



PART I

CHAPTER

03





SETTING AND CONTEXT

Downtown is desirably located and deeply woven into the fabric of Vacaville. Building upon and celebrating Downtown's rich historic context, the Vacaville Downtown Specific Plan Area captures the essence of its unique subareas, maximizing the potential within its neighborhoods and commercial corridor.



View of Merchant Street from Downtown Vacaville, facing west (Source: ESA)

3.1 Prime Location

3.1.1 Regional Setting

With a population of roughly 100,000, the city of Vacaville is located in Solano County, California, at the foot of the Coast Ranges, which divide the Central Valley from the San Francisco Bay Area. Vacaville is approximately 27 miles southwest of Sacramento and 46 miles northeast of San Francisco. Interstate 80 (I-80) bisects the city, connecting Vacaville with the Bay Area and the Sacramento region. Interstate 505 branches off I-80 northwest of the Plan Area and connects to Interstate 5 to the north. The Plan Area is north of I-80 in the city's northwest quadrant (**Figure 3.1.1-1**). Three miles to the northeast is the Solano County–owned Nut Tree Airport, which accommodates aircraft ranging from light aircraft to corporate jets. The nearest commercial airport is Sacramento International Airport, approximately 40 miles northeast of Vacaville.

3.1.2 Local Setting

Located in the heart of Vacaville, Downtown covers an approximately 10-block by 10-block area. City Hall and many other public facilities are one-half mile to the southwest, and the Nut Tree commercial development is 2 miles to the northeast, along I-80. Surrounding land uses include residential and public facilities to the west; residential and commercial uses and swaths of open space to the north; residential and commercial uses to the east; and I-80 and highway commercial uses to the south.



Aerial view of the Downtown Center subarea, facing west (Source: ESA)

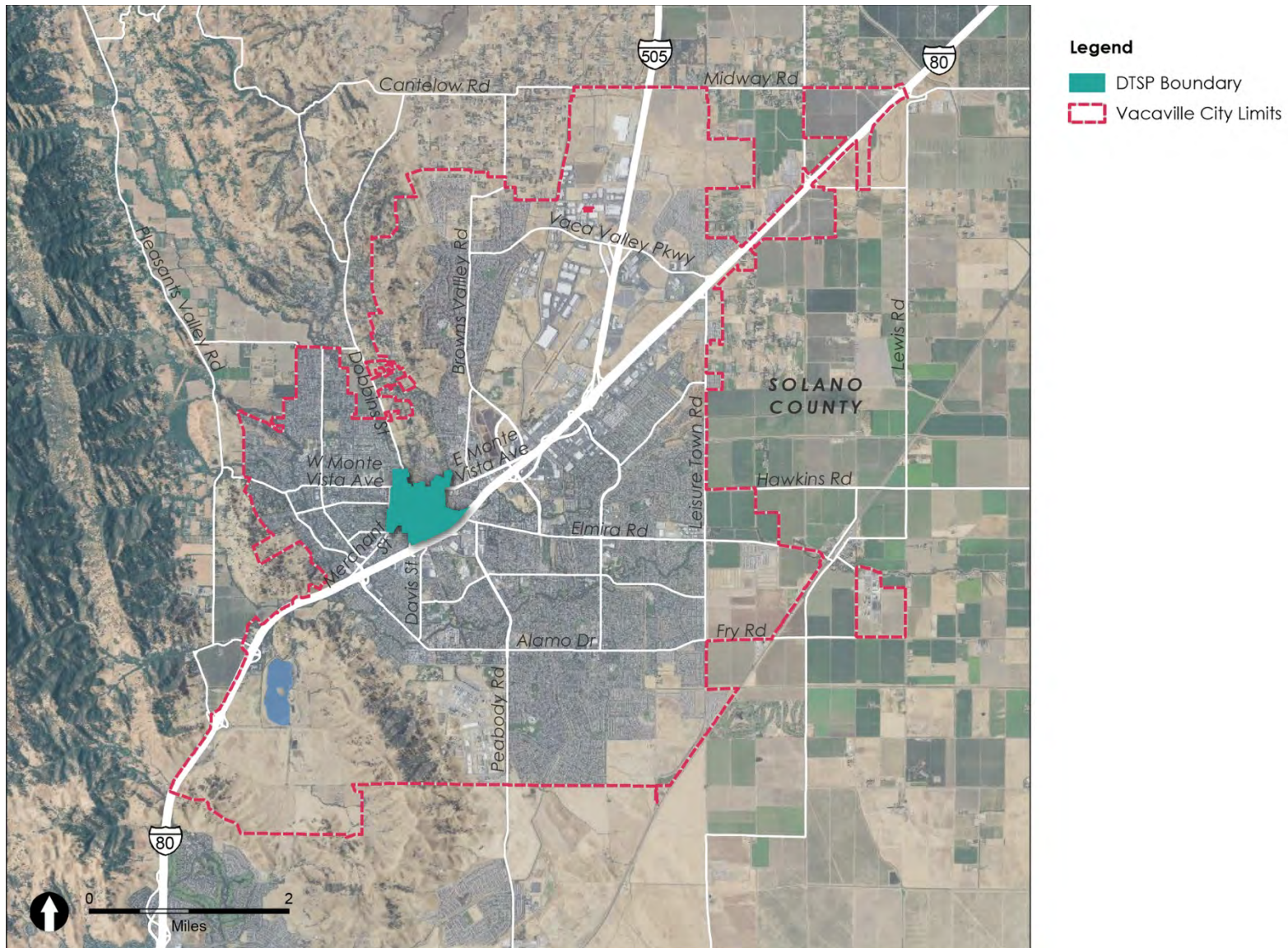


Figure 3.1.1-1: Regional Map

3.2 Plan Area

As shown in **Figure 3.2-1**, the 237-acre Plan Area is generally bounded by West Street on the west, East Monte Vista Avenue on the north, Depot Street on the east, and I-80 on the south. The Plan Area includes the Downtown Transit Plaza at East Monte Vista Avenue and Cernon Street, which serves three local bus routes and connects to the Vacaville Transportation Center (also known as the Vacaville Intermodal Station) at the northeasterly corner of Allison and Ulatis Drives.

The Plan Area also includes a number of existing shopping and dining options, a branch of the Solano County Library, the McBride Senior Center, a U.S. Post Office branch, a multiscreen movie theater complex, an indoor sports facility, and Andrews Park, a community park and plaza that routinely hosts live entertainment and major community events. Ulatis Creek runs along the northeastern quadrant of the Plan Area. Vacaville High School is located immediately west of Downtown, outside of the Plan Area. The newly relocated Buckingham Collegiate Charter Academy, which replaced the Muzzetta Thrower Education Center and Country High, is situated within the eastern portion of the Plan Area at the corner of East Monte Vista Avenue and McClellan Street.

The Plan Area encompasses the Downtown Vacaville Priority Development Area (PDA), which Bay Area Metro designated as one of Solano County's PDAs in Plan Bay Area 2050. PDAs are areas of existing communities that have been identified and approved by local city or county governments as future compact growth areas.

Plan Bay Area 2050

Adopted on October 21, 2021, Plan Bay Area 2050 is a state-mandated, integrated long-range transportation and land use plan. As required by SB 375, all metropolitan regions in California must complete a sustainable communities strategy (SCS) as part of a regional transportation plan. In the Bay Area, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission and Association of Bay Area Governments are jointly responsible for developing and adopting an SCS that integrates land use, housing, and transportation to meet greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduction targets set by the California Air Resources Board.

As the Bay Area's regional transportation plan to address transportation, housing, the economy and the environment, Plan Bay Area was developed as a way to chart a course for reducing per capita GHG emissions through the promotion of more compact, mixed-use residential and commercial neighborhoods near transit. Plan Bay Area supports PDAs with planning grants, technical assistance, and prioritization for regional and state transportation and affordable housing funds. However, earlier versions of Plan Bay Area fell short of key equity goals, such as addressing regional affordability. Therefore, Plan Bay Area 2050 is intended to integrate the cross-cutting issues of equity and resilience.

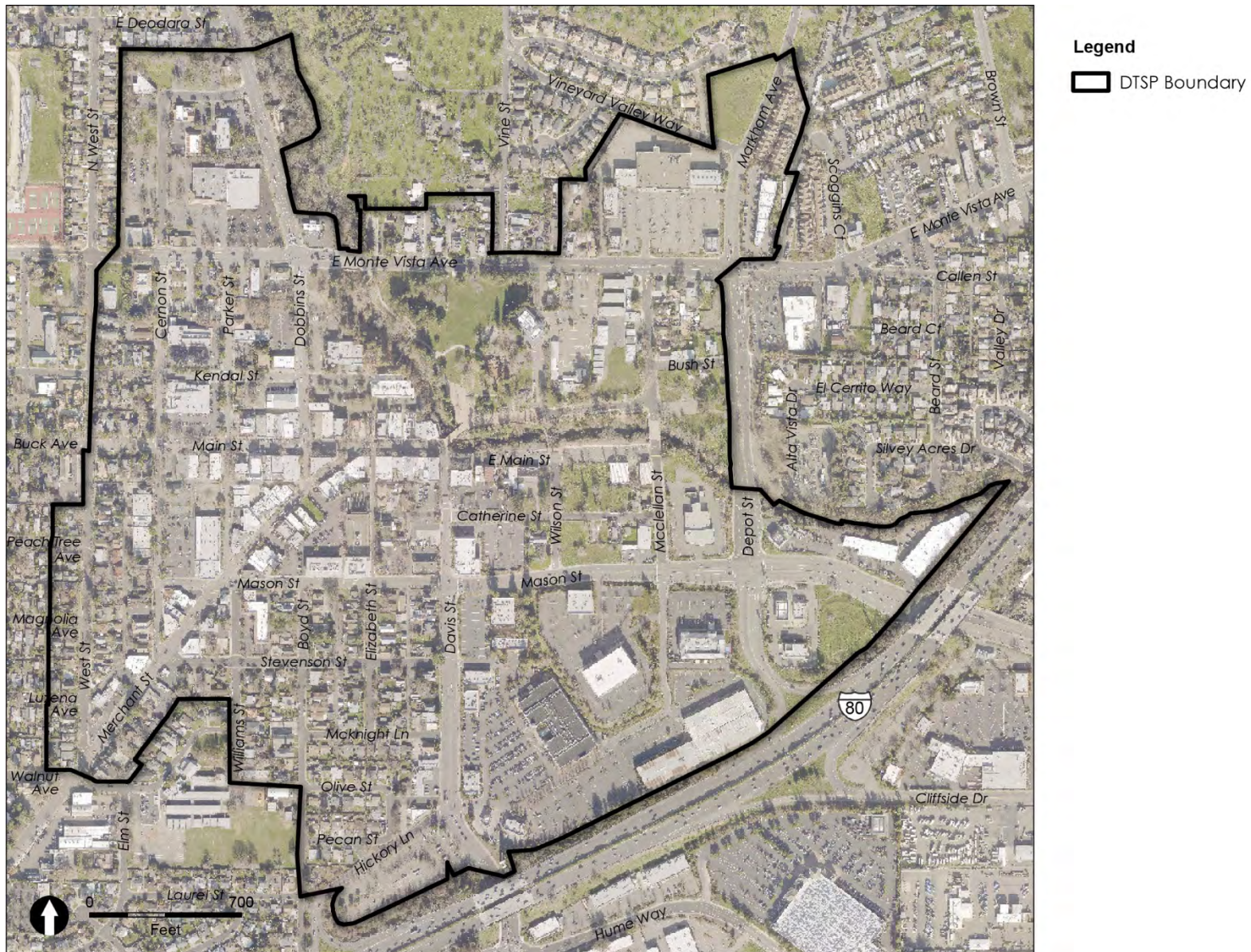


Figure 3.2-1: Vacaville Downtown Specific Plan Area

3.3 Partnership between Landowners

The geographic range of the Plan Area includes the core Downtown, along with neighborhoods and development areas that extend two to four blocks beyond Downtown, depending on the direction. For this reason, parcels in the Plan Area vary in size, from smaller lots within the traditional Downtown core and residential neighborhoods to larger parcels north of East Monte Vista Avenue and to the southeast along I-80, where the theater complex is located. As shown in **Figure 3.3-1**, more than 480 parcels make up the Plan Area, with approximately 17 percent of the parcels publicly held and 83 percent privately owned. There is a larger concentration of publicly owned land in the area generally bounded by East Monte Vista Avenue to the north, McClellan Street to the east, Main Street to the south, and Dobbins Street to the west. The success of the DTSP will rely on a collaborative and innovative public-private partnership between the City, landowners, and merchants, working hand in hand to create a Downtown that will be a source of pride and enjoyment for generations to come.



Statue by the Town Square Library (Source: ESA)

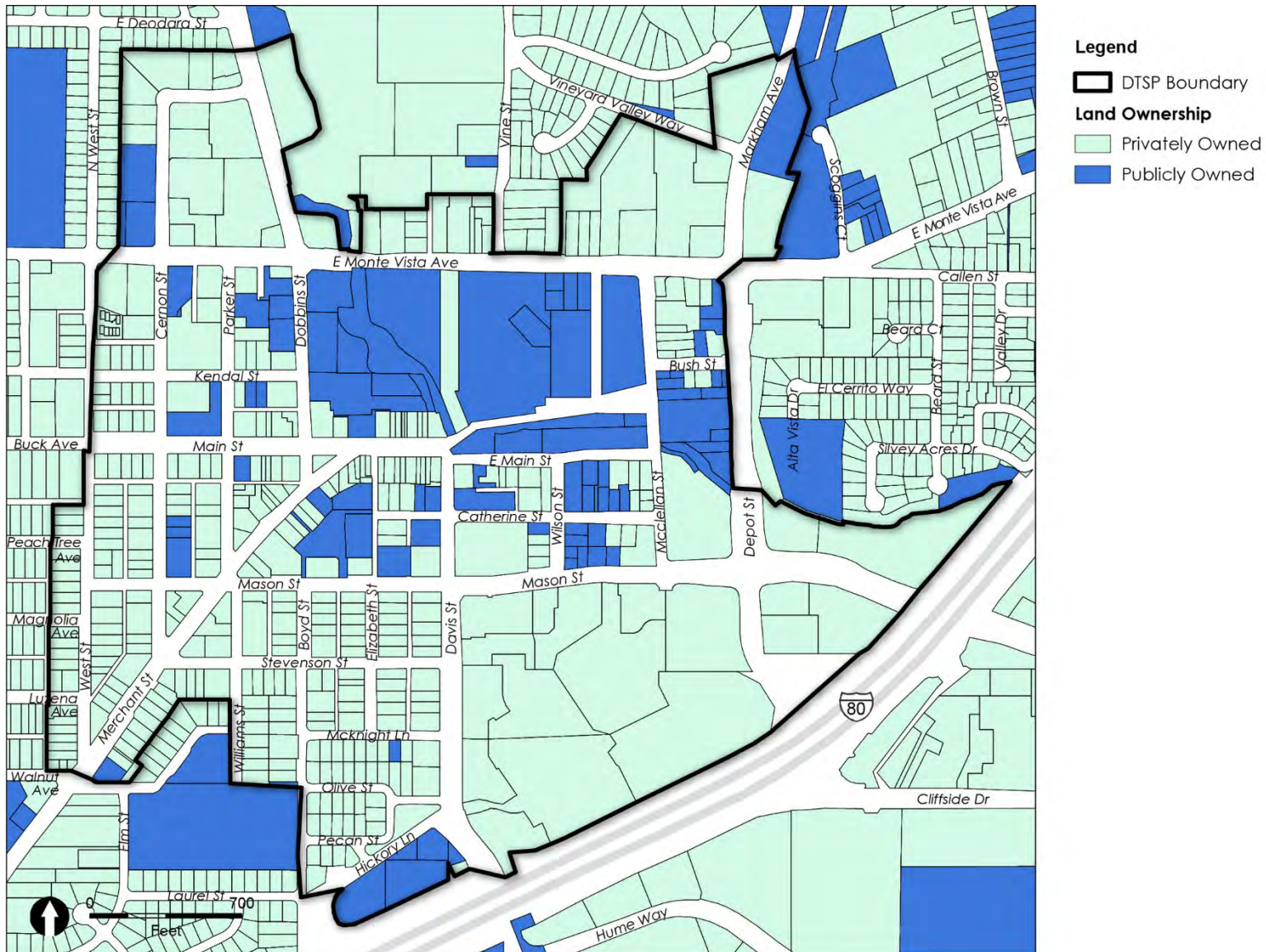


Figure 3.3-1: Land Ownership in the Plan Area

3.4 Downtown's Rich History

3.4.1 Earliest Settlement to 1930s

Prehistoric settlement in the Vacaville area began with the Penutian-speaking Hill-Patwin, who were part of the larger Patwin group. Their territory extended from the southern portion of the Sacramento Valley to west of the Sacramento River and from the town of Princeton south to Suisun Bay. With the arrival of the Spanish, the lives of the Patwin and their neighbors were indelibly changed. By 1800, missionaries had begun removing Patwin people to Mission Dolores, Mission San José, and Mission Sonoma. During the mission period, Native American land was largely overtaken by Mexicans and Americans.¹

Historic-era settlement is traced back to 1842, when the Mexican government awarded the Los Puntos land grant to Manuel Vaca and Juan Felipe Peña. It was at this time that Peña built his adobe home just west of present-day Downtown Vacaville. Shortly thereafter, three major events happened to set the stage for the modern city of Vacaville: War with Mexico was declared in 1846, leading to California's statehood in 1848; gold was discovered at Sutter's Mill, also in 1848; and Vaca sold a portion of his ranch to William McDaniel with the condition that a town called Vacaville be established. McDaniel and Vaca had disputes over the sale of land for years after the 1850 sale, but McDaniel made good on the

agreement to found a town. In 1851, the Town of Vacaville was officially platted.²

At the time Vacaville was established, livestock and wheat were the principal economic products in Solano County. The completion of nearby railroad lines in the late 1860s provided a way for ranchers to send their crops to market, but the higher cost of rail transport coupled with increased competition led to the decline of the area's wheat industry during the 1880s. Orchards were planted in place of wheat, and Vacaville was formally incorporated in 1892.³

Growth was slow but steady in spite of major fires that broke out in 1877, 1888, and 1890, destroying whole blocks of the town, and a major earthquake that occurred in 1892. Fruit production continued through this period, bringing a modest amount of prosperity to the region. However, after peaking in the mid-1910s, fruit production in the Vacaville area declined as a result of drought and soil depletion, overproduction for the World War I war effort, and competition during the Great Depression.

In the lean years of the Depression, Vacaville served as a hub for relief programs in the region, housing a 300-person Civilian Conservation Corps camp. The Vacaville Camp largely focused on tasks related to preventing soil erosion, including building dams, planting trees, installing drain pipes, and clearing creeks.

¹ Dudek, *Cultural Resources Evaluation Report for the Eldredge Property (Homestead) Project*, prepared for the City of Vacaville, April 2018.

² Ibid.

³ City of Vacaville, *Vacaville General Plan and ECAS EIR*, prepared by The Planning Center, June 2014.

3.4.2 Modern Vacaville (1940s–present day)

In the mid-20th century, new employers arrived in the area, resulting in explosive growth in Vacaville. The now-defunct Basic Vegetable Products company located a 1,000-worker onion dehydrating facility in Vacaville, and in 1942, Suisun Air Base (now Travis Air Force Base) was established just south of Vacaville.

Between 1941 and 1960 Vacaville experienced a massive population boom, growing to 12,000 people. The growth and development of Vacaville continued, and by 1978, there was a population of approximately 38,000 people, representing an increase of 35,000 in three decades. By 2019, Vacaville’s population had grown to more than 100,000 people.⁴ The area’s steady population increases can be attributed to the construction of new freeways, which fostered the construction of new business parks, schools, and residential subdivisions. The end of this period of rapid growth and development saw renewed interest in protecting the historical resources of the original center of Vacaville.

Refer to DTSP Part I, Chapter 4, “Development Framework,” and DTSP Part II, Chapter 13, “Historic District Standards and Guidelines,” for more information regarding the historic context of Vacaville. These chapters also present the requirements and guidelines for the Downtown Historic Preservation District Overlay; a list of known historic resources and an explanation of the management of historic resources within the Plan Area; and supporting resources and references.

⁴ City-Data.com, *Vacaville, California*, available at www.city-data.com/city/Vacaville-California.html.

3.5 Subareas

The traditional, grid-like street network is the common thread connecting the subareas within the Plan Area that make up the Downtown fabric. The subareas vary in size, land use characteristics, and development and mobility patterns, among other attributes. The seven subareas are outlined below, followed by individual descriptions. **Figure 3.5-1** provides a conceptual illustration of the subareas. This figure is intended to be diagrammatic, recognizing that no hard boundaries separate the subareas and that adjacent subareas may share similar and complementary characteristics.

1. Downtown Center
2. Historic Main Street
3. North Monte Vista
4. West End Residential
5. Merchant & Mason Street Corridor
6. South Residential
7. Highway Entertainment & Employment

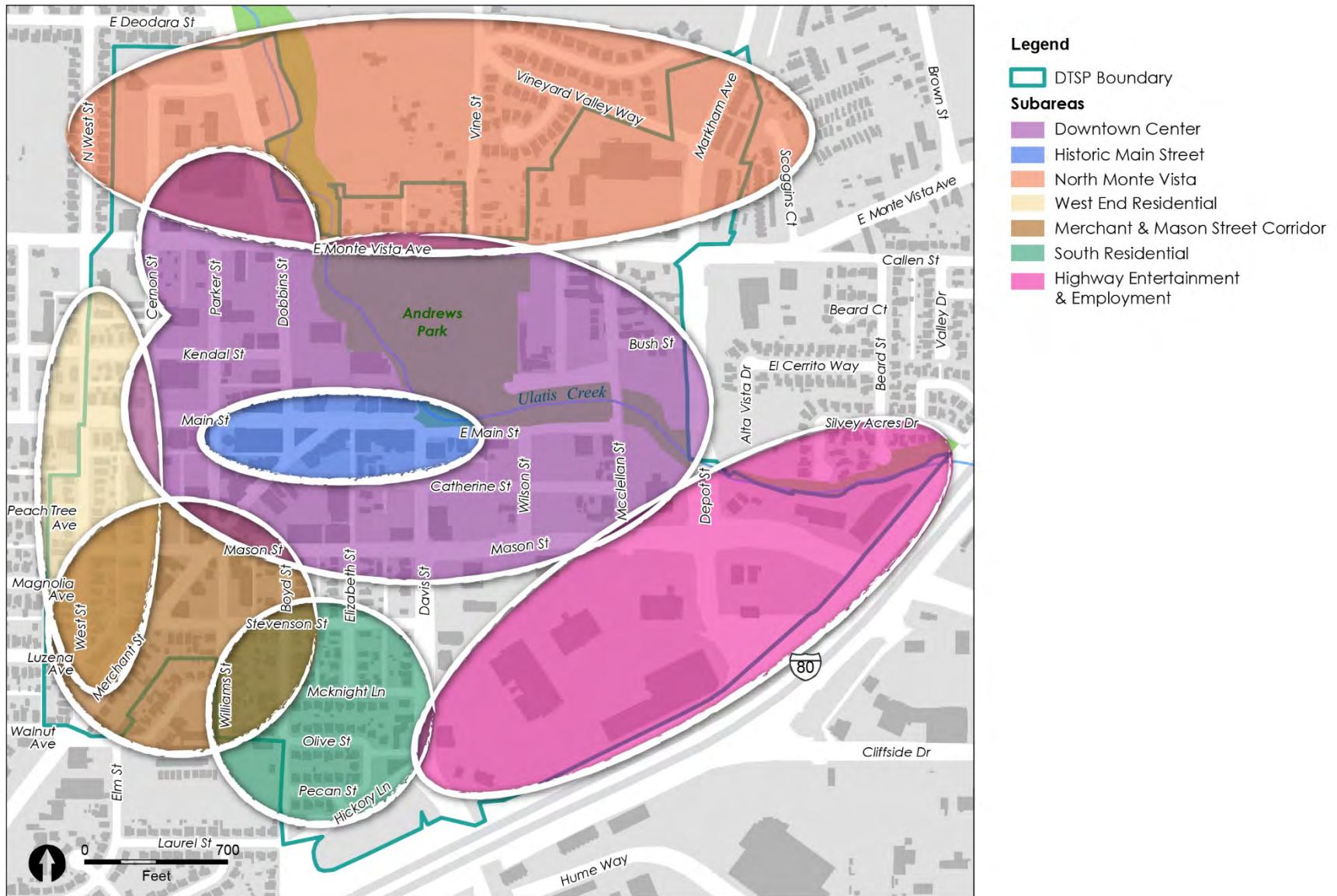


Figure 3.5-1: Conceptual Subareas within the Vacaville Downtown Specific Plan Area

3.5.1 Downtown Center

Vision: A vibrant, mixed-use Downtown core with bustling pedestrian-level activity and a broad range of housing opportunities

The Downtown Center not only is the largest subarea, but is also considered the heart of the Plan Area. This subarea is generally bounded by East Monte Vista Avenue to the north, Depot Street to the east, Mason Street to the south, and Cernon Street to the west. Davis Street serves as a significant gateway entry into this subarea from neighborhoods south of the Plan Area and I-80.

Made up of a series of contiguous, larger parcels, the site of the former CVS Pharmacy located north of East Monte Vista Avenue between Cernon Street and Dobbins Street is also considered a part of this subarea, given its potential to yield a greater number of residential units than other Downtown parcels.

The Downtown Center consists of a mixture of land uses, including commercial, office, residential, and public uses, which are woven into the intimate, small-block Downtown grid. The Downtown Transit Plaza, McBride Senior Center, Town Square Library, Andrews Park, Ulatis Creek, and Buckingham Collegiate Charter Academy are some of the notable facilities and features located within the Downtown Center, a subarea well-suited for mixed-use development.



Streetscape along Main Street in Downtown Vacaville (Source: ESA)

3.5.2 Historic Main Street

Vision: A robust corridor that maximizes the advantages of its central location

Historic Main Street, a subarea within the Downtown Center subarea, generally runs along Main Street and the northern tail of Merchant Street that extends diagonally from Mason Street to Main Street. This pedestrian-oriented area is the main destination for much activity in the Plan Area and boasts the most concentrated area of commercial uses. It represents the historic core of Vacaville's Downtown and contains many structures from the town's early history, providing a valuable cultural and aesthetic amenity. The former Theatre DeVille, the former Carnegie Library (now being used as a brewpub), Vacaville Town Square Plaza, Vacaville Heritage Council, and many dining and retail destinations are found within the Historic Main Street subarea. This subarea provides the entry to the CreekWalk trail in Andrews Park from the historic School Street Bridge at Main and Davis Streets.



Main Street sign in front of the mural on the Heritage House Café building in Downtown Vacaville (Source: ESA)

3.5.3 North Monte Vista

Vision: An enhanced mix of supporting residential and commercial development that complements the Downtown Center

Located at the northern portion of the Plan Area is the North Monte Vista subarea. East Monte Vista Avenue, a primary arterial that connects the Plan Area to neighborhoods to the east and west, serves as the southern boundary of this subarea. North Monte Vista is characterized by a mixture of commercial buildings, including the Vista Crossings shopping center off East Monte Vista Avenue and Markham Avenue to the east, financial institutions, government facilities such as the U.S. Post Office, and residential neighborhoods. This subarea provides access to both Andrews Park to the south and the Rocky Hill trailhead to the northeast.

3.5.4 West End Residential

Vision: An enhanced residential neighborhood seamlessly combining a variety of detached and attached homes

The West End Residential subarea is north-south oriented along the western boundary of the Plan Area and generally includes the mid-block south of East Monte Vista Avenue to the north and Luzena Avenue to the south. A small church on the southeast corner of Main Street and West Street is located in this subarea, although residential is the primary use. Larger single-family homes from the early 1900s can be found closer to Buck Avenue in the north, while smaller residences, including multiplex units and apartments with alley access, are farther south on West Street. Residents in this neighborhood have convenient access to the Downtown Transit Plaza to the northeast, within the Downtown Center subarea.



Triplex residential unit on West Street in Downtown Vacaville (Source: ESA)

3.5.5 Merchant & Mason Street Corridor

Vision: An activated gateway area for retail, commerce, and housing opportunities

Located in the southwestern portion of the Plan Area and south of the West End Residential subarea is the Merchant & Mason Street Corridor subarea. This subarea includes a mixture of commercial uses, offices converted from older homes, personal service businesses, and residential uses. For visitors and residents traveling eastbound on I-80, Merchant Street in this neighborhood serves as one of the primary western gateways into the Plan Area, which makes this corridor a targeted zone for mixed-use development, given its prime visibility and accessibility.

3.5.6 South Residential

Vision: A traditional neighborhood with increased mobility options to access Downtown goods and amenities

Southeast of the Merchant & Mason Street Corridor is the South Residential subarea. This subarea is generally bounded by Stevenson Street to the north, Davis Street to the east, Hickory Lane to the south, and William Street to the west. Unlike many other neighborhoods in the Plan Area, the South Residential subarea is almost entirely residential, with some religious institutions scattered through the neighborhood. Increased development of multiplex units will better maximize the use of nearby services and amenities, including the Kairos Public School Vacaville Academy immediately to the southwest (and outside of the Plan Area) and the Vacaville Transportation Center south of Hickory Lane, a park-and-ride bus station that provides mobility to other local and regional destinations.

3.5.7 Highway Entertainment & Employment

Vision: A signature commercial area that draws increased foot traffic to the Downtown Center

Appropriately named as Highway Entertainment & Employment, this subarea boasts approximately one-half mile of highway frontage, with I-80 serving as the neighborhood's southern boundary. I-80 is joined by Davis Street to the west and Mason Street to the north to form this triangle-shaped subarea. Given this subarea's prime highway visibility and accessibility, development here is conducive to larger scale commercial and potential mixed-use development in targeted locations. The Vacaville Regional Transportation Center's park-and-ride lot, the Brenden Theatre, the Vacaville Ice Sports ice skating rink, a hotel, Sutter Health, and other supporting commercial uses are located in this subarea.

Two primary gateways into the Plan Area lie within this subarea: Mason Street, for visitors and residents traveling westbound on I-80; and Davis Street, which connects the Plan Area to existing neighborhoods and development farther south.