
Granny flat on an alley



Townhouses



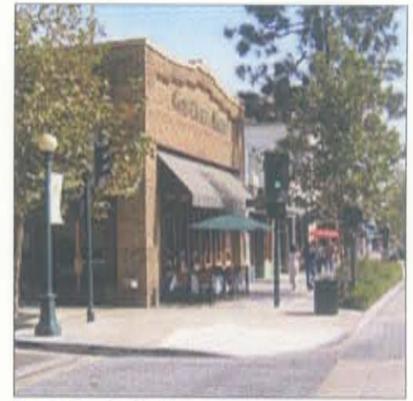
Courtyard Housing



Lofts and flats over stores



Simple, pedestrian friendly sidewalks



Locally-oriented businesses



Regionally-oriented businesses

**SP6 Ensure a mix of retail uses configured to facilitate pedestrian storefront shopping: Get the Retail Right**

The retail industry has recently discovered that outdoor, Main Street-type retail fits the lifestyle of busy consumers, often yielding more regular trips and higher sales volumes than standard shopping centers. Retailers are therefore, encouraged to facilitate pedestrian storefront shopping. The retail core of transitional downtowns is typically located around a pattern of streets accommodating cars and on-street parking. Off-street parking is located in shared, Park-Once lots or structures, convenient but compatible to the scale of a Main Street. The retail core typically includes at least one anchor tenant, and a mix of vendors to broaden its appeal and success over the long-term while capturing vehicle trips that would otherwise generate more vehicle miles.



Parking as active, urban building



Liner building transitioning to sidewalk



Attractive and clear signage

**SP7 Ensure sufficient parking for all uses within the plan area with emphasis upon an appropriate combination of on- and off-street parking: Get the Parking Right**

The typical suburban, sequential pattern of "shop and park" requires two movements and a parking space to be dedicated for each visit to a shop, office, or civic institution. For three tasks, this requires six movements and three parking spaces. By contrast, the compactness, mixed-use nature and walkability of a mixed-use environment lends itself to moving twice, parking just once, and completing multiple daily tasks on foot. This principle, 'park-once', reduces the average trip load and parking in a traditional downtown by half over strip retail. The transformation of drivers into walkers is the immediate generator of pedestrian life: crowds of people that animate public life in the streets and generate the patrons of street-friendly retail businesses. It is this "scene" created by pedestrians in appropriate numbers, that provides the energy and attraction to sustain a thriving Main Street environment.

CHAPTER 1 : INTRODUCTION

1.10 - Strategy for Revitalization

1.10.010 - Objectives by District

In concert with the following statements about emphasis and objectives, the diagram at right illustrates the twenty plan-wide objectives that carry forward the six goals and seven plan-wide policies that drive this plan. The following objectives are represented through the various actions described on the following pages. Accordingly, this policy-level information informs the vision, programs, implementation measures and development regulations that will carry out the plan over its 20-year planning horizon.

District (Place) and Emphasis

1. Commerce Avenue: 6.5 acres [a] CA

a. **Revenue-Generation** - The purpose of this area of the plan is to capitalize on its key exposure and access to US 101 for community-wide service and retail opportunities. While not large in area, this area is best-suited for such activity and revenue-generation in support of the larger plan area.

Objectives

- CA-1. Improve circulation and provide civic identity at intersection of Gravenstein and Old Redwood Highway.
- CA-2. Define and unify streetscape in support of highway retail.



2. Northern Gateway: 36.2 acres [a] NG

a. **Regeneration** - This area of the plan represents the potential for several new blocks of housing, commercial and civic development supported by a new network of open spaces and streets. Such regeneration of an infill area provides for growth without the need to extend the City's boundaries by using what is currently underutilized and vacant land.

b. **Revenue-Generation** - To facilitate development of key improvements identified throughout the plan, it is necessary to generate revenue with which to offset those expenditures. This area of the plan presents the largest contiguous opportunity for a substantial revenue stream for such efforts. Through anticipated tax increment revenue to the Cotati Community Redevelopment Agency, the Agency's limited bonding capacity is increased. The additional value for the plan area can also support a variety of financing strategies such as assessment districts, business improvement districts, transportation improvement districts, etc. to be determined by the City.

Objectives

- NG-1. Transform underutilized land into mixed-use district.
- NG-2. Reconfigure Old Redwood Highway into a vibrant, mixed use, multi-modal and beautiful urban street.
- NG-3. Provide a variety of open space.
- NG-4. Provide a variety of housing.
- NG-5. Provide pedestrian-oriented retail in mixed-use buildings.
- NG-6. Require 'park-once' system of shared parking.



3. La Plaza Park: 11.3 acres [a] LP

a. **Civic Identity** - The reconfiguration of this important place in Cotati is of vital long-term interest to the community. La Plaza Park elegantly addresses local and regional circulation needs while enhancing a genuinely memorable place. The enhanced setting for community events as well as for the individual buildings and properties that line its edges catalyzes activity due to the strength of place and identity of the new park.

Objectives

- LP-1. Maintain La Plaza Park as the civic focus for Cotati.
- LP-2. Plan development and infrastructure to accommodate a unified La Plaza Park
- LP-3. Over time, as financing and development allow, reconfigure La Plaza Park to maximize and enhance use.
- LP-4. Accommodate community-wide circulation while maintaining the village-scale context of the La Plaza Park area.
- LP-5. Enhance bicycle and pedestrian circulation and access.
- LP-6. Reactivate the hub with housing & office over commercial
- LP-7. Enhance public parking

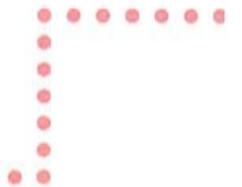


4. Historic Core: 5.5 acres [a] HC

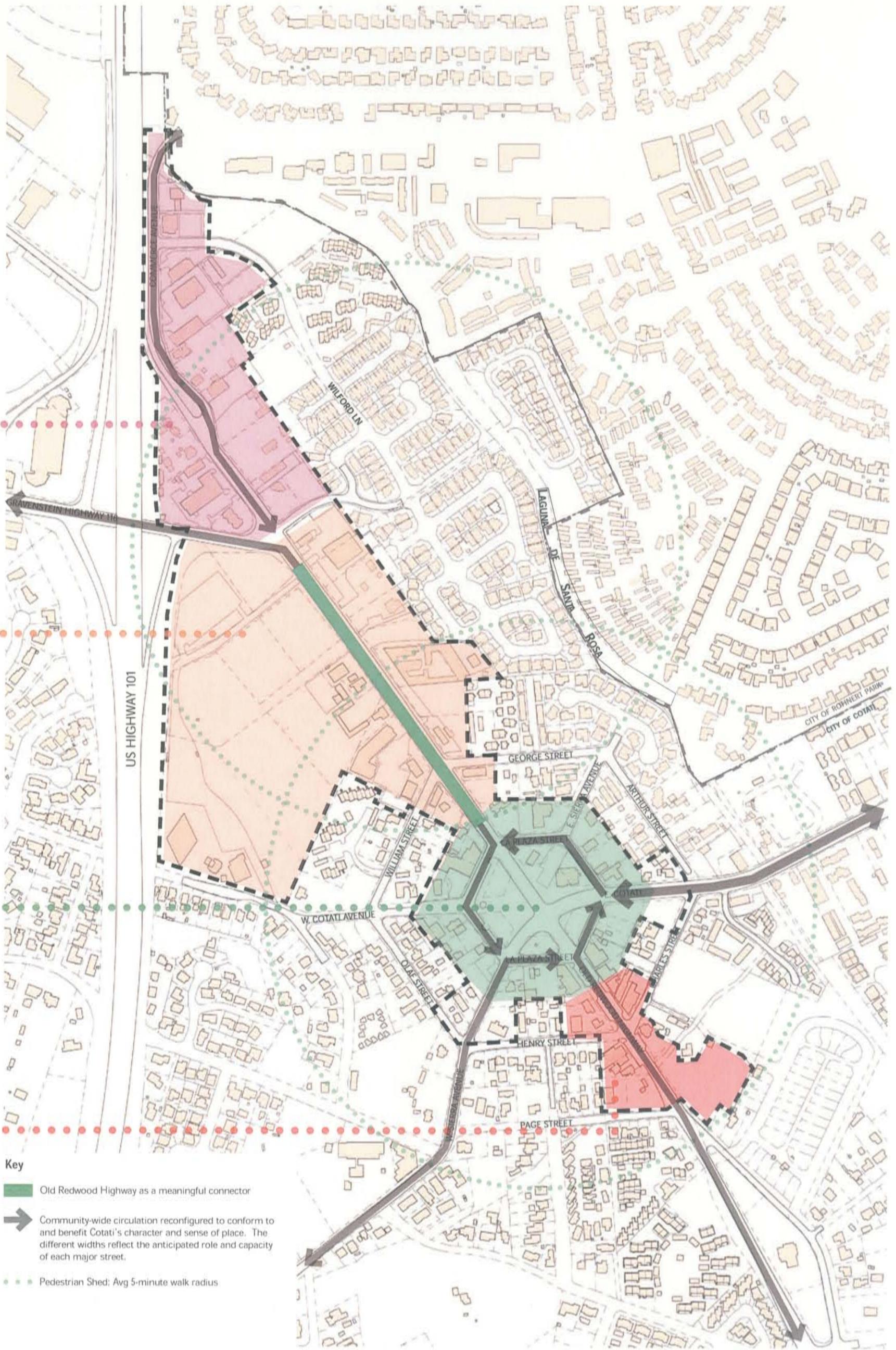
a. **Renovations and Restoration** - Fundamental to the success of the revitalization efforts is the subject of working within the existing physical conditions of the historic character of downtown. Priority needs to be given to projects that restore historic buildings by removing existing, inconsistent, elements/renovations or by renovating compromised buildings to their former visual integrity. This is critical because it signals commitment to maintain Cotati's character prior to, or simultaneously with, pursuing new development. Future actions or development projects are then measured against the success of restoration and renovation of the historic core.

Objectives

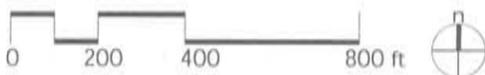
- HC-1. Require restoration or renovation of federally, state or locally designated historic buildings to the maximum feasible extent.
- HC-2. Enhance public parking.
- HC-3. Enhance bicycle and pedestrian circulation and access.



[a] Total 59.5 acres: Net developable area = 54-acre plan area (exclusive of R.O.W.)



- Key**
- Old Redwood Highway as a meaningful connector
  - Community-wide circulation reconfigured to conform to and benefit Cotati's character and sense of place. The different widths reflect the anticipated role and capacity of each major street.
  - Pedestrian Shed; Avg 5-minute walk radius



# CHAPTER 1 : INTRODUCTION

## 1.10 - Strategy for Revitalization

In response to the preceding goals, policies and objectives for the districts, and in light of the plan-area's constraints and opportunities, the following programs are set forth.

### 1.10.020 - Plan-Wide Programs

To initiate revitalization, the following programs carry forward the direction of the goals, policies and objectives to facilitate implementation of this plan. These actions set the overall tone to stimulate investment from the widest variety of perspectives and interests.

**Mobility and Transit** - The balance between accommodating regional and community-wide circulation through the heart of Cotati and maintaining Cotati's character and sense of place needs to be restored. Further, the existing circulation system needs to be made as continuous as possible, providing multiple routes as well as enhancements to bus service.

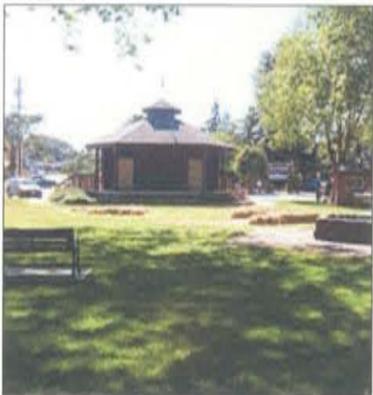
• **Reclaim the heart of Cotati for more than traffic circulation** - This can be accomplished through the following:

1. Maintain low traffic speeds throughout the plan area that reinforce the area's historic and pedestrian-oriented context (e.g., relationship of buildings to street, smaller curb radii, streetscape, etc). The design and ultimate construction of all new and modified streets in the plan area are to reflect the area's village-scale context and the intrinsic need to also accommodate cyclists and pedestrians.
2. Reconfigure Old Redwood Highway so that it becomes the northern counterpart to the established and visible southern half of Downtown Cotati, setting the stage for pedestrian-focused development. Through its transformation into an important and beautiful urban parkway with lush landscape and pedestrian-oriented frontages, this road will catalyze numerous private development actions along its new edges.
3. Complete or add to, as appropriate, the circulation system to enable bicycle and pedestrian circulation.



Top Row:  
Several gaps in the streetscape and pedestrian or bicycle access need to be completed appropriately to encourage alternative modes to the automobile on a plan-wide basis (above).

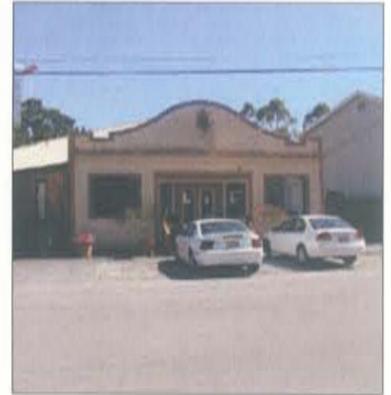
Right and Far Right:  
The current bisecting of La Plaza Park into 4 pieces that do not operate coherently as a whole needs to be reversed by reclaiming the pieces into one and responsibly directing traffic around the hexagonal park.



**Historic Preservation** - Preserving and reinforcing the prevalent historic and pedestrian nature of downtown is fundamental to successful revitalization.

• **Provide purpose and motivation for restoration/renovation** - The benefits of making such investments need to be conveyed and facilitated for maximum positive effect to the plan area and community. This can be accomplished through the following:

4. Inventory all cultural and historic resources within the plan area to appropriately inform near and long-term actions/investment.
5. Enable the combination of historic preservation and new development.



Left and Above:  
Buildings such as these exist in a dispersed pattern that generally focuses around the La Plaza Park area of the plan. The range of need varies from the removal of inconsistent elements (e.g., signage, aluminum windows) and poorly executed additions, to the lack of streetscape and connection to the public realm (top right).

Simultaneous with other actions throughout the plan area, the careful restoration and/or renovation of such resources needs to occur for the long-term benefit of Downtown Cotati.

**Civic Features** - The factor that will leverage downtown into a community-wide and regional feature is the inclusion of civic buildings and activities.

• **Enhance and/or generate civic space** - The very presence of civic activity is what distinguishes a place from just another collection of stores and restaurants. For Downtown Cotati to be a true community focus, civic space needs to be enhanced and generated in a variety of sizes and locations through the following:

6. Ensure that new development areas provide genuine and varied civic space and/or uses, particularly in the northern planning area where there is a great imbalance of open space (left and below left).
7. Promote and expand downtown festivals and events.
8. Enhance La Plaza Park as the community focus for civic activity in Cotati.



Above: The southwest quadrant of La Plaza Park (0.69-acres) separated from the other three pieces by large amounts of pavement.

**Shared Parking**- The idea of parking as a utility or as infrastructure that is shared in the same way as a street or water service, is fundamental to enabling the intimate types of places envisioned by this Specific Plan.

- **Public Parking** - To create the reason for walking or visiting more than one destination, it is necessary to free non-residential projects from providing their required parking on site. In this way, motorists are transformed into pedestrians to maximize each site and by extension, to benefit the entire plan area. This action can be accomplished through the following:

9. Reward retail and restaurant activity in mixed use environments through lower parking requirements, including shared parking (park-once).
10. Provide a variety of shared parking through a balanced approach of on-street and off-street lots or garages strategically dispersed for maximum effect.



**Sustainable-Building Practices** While the act of revitalizing the village-scale and urbanism of downtown is sustainable, the buildings that ultimately generate the place must also contribute to the quality of the local natural environment.

- **Incentivize Best Practices** - The benefits of successful examples need to be documented and published for further use through the following:

16. Provide applicants with information about sources and performance of green-building products/techniques.
17. Provide examples of executed green-buildings for reference.
18. Require all development within the plan area to comply with media campaign on Cotati's sustainable building program.

Left: Cotati established green-building requirements in 2005 and has working-experience to leverage further sustainable investment.

Above: The strategic and efficient distribution of shared parking ("park once") leverages what is often a burden into a resource that can actually produce real estate as shown above in the "liner" building concealing a public, shared garage (left). The Park-Once approach combines shared on and off-street parking to liberate private property from having to consume itself with parking.

**Housing** - There is an increasing demand for housing in the area to serve a diverse set of needs.

- **Leverage the demand for housing into an asset for both downtown and the community.** - This can be accomplished through the following:

11. Ensure a wide variety of housing types and unit types into the various buildings throughout the plan area.
12. Provide a variety of housing choices within the smallest scale of development: the building



Above: A variety of building types and unit types assembled to generate diverse and context-responsive living environments

**The Public Realm** - For the various blocks, buildings, housing and businesses to operate cohesively, it is necessary to consider the public realm as the community framework which unites and maximizes the individual elements.

- **Enhance and complete the public realm** -The needs of cars must be balanced with those of pedestrians and cyclists to achieve an appealing and coherent village-scale downtown. This can be accomplished through the following:

13. Enhance or complete streetscapes as appropriate;
14. Treat streetscapes as multi-modal, flexible and practical;
15. Require high design quality in buildings to help shape the public realm.



Left and Below: Lodging of a village-scale that is urban in nature provides visitors with direct access to the amenity that is Downtown without having to leave the area.



Bottom Row: All streetscapes need to be intentional and inviting to provide residents and visitors alike with a reason to walk and for businesses to respond accordingly.

