2. VISION & DOWNTOWN CHARACTER

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This Chapter summarizes the community’s vision for the character and function of the Plan Area. As discussed in Chapter 4 (Implementation), some improvements can be initiated immediately while others may require years of sustained effort.

The Chapter provides a strategy for revitalizing downtown Soledad through strategic infill projects and improvements that capitalize on the significant assets in the area. The discussion and illustrations build upon the existing Design Guidelines to establish the desired character and design quality of the downtown.

The vision is based on an analysis of existing conditions, a review of past studies, reports, and plans, meetings with Staff and elected officials, interviews with stakeholders, and public input gathered during a three-day design charrette. Refer to Appendix C for a detailed discussion of community input.

The vision outlines opportunities for improvement in five downtown areas including the Downtown Core, Monterey Street, Vosti Park, South Gateway, and the Railroad District. Policies and actions in Chapter 4 (Implementation) address improvements throughout the Plan Area and focus on infill development, design and character, streetscape improvements, historic preservation, and economic vitality. The timeline, funding sources, and responsible party for each action item is also identified in Chapter 4 (Implementation).

DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

The vision calls for significant infill development in the downtown over the next 20 or more years. While land uses are flexible, in keeping with the standards described in Chapter 5 (Development Code), and may vary according to market demand, the Plan Area may accommodate up to 570 new housing units, over 480,00 square feet of commercial space including retail, hospitality, office, education, and public facilities, and over 40,000 square feet of industrial space. Table 2.1 provides a detailed estimate of the buildout potential within the Plan Area.
Enhanced streetscapes, lighting, and sidewalks will encourage pedestrian activity, bringing additional foot traffic to downtown businesses. Public spaces such as the train depot plaza will provide wind-protected space for regular events. Infill development and building design standards will create an environment that draws tourists and locals from throughout the region.

The vision was developed based on an understanding of current economic conditions and demographics as well as economic priorities and limitations outlined in previous studies and in the Soledad Economic Development Strategy. See Appendix D for an overview of economic trends and Appendix E for a summary of previous studies.

### Economic Vitality

The vision aims to shape and direct public and private investment in the downtown. This shared vision is designed to unite downtown interests including business owners, property owners, and business organizations to achieve a revitalized downtown. Improvements to amenities, circulation, parking, and other public elements are intended to create an attractive environment in which businesses can thrive and new businesses are inspired to invest.

### Neighborhood Preservation

Downtown Soledad is home to a thriving historic neighborhood. Single-family residences are primarily concentrated in the portion of the Plan Area located to the northeast of Market Street. Architectural styles include folk Victorian, minimal traditional, craftsman, victorian gothic, and Spanish eclectic. Proximity to downtown services and amenities as well as schools and parks make the neighborhood convenient and walkable.
Preservation and enhancement of this neighborhood is key to the downtown vision. The Chapter 5 (Development Code) is crafted to provide standards for multifamily infill building types that are compatible in scale and character with existing residences. Policies and actions (see Chapter 4 (Implementation)) call for streetscape improvements including wider sidewalks, additional street trees, and improved lighting to enhance aesthetics and pedestrian safety, and continued rehabilitation loan and grant programs to maintain existing homes. Infill and improvements in this neighborhood will benefit residents and support commercial vitality in the downtown.

**HISTORIC PRESERVATION**

The City completed an Historical Resources Inventory in 2010, which identifies historically significant and potentially significant buildings, structures, and sites. Figure 2.3 is a map of the contributing properties located within the Plan Area. The City’s historic structures include a range of styles including craftsman, 20th century classic revival, storefront vernacular, italianate, victorian gothic, spanish colonial revival, mission revival, and art moderne.

Non-building historic resources include a pump station, water tower, horse hitching post, and the Front Street rail bridge.

The vision for Downtown Soledad celebrates and capitalizes on historic resources. It includes concepts, policies, and actions for rehabilitating historic homes and commercial buildings, and protecting structures from demolition and renovations that are not in keeping with the historic character. Section 9.0 in Chapter 5 (Development Code), provides design standards for renovations, retrofits, additions, and reconstruction.

Historic structures, particularly single-family homes, may need to be relocated to allow for parcel consolidation to accommodate larger scale development in the downtown. Whenever possible, these structures should remain within the downtown area. Figure 2.3 identifies potential relocation sites for these properties. Identified sites are located outside of the commercial core and are vacant or underutilized properties.
Figure 2.3 Potential Relocation Sites for Historic Structures

Historic Resources
- Historically Significant Properties
- Potentially Significant Historic Properties
- Historic Structure Receiver Sites

NOTES:
1. This site currently contains a small historic residence, but the majority of the parcel is unused.
2. This site currently contains a residence, however there is potential for an additional small residence fronting on Palm Avenue.
2.2 VISION AND URBAN DESIGN

DOWNTOWN CORE

Existing Conditions

Front Street is the historic main commercial corridor of the City. Front Street runs adjacent to the railroad, with commercial buildings primarily along just the eastern side. The Corridor provides north and south access to U.S. Highway 101 and connects to the neighborhoods to the north and east with a regular pattern of cross streets.

Buildings. Recent strip commercial development at the City’s south end (south of the South Gateway Area) has diverted commercial spending away from downtown, leaving Front Street with unoccupied storefronts and office spaces. Many of the buildings along Front Street are historic, fine examples of small town commercial architecture. While some have been well taken care of and maintain their original character, a number of these buildings have been modified over the years and lack their original charm.

Development along Front Street is almost entirely on the east side. While the east side of Front Street is largely built-out, there are a few vacant and underutilized parcels between East Street and West Street. Several of the vacant parcels on the west side between Front Street and the railroad tracks are owned by the City.
CHAPTER 2: VISION & DOWNTOWN CHARACTER

Vision

Streets. The City’s downtown street network is the standard California “railroad town” grid pattern with blocks laid out to the east of the train tracks. Typical blocks are 300 feet by 400 feet and the typical street right-of-way is 80 feet, although the Front Street right-of-way is generally 100 feet. There is a planted median running the length of Front Street from East Street to Benito and West Street to Moranda Road. The Front Street sidewalks and medians are planted with street trees, but the trees lack sufficient height to shade the street and require more attention and watering to thrive. Many of the cross streets lack meaningful street tree plantings. While the block sizes are a good scale for a pedestrian-oriented downtown, the pavement widths are wider than necessary for vehicular travel lanes and can be utilized for parking or other public amenities.

Public Space. Cesar Chavez Park is located on the west side of Front Street between Main and Soledad Street. The park is 0.1 acre and consists primarily of a grass lawn. The park is used infrequently and primarily serves as visual open space.

Front Street is to be transformed into the commercial, entertainment, and cultural center of the City. Existing historic buildings will be restored to their original condition, the streetscape will be enhanced with taller street trees and an improved lighting scheme, and a number of development projects will bring new energy and increased pedestrian activity to the area. Specific projects and actions envisioned and recommended for the corridor are listed below.

Infill Development. A more continuous pattern of active shopfront businesses and some residential frontages on cross streets will encourage more pedestrian activity, which will help to stimulate and support economic activity and a sense of community within the downtown. Specific projects could include the following:

Movie Theater. A movie theater at the corner of Front and Encinal Street will help make Front Street the City’s entertainment core. A tall lighted marquee will make the theater visible from U.S. Highway 101 and establish it as a downtown landmark. Creative shared parking strategies can allow this site to accommodate a multi-screen first-run theater.
Top: Illustration of proposed facade improvements to the building on the corner of Front and Main Street, with view of new hotel or commercial building on the west side of Front Street. Proposed new hotel or other use should be of an architectural style that meshes with the existing historic buildings along Front Street and the architectural heritage of northern California.

Bottom Left: Illustrative view of hotel, looking north along Front Street. Illustration includes projecting sign, corner-facing entrance and the restored brick facades of the historic hotel building.

Bottom Right: Illustrative view of potential facade improvements. Suggested improvements include a “stripping down” of more recent decorative additions that are inconsistent with the original architecture, removing stucco from brick facades, simplifying signage, and replacing windows to restore buildings to their historic character.
Commercial Development on West Side of Front Street. A hotel, commercial building, education, or other community-serving use on the west side of Front Street, south of Main Street, will help to create a feeling of enclosure and improve the pedestrian environment on Front Street. This block is recommended because of its location adjacent to the proposed train station site at the end of Main Street and it is opposite a block of historic buildings along Front Street.

Station Plaza and Train Depot. A pedestrian-only plaza adjacent to the hotel/commercial development on the west side of Front Street will eventually serve as the entrance to the train depot, and will provide a gateway into Soledad for visitors arriving by train. Buildings surrounding the plaza should have gallery and small storefront frontages.

Government Center. A government center housing the Monterey County Superior Court could be located at the proposed theater block, or somewhere else downtown. This type of use will bring with it an influx of related office uses and employees in need of commercial and entertainment services.

Facade and Signage Improvements. Facade renovations can restore the historic buildings to their original character. In general, this involves removing stucco from brick facades, replacing or restoring windows and shopfronts, replacing original cornices and other key details, and eliminating decorative elements added to the buildings in recent decades that are inconsistent with the original architecture.

The City’s downtown currently lacks professionally prepared signs and many banner and window signs are of poor quality and do not comply with City standards. Simplified signs and awnings will better fit with the design of the historic buildings. Signs should generally be front-lighted and made of metal or wood or painted directly onto the buildings. Projecting signs should address the pedestrian and, in some cases, also be targeted at passing motorists through use of classic projecting neon “highway sign” types typical of the 1930’s through 1950’s.

Streetscape Enhancements. Front Street’s medians and sidewalks should be enhanced with taller trees to act as a windbreak and provide shade. The median and lighting scheme should be extended to San Vicente and Oak Streets. The lighting should be improved to enhance pedestrian safety after dark and improve visibility for motorists. Streetscapes should be improved with more benches, decorative planting areas, and public art in the “street tree zone” within the sidewalks.
VISION AND URBAN DESIGN
MONTEREY STREET

Existing conditions
The Monterey Street Area includes Monterey Street as well as the properties fronting the cross streets for the half block north and south of Monterey from West Street to Oak Street.

Buildings. The majority of buildings along Monterey Street and on the side streets to the northeast are single-family homes in varying conditions. Many of these homes are identified on the City’s registry of historic places. There are a few commercial uses on Monterey Street that serve the neighborhood, including a bakery, neighborhood market, movie rental store, and hair salon. Uses on the side streets between Oak and Benito Streets are primarily commercial, including services, professional offices, and retail.

Streets. Monterey Street has a right-of-way of 80 feet with parallel parking on both sides of the street. The street lacks mature street trees. The side streets from West Street to Oak Street generally have an 80 foot right-of-way, and several have parallel parking on one side and angled parking on the other. Monterey Street features a designated bicycle lane in both directions from West Street to the south of Vosti Park. Existing sidewalks on Monterey Street between West and Oak Street are approximately five feet wide, and the street supports considerable pedestrian activity.

Public Space. Bill Ramos Park is located on the northeast corner of Monterey and Soledad Streets. The park encompasses 1.25 acres and includes a walking path, grass lawn, and picnic tables. The park has been observed to be rarely utilized and is planned to be part of the Civic Center expansion.

Vision
The Monterey Street area will be an active mixed-use neighborhood with a predominantly residential scale and character. The neighborhood will include higher density residential infill and flexible-use structures with a residential style and scale. Historic homes will be preserved and enhanced. Streetscape improvements will create improved connections to Front Street and a more pleasant pedestrian environment characterized by large street trees to provide shade and reduce wind speeds.
Infill Development.

**Senior Housing Project.** A senior housing development would be appropriate for the southwest corner of Monterey and Soledad Street. The development’s close proximity to goods and services including food markets and a pharmacy will allow residents to handle daily errands on foot, reducing total automobile trips.

**Multi-Family Residential Development.** Medium density infill housing is appropriate along Monterey Street and the east/west side streets connecting Monterey to Front Street. The design of residential developments should be of a scale and character similar to the area’s existing homes and neighborhood-serving commercial buildings. Infill development may include small neighborhood-serving commercial uses (two to three stories), although the Front Street Corridor will likely provide a more favorable environment for most businesses.

**Streetscape Improvements.** Trees along Monterey Street and side streets will act as a windbreak and provide shade for pedestrians. Paso Robles and King City are examples of existing places that demonstrate the value of such trees on almost identical streets. A colorful flowering tree variety on some of the east/west streets will add visual interest and differentiate streets. An improved lighting scheme will complement the lighting on Front Street.

Examples of infill housing appropriate for the Monterey Street area. Housing is medium density, but designed with residences accessed directly from the street, in buildings of a scale and character compatible with the historic homes of the neighborhood.
VISION AND URBAN DESIGN

VOSTI PARK

Existing conditions
The Vosti Park Area is located at the southeast end of Downtown Soledad. The park runs parallel to the railroad tracks near where the tracks cross over Front Street. The park is home to the landmark Soledad water tower.

Buildings. The Vosti Park area includes a mix of uses including a public park, residential units, retail, services, and light industrial (City Yard). Buildings on the blocks between Oak Street, Monterey Street, and Park Street are primarily warehouse-style structures. Structures on nearby side streets are a mix of single and multi-family residences.

Streets. Streets adjacent to Vosti Park stray slightly from the uniform downtown grid pattern, with some narrower blocks and narrower street rights of way and several discontinuous streets. State Street bisects the blocks between Park Street and Oak Street to the southwest of Monterey Street. The variation visually disconnects Vosti Park from the center of the downtown area as there is no direct line of site to the park. Pedestrians cannot access the park directly from Front Street and must pass industrial sites such as the City Yard to reach a park entrance.

Public Space. Vosti Park is a 6.4-acre park bordered by Front and Monterey Streets to the east and west, and Park Street to the north. The park has a sand volleyball court, picnic benches, a playground, and large play fields for soccer and baseball.

Vision
The Vosti Park area will be transformed from a mixed industrial/residential area that is physically isolated from Downtown into a seamless neighborhood extension of the Monterey Street and Front Street environments. The park will be fronted by a mix of multi-family housing and civic buildings, reinforcing its function as a key public gathering space for Downtown Soledad and the entire City.

Block Reconfiguration. A reconfigured block structure will create two larger blocks between Park and Oak Street, similar to the typical downtown area block size. The sidewalk connection from Front Street to Park Street will provide direct pedestrian access to Vosti Park from Front Street and a view corridor from the downtown core to the community center and park entrance.

Community Center. A community center at the end of Park Street will provide gathering space for residents and serve as a gateway from Front Street into Vosti Park. The community center should have a tower or other vertical feature to make it a landmark for pedestrians and motorists driving to the downtown from the U.S. Highway 101 off-ramp and terminating the southerly vista on Front Street.
Proposed improvements for Phase I include 1) relocation of the City Yard and a new community center, 2) medium and high-density residential developments, 3) park enhancements and additional street trees, 4) infill development on the corner of Oak and Front Street, 5) reconfiguration of the two smaller blocks between Alder and Park Streets into one large block and closing off vehicle access between Alder Street and Park Street, and 6) a pedestrian-only path connecting Vosti Park to Alder Street through the proposed residential development.

Proposed improvements for Phase II include 1) reconfiguration of the two smaller blocks between Oak and Alder Streets into one block, 2) road realignment to connect Alder Street to Park Street, 3) high-density residential development, 4) a bridge over Front Street providing access to the parcels west of the railroad tracks (see Chapter 3, Section 3.1 (Downtown Access & Circulation) for more information on this recommendation), and 5) streetscape enhancements and a continuation of the Front Street median.

Residential Development. The light industrial uses on the blocks between Monterey Street, Oak Street, and Park Street will be replaced by medium density housing and flexible-use units over time. Flexible spaces could accommodate live/work, professional offices, and some service uses that are compatible with the neighborhood environment.

Park Enhancements. Park improvements including a permanent soccer field, a shaded path meandering around the entire park, a tree grove near the park’s community center at the northern entrance, and semi-permanent food stands will enhance the visual quality and usability of the park.

Streetscape Improvements. An improved lighting scheme will complement lighting on Front Street and in the Monterey Street area. Street trees along Park Street and Monterey Street will help to define the space of the park and shelter it from wind.
VISION AND URBAN DESIGN

SOUTH GATEWAY

Illustrative view of the vision for the South Gateway area, facing northeast along Front Street, with a view of the proposed automobile bridge over Front Street and the railroad tracks.

Existing conditions

Buildings. Buildings in the South Gateway area are typically single-use structures on large parcels. Many buildings in this area have street-side surface parking lots designed to accommodate large vehicles and provide ample spaces for stop-over visitors travelling on U.S. Highway 101. There are several large vacant parcels and a number of underutilized parcels in the area.

Streets. The street pattern is very different from the grid/network pattern in the downtown area and does not support the small town environment. Front Street connects the U.S. Highway 101 off-ramp to the downtown area via a railroad underpass. Existing sidewalks in this area are inconsistent with Public Works standards and Community Design Guidelines. Sidewalks are narrow and portions along Nestles Road are unpaved. The sidewalk along Front Street north of Nestles Road through the underpass is particularly narrow. A steep concrete slope abuts the sidewalk, making the pedestrian experience unsafe and unpleasant. There are few street trees in the South Gateway area.

Vision

This area will be systematically altered from its current highway rest stop character to become an integral part of the City of Soledad. Creating a small town street network, completing each street to accommodate pedestrians and bicycles in addition to motorized vehicles, and developing buildings that address the streets in a small town development pattern are key elements to the transformation.

Commercial Development. Commercial businesses such as restaurants and services developed on vacant and underutilized sites will be oriented toward Front Street with parking in the rear. Building architecture will be generally compatible with those of the downtown, but may also include larger, simpler “edge of town” buildings more reflective of the agrarian heritage and character of South Monterey County.

Streetscape Improvements. Street trees and the improvement or addition of sidewalks on all streets will greatly enhance walkability in the area. Additional signage, including a monument sign at the northeast corner of Front Street and Nestles Road, will help direct visitors to the
Plan drawing of the South Gateway area, showing future south gateway development, new street design concepts and the automobile bridge over Front Street and the railroad tracks.

Close-up plan drawing of proposed location and design for automobile bridge over Front Street and the railroad tracks. The bridge will provide access to the railroad district from the South Gateway area.
downtown and nearby attractions. Parking lot landscaping will minimize the visual impacts of surface parking. Lots will also include clear pedestrian walkways connecting visitors to buildings and out to adjacent sidewalks. Additionally, pedestrian improvements include wider sidewalks raised above vehicular traffic in the railroad underpass, increasing safety.

**Circulation Improvements.** Circulation improvements for the South Gateway area include a new automobile and pedestrian bridge over Front Street providing access to the Railroad District. Access is discussed in Chapter 3 (*Mobility and Infrastructure*). Circulation can also be enhanced in the South Gateway area by potential new roundabouts serving as an entrance to the new commercial development and adjacent residential area.
CHAPTER 2: VISION & DOWNTOWN CHARACTER

VISION AND URBAN DESIGN

RAILROAD DISTRICT

Existing Conditions
The Railroad District consists of several vacant parcels owned by Union Pacific Railroad encompassing over 12 acres between the railroad tracks and U.S. Highway 101. The site has limited accessibility, with one existing private at-grade rail crossing at Main Street and a small access road through the Santa Elena Mobile Home Park. Accessibility and potential noise and environmental constraints have made development in this area difficult.

Vision
Over the long term this area may become an integral part of Downtown Soledad. The site’s visibility from U.S. Highway 101 and commercial development potential could result in a significant private investment if current obstacles are removed. In the short and mid-term, the cost and complexity of creating meaningful pedestrian and vehicular connections across the railroad to Front Street make the development of this area a long-term City priority. Moreover, given the vacant and underutilized sites in the downtown core (north of the railroad tracks), the City should first focus on infill along Front Street.

Continued Block Structure. Rows of trees along unpaved streets in line with the existing streets from San Vicente Road to East Street will continue the current block structure and establish a pattern for potential future commercial development on the site while maintaining view corridors, providing additional wind protection for Front Street, and improving aesthetics.

Short-Term Development. Colorful agricultural crops, such as flowers, planted in rows on the vacant sites between tree-lined dirt streets will create a beautiful and distinctive backdrop for downtown activity and serve as a landmark of the City from U.S. Highway 101. The site could be leased by the City to a local farmer and may serve to generate revenue for cut flowers, plants, and/or seed sales. Soil quality issues make the production of food crops on this site questionable.

Illustrative site plan of the Railroad District. Proposed improvements include 1) continued downtown street and block structure to establish an ideal street layout for future development, initially laid out as dirt roads with street trees, 2) colorful flower fields to provide visual interest at a low cost in the interim, and 3) in the mid to longer-term, new commercial development or a new branch of Hartnell College.

Example photograph of colorful flower fields.
Mid/Long-Term Development. Longer term development may include flex buildings and commercial or educational uses, such as a community college. Access is discussed in more detail in the South Gateway section of this Chapter (p. 2-16), as well as in Chapter 3 (Mobility and Infrastructure), and should include improved vehicular access such as a pedestrian connection to Front Street and access through the mobile home park.

Additional mid- to long-term development includes new vehicular and pedestrian access connecting the railroad district to Front Street. Options include a pedestrian overpass as part of a new intermodal transit station along Front Street, vehicular underpasses and a pedestrian/vehicular bridge running adjacent to the existing train bridge. These options are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3 (Mobility and Infrastructure).

In order to preserve visual access to the Downtown and maintain opacity, building heights should be staggered and breaks in building massing should be provided.