



CHAPTER 1 - EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND GUIDE TO THE SPECIFIC PLAN

This Executive Summary and Guide to the Downtown Lancaster Specific Plan provides straightforward guidance for optimizing the use of this plan to achieve and sustain vitality in the Downtown. The summary and step-by-step framework are intended to help readers obtain the information they are seeking in a user-friendly and efficient manner.

1.1 WHAT IS THE LANCASTER DOWNTOWN SPECIFIC PLAN?

The Downtown Lancaster Specific Plan is a community-based revitalization plan. The Specific Plan process was initiated by the City of Lancaster and included numerous opportunities for community involvement in order to develop a plan that is truly community-based. The goals of the Specific Plan are multi-fold and include the following:

- ◆ Revitalize & improve the Downtown as a place of historic, cultural, social, economic and civic vitality
- ◆ Create a Destination Place with a mix of commercial, retail, dining, entertainment, residential, and transit uses
- ◆ Create a pedestrian-friendly environment
- ◆ Create tools to implement community goals for Downtown



The Specific Plan aims to revitalize the Downtown Lancaster economy and sense of place through:

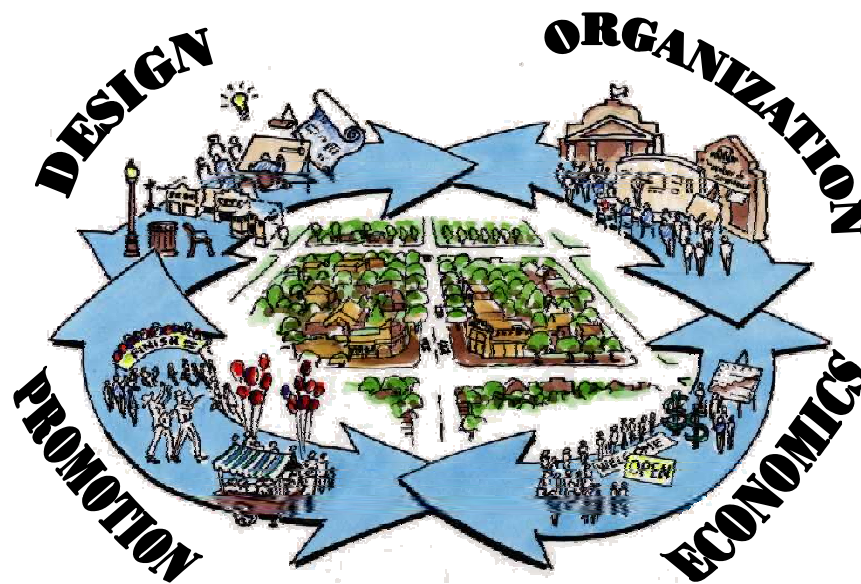
- ◆ A clearly stated vision for the future;
- ◆ Design concepts and illustrations depicting the desired future;
- ◆ Appropriate design guidelines and regulations;
- ◆ Strategies to encourage desired redevelopment and business; and
- ◆ An implementation program identifying action steps, organizations, and resources.

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1.2 WHAT IS INCLUDED IN THE DOWNTOWN LANCASTER SPECIFIC PLAN?

The Downtown Lancaster Specific Plan includes tools needed to revitalize Downtown including: a regulating code with design guidelines and standards, a vision plan, infrastructure studies, implementation steps, and information about the planning process for Downtown Lancaster. The Specific Plan is intended to foster a pedestrian-friendly mixed-use environment, consistent with the goals listed above.

The Downtown Lancaster Specific Plan is consistent with the Main Street Four Point Approach and includes information on each of the four key points to successful Downtowns: Economics, Physical Design, Promotion, and Organization.



1.3 HOW IS THE SPECIFIC PLAN ORGANIZED?

The Downtown Lancaster Specific Plan is organized into six chapters as follows:

Chapter 1: Executive Summary – This chapter provides a brief introduction to the Specific Plan, explaining what the Downtown Lancaster Specific Plan is, what it includes, and tips on how to use it.

Chapter 2: Introduction – This chapter presents the purpose and intent, a historical context, Specific Plan authority and requirements, statement of CEQA compliance, and other pertinent information.

Chapter 3: Vision – This chapter details the community-based planning process for the Specific Plan in which many residents, property owners, and business owners were involved. The chapter presents the resulting community vision for Downtown, including community values, a vision statement, and an illustrative plan identifying key aspects of the vision. This section is provided for guidance and ideas only and is not intended to serve as Specific Plan policy or literal statement of what will occur.



Chapter 4: Development Plan – This chapter discusses the existing project area, surrounding land uses, and infrastructure present at the time of preparation of this Specific Plan. It also provides the specific land use, circulation, parking, and infrastructure plans for the future development and redevelopment of Downtown under the Specific Plan.

Chapter 5: Regulating Plan – This chapter defines land use districts, the permitted land uses, site development standards, parking requirements, sign regulations, landscaping requirements, and design guidelines for Downtown Lancaster through text, graphics, and photographs.

Chapter 6: Administration and Implementation – This chapter specifies the procedures for amending, administering, and enforcing the Specific Plan, development review procedures, public improvement costs (to an order of magnitude), and financing mechanisms.

Appendices – The appendices provide background material related to the Specific Plan update process, including technical studies, General Plan consistency discussion, and notes from the community involvement process.

1.4 HOW DO I USE THE DOWNTOWN LANCASTER SPECIFIC PLAN?

The Downtown Lancaster Specific Plan is designed to meet the needs of many users, including property owners, merchants, architects, designers, building contractors, City staff, residents, investors, developers, and other interested organizations and persons in the community. Each of these interests has a vital role to play in the future of Downtown Lancaster.

To most effectively use the Downtown Lancaster Specific Plan, the following basic process is recommended:

Step 1:

Read Chapter 2 for the overall purpose and intent of the Specific Plan and review Chapter 3 to more fully understand the community's illustrative vision for the future of Downtown Lancaster. If you are an interested resident, contact the Community Development Department or the Chamber of Commerce to see how you can get involved in the implementation of the vision through committees, volunteering, and participating in planned events.

Step 2:

If you are interested in improving a specific site or developing a new building within the Downtown, review Chapters 5 and 6, which provide development regulations and architectural design guidance. You may also need to review other City of Lancaster ordinances and policy documents for additional requirements.

Step 3:

If you are interested in starting a new business or expanding/enhancing an existing business in the Downtown, review Chapters 5 and 6, which contain key objectives related to desired types of business and business development, as well as permitted land uses. Also, consult with the Chamber of Commerce and the City of Lancaster for additional requirements and assistance.

Step 4:

After completing Steps 1 through 3, schedule a meeting with the City of Lancaster to review your ideas, determine processes and requirements, identify other agencies you need to contact, and discuss potential issues, solutions, and approaches.

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CHAPTER 2 - INTRODUCTION

2.1 BACKGROUND

The City of Lancaster initiated a comprehensive planning process for Downtown Lancaster in August 2005, in an effort to revitalize Downtown and create a corridor that is a place of historic, cultural, social, economic, and civic vitality for the Lancaster community, as well as the Antelope Valley. The Downtown Lancaster Specific Plan provides policy, regulatory, and design guidance for both public and private land that implements the community's vision for the future of Downtown.

This chapter provides background for the Specific Plan, along with its purpose, the planning process that was employed, statutory authority, consistency with the General Plan, and compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE



The City of Lancaster is located in Los Angeles County along State Route 14, 70 miles northeast of Los Angeles. This high desert city is located in the Antelope Valley of the Mojave Desert and bordered by the Tehachapi Mountains to the north and the San Gabriel Mountains to the south. Incorporated in 1977, the City contains a population of almost 140,000 in its 94 square miles.

Lancaster grew from a railroad town in the late 1800s into a center for commerce for the Antelope Valley by the mid 1900s, due first to the agricultural industry in the early 1900s and then the aerospace industry of the 1950s on.

The existing architecture is representative of the time periods of major development in the Downtown, ranging from the late 1800s to today. Most commercial buildings date from the early to mid 1900s and are in Traditional Commercial and Art Deco styles. Many of the public buildings date from the 1980s to today and are mostly in a modern style or are an interpretation of an older style. The majority of the buildings are one-story, with a few two-story buildings. The roof forms vary based on the architectural style; however, most in the Downtown have flat or parapet roofs. The exterior building materials mostly include brick and concrete with a stucco finish. Natural colors dominate along Lancaster Boulevard.



Art Deco/Streamline style

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LOCAL CONTEXT

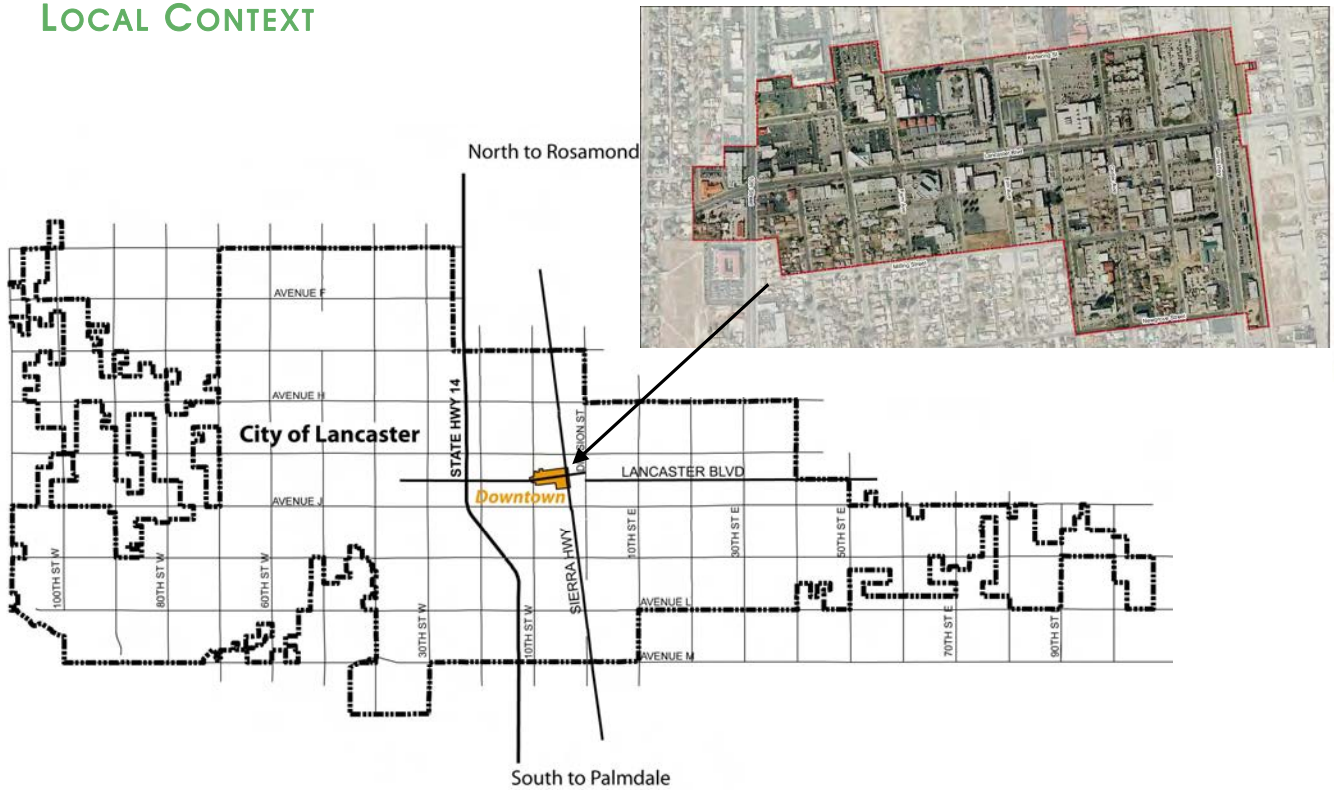


Figure 2-1: Location of Downtown Lancaster Specific Plan Project Area

The Downtown Lancaster Specific Plan Project Area encompasses much of the original settlement along the railroad (see Figure 2-1). It is bounded by 10th Street West to the west, Sierra Highway to the east, Kettering Street to the north, Milling Street to the southwest and Newgrove to the southeast.

General Plan land use and zoning within Downtown Lancaster consists mainly of commercial uses with some public and residential uses. Downtown is surrounded by predominantly residential uses to the north and south, and commercial uses along 10th Street West and Sierra Highway (see Figures 2.2 and 2.3).



Public Use Building



Commercial Building

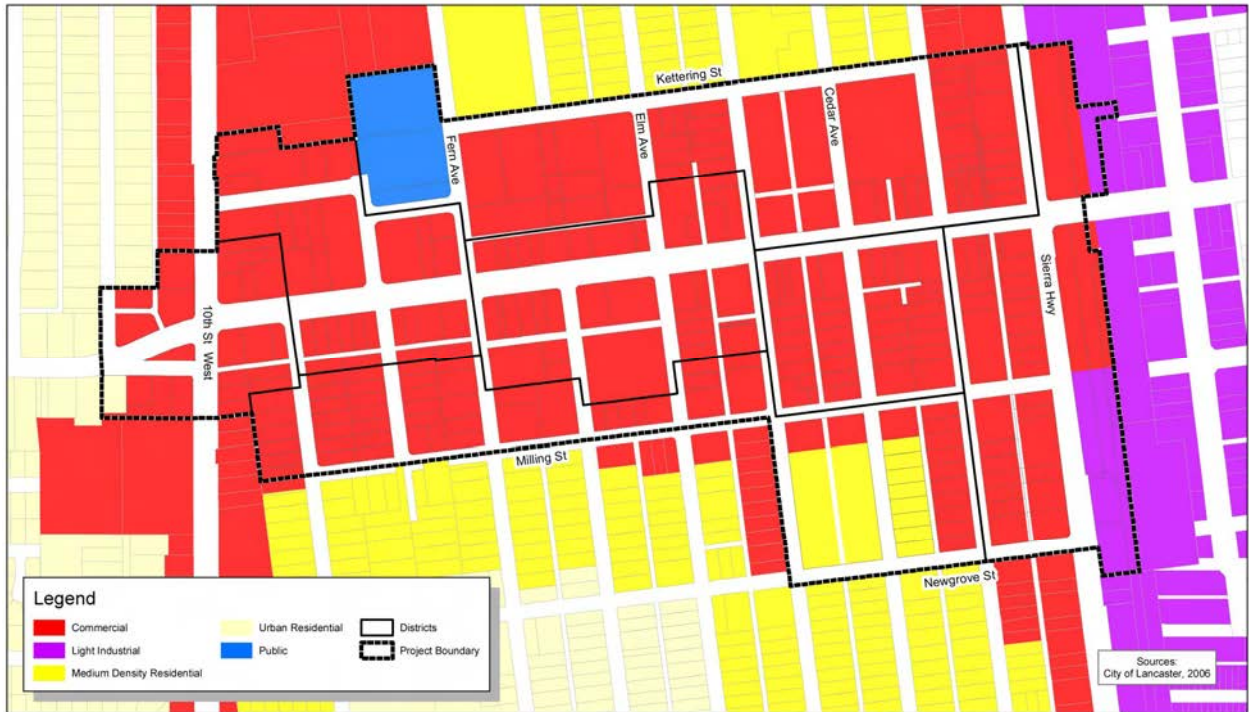


Figure 2-2: Existing General Plan Land Uses

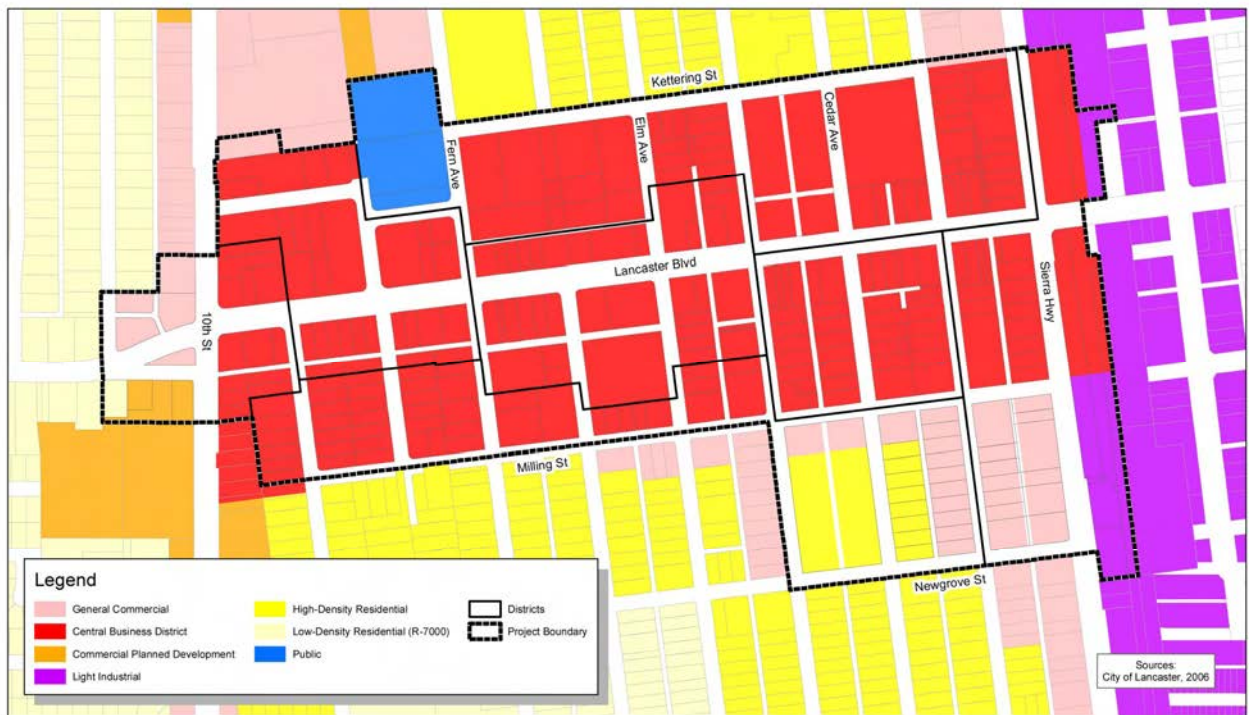


Figure 2-3: Existing Zoning Land Uses

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Existing land uses in Downtown Lancaster include a mixture of civic, cultural, commercial, and office (see Figure 2-4). Some building uses generate higher volumes of foot traffic and pedestrian activity. Approximately one-half of the building facades along Lancaster Boulevard have storefront windows, which are an integral component for an active pedestrian environment.



Existing Mixture of Uses

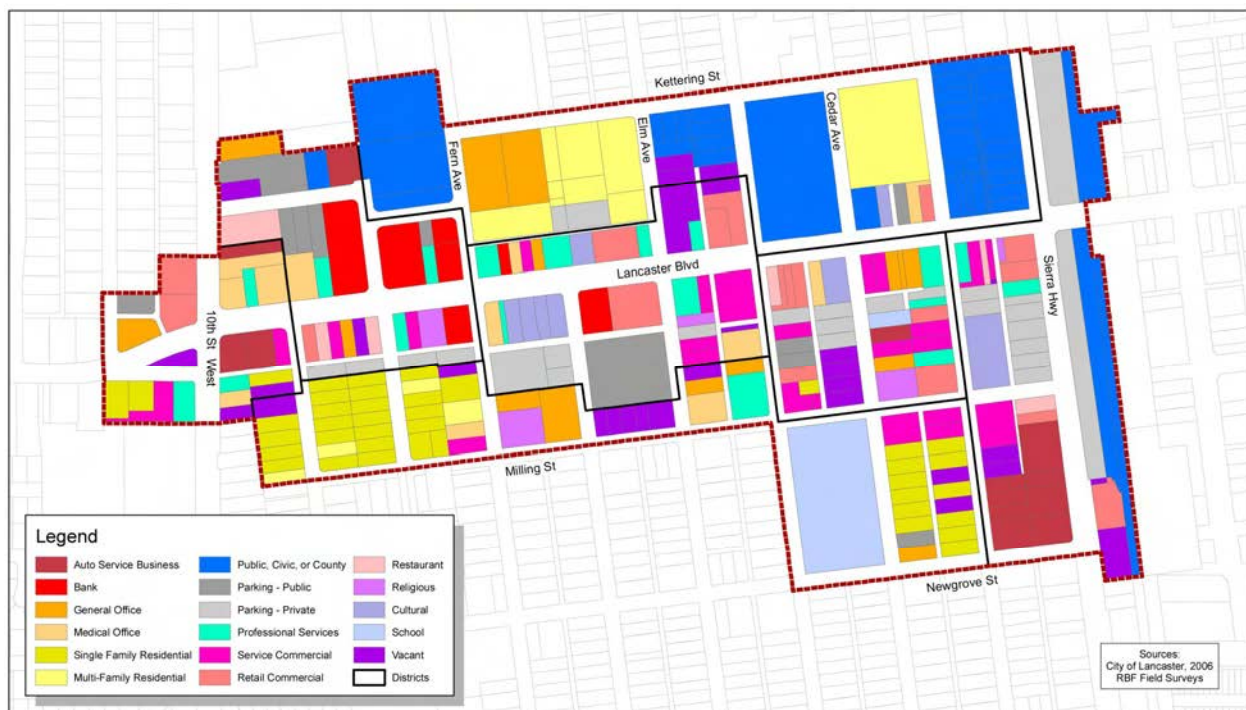


Figure 2-4: Existing Land Uses

Understanding the relationship between the built and unbuilt dimensions of Downtown helps identify opportunities for the development of new buildings, public spaces, and other uses. In Figure 2-5, it is evident (by the white spaces between the building footprints) that ample vacant areas exist for new development. At the same time, the many continuous buildings along Lancaster Boulevard and adjacent streets provide opportunities to enhance pedestrian activity.



Existing Built Environment

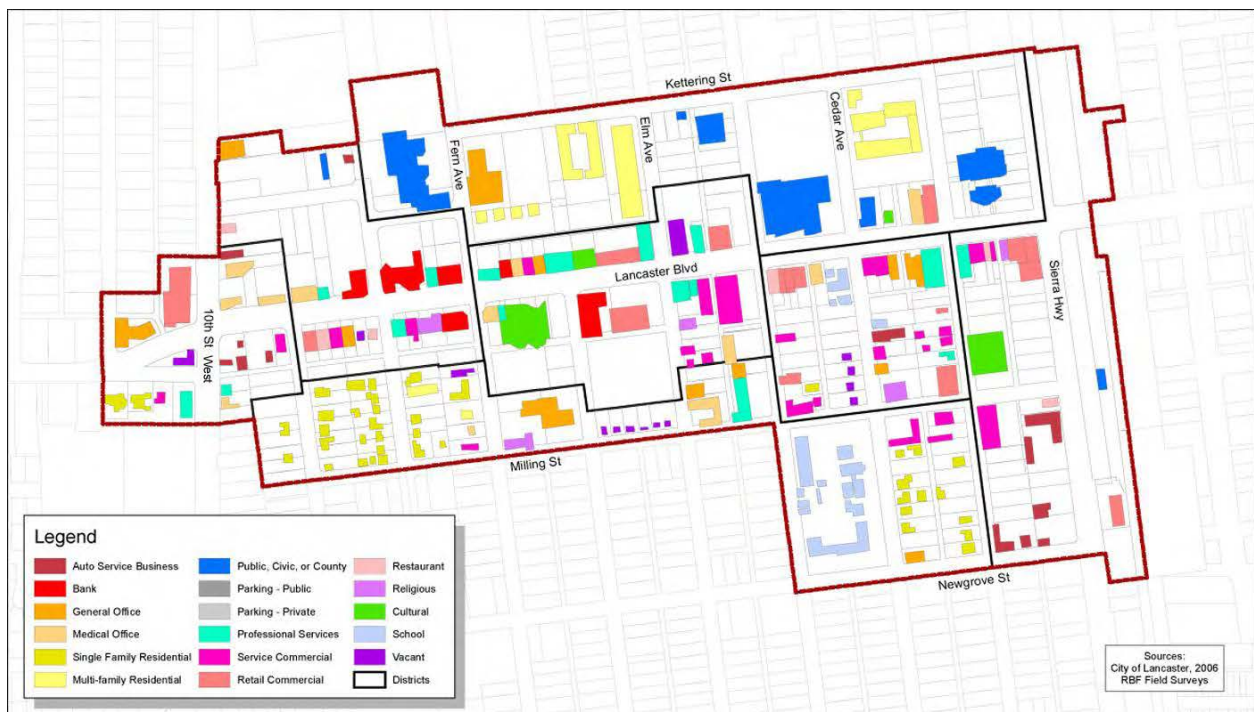


Figure 2-5: Existing Business Patterns

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Circulation in Lancaster is based on a grid street system. Downtown is centered along Lancaster Boulevard, and the main arterial streets used to access Downtown are 10th Street West and Sierra Highway. Many more local streets and alleys make up the Downtown grid (see Figure 2-6). The types of circulation include pedestrian, vehicular, bus, and train. A Metrolink regional transit stop is located within a 10 minute walk of Downtown. Parking options in Downtown include both private and public parking lots as well as 2-hour on-street parking along most streets.



Train Depot

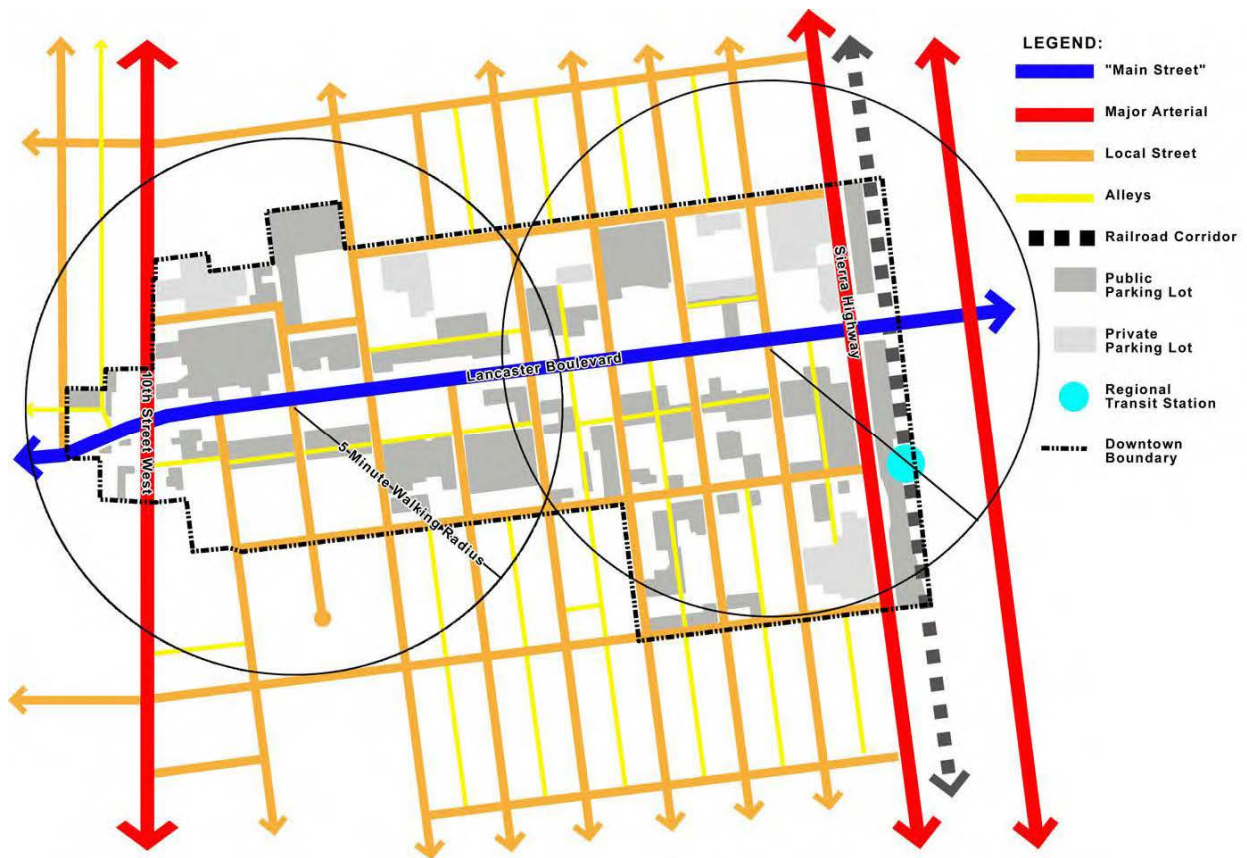


Figure 2-6: Circulation

Pedestrians encounter different environments on Lancaster Boulevard, the arterials of 10th Street West and Sierra Highway, and local streets. Typical existing street cross-sections show the variety of building setbacks, sidewalk widths, on-street parking, and number of lanes in Downtown (see Figures 2-7 through 2-9).

The streetscape along Lancaster Boulevard contains many amenities including trash receptacles, benches, light fixtures, banners, street trees, patterned sidewalks, business signs, aerospace interpretive monuments and other forms of public art.



Street Amenities

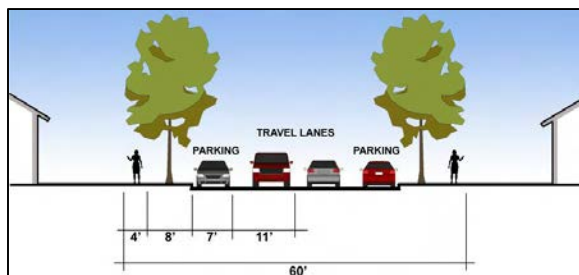


Figure 2-7: Fern Avenue Looking North

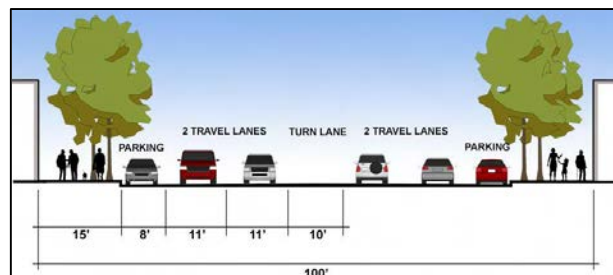


Figure 2-8: Lancaster Blvd. Looking East

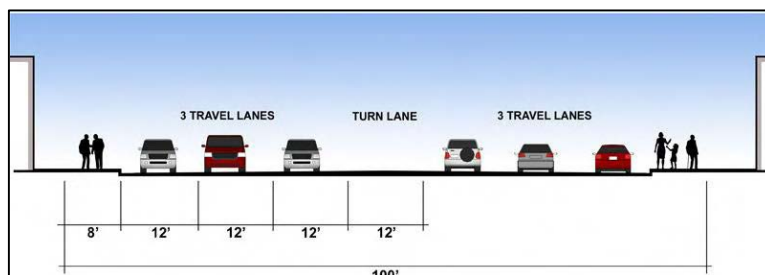


Figure 2-9: 10th Street West Looking North

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2.2 PURPOSE OF THE SPECIFIC PLAN

The purpose of the Downtown Lancaster Specific Plan is: (1) to guide change in an appropriate manner compatible with the existing character and, (2) to encourage quality development that is compatible with the surrounding area and the community. The Specific Plan provides a framework for quality planning, and establishes development standards and design criteria.

2.3 PLANNING PROCESS

The Downtown Lancaster Specific Plan planning process contributes to a policy and regulatory document grounded in community participation and input. A number of opportunities for community input were offered to residents, business and property owners, and other interested parties (described in more detail in Chapter 3). The planning process for the Downtown Specific Plan included three distinct phases, as described below:

PHASE 1: UNDERSTANDING DOWNTOWN LANCASTER (JANUARY 2006 TO APRIL 2006)

This phase included a review of existing documents and information, background and data research, site reconnaissance, and visual observations. This initial phase of the planning process allowed the design team to build a baseline understanding of Downtown Lancaster and surrounding neighborhoods.

PHASE 2: DEVELOPING THE VISION FOR DOWNTOWN LANCASTER (MAY 2006 TO OCTOBER 2006)

This next phase of the planning process entailed the creation of community-based preliminary visions, concepts, plans, and strategies for Downtown Lancaster based upon an intensive Downtown Immersion process. The objective of this phase was to arrive at a single vision for Downtown Lancaster that has an optimal level of support from the community and provides the requisite framework for preparing the Specific Plan.



Community Visioning

PHASE 3: COMPLETING AND IMPLEMENTING THE DOWNTOWN LANCASTER SPECIFIC PLAN (NOVEMBER 2006 TO DECEMBER 2007)

During this phase, a complete draft of the Downtown Specific Plan, a Downtown Vision Poster, and a Program Environmental Impact Report (EIR) were prepared, reviewed, and accepted by the community, Planning Commission, and City Council. This final phase in the planning process is where all the efforts of the community became truly evident.

2.4 STATUTORY AUTHORITY

The Downtown Lancaster Specific Plan is a regulatory plan constituting policies, a development program, and a regulating plan that has been adopted by ordinance. The Specific Plan also includes a vision plan, design guidelines, and implementation plan that has been adopted by resolution – these sections are intended to provide guidance. Decision makers may condition properties to adhere to the guidelines in order to meet project specific findings. The Downtown Lancaster Specific Plan is established through the authority granted to the City of Lancaster by the California Government Code, Title 7, Division 1, Chapter 3, Article 8, Sections 65450 through 65457 (specific plans).



As set forth in the Government Code, Section 65451, a Specific Plan must contain the following information:

- ◆ A description of the general distribution, location, and extent of the uses of land within the area covered by the Plan.
- ◆ The proposed distribution, location, extent, and intensity of major components of public and private transportation, sewage, water, drainage, and other essential facilities proposed to be located within the area covered by the Specific Plan and needed to support the land uses described in the plan.
- ◆ Standards and criteria by which development will proceed and standards for the conservation, development, and utilization of natural resources, where applicable.
- ◆ A program of implementation measures, including regulations, programs, public works projects, and financing measures necessary to carry out the above information.
- ◆ A statement of the relationship of the Specific Plan to the General Plan.

The Downtown Lancaster Specific Plan is a regulatory plan constituting the development concept, land use regulations, and development standards for the project area that will be adopted by ordinance. Development plans or agreements, tract or parcel maps, precise development plans, and any action requiring ministerial or discretionary approval within the boundaries of the Specific Plan shall be consistent with the Specific Plan as adopted by the City Council.

2.5 CONSISTENCY WITH THE LANCASTER GENERAL PLAN

California law requires that a Specific Plan be consistent with the General Plan of the adopting locality. To this end, existing General Plan goals and policies were reviewed to ensure consistency between the Downtown Specific Plan and the Lancaster General Plan. The Lancaster General Plan provides a supportive foundation for the Specific Plan and reinforces the goals and policies for the Downtown area, as evidenced by the highlighted General Plan goals and policies in Appendix A. A thorough analysis of consistency with the Lancaster General Plan was conducted as part of the planning process. The analysis concluded that the policies contained within the Downtown Specific Plan are consistent with the General Plan and no General Plan Amendments are required.

2.6 CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT COMPLIANCE

The Downtown Lancaster Specific Plan was prepared in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Pursuant to State and local CEQA guidelines, the City of Lancaster prepared an Initial Study, including an Environmental Checklist. The City determined that the Specific Plan could result in environmental impacts, and therefore required environmental analysis. Because the potential impacts resulting from the Specific Plan were determined to be potentially significant in the Initial Study, an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) was prepared and is available under a separate cover. As part of the approval process for the Specific Plan, an Environmental Impact Report must be considered and certified by the City prior to the approval of the Specific Plan.

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