

CITY OF SOLEDAD
DOWNTOWN VISION
PROGRAM



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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Downtown Soledad Vision Program (Vision Program) is the first phase in a two-phase project intended to create a comprehensive strategy for revitalizing Downtown Soledad. The Vision Program outlines specific recommendations for strategic infill projects and improvements that capitalize on the significant assets in the area. The Vision Program will inform the second phase of the process - an update of the Downtown Soledad Specific Plan, adopted in 1996.

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

The City of Soledad is located in Monterey County, approximately 25 miles south of Salinas along U.S. Highway 101. Other nearby cities include Gonzales (10 miles), Greenfield (nine miles) and King City (20 miles). The Plan Area encompasses all of Downtown Soledad and is bounded roughly by U.S. Highway 101 to the west, Monterey Street to the east, San Vicente Road to the north, and Nestles Road to the south. The Plan Area comprises nearly 200 total acres. The Plan Area boundaries are extended to the south and east from the 1995 Downtown



Plan Area Boundary Map

- - - Downtown Specific Plan and Vision Program Project Boundary
- - - Existing Specific Plan Boundary



Left: Unoccupied theater building on Kidder Street. **Right:** Example of wide streets in the downtown area (looking west on Main Street at the Monterey Street intersection).

Specific Plan area to incorporate the northern and southern City gateways.

The Vision Program document is organized as follows:

Chapter 2 (Vision Program) provides detailed descriptions and designs illustrating the Vision for Downtown Soledad. The Vision Program is organized into five planning areas - Front Street, Monterey Street, Vosti Park, South Gateway, and the Railroad District.

Chapter 3 (Implementation) outlines key strategies and recommendations to implement the Vision Program through the Downtown Specific Plan update and other City programs.

The Appendices provide background information including the City's location and regional context, demographics, and summaries of previous plans and studies. It also offers a brief history of Downtown Soledad and describes feedback obtained through public outreach.

1.2 CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES, AND CONCEPTS

The document review, site analysis, and community input revealed several core challenges in the downtown as well as a number of notable strengths to build upon. While the downtown has suffered from disinvestment, the block structure, historic character, and availability of attractive opportunity sites hold significant potential to create an active and enjoyable downtown.

1.2.1 PRIMARY CHALLENGES

LIMITED DOWNTOWN AMENITIES AND ATTRACTIONS

There are few options for dining, entertainment, and recreation in the downtown area. Residents must leave the City to shop, attend movies, and find family-friendly activities. The downtown is in need of new businesses as well as regular programming and events to reinforce the downtown as the center of activity and cultural life.



Left: Map showing regional attractions in proximity to Downtown Soledad. **Right:** Example of an historic structure in the downtown (northeast corner of Main Street and Front Street).

COMMERCIAL GROWTH OUTSIDE OF DOWNTOWN

Highway-oriented commercial development has shifted activity away from the downtown area to the southern end of Front Street near Nestles Road. Development in this area is auto-oriented and disconnected from the downtown. Additional highway-oriented development has been proposed for sites on the north and south ends of the City. New commercial space in these areas is likely to further jeopardize the viability of economic growth in the downtown.

LACK OF QUALITY DOWNTOWN PUBLIC OPEN SPACE

The downtown has few spaces for casual gathering and public events. There is a need for a downtown focal point, such as a public plaza, to serve as a “living room” for the City. Existing downtown gathering areas, including landscaped bulb-outs on Front Street corners, are heavily utilized and could be further enhanced with additional street furniture and improvements to existing lighting fixtures.

WIDE STREETS

Most streets in the downtown area have a right-of-way of 80 to 100 feet. Overly wide travel lanes contribute to high vehicle speeds, endangering drivers, bicyclists, and

pedestrians. Wide streets also create a large separation between buildings on facing blocks, resulting in a lack of enclosure. However, the wide right-of-ways provide a number of opportunities for reconfiguration and parking, as discussed in the following section.

1.2.2 KEY OPPORTUNITIES

HISTORIC FABRIC

The downtown project area retains the historic street pattern established by the railroad in the mid 1800s. Streets are laid out in a traditional grid with 400 by 300 foot blocks. Despite the wide streets, the size and pattern of the blocks allow for simple navigation and pedestrian mobility.

There are a number of historic structures located within the project area, including a series of commercial structures on Front Street between Encinal and Kidder Streets. The structures significantly contribute to the downtown character and serve to define the physical and perceived center of the downtown.

EXTRA STREET WIDTH

The City has wide streets and ample parking, including diagonal spaces along a number of downtown streets.



Opportunity Sites Map

■ Opportunity Site
 --- Plan Area Boundary

Additional diagonal parking could be added as needed at minimal expense to the City to accommodate new development and more intense uses. Abundant street parking would allow for significant reductions in on-site parking requirements and eliminate the need for additional surface lots. Wide right-of-ways can also be reconfigured for wider sidewalks, additional trees, and dedicated bicycle lanes.

SITES AVAILABLE FOR INFILL

There are a number of undeveloped and underutilized sites within the downtown area that represent important opportunities for development. Sites could accommodate a wide range of uses including a variety of commercial units, mixed-use buildings, and higher density residential projects. Infill development on these sites will help define the physical form of the downtown and serve as locations for potentially catalytic projects such as a train and bus multi-modal transit station, hotel, movie theater, education center, or family entertainment center.

PROXIMITY TO REGIONAL ATTRACTIONS

The City is central to a number of regional attractions including the Mission, Pinnacles National Monument, Los Coches Adobe, and vineyards and wineries. The City has an opportunity to better leverage these resources by linking the downtown to these attractions. This could be accomplished through signage, art, maps, marketing, and visitor-serving amenities.

1.2.3 KEY CONCEPTS

The following section outlines the key guiding concepts of the Vision Program. Concepts were developed based on noted challenges and opportunities, and input from City residents and stakeholders. The concepts seek to maximize the potential of Downtown Soledad as the center of the community.

1. FOCUS NEW ENTERTAINMENT AND HOSPITALITY USES DOWNTOWN

Concentrate resources on attracting key projects to the downtown area, rather than the highway-oriented commercial area on the south end of the City. Work with



Left: One of the City's vacant lots, an ideal site for a new commercial or residential development to serve as a catalyst for bringing new activity and energy downtown. **Right:** Vosti Park, a central gathering place for Soledad residents.

developers to initiate projects such as a movie theater, hotel, senior housing, and mixed-use projects on vacant and underutilized infill sites.

These types of projects will act as catalysts to spur renewed interest and investment in the downtown. They can be leveraged to attract smaller supporting businesses including restaurants and retail.

Targeted development on the vacant parcels on the west side of Front Street between Encinal and Kidder Streets will add to a sense of place in the downtown core and will create the opportunity to add amenities, such as a public plaza.

Chapter 2 (Vision Program) identifies potential locations for these developments and illustrates building forms and styles appropriate for Downtown Soledad.

2. ENHANCE EXISTING ASSETS

Build upon the City's existing fabric including historic structures and streetscapes. Initiate a program for commercial building facade improvements to restore historic storefronts and improve the aesthetic quality of

newer structures. The revitalized buildings will add character and visual interest to the downtown. Chapter 2 (Vision Program) includes illustrations and example before and after photographs to illustrate the potential impact of an improvement program.

The Front Street streetscape is widely considered to be a strength of the downtown. The improvements have enhanced the physical appeal of the area and serve to slow through traffic, enhancing pedestrian safety. However, taller trees in the medians and along sidewalks would help block the wind and enclose the space. Existing lighting could be modified to be brighter in the evening.

Front Street improvements should be extended north to West Street and south to Oak Street, and along side streets throughout the downtown area. The addition of trees on side streets between Monterey Street and Front Street will make the walk to downtown more appealing for pedestrians.



Left: Vacant parcels west of railroad tracks, across from Downtown Soledad. The parcels are currently owned by Union Pacific Railroad. **Right:** Diagonal parking and decorative street lights along Front Street. Existing conditions of Front Street are a good starting point. The downtown can be greatly improved through minor building and streetscape enhancements.

3. LEVERAGE EXISTING RESOURCES

The City controls key sites including several vacant parcels on the west side of Front Street, a vacant lot adjacent to the museum on Soledad Street and Monterey Street, the City Yard near Vosti Park, and a large parcel at the south gateway to the downtown on Nestles Road. Appropriate development form and type on these sites could not only create great projects, but spur interest in downtown and investment from the private sector. Chapter 2 (Vision Program) includes an illustrative plan showing ideal massing and uses for existing vacant and underutilized properties and sites controlled by the City.

In addition to specific lots, the City controls ample land in the form of wide streets. At very little expense, existing paved street space can be repurposed for parking as greater downtown activity results in increased parking demand. The updated Downtown Specific Plan will include a specific parking program documenting a strategy for leveraging existing street space.

4. CREATE MEMORABLE PLACES

Building design, streetscape treatments, public spaces, and unique elements such as gateway markers and public art should contribute to a unique and memorable downtown experience for both residents and visitors. The Vision Program articulates a number of concepts to create this type of experience. The flower fields proposed on the vacant parcels between U.S. Highway 101 and the railroad tracks will be a differentiating element for downtown users and Highway motorists. The bright lights of the depicted movie theater sign could serve as a downtown landmark. A public plaza and train depot will welcome visitors and clearly mark the center of the City. Properly oriented development, streetscaping, and a pronounced community center will contribute to a significantly improved visitor experience from the southern U.S. Highway 101 interchange. As more of these changes are integrated and constructed over time, the City will take on a distinctive feel and personality, making it a more attractive place to spend time and make a stop for those travelling through the area.

2. VISION PROGRAM

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The Soledad Downtown Vision Program defines the community's vision for the future character and function of the Downtown Specific Plan Area and provides recommendations for a series of coordinated actions by the City and private property owners, business owners, and developers to realize that vision over time. Some recommendations will require many years of sustained effort, while others can be initiated immediately to continue the transformation and improvement of Downtown Soledad.

The Vision Program provides illustrative site plans, perspective illustrations, cross section drawings, precedent photos, and before and after photo-simulations to help the community visualize the nature of the recommended changes. The illustrations and concepts presented in the Vision Program will serve to guide the goals, policies, and standards in the updated Downtown Specific Plan.

The Vision Program was generated based on review and analysis of previous planning studies, existing conditions in the planning area, input received from stakeholder interviews, and conceptual design work and community meetings conducted during a three-day design charrette held at the Small Business Development Center in the heart

of Downtown Soledad. Refer to Appendix D for detailed discussion of the interviews and charrette. Over the course of the charrette, the Consultant Team, made up of land use planners, traffic engineers, and urban designers, met with City Officials, interested stakeholders, and members of the general public to discuss design and land use concepts for the Specific Plan area.

It is important to note that the illustrations and descriptions in this Vision Program describe the envisioned general urban and architectural character of the downtown, which will be the composite result of many small and large public and private improvement projects. The Vision Program does not require that any property owner make any change to his/her property at any specific time, but rather suggests ways in which the value of each property and of the overall downtown can be increased over time through coordinated action.

2.1.1 VISION SUMMARY

The Vision Program for the community is summarized below and discussed in greater detail in the rest of this Section. The Vision Program outlines opportunities for improvement in five downtown areas including Front Street, Monterey Street, Vosti Park, the South Gateway, and the Railroad District.



Conceptual illustrative plan for the Downtown Plan area, showing Monterey Street and Front Street between West and East Streets.

1. Front Street Corridor. Front Street is the historic highway corridor and central business district of Soledad. The purpose of the Downtown Specific Plan is to bring new life to this corridor by introducing commercial and entertainment uses that will draw locals and visitors downtown, balancing the commercial activity in existing and potential future retail centers outside of downtown.

The Vision Program envisions a new movie theater, a small hotel and plaza adjacent to a new passenger rail stop, facade enhancements and restoration of the many historic buildings along Front Street, and an enhanced streetscape with more street trees and improved pedestrian-scale lighting.

2. Monterey Street Area. This area encompasses Monterey Street itself as well as properties fronting the cross-streets for the half-blocks north and south of Monterey. The properties south of Monterey are a mix of residential and commercial in use and character, while Monterey Street and the properties to the north are primarily residential and include a number of homes identified on the City's Historic Resources Inventory. Monterey Street has a wide right-of-way and minimal street trees, which do not reinforce a comfortable neighborhood character. The Vision Program suggests a range of infill development including a new senior housing development on Monterey Street located near the proposed movie theater, and additional street trees and pedestrian improvements for the area.



Conceptual illustrative plan for the Downtown Plan area, showing Monterey Street and Front Street between East Street and Nestles Road.

3. Vosti Park Area. Vosti Park is located at the southeast end of the Specific Plan area. The park is well-used on the weekends and is often served by mobile vendors. The area surrounding the park includes a mix of light industrial (including the City Yard), commercial, and residential uses.

The Vision Program proposes extending the public space of Front Street directly into the park, creating an improved physical and visual connection from the park to the downtown core to enable and encourage pedestrian rather than auto trips from Downtown Soledad to the park. The Vision Program also recommends new residential development to the north of the park and a community center at the southerly terminus of Front Street, to serve as a visible landmark

and provide community members with additional event and recreation space.

4. South Gateway. The South Gateway area is located at the south end of the plan area, on the west side of the railroad tracks near the U.S. Highway 101 interchange. The area contains several vacant parcels as well as highway-oriented commercial and light industrial uses. The area serves as an important entryway from the Highway to Downtown Soledad.

The Vision Program envisions that development in this area will be primarily oriented toward Front Street, with significant street tree plantings and other urban design elements to emphasize the connection to Front Street through the downtown core. While continuing to provide ample automobile amenities, sites would contribute to a sense of place and encourage

The Vision Program was generated based on review and analysis of previous planning studies and of the existing conditions in the planning area, input received from stakeholder interviews, and conceptual design work and community meetings during a three-day design charrette...

travelers to continue travelling along Front Street to the downtown. The Vision Program also suggests improvements to the railroad underpass to enhance aesthetics and pedestrian safety.

5. Railroad District. The Railroad District consists of over 12 acres of vacant land owned by Union Pacific Railroad, located between the railroad tracks and U.S. Highway 101. While the area may attract commercial development interest due to its size, proximity to downtown, and Highway visibility, the location presents severe constraints to pedestrian and vehicle access, and would be difficult to develop in a way that benefits the commercial and civic life of the Front Street corridor. There are several potential traffic connection solutions; however, the options may not be financially feasible for the near term. In addition, the City would be better served to focus on opportunities in the downtown core (i.e. Front Street between Kidder and Benito Street) to generate foot traffic and synergy. If at some point in the future that the downtown core area is highly successful, the Railroad District may present an opportunity to continue downtown development across the rail tracks onto the Railroad District site.

With this in mind, the Vision Program proposes in the near term a visual continuation of the street pattern through rows of planted trees along dirt lanes in keeping with the existing downtown street network. The addition of such delineated streets will form blocks of land that could be developed in the future as an expansion of downtown and, in the interim, could be planted with an attractive and economically viable crop, such as colorful flowers. Flower fields would substantially improve the appearance of Soledad from U.S. Highway 101 and would provide attractive views from Front Street while maintaining views of the Santa Lucia mountain range from the downtown area. Additional mid- and long-term strategies will be explored for this area as the preparation of the Specific Plan advances.



Illustrative view of the proposed movie theater at the corner of Front Street and Encinal.

2.2 FRONT STREET

2.2.1 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 Highway 101 and connects to the neighborhoods to the north and east with a regular pattern of cross streets.

1. 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.

2. 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-



Conceptual illustrative plan for the northerly portion of the Downtown Front Street Corridor. Proposed projects include 1) a new movie theater, 2) a public plaza and train depot, 3) a small hotel or mixed-use commercial development adjacent to the public plaza, and 4) facade improvements to downtown buildings. Additional improvements include redesigned courtyard housing between West and Benito Streets, small commercial buildings and a parking lot across from the courtyard development, larger street trees in the medians, and a variety of new street trees along the side streets.

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.

3. 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.

2.2.2 VISION

Front Street is to be transformed into the 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.

- **Movie Theater.** Work with developers to build a movie theater at the corner of Front and Encinal Street to 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 recommended site to accommodate a multi-screen first-run theater.



Top: Illustrative view of Station Plaza. A gallery frontage on the hotel or mixed-use commercial development provides shade and visual interest. Tall trees and wide awnings on smaller commercial frontages provide additional shade and create a sense of enclosure to enhance the pedestrian environment.

Bottom: Section illustration of Station Plaza and commercial development across the street. A gallery frontage along Front Street in Station Plaza provides shade and a strong architectural character and spatial definition for this key block of Front Street. Tall trees in the central median and deep awnings on the shopfronts across the street reinforce the sense of pedestrian enclosure within the "outdoor room" of Front Street.



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: Existing condition of site for the proposed Station Plaza.

Bottom Right: 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.



Left (before): Existing facade on one of the City's charming historic buildings. **Right** (after): Photosimulation of facade and streetscape enhancements. Improvements include restored shopfronts, simple green awnings, a decorative streetlight element and new street trees.

The City should explore incentives to make the downtown site financially feasible and attractive to developers so that this potential "anchor tenant" does not locate outside the downtown.

- **Hotel/Commercial Development on West Side of Front Street.** Develop a hotel, commercial building, or community-serving use on the west side of Front Street, south of Main Street. The development 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 the Front Street.
- **Station Plaza and Train Depot.** Build a pedestrian-only plaza adjacent to the hotel/commercial development on the west side of Front Street. The plaza 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.
- **Facade and Signage Improvements.** Encourage facade renovations to 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. Signs and awnings should be simplified to 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



Illustrative example of facade enhancements to two of the City's historic buildings, including addition of transom windows, awnings, storefront bulkheads and more figurative and frontlit signage.

with more benches, decorative planting areas, and public art in the "street tree zone" within the sidewalks.

- **Parking Program.** Reduce the commercial and residential parking requirements and allow on-street angled parking to count for required spaces. When parking becomes an issue, paint angled spaces on Monterey Street and the cross streets, as needed.
- **Hartnell Branch.** Encourage Hartnell College to open a branch in Downtown Soledad. The branch could be located within an existing structure or could be established in a new building along Front Street or a downtown side street.
- **Government Center.** Explore the possibility of bringing the Monterey County Superior Court to downtown Soledad and create a government center along Front Street. The government center 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.

- **Infill Development.** Encourage infill development on vacant lots along Front Street and the cross streets to the north of Front. 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. Refer to Chapter 3. Implementation for recommendations regarding economic development.



Conceptual illustrative plan of a portion of the Monterey Street area. Proposed projects include 1) a senior housing development 2) residential or commercial flexible-use spaces and 3) flexible-use buildings in a residential style and scale. Additional improvements include new street trees in a variety of types to provide color and visual interest.

2.3 MONTEREY STREET AREA

2.3.1 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.

1. 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.

2. 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.

3. 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.



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 with a scale and character compatible with the historic homes of the neighborhood.

2.3.2 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.

- **Senior Housing Project.** Work with developers to build a senior housing development at 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 with reduced need for automobile trips.
- **Multi-Family Residential Development.** Encourage medium density infill housing 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.** Plant trees along Monterey Street and the side streets that are tall enough to act as a windbreak and provide sufficient shade for pedestrians. Paso Robles and King City are examples of existing places that demonstrate the value of such trees on almost identical streets. Add visual interest by planting a colorful flowering tree variety on a few of the east/west streets. Consider introducing a lighting scheme that is complementary to lighting on Front Street.
- **Parking Strategy.** Monterey Street and side streets in the Monterey Street Area have wide right-of-ways, typically 80 feet. As downtown parking demand increases over time, some streets can be re-stripped for angled parking on one or both sides – both sides are recommended for parking efficiency and for slowing vehicular traffic to speeds that are safer for pedestrians and bicyclists. Each street should be evaluated for unique obstacles and potential. Back-in angled parking should be considered for increased bicycle safety.



Photosimulation of four phases of development on Soledad Street between Front and Monterey Street. This gradual transformation process can be achieved along many of the east/west streets connecting Monterey and Front Street. Angled parking can be added to the east/west streets over time as parking demand increases.

Existing condition of Soledad Street, with angled parking on one side and minimal street trees.



Phase 1: Parallel parking and street trees on both sides of the street.



Phase 2: Multi-family residential development on the north side of the street, with dwellings entered directly from the street and from small entry courts between the buildings.



Phase 3: Angled parking on both sides of the street.



Illustrative view along the proposed Front Street extension to Vosti Park, with a new community center on the right and a multi-family, live-work or mixed-use building on the left.

2.4 VOSTI PARK

2.4.1 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.

1. 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.

2. 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.

3. 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.

2.4.2 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



Illustrative site plan of the Vosti Park area. Proposed improvements include 1) a new community center, 2) medium and high-density residential developments, 3) park enhancements and new street trees, and 4) block reconfiguration to connect the sidewalk from Front Street to Park Street and allow direct pedestrian access from Front Street to Vosti Park.

buildings, reinforcing its function as a key public gathering space for Downtown Soledad and the entire City.

- **Community Center.** Build a community center at the end of Park Street on the site currently used as a portion of the City Yard. The community center 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.
- **Park Enhancements.** Pursuant to the conceptual Master Plan for Vosti Park, improve the park with 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.
- **Block Reconfiguration.** Reconfigure the blocks between Park and Oak Street into two larger blocks, similar to

the typical downtown area block size. Connect the sidewalk from Front Street to Park Street to 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.

- **New Residential Development.** The light industrial uses on the blocks between Monterey Street, Oak Street, and Park Street should 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.
- **Streetscape Improvements.** Plant trees along the reconfigured sidewalk and all streets in the Vosti Park area. Consider introducing a lighting scheme that is complementary to 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.



Illustrative site plan of the South Gateway area. Proposed improvements include 1) new commercial development oriented toward Front Street, 2) pedestrian improvements to the Front Street underpass, 3) a monument sign or gateway feature, and 4) improvements to the access road to the Railroad District through Santa Elena Mobile Home Park to accommodate any new development.

2.5 SOUTH GATEWAY

2.5.1 EXISTING CONDITIONS

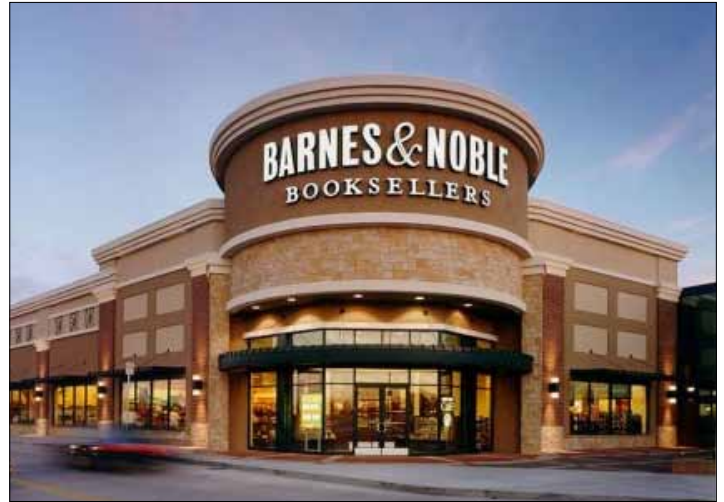
1. Buildings. Buildings in the South Gateway area are typically single-use structures on large parcels. Many buildings in this area have street-side surface parking lots designed to accommodate large vehicles and provide ample spaces for stop-over visitors travelling on U.S. Highway 101. There are several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

2. 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.

2.5.2 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.



Examples of commercial building types suitable for the South Gateway area. Buildings should be oriented towards Front Street with rear parking lots. Buildings can be larger scale than those in the downtown core, but should still fit with the historic architectural styles of nearby buildings in the downtown. Chain commercial buildings like those shown above can be designed with the appropriate scale and frontage type to contribute to the urbanism of the street.

- **Commercial Development.** Commercial businesses such as restaurants and services developed on vacant and underutilized sites should be oriented toward Front Street with parking in the rear. Building architecture should 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.** Streets should be lined with trees and sidewalks should be provided on all streets, and improved and widened wherever possible. Signage, including a monument sign at the northeast corner of Front Street and Nestles Road, should be added to direct visitors to the downtown and nearby attractions. Surface parking lots should be landscaped to minimize visual impacts and should include clear pedestrian walkways connecting visitors to buildings and out to adjacent sidewalks.



Illustrative site plan of the Railroad District. Proposed improvements include 1) continued downtown street and block structure, and 2) colorful flower fields.

2.6 RAILROAD DISTRICT

2.6.1 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.

2.6.2 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.

- **Continued Block Structure.** Continue the downtown block structure by planting rows of trees along unpaved streets in line with the existing streets from San Vicente Road to East Street. Continued streets in the current block structure will 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.
- **Flower Fields.** Plant colorful agricultural crops, such as flowers, in rows on the vacant sites between tree-lined dirt streets. The flowers will create a beautiful and distinctive backdrop for downtown activity and serve as a landmark of the City from U.S. Highway 101.



Example photograph of colorful flower fields.

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.

- **Mid/Long-Term Development.** As the downtown builds out, the City should work with Union Pacific Railroad to gain control of the site and improve access. The existing access road through the Santa Elena Mobile Home Park should be improved to access the site without crossing the railroad tracks. Future development may include flex buildings and visitor-serving commercial uses and a pedestrian connection to Front Street.

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3. IMPLEMENTATION

3.1 IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

This Chapter outlines implementation tools and programs for realizing the Vision Program described in Chapters 1 (Introduction) and 2 (Vision Program). Many implementation strategies will be incorporated into the updated Downtown Soledad Specific Plan (Specific Plan). Realization of the Vision will require long-term focus and a variety of coordinated tactics. Strategies include development regulations and standards, ongoing programs and events, and coordination and outreach to the business and development community.

The Vision Program serves as the foundation for the update of the Downtown Specific Plan. The Specific Plan will provide regulations for downtown development such as building height, siting, parking, and allowed frontages as well as specifications for public spaces including streets, sidewalks, and parks and plazas. The Specific Plan will build upon the existing Community Design Guidelines and Standards to promote high quality design and continuity among properties to establish a downtown character that will raise property values, attract new businesses, and improve economic vitality.

FORM-BASED CODE

The updated Downtown Specific Plan will include a form-based code with unique zoning designations for the downtown area. Form-based codes differ from traditional zoning codes in that they focus on regulation of the physical form of buildings and other land improvements, rather than the use. The code will build upon historic building types and frontages, and establish standards for high quality design and construction.

PARKING PROGRAM

The updated Specific Plan will include a comprehensive parking analysis and will establish a program that prioritizes street parking. The parking program will outline a strategy for angled parking on downtown side streets that allows for a reduction in parking requirements for new development.

CITY-WIDE DEVELOPMENT CODE UPDATE

Update the City-wide code to support the Downtown Specific Plan and ensure cohesive development and implementation. A City-wide code update should include revisions to the subdivision ordinance to establish more traditional block development in new subdivisions. This will contribute to improved connectivity among neighborhoods and to the downtown area.



Left: Photograph of existing mural on the side of a downtown building. Murals can be part of a larger public art program. **Right:** One of the City's many historic structures. These buildings should be seismically retrofitted and preserved.

PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

Well-executed City programs and events can serve to inspire community pride, attract visitors, and boost business exposure. Downtown events such as the annual Christmas parade were noted by stakeholders as one of the best elements of cultural life in downtown. The City, in collaboration with downtown business groups, should develop a calendar of monthly and annual events to regularly attract people downtown. New public spaces such as the train station plaza will increase location options and allow for regular activities.

PUBLIC ART PROGRAM

The downtown has several large-scale murals that enhance visual interest and character. Additional public art such as new murals, sculptures, and fountains would contribute to an active, interesting public realm and reinforce the downtown as the cultural hub of the City. The City could initiate a public benefits program to incentivize the improvements.

SEISMIC RETROFIT PROGRAM

The City's extensive collection of historic structures is at risk of damage in the event of an earthquake. The City should consider establishing a seismic retrofit program to advise

and assist property owners in completing seismic upgrades and bringing structures up to code.

BUILDING IMPROVEMENT LOAN OR GRANT PROGRAM

The City should consider re-establishing a loan or grant program to finance improvements to structures in the downtown. The program could leverage and stimulate private investment. The Vision Program provides examples of potential facade improvements.

CODE ENFORCEMENT

As budget allows, the City should consider employing a full or part-time code enforcement officer to respond to complaints and monitor activities in the downtown area. A code enforcement officer can ensure structures and businesses are in compliance with existing regulations, particularly regulations relating to signs and banners. Consistent compliance will help improve downtown aesthetics.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

While the City is focusing on creating a more vibrant downtown with the Vision Program and Specific Plan update, the City should also consider preparing an economic development strategy that builds a strong

foundation for long-term stability and growth for the City as a whole. The economic development strategy should convey a clear and compelling message that reflects local goals and ensures broad support for economic development projects undertaken by the City and its partners. The strategy should leverage local assets and mitigate constraints to create a diverse, resilient industry base that promotes equality of opportunity and sustainable practices.

Based on the City's position in the regional economy, the economic development strategy should focus on serving tourism, agricultural processing, distribution, and services, and providing goods and services to the southern Salinas Valley.

- The City is central to a number of regional attractions including the Mission, Pinnacles National Monument, Los Coches Adobe, and vineyards and wineries. The City would benefit from a coordinated tourism strategy outlining a detailed plan to bring visitors and related businesses to the City. The strategy should address signage, art, maps, marketing, accommodations, and visitor-serving amenities.
- The economic development strategy should include an analysis of potential retail for the City as a whole. The location, type, and size of new retail will greatly impact the potential for downtown revitalization and should be considered carefully. Any new regional shopping centers should have limited small format retail and office space and site plans should emphasize continuity with the existing street pattern, safe and convenient pedestrian and bicycle access, and aesthetics and scale that are in keeping with the City. Smaller format chain retailers could potentially be targeted for locations in the downtown. In addition, a number of regional and national chains may find adequate space in the downtown and serve to draw visitors and residents of nearby cities to Downtown Soledad. As development pressure increases in the Nestles Road area, the City should consider preparing a master

plan to address land use and zoning, circulation, parking, access, signage, and other infrastructure and development issues.

- Soledad is located within the boundaries of the Salinas Valley Enterprise Zone. The Enterprise Zone provides tax incentives to encourage economic activity, such as employee hiring tax credit, a sales tax credit, accelerated expense deductions, a net operating loss carry-forward, and preference points on State contracts. The City should continue to inform existing and potential Soledad businesses of these benefits and document available resources for maximizing program incentives as part of an overall economic development strategy.

Economic development goals should be linked to specific activities with allocated budget and staff for implementation. They should be developed and implemented in collaboration with the business community including the Chamber of Commerce and other business associations. Effective strategies are led by local officials with strong relationships that facilitate communication, support the growth and expansion of local businesses, and create solid relationships with staff members who work on these issues on a daily basis.

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APPENDIX A: HISTORIC CONTEXT

A.1 HISTORIC BACKGROUND

EARLY SETTLEMENT

The earliest known inhabitants of the Soledad area were the Eshenahan tribe, who lived in the valley prior to Spanish settlement. The Nuestra Senora de la Soledad Mission was established in 1791, and Spanish settlement followed. The area that is now Soledad was owned by a Spanish settler named Esteban Munras, whose property was known as San Vicente Rancho.

THE ARRIVAL OF THE RAILROAD

The Southern Pacific Railroad Company began construction of a line from San Francisco to San Diego in 1865. The original route was intended to go east from Gilroy through the Pacheco Pass and Fresno, but proved too expensive and time consuming to construct. In 1869, the route changed to extend south from Gilroy, and the tracks were built to Soledad in August 1873. The City remained the Southern terminus for 13 years while the Southern Pacific completed a line through the San Joaquin Valley. As the southern terminus, Soledad had a turntable and round house, large water tower, coal bin, and freight depot. Figure A.3 shows historic photos of the Union Pacific train depot.

The line was extended from Soledad over the Salinas River, which was a significant barrier at the time, to King

City, Paso Robles, and Templeton in 1886. By 1892, railroad activity had significantly increased in the Salinas Valley, spurring the development of the Salinas Valley Association Grain Warehouse (5,000 tons of storage capacity), a Merchandise and Agriculture Implements building, other warehouse buildings, a small lumber yard, and stock yards in the City. By 1926, the City was host to cattle corals, a large scale lumber yard operation, a wagon shop, train scales, and a Southern Pacific Milling Company and Hay Warehouse Building (now True Value Hardware).

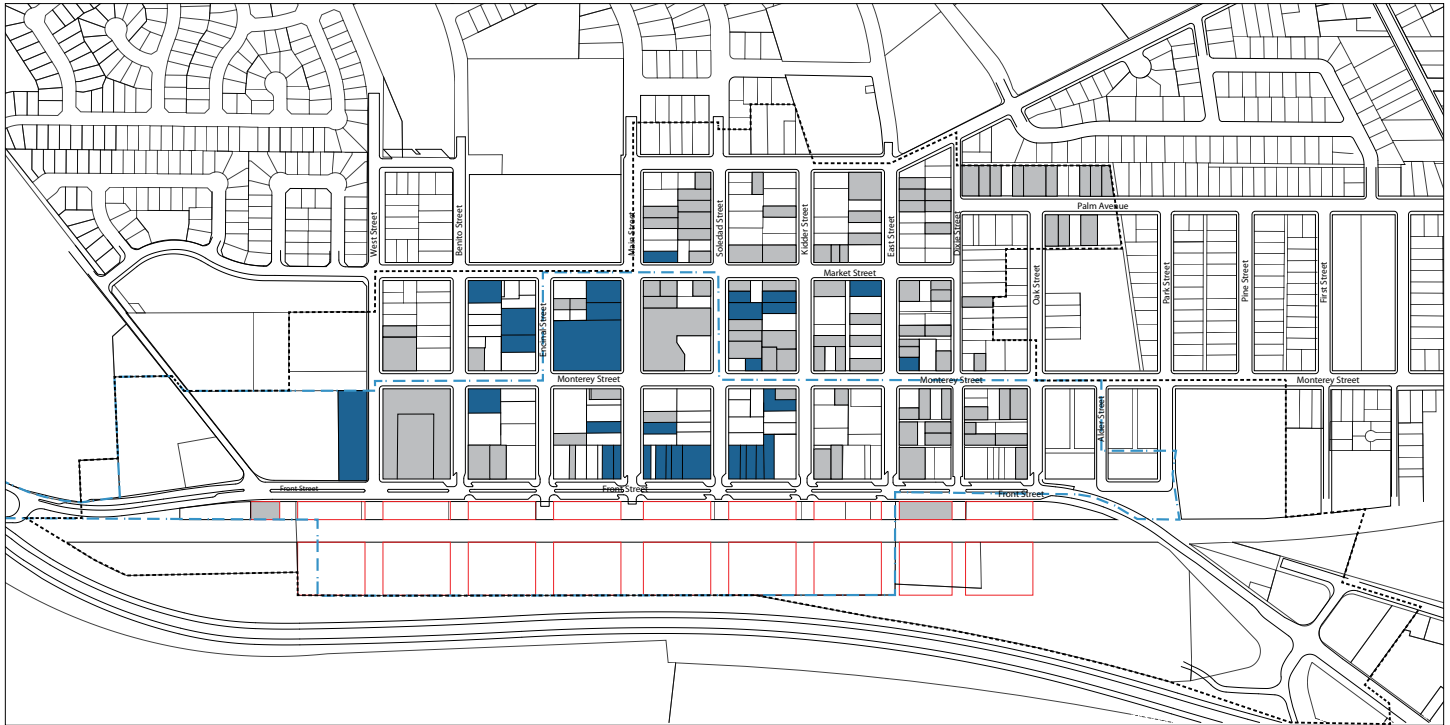
CITY INCORPORATION

As a result of the availability of land and access to rail transportation, Soledad quickly became an agricultural and dairy hub. The growing agricultural industry drew Chinese immigrants to the area, who farmed row crops and sugar beets. Swiss-Italian immigrants established the dairy industry and began shipping monterey jack cheese throughout California. The Swiss-Italian immigrants played a key role in establishing town settlement and governance, and in 1921 the City was incorporated.

POST INCORPORATION

Front Street development occurred during and after incorporation as commercial businesses offering essential goods and services emerged. During this time the row crop and grain industry drew Filipino immigrants and workers from the midwestern United States. The Bracero Program,

Figure A.1 Historically Significant Properties

**Historic Resources Map**

- Historically Significant Properties
- Potentially Historically Significant Properties

Source: Soledad Historical Resources Inventory, 2010

an agricultural and labor program, brought an influx of Mexican immigrants to the City from 1942 to 1964. The City's population grew from 54 residents in 1875 to 4,222 in 1970, and is currently at 15,595, excluding the inmate population.

A.2 HISTORIC RESOURCES

The City completed an Historical Resources Inventory in 2010, which identifies a number of historically significant and potentially significant buildings, structures, and sites, including buildings on the State and national registries of historic places. Figure A.2 shows historic photos of the City. Figure A.1 maps the locations of properties in the downtown area contributing to the City's historic resources, as identified in the Inventory. Figure A.3 shows historic photos of the Soledad Union Pacific train depot.

The City's historic structures include craftsman, 20th century classical revival, storefront vernacular, italianate, victorian gothic, spanish colonial revival, mission revival, and art moderne. Soledad has non-building historic resources as well. These resources include a pump station, water tower, cemetery (1867), horse hitching post (1910), and the Front Street rail bridge (1935).



Figure A.2 Historic Photos of Soledad

Source: City of Soledad



Figure A.3 Historic Photos of the Soledad Union Pacific Train Depot

Source: City of Soledad

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APPENDIX B: DEMOGRAPHICS

B.1 INTRODUCTION

Data tracked over time and compared to surrounding communities can serve as a basis for gaining an understanding of the City and drawing conclusions to guide decisions and plans for the future. This Section includes an analysis of trends in population, households, housing stock, and income.

Information in this Section was gathered from a number of secondary sources including the U.S. Census, Department of Finance, State Board of Equalization, and others.

B.1.1 POPULATION

The City population was estimated at 25,738 as of 2010 (U.S. Census, 2010). Among the total population, 10,143 persons were institutionalized (U.S. Census, 2010), most of whom were inmates at the Correctional Training Facility and Salinas Valley State Prison, leaving a total non-inmate population of 15,595.

The Soledad population has grown significantly over the past 20 years. From 1990 to 2010, the population increased approximately 118 percent (excluding the prison inmate population), with an average annual growth rate of six percent. However, the City's population is estimated to have decreased slightly between 2005 and 2010. As shown

in Table B.1, nearby Greenfield grew at a pace similar to Soledad. King City and Gonzales also experienced rapid growth from 1990 to 2000 but the pace of growth in Gonzales slowed slightly over the past 10 years while growth in King City increased.

In a 2008 Regional Forecast, the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments (AMBAG) predicted continued growth in Soledad and throughout Monterey County through 2035. AMBAG estimated a total population of 33,760 by 2020 and 41,405 by 2035 for the City. Assuming a prison population comparable to the average number of inmates from 1990 to 2010, the adjusted non-prison AMBAG population estimates would be 22,814 by 2020 and 30,459 by 2035. Figure B.1 shows population totals and estimates.

As of 2010, Soledad represented approximately six percent of the population of Monterey County, including the inmate population.

B.1.2 HOUSEHOLD SIZE

According to the U.S. Census, the estimated average household in Soledad contained 4.27 persons as of 2010. This was significantly higher than the Monterey County average of 3.15 but was comparable to the nearby communities of Greenfield (4.71), Gonzales (4.27), and King

Figure B.1 Projected Population*

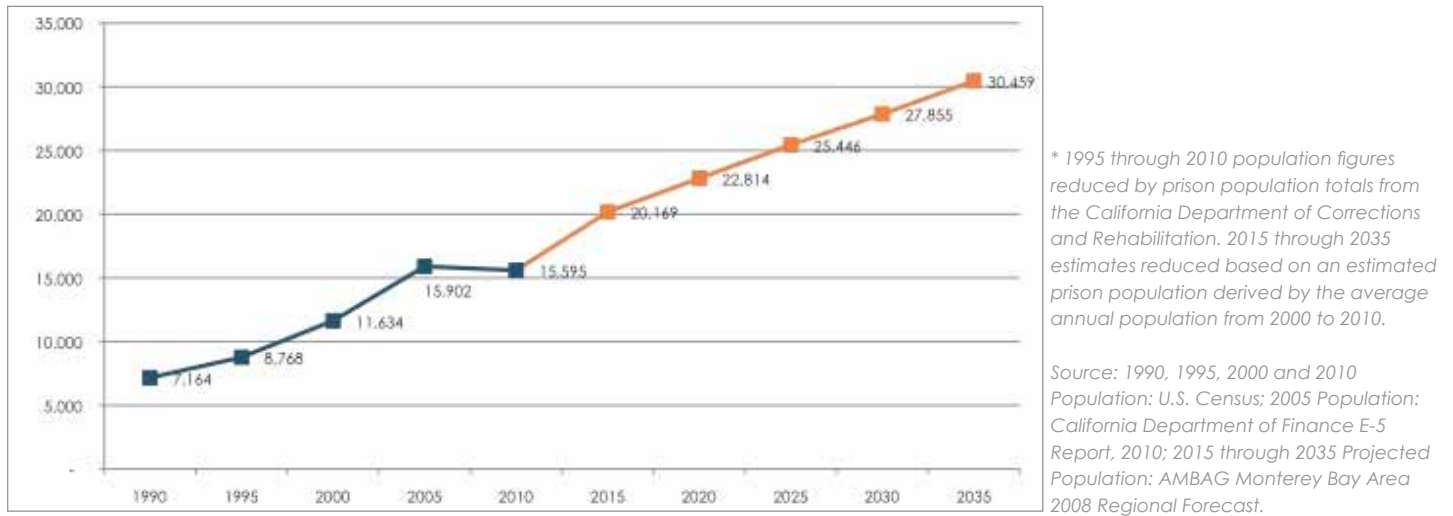


Table B.1 Trends in Population

	1990	2000			2010		
	POPULATION	POPULATION	PERCENT CHANGE	AVG. ANNUAL GROWTH	POPULATION	PERCENT CHANGE	AVG. ANNUAL GROWTH
SOLEDAD	7,164	11,634*	62%	6.2%	15,595*	34%	3.4%
GREENFIELD	7,464	12,648	69%	6.9%	16,330	29%	2.9%
GONZALES	4,660	7,564	62%	6.2%	8,187	8%	0.8%
KING CITY	7,634	11,204	47%	4.7%	12,874	15%	1.5%

* Soledad 2000 and 2010 population number adjusted to reflect only the non-prison population

Source: U.S. Census

City (4.26). The 2010 Soledad household size represents a decrease from 2000, when the average was 4.54 persons per household.

The 2010 Soledad household size was lower among owner-occupied units, with an average of 4.13 persons per household, while the average in renter-occupied units was 4.45.

B.1.3 HOUSING STOCK

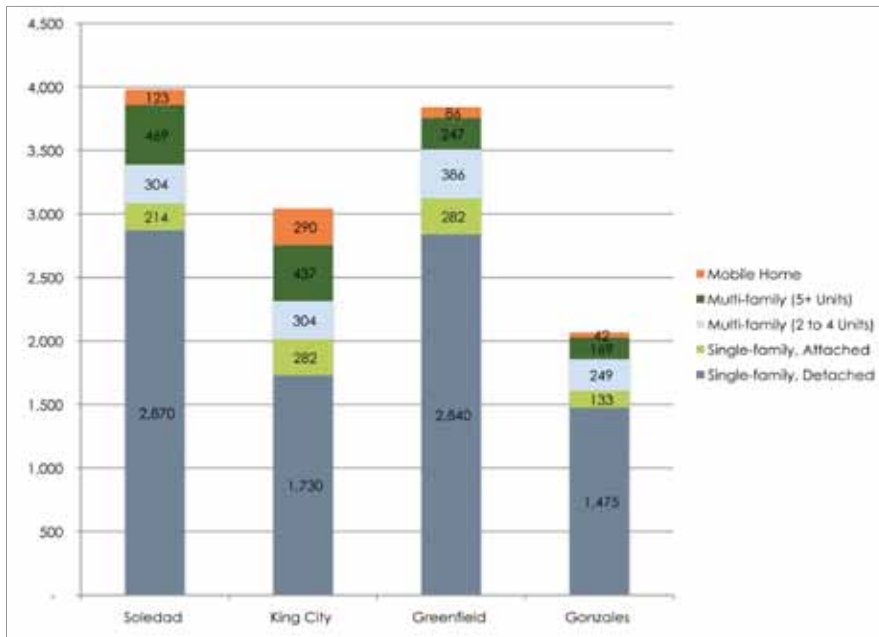
The Soledad housing stock consisted of 3,876 units as of 2010 (U.S. Census). This represents an increase of 53 percent over the period from 2000 to 2010. Refer to Table B.2 for trends in Soledad housing type from 2000 to 2010. Note that the housing type numbers from 2010 reflect estimates from the Department of Finance because detailed housing type

data from the 2010 U.S. Census was not yet available at the time of this report.

According to estimates, the majority of new units constructed were single-family homes, which increased from 1,681 units in 2000 to 2,870 units in 2010, an increase of 71 percent. As of 2010, single-family homes represented approximately 72 percent of the City's housing stock. The percentage was comparable to that of Greenfield and Gonzales, but higher than nearby King City where single-family dwellings represent 57 percent of the housing stock. See Figure B.2 for a comparison of housing units by type in Soledad, King City, Greenfield, and Gonzales.

There was also a significant increase in multi-family units within developments of five or more units in Soledad. Multi-family units increased over 120 percent from 210 units in 2000 to 469 units in 2010.

Figure B.2 Housing Stock by Unit Type



Source: California Department of Finance E-5 Report, 2010

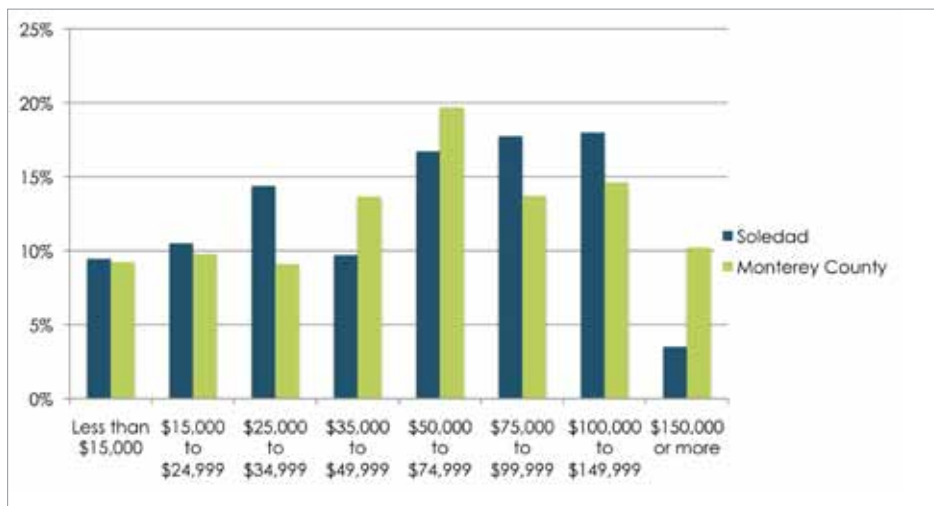
Table B.2 Trends in Housing Type

HOUSING TYPE	2000		2010*		PERCENT CHANGE
	NUMBER	PERCENT	NUMBER	PERCENT	
Single-family, Detached	1,681	66%	2,870	72%	71%
Single-family, Attached	205	8%	214	5%	4%
Multi-family (2 to 4 Units)	315	12%	304	8%	-3%
Multi-family (5+ Units)	210	8%	469	12%	123%
Mobile Home	123	5%	123	3%	0%
Total	2,534	100%	3,980	100%	57%

*2010 number for total housing units differs than the number listed in paragraph one of Subsection B.1.3 (Housing Stock). The housing type numbers shown above are from the California Department of Finance due to the unavailability of detailed 2010 Census data at the time of this report.

Source: California Department of Finance E-5 Report, 2010

Figure B.3 Income Distribution, 2009



Source: U.S. Census American Community Survey, 2009

Table B.3 Trends in Housing Occupancy

	2000		2010	
	NUMBER	PERCENT	NUMBER	PERCENT
Occupied Housing Units	2,472	98%	3,876	95%
Vacant Housing Units	62	2%	3,664	5%
Total	2,534	100%	212	100%

Source: U.S. Census

B.1.4 HOUSING OCCUPANCY AND TENURE

As of 2010, approximately 95 percent of Soledad housing units were occupied. The occupancy rate is slightly down from 2000 when 98 percent of units were occupied. Refer to Table B.3 for occupancy trends in Soledad. The 2010 occupancy rate in Soledad was higher than that of nearby Greenfield and King City which had rates of 92 percent and 93 percent respectively, but slightly less than Greenfield, which had an occupancy rate of 96 percent. Among vacant units in 2010, over half were for rent or for sale.

Among occupied housing units, 57 percent were owner-occupied as of 2010. This represents a decrease from 2000 when 62 percent of occupied units were inhabited by the owner.

B.1.5 INCOME

As of 2009, the City median household income was \$57,132 (U.S. Census, American Community Survey). This was slightly lower than the Monterey County median at \$59,111 and the California median at \$60,422.

Approximately 44 percent of Soledad households had an annual income of less than \$50,000. This is comparable to the total percentage of Monterey County households at 42 percent. Refer to Figure B.3 for a comparison of the income distribution in the City of Soledad and Monterey County.

APPENDIX C: REVIEW OF EXISTING PLANS

C.1 CAL POLY STUDENT PLANS

The City and Regional Planning Department at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo was approached by the City of Soledad Community Development Department in the Summer of 2009 to develop urban design alternatives for downtown Soledad. In Spring 2010, twenty undergraduate students participated in CRP 203 (Urban Design Studio). The studio was a ten week course that mirrored professional planning practices including the collection of background research and existing conditions, the design and execution of public outreach, and the formation of urban design proposals.

The students hosted several public workshops in the City. At the first community workshop on April 14th, 2010, the students used various data collection tools to gather a wide variety of information about the community. In particular, the students learned that residents want the downtown to:

- Have more recreational and youth activities;
- Capture passing traffic on U.S. Highway 101 (maintain the view of the downtown from the highway);
- Provide services for residents in nearby towns;
- Preserve scenic vistas to surrounding mountain ranges;
- Preserve and highlight multicultural aspects of the Salinas Valley; and
- Help retain residents (many people leave Soledad after school and return when they are elderly).

Using data collected from the public outreach process, the students crafted design concepts for downtown, including:

- A paseo behind Front Street that connects proposed plazas and amenities.
- A mid-block street between Monterey and Front Street, which would provide an additional area where commercial buildings could be located. The participants did not want the mid-block street to take away from the business and the use of Front Street; therefore the planning team proposed that it would only be present along the block located between Benito and Encinal. This mid-block street would provide access to a proposed hotel and to the year round
- Farmers Market that the participants strongly wanted.
- A community plaza with facilities for outdoor concerts and events.
- A movie theater and parking on the lot between the railroad tracks and U.S. Highway 101.

C.2 DOWNTOWN SPECIFIC PLAN

The Downtown Specific Plan and Front Street Rehabilitation Plan was adopted in 1996 as an update to the first Downtown Soledad Specific Plan, which was adopted in 1981. The Plan was intended to implement the General Plan and Redevelopment Plan. Primary goals include improving the downtown appearance, replacing and upgrading public infrastructure, making the pedestrian and retail

environment more desirable, preserving and enhancing the character of Front Street, and promoting economic stability.

The Plan provides an overview of existing conditions, analysis and policies regarding land use, circulation, and design, and recommendations for implementation. Design concepts are outlined in a conceptual plan and detailed in guidelines and standards for new development. The Plan envisions improvements in four sub-areas as described below:

NORTH GATEWAY

- The area covers properties along both sides of Front Street north of West Street. Design principles include:
- Renovations to Front Street to provide a more inviting entrance to the City;
- Landscape improvements and screens for the PG&E property;
- Underground utility lines along Front Street; and
- Redevelop the property to the immediate south of the Exxon service station.

STREETSCAPE IMPROVEMENTS

The Plan suggests the following principles to guide streetscape improvements to Front Street:

- Improve streetcapes only within existing rights-of-way whenever possible;
- Accommodate the traffic volumes expected at General Plan buildout;
- Minimize new curb cuts along Front Street; and
- Encourage off-site and rear parking for infill development along Front Street.

THE RAILROAD PROPERTY

The Railroad Property is an approximately eight-acre site located between U.S. Highway 101 and the railroad tracks. Design principles include:

- Plan for the site as an expansion of the Front Street corridor in the long-term;

- New commercial development on the site should complement the existing downtown character; and
- Heavy commercial uses may be appropriate on the site.

THE PASEO

The Plan envisions a paseo in the alleys on the blocks between Encinal and Kidders Streets. The paseo would include public plazas, retail, and restaurants. Design principles include:

- Utilize the parking areas and underutilized parcels at the rear of building facing Front Street to create a paseo that could serve as a downtown attraction; and
- Prioritize pedestrian use over parking and delivery uses in this area.

The Plan utilizes 2005 General Plan land use designations and development standards from the following zones:

- C-1, Retail Central Business
- C-2 General Commercial
- C-R Commercial Residential
- H-C Highway Commercial
- M Industrial
- PF Public Facilities
- R-2 Duplex Residential
- R-3 High Density Multiple Residential

C.3 GENERAL PLAN

The City of Soledad General Plan was updated in 2005 and includes the following elements: Land Use, Economic Development, Housing (updated in 2009), Circulation, Parks and Recreation, Public Services and Facilities, Conservation and Open Space, Safety, and Noise. For each element, the Plan provides a summary of existing conditions, analysis of the impacts of projected growth, and goals, policies, and programs to direct future development and improvements.

The General Plan focuses on accommodating growth estimates through annexation and expansion. See Table C.1 for key anticipated numbers at buildout within the

Table C.1 Build-out Estimates from the 2009 General Plan

BUILD-OUT NUMBERS	
Population	53,500 - 61,000 (excluding prison inmates) (estimated 27,000 by 2020)
Potential dwelling units ¹	9,680 - 11,600
Potential commercial floor area ¹	2,800,000 s.f.
Potential industrial floor area ¹	9,200,000 s.f.
FLOOR AREA RATIOS	
Commercial	0.4
Industrial	0.6
Public/institutional	0.4
Residential, single-family	6 units/acre
Residential, multi-family	20 units/acre

¹ 80% of maximum allowed

Source: City of Soledad General Plan, 2005

General Plan area. Growth areas are designated to accommodate additional housing as well as regional commercial centers.

The General Plan also includes policies for residential and commercial development consistent with Smart Growth. Policies include:

- Designing commercial development to encourage safe and efficient pedestrian circulation;
- Minimizing the visibility of parking areas from public roadways;
- Allowing residential units in conjunction with compatible commercial development;
- Maintaining and expanding the visitor-serving sector by encouraging new motels within walking distance to downtown; and
- Allowing higher density residential development located in areas served by the widest range of urban services.

C.4 COMMUNITY DESIGN GUIDELINES AND STANDARDS

The City of Soledad Community Design Guidelines and Standards were adopted in October 2010 to implement

the goals, policies, and programs of the 2005 General Plan and Redevelopment Agency Implementation Plan. Development standards and design guidelines are intended to maintain the character and enhance the quality of the City's built environment. The Guidelines direct development patterns and architectural styles that are in keeping with a traditional, pedestrian-oriented town centered upon an historic "main street". The Guidelines supplement the standards outlined in the City Zoning Ordinance and are utilized as the primary basis for design review by City Staff, the Architectural Review Committee, the Planning Commission, and the City Council. Chapters of the Guidelines correspond directly to City zoning districts.

Development standards are organized into six sections - community design, community commercial, traditional commercial, single-family detached residential, multi-family residential, and office and industrial. The community design section provides historic precedents and direction regarding neighborhood design, circulation, and open space. Guidelines for each of the other sections include standards for site planning, architecture, and landscaping. The sections describe the intent of the guidelines and provide detailed direction as well as illustrations and examples to clarify expectations and desired outcomes.

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APPENDIX D: COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Community input is an essential building block for an effective plan. The Vision Program was shaped by suggestions and recommendations gathered through individual stakeholder interviews and a three day intensive design charrette in May 2011. The following section summarizes the interview and charrette results.

D.1 STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

The Consultant Team, which included Lisa Wise Consulting, Sargent Town Planning, and transportation planning firm Nelson Nygaard, conducted personal interviews with 25 community members on March 1, 2011. Each interview ranged from 30 to 45 minutes. The interviews were comprised of general, open-ended questions intended to gather specific data as well as invite conversation, enabling the Consultant Team to gather more extensive responses than may have otherwise been captured.

Interviewees included public officials, downtown property owners, and representatives of business organizations. Interviewees were invited to participate based on the recommendations of the Community and Economic Development Department.

The input received from the interviews is organized by: strengths, weaknesses, missing services and amenities, circulation issues, vision, and obstacles. While most of the

comments focus on downtown, some are applicable Citywide or in other areas of the City.

STRENGTHS

The most frequently mentioned strength of Downtown Soledad was the Front Street landscaping improvements, which were mentioned by over half of the interviewees. Respondents noted that the recent streetscape improvements have enhanced the appeal of the downtown. Respondents also mentioned the historic small-town feel, existing businesses, Christmas parade and lights, accessibility and visibility from U.S. Highway 101, and safety as strengths of downtown.

WEAKNESSES

The most commonly mentioned weakness of downtown was the appearance of downtown businesses and buildings. Particular concerns included the color scheme (thought to be drab), unattractive business shopfronts, and the lack of upkeep of the buildings. Interviewees suggested that facades could benefit from historic retrofits, more uniformity, and awnings. Additional weaknesses include lighting, lack of a compelling town center, lack of amenities and attractions, lack of stakeholder coordination, and poor signage.



Figure D.1 Photos of cities mentioned by stakeholders as ideal downtowns. From left to right, Arroyo Grande, San Luis Obispo, and Paso Robles.

MISSING SERVICES AND AMENITIES

Missing services mentioned during the interviews can be grouped into the following categories: restaurants, retail, entertainment and activities, and parks and sports fields. The majority of interviewees expressed an interest in a better variety of restaurants in downtown including the need for a coffee shop, deli, and sports bar. Interviewees noted a wide range of retail desires including big-box chain retail such as Walmart, specialty stores, grocery stores, antique shops, and a book store. Interviewees cited an overall lack of entertainment and activities and specifically noted a desire for a movie theater, performing arts center, and miniature golf course. Several interviewees suggested a need for smaller parks in the downtown area as well as sports fields suitable for tournaments and soccer games.

CIRCULATION ISSUES

Parking was consistently mentioned as a circulation issue during the interviews. Interviewees offered mixed comments regarding diagonal parking. Some felt it was dangerous and others felt it was working well. Some respondents mentioned handicapped spaces and the eventual need for a parking structure. Other circulation issues include conflicted views on stop signs and stoplights, a need for mass transit, and a need for wider sidewalks.

The northern Highway interchange, San Vicente, Metz Street, and the Mission Plaza Shopping Center were streets and intersections in need of attention.

VISION FOR SOLEDAD

Interviewees were specifically asked about their vision for downtown. Their answers were organized into the following categories:

Example cities. Interviewees most frequently named Paso Robles as an example of the type of downtown they would like to see Soledad become. They liked the style and scale of buildings, the location of the civic buildings on the square, and the cohesive work of the downtown association. Other cities included San Luis Obispo, Salinas, Gilroy, Walnut Creek, Arroyo Grande, Sacramento, Messilla (New Mexico), and Solvang (see Figure D.1).

Train stop and station. Many interviewees stated that a train stop and station are an important part of their vision for Soledad. They felt that the train could serve as an important travel link and bring visitors to the City. The station could serve as a hub for train and bus travel.

Wine and agriculture. Wine tours, wine tasting, and local agriculture were thought to be important local assets.



Figure D.2 Photos from the design charrette and City Council/Planning Commission meeting.

Interviewees suggested that businesses centered around wine and agriculture could be beneficial to the downtown area.

Tourism. Interviewees would like to see the City capitalize on tourism by promoting regional attractions including Pinnacles National Monument, the Soledad Mission, Paraiso Hot Springs, and local wineries. Some felt it would be beneficial to establish a theme or angle to better define the downtown. Suggestions included a focus on making Soledad an antiques destination, an information center, wine tasting, creating a Steinbeck “village”, and an emphasis on music.

Cultural venue and events. Several interviewees would like to see more family-oriented events in the downtown. A performing arts center was recommended to bring regular visitors to the downtown.

Improved look, retained historic style. Interviewees suggested retaining the old-town feel but building upon the existing historic look and feel with an updated color palette, fresh details such as awnings, and a more modern look to storefronts.

Increased collaboration and coordination. Interviewees noted that they hope to see improved communication and collaboration between the City, the Chamber of Commerce, merchants, and developers.

Further improvements to the pedestrian realm. While interviewees were pleased with improvements to Front Street, their vision included further improvements to extend along the downtown side streets and better connect the downtown with the rest of the City.

Hartnell College Branch. Several interviewees suggested that locating a branch of Hartnell College in the downtown, particularly in the Lum Building, would be beneficial.

OBSTACLES

Interviewees mentioned a number of obstacles that could hinder implementation of the Vision Plan including a general lack of support and collaboration; conflicting politics and city initiatives; problems with permits, policies, and procedures; excessive parking standards; existing structures and land uses; excessive fees; a lack of public understanding and support; and a generally poor economic environment.



Figure D.3 Design charrette noticing poster, placed outside the Small Business Development Center

D.2 DESIGN CHARRETTE

As part of the planning process, a three-day (May 2, 2011 to May 4, 2011) design charrette was held at the Small Business Development Center in the Lum Building on 749 Front Street to enable the community to direct the long-term visioning process.

The charrette kicked off with a brown bag lunch presentation on Monday regarding urban design and circulation. The studio was held open Monday and Tuesday evenings for the public to view preliminary drawings and discuss ideas and concerns with the Consultant Team.

The Team gave another lunchtime presentation on Tuesday to discuss economic development strategies for downtown. The Consultant Team also had the opportunity to meet with a number of City Staff members during the charrette including the City Manager, Director of Public Works, Fire Chief, as well as the Mayor and several downtown property and business owners.

The charrette culminated in a presentation at a joint Planning Commission and City Council workshop at City Hall on Wednesday. The Consultant Team summarized ideas generated throughout the visioning process and presented a concept for the future of Downtown Soledad (see Chapter 2).

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