





1 VISION, GUIDING PRINCIPLES, AND CONTEXT

Originally settled as an agricultural community in the 1850s, Windsor has transitioned impressively from its rural past, particularly since the town's incorporation in 1992. The community's commitment to smart growth and sustainable development practices is most evident in the creation over the past decade, nearly from scratch, of an authentic Downtown, with a walkable grid of streets and a mix of commercial and residential uses. The Downtown core is centered on a four-acre Town Green, which is surrounded by three-story buildings to the south and west, with retail and commercial space on the ground floors and residential uses above. Town Green special events, including live music and a farmers' market, draw people from afar.







SMART rail service will be provided in the Planning Area in the future, enhancing regional access and complementing pedestrian and bike access and local bus service.

The Downtown Windsor Station of the Sonoma Marin Area Rail Transit (SMART) system is located near the intersection of Windsor Road and Windsor River Road, adjacent to Downtown. In anticipation of the rail service, the Town has already constructed the station, which currently serves as a hub for bus transit connections. The planned SMART service will connect Windsor to other North Bay communities through a 14-stop service running between Cloverdale and Larkspur, with bus and ferry links to San Francisco and the greater Bay Area. SMART service is expected to begin in 2014 between San Rafael and Santa Rosa, with service extending to Windsor in the second phase. A roughly half-mile radius around the station forms the Planning Area for the Station Area/Downtown Specific Plan, and encompasses the Downtown and a multitude of uses—including established single-family neighborhoods, multi-family residential, retail, some office uses, the high school and the Civic Center.

The Station Area/Downtown Specific Plan seeks to establish a cohesive transit-oriented community with links to the town and the region. It sets forth the framework for the next era of Downtown's development with an expanded core—re-orienting it around the Town Green with a "Town Green Loop" strategy—with a broader array of uses and amenities, which will serve as a regional draw. A greatly increased population of residents and workers will enjoy walking access to stores and restaurants, transit, and a redeveloped Civic Center. An enhanced public realm with more parks and open spaces, streetscape improvements, outdoor dining, and community gathering opportunities will enhance livability. Upon adoption, this Plan will supersede the Town of Windsor 1997 Downtown Plan.

The Plan includes guiding principles that provide an overall vision for the area, goals and policies for each topic, as well development standards/zoning regulations and design guidelines for development. It also includes an implementation program, with timelines and responsibilities.

1.1 PLANNING AREA

The Town of Windsor is situated in the central portion of Sonoma County in the heart of wine country, just east of the Russian River and about seven miles north of Santa Rosa. The Town has numerous natural and man-made amenities, including lush vegetation; a mild climate; relatively new development and the popular Town Green in Downtown; transportation access via Highway 101, Old Redwood Highway, Sonoma County Transit bus service, and the planned SMART service; well-maintained housing stock; and several historic buildings. These amenities render Windsor a desirable place to live, work, and visit. The Town's regional context is shown in Figure 1-1.

The Planning Area, shown in Figure 1-2, encompasses approximately 390 acres and includes Windsor Station, the Downtown core, and surroundings; two large approved and pending development projects; several opportunity sites; and community destinations including Windsor High School, Keiser Park, the Town Green, Windsor Creek Elementary School, and the Civic Center. At the center of the Planning Area, the Downtown core and Town Green act as important community anchors. The primary activity streets include McClelland Drive along the Town Green and Windsor Road from Windsor River Road to the Civic Center. The surrounding areas located to the west of the SMART corridor are primarily single-family residential neighborhoods and are not expected to change substantially.

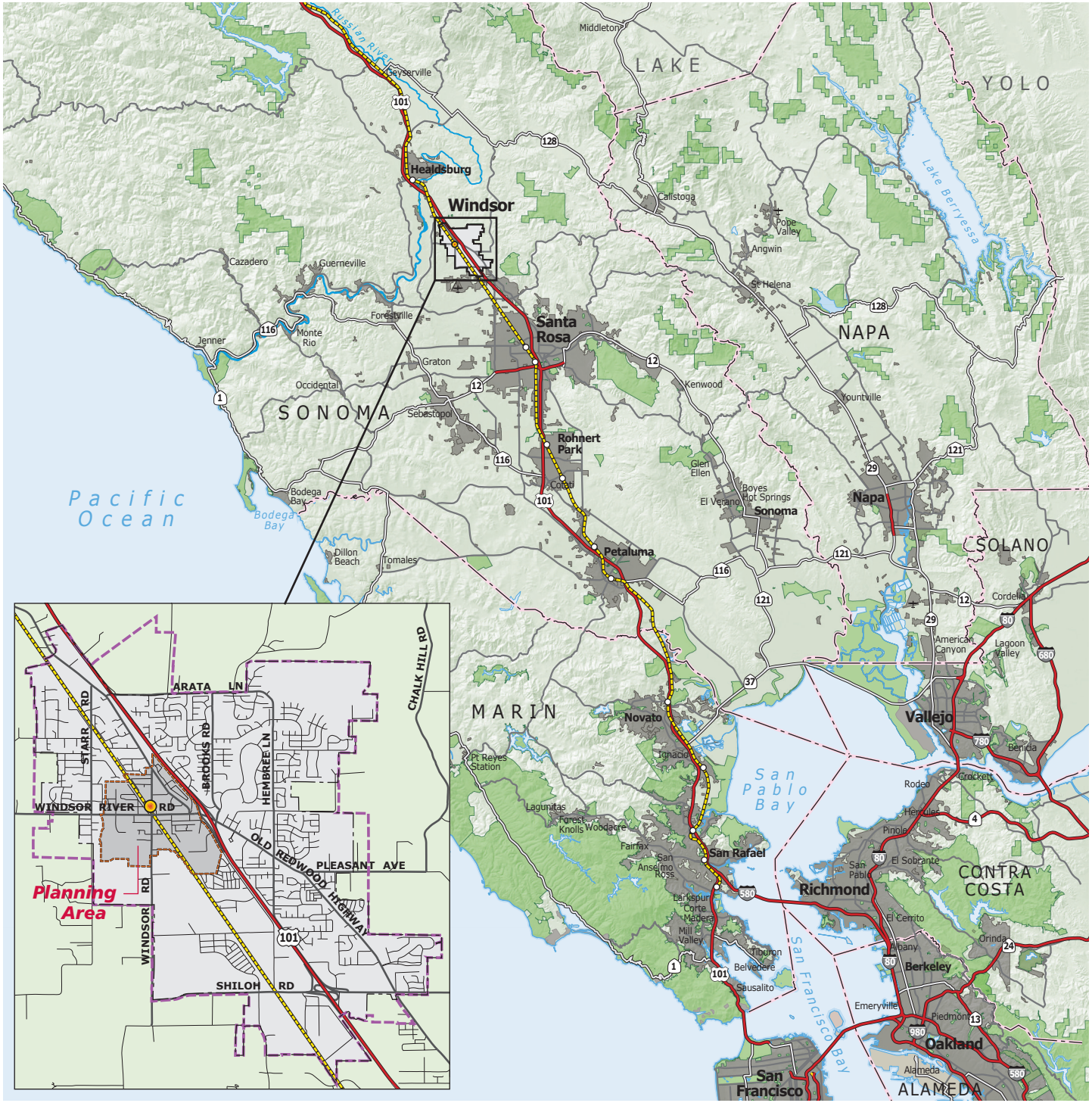






The Plan builds on the existing assets of transit access, a lively Downtown core, and public spaces, including the Town Green and Keiser Park.

Figure 1-1:
Regional Location



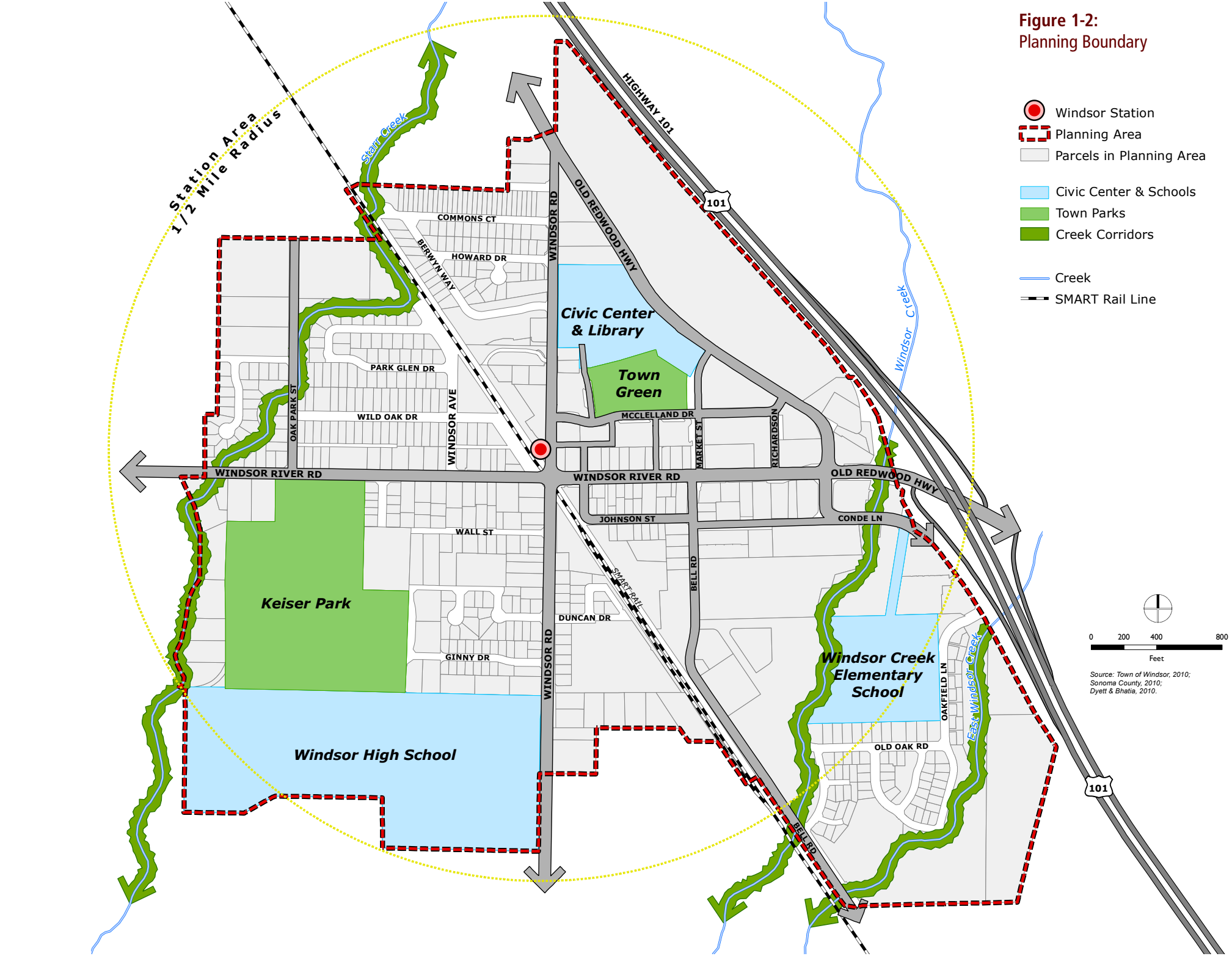


Figure 1-2:
Planning Boundary







The Windsor Station Area/Downtown Specific Plan extends the Downtown core with a "town green loop" strategy, and aims to promote transit oriented development and a vibrant, walkable, and well-connected Downtown.

1.2 OBJECTIVES AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Objectives

The objectives of the Station Area Plan/Downtown Specific Plan, established at the outset of the planning process, are to:

- Establish a land use plan and policy framework to guide future development and redevelopment toward land uses that support transit ridership.
- Improve motorized, non-motorized, and transit connectivity between the Station and existing adjacent commercial and residential areas.
- Develop urban design standards and implementation strategies that promote walkable and livable environments.
- Prepare a comprehensive environmental document (Programmatic EIR) to facilitate subsequent environmental reviews of changes to existing policy/regulatory documents, capital improvement projects, and private development proposals.
- Work collaboratively with the community in establishing a vision for the area, and to educate and inform the public about the specific plan process and transit-oriented development (TOD) concepts.

Guiding Principles

The following Guiding Principles emerged from community outreach—including through workshops and a town-wide survey—and decision-maker input during the early stages of the planning process. Taken together, these ideas establish an overall vision for the Planning Area that is reflected in the policies and implementation measures of this Specific Plan.

1. Enhance the Station Area's identity as Windsor's center, building on successful Downtown revitalization efforts, and ensure long-term economic sustainability by expanding the Downtown commercial core and accommodating a broader array of uses and activities.

2. Foster a unique sense of place that establishes Windsor's identity in the region, by developing the Downtown/Station Area as a mixed-use, pedestrian-scaled, transit-oriented district, centered on the Town Green. Improve pedestrian and bicycle connectivity between key destinations within the Station Area, and to surrounding neighborhoods, including east of Highway 101.

3. Establish a unified image for Downtown and enhance the public realm with consistent streetscapes, improved sidewalks, and greater opportunities for community gathering and outdoor dining.

4. Promote retail diversification by identifying priority retail markets and attracting establishments that meet everyday community shopping needs. Attract an anchor tenant and high traffic establishments, in part by accommodating larger-sized retail establishments that complement the existing mix, while ensuring they are designed to further downtown's pedestrian-scale and ambiance. Consider urban formats of larger chain stores for Downtown.

5. Establish a balance of housing, retail, office, and institutional uses in the Downtown core. Increase the daytime population so that it supports Downtown businesses by expanding opportunities for office uses to locate Downtown; in particular consider more educational uses, such as a Santa Rosa Junior College extension.

6. Encourage design diversity and visual richness by promoting a variety of architectural building styles, including contemporary-styled buildings, while ensuring cohesiveness, and building design that is flexible, in order to accommodate a range of uses and changes over time. Promote compact development patterns through average building heights of three to four stories, while allowing taller buildings in selected locations (if public safety measures are included).

7. Attract more tourism-related establishments to support Downtown's continued development by distinguishing Windsor as an active and kid-friendly destination in the heart of wine country. Promote the establishment of additional accommodations in Downtown by striving to attract at least one hotel Downtown. Highlight Downtown as the center of activity in Windsor, establish permanent activities that create a regional draw in Downtown, and enhance linkages to regional assets such as the Russian River, regional parks, and the Windsor Golf Club. Promote use of SMART weekend service and trails to enhance tourist access.

8. Explore intensification or redevelopment of the Civic Center site with multi-use development that re-defines the Town Green's northern edge with active uses.

9. Continue to promote green leadership in Windsor by maintaining and expanding Downtown as a green and healthy community with sustainable building and landscape design, sustainable water use and irrigation practices, and reduced energy use. Encourage outdoor and active living with more opportunities for healthy choices including walking and biking, readily available access to transit, housing in close proximity to workplaces, and access to parks, play spaces and open space for kids and families to enjoy.

10. Continue to promote more activities and attractions in Downtown, including more restaurants; entertainment venues; art, cultural, and athletic events; and an expanded playground for children. Explore development of a community activity center, and expand on Town Green events, for instance by exploring public/private partnerships.







New development along McClelland Drive, historic development on Windsor River Road, and the Town Green are key components of the Planning Area.

1.3 PLANNING CONTEXT

Existing Land Uses & Opportunities

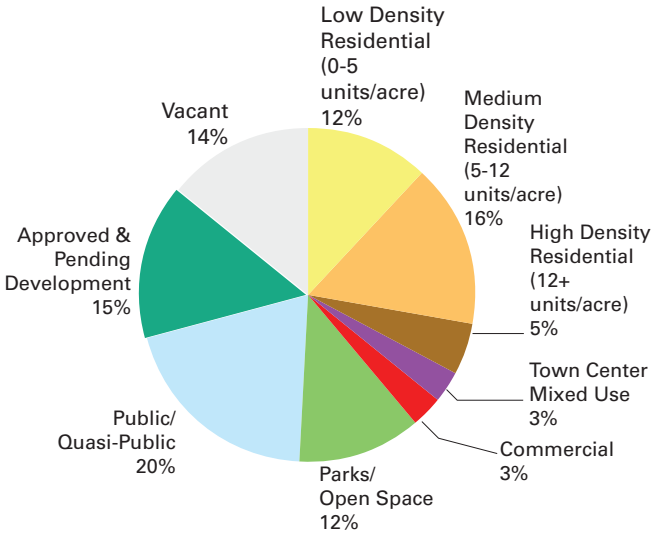
Existing Land Uses

The Planning Area is comprised of a diverse mix of land uses, with the greatest diversity of uses located between the SMART corridor and Highway 101. The majority of retail, restaurants, and office uses are located in the Downtown core and along Windsor River Road, while regional serving commercial uses are located along Highway 101 and Old Redwood Highway. Low- to medium-density residential uses are predominant in the western half of the Planning Area. Two large-scale approved or proposed development sites exist that would redevelop former industrial land and a former mobile home park.

There are 988 residential units existing in the Planning Area, housing an estimated 2,800 residents.[1] The average residential density in the Planning Area is 8.5 dwelling units per acre. The highest residential densities in the Planning Area are achieved in the Town Green Village, which was developed at 16 dwelling units per acre in 2001. Furthermore, this density calculation includes the Town Green; the effective average density on built blocks only is nearly 20 dwelling units per acre in the Town Green Village. In addition, there are just over 100,000 square feet of retail[2] and 40,000 square feet of office space.[3]

Chart 1-1 reflects the relative presence of various land uses in the Planning Area by acres. The pattern of land uses within the Planning Area is shown in Figure 1-3.

CHART 1-1: Existing Land Use by Acreage



1 *Based on average household size and vacancy rates.*

2 *Town of Windsor Station Area/Downtown Specific Plan, Market Demand Study, 2010; 2006 Shopping Center Directory; Individual Shopping Centers' websites; Economic & Planning Systems, Inc.*

3 *Office space is estimated assuming a floor area ratio of 0.25 on the existing 3.7 acres of office uses.*

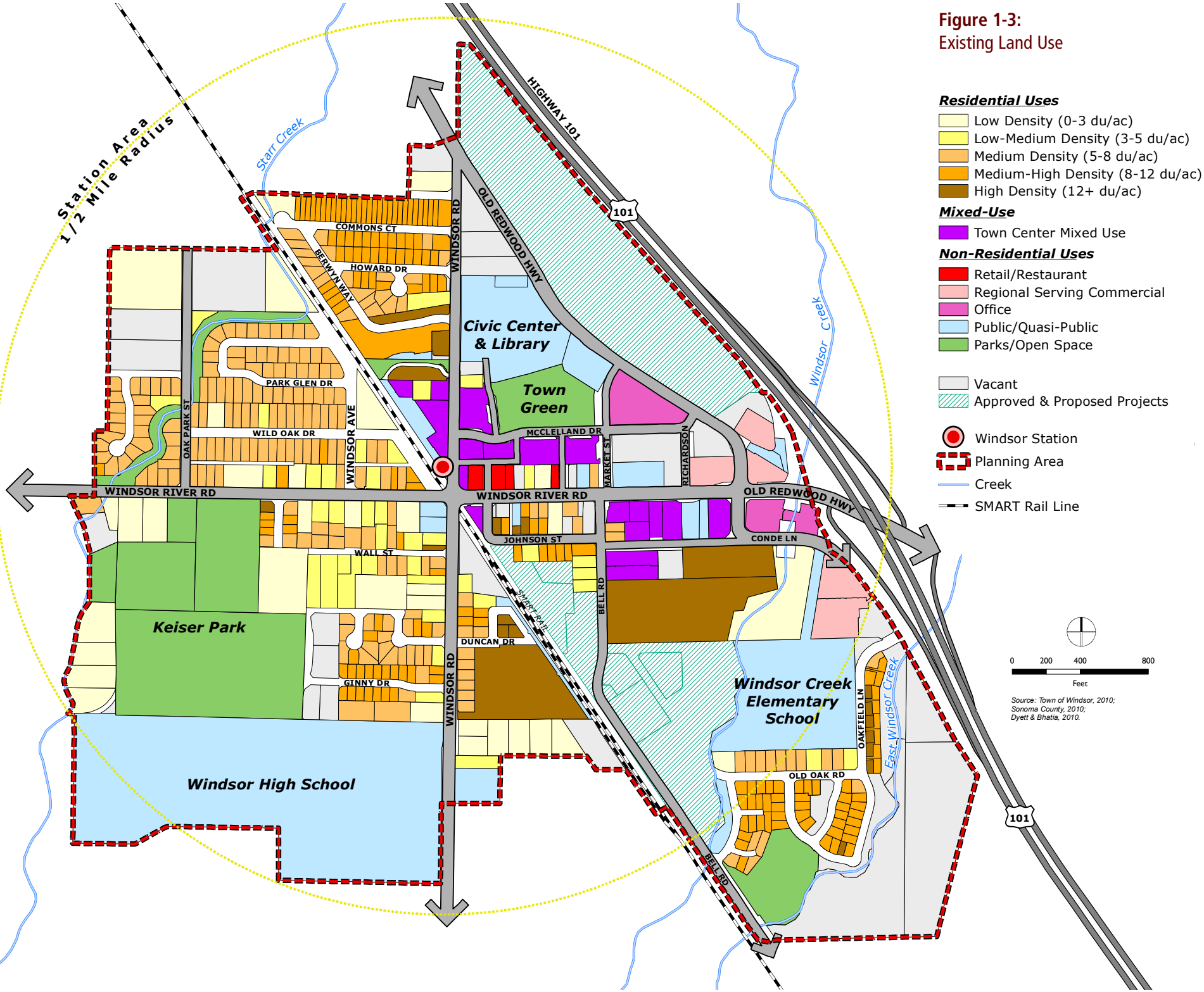


Figure 1-3:
Existing Land Use







Publicly owned land includes several properties owned by the Town of Windsor, including the Civic Center, Town Green, and Windsor Station.

Property Ownership

PUBLIC

There are several significant publicly-owned properties within the Planning Area, as shown in Figure 1-4. The Town of Windsor owns 48 acres within the Planning Area, including the Civic Center, Town Green, and Keiser Park. Other public agencies that own land in the Planning Area include Windsor Unified School District, the Windsor Water District, the Sonoma County Water Agency, and the SMART District.

MAJOR PRIVATE OWNERSHIP

The majority of property in the Planning Area is privately owned, and most property owners own only a single property. There are, however, several major properties in the Planning Area that are either large properties or are contiguous and have the same owner. Together, these owners control 95 acres, or nearly 30 percent of developable land within the Planning Area. Many of these properties provide key opportunities for land consolidation and intensification as the Planning Area develops. Figure 1-4 shows the major private property owners in the Planning Area.

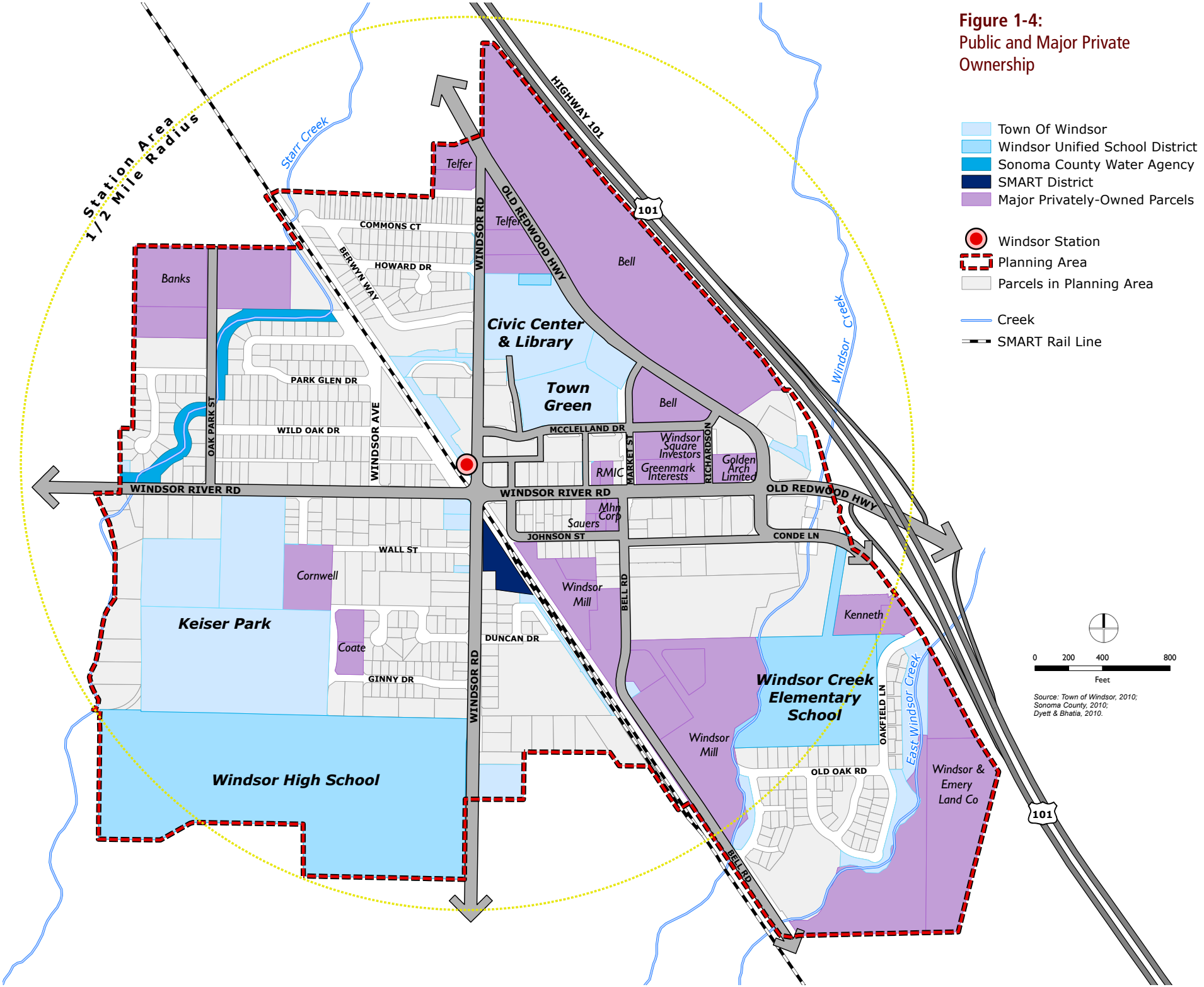


Figure 1-4:
Public and Major Private Ownership







Proposed or approved development sites include Windsor Mill (top) and Bell Village (middle), and a major opportunity site exists at Windsor Road and Old Redwood Highway.

Opportunity Sites

Opportunity sites are identified as those sites that may have potential for land use or intensity change over the long-term (20 years). Sites may currently be vacant or underutilized. In the Planning Area, vacant land accounts for approximately 46 acres. Underutilized land is determined by a combination of qualitative factors and quantitative analysis of development intensity and improvements, such as the relationship between assessed building value to land value.[4] Underutilized sites in the Planning Area total 36 acres, for a total of 80 acres of opportunity sites. These opportunity sites are shown in Figure 1-5.

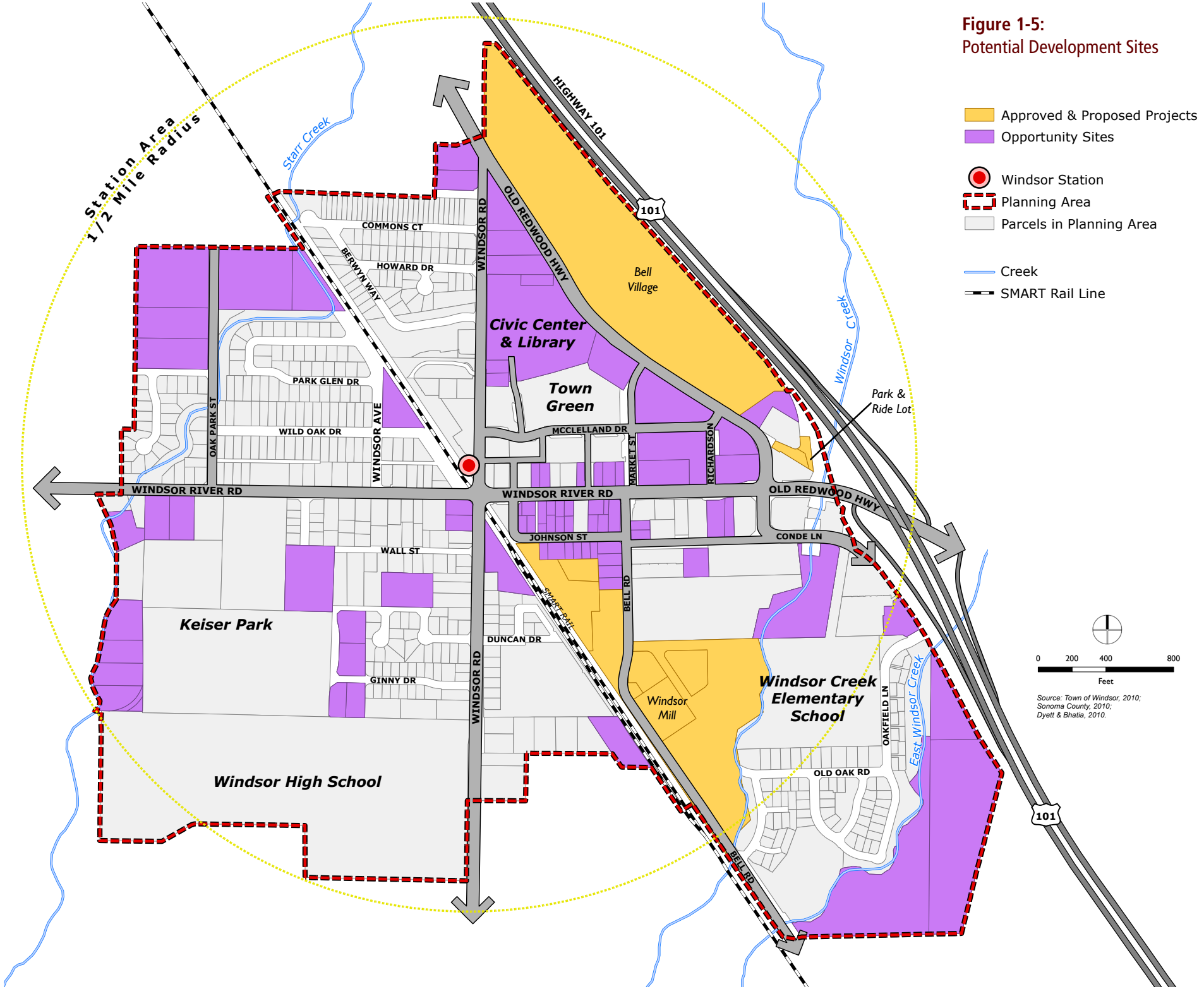
Many of the opportunity sites are larger than an acre in size, and include large sites north of the Civic Center, adjacent to Keiser Park to the west, Starr Creek to the north, and southeast of East Windsor Creek. Opportunities to develop adjacent to the Downtown core include much of the property immediately surrounding the core, including the Civic Center and library (which could be redeveloped, relocated, and/or expanded), the Richardson properties, and multiple smaller properties along Windsor River Road.

4 *Land value analysis considers the ratio of the assessed value of property improvements to the assessed land value. If the ratio is less than one, meaning the land is worth more than the building, the property could be considered underutilized, depending on other factors, such as land use, location, and surrounding development activity.*

Proposed Development

Approved or proposed development within the Planning Area includes primarily residential development (670 residential units), with some commercial components (77,000 square feet). Approved and proposed projects in the Planning Area are shown on Figure 1-5, labeled as Bell Village and Windsor Mill.

Figure 1-5:
Potential Development Sites









The Plan will support the General Plan's goals, in particular by strengthening the Town's identity and promoting a unified and vital community in the heart of Downtown.

1.4 RELATIONSHIP TO EXISTING PLANS

The Station Area/Downtown Specific Plan will supersede the Town of Windsor 1997 Downtown Plan and will supplement the Town of Windsor Design Standards.

Relationship with the General Plan

The Town of Windsor was incorporated in 1992 and adopted its first General Plan—which is still in place—in 1996. The General Plan includes all seven state-required elements (no optional elements), and establishes long-range policies to guide the use of private and public lands within the community's planning boundaries through the horizon year of 2015. This Plan is consistent with the General Plan as it strives to achieve many goals and desires outlined in the General Plan, including:

- Create a strong Town identity;
- Promote a unified, vital community;
- Organize the community in a coherent fashion, marked by high quality buildings, streets, and open spaces;
- Revitalize Old Town as the civic and cultural heart of the Town;
- Preserve agricultural and natural resources; and
- Manage growth and provide necessary community services and facilities concurrent with the needs of future development.

Some of the General Plan policies that will be implemented by this Specific Plan include:

- A.2: Revitalize the Old Town area and reinforce its importance as the community' historic center.
- A.5: Integrate neighborhoods and districts within the larger Town by encouraging an interconnected street network.
- A.9: Encourage pleasant walking environments.
- A.10: Develop appropriate building design and parking strategies.
- C.1: Promote the retention and expansion of existing businesses and the attraction of new businesses that will increase the tax base.
- C.5: Reinforce the Old Town area along Windsor River Road as the civic and cultural heart of Windsor.
- C.6: Concentrate higher intensity/density activities in the Old Town area.
- D.1: Provide an interconnected street network that is accessible and friendly to all modes of travel.
- D.2: Develop guidelines for street design that meet travel demands but also create a safe and pleasant walking environment.

This Plan also modifies existing General Plan designations and Zoning Districts as a means of achieving General Plan goals and implementing General Plan policies enumerated above. The General Plan will ultimately be amended to reflect this Specific Plan.

1.5 PLANNING PROCESS AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The majority of the Planning Area is designated by the Metropolitan Transportation Agency (MTC) and the Association of Bay Area Government (ABAG) as a regional FOCUS Priority Development Area (PDA). This program encourages smart growth principles along routes of regional significance. In May of 2010, with a $300,000 grant from MTC to fund the project, the Town of Windsor initiated the process to develop a Specific Plan for the Windsor Station Area including Downtown. The Specific Plan seeks to advance MTC's TOD Policy, which has a goal of reaching an average of 2,200 units within a half a mile of commuter rail stations, as well as evolve Windsor's PDA from a Suburban Center to a Transit Town Center.

The planning process evolved from visioning to defining implementation measures through a combination of analytics and community input. Each step in the process was designed to allow the planning team to learn from Town residents, business and property owners, decision-makers, and other community members about their needs and values, as well as to allow the public to provide feedback and formulate ideas throughout the planning process.



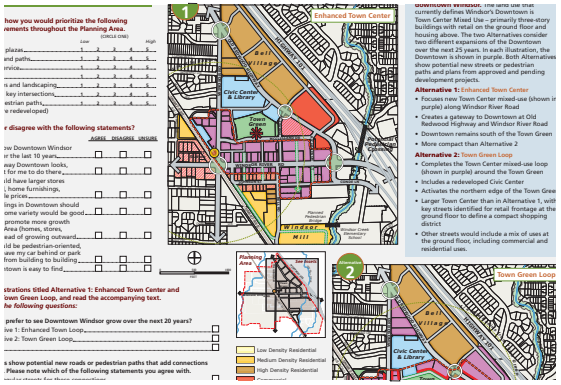




Input from residents, business and property owners, decision-makers, and other community members is an essential component in the development of the Plan.







The first community workshop was held in September 2010. Feedback received at this workshop is incorporated in the Guiding Principles. A community survey was conducted in January 2011.

Stakeholder Meetings

Sixteen stakeholders participated in stakeholder meetings in July 2010 at the Town's Civic Center. The format was open-ended to allow for a wide range of discussion and input. Stakeholders were asked to describe key issues, ideas, or visions they have for the Planning Area.

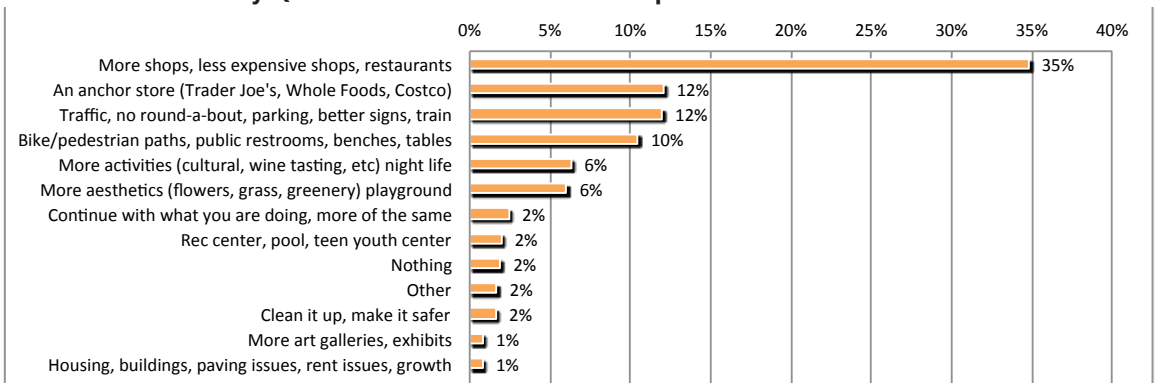
Community Workshop

A community workshop for the Plan was held in September 2010. Community members participated in a visioning exercise and a discussion of key issues in the Planning Area, guided by the overarching topics of character and identity, land use and amenities, and transportation and linkages.

Community Survey

A community survey on the alternatives was conducted in January 2011. The survey contained a summary of the alternatives along with 17 questions, and was mailed to all residential addresses in the town. In total, 806 completed surveys were returned out of 9,453 mailed out, resulting in a response rate of 8.5 percent.

CHART 1-2: Survey Question: What would most improve Downtown Windsor?



This open ended question solicited a variety of responses, with a clear plurality of responses indicating that more shops, less expensive shops, and restaurants would most improve Downtown Windsor.

1.6 RELATED DOCUMENTS

Environmental Review

A programmatic Environmental Impact Report (EIR) is being prepared concurrently with preparation of the Specific Plan, pursuant to the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Policies in the Plan are prepared in response to analysis for the EIR to ensure that the plan minimizes or reduces significant environmental impacts to the extent feasible; in this way the plan is "self-mitigating."

Background Technical Work

Complementing community outreach activities were analyses of site and market conditions. Documents leading to the Specific Plan include:

- Windsor Station Area/Downtown Specific Plan Market Demand Analysis, October 2010.
- Windsor Station Area/Downtown Specific Plan Existing Conditions Report, September 2010.
- Windsor Station Area/Downtown Specific Plan Alternatives Report, December 2010.

In addition to the above, several interim documents were prepared based on the identification of a preferred plan, findings and analysis from which are reflected in this plan.

- Windsor Station Area/Downtown Specific Plan Infrastructure Needs Assessment, April 2011.
- Parking Demand Study Draft Technical Memorandum, March 2011.
- Windsor Station Area/Downtown Specific Plan Draft Urban Design Standards and Guidelines, May 2011.

1.7 PLAN ORGANIZATION

The following chapters of this document present guiding goals and accompanying policies; design standards and guidelines; and recommendations for implementation:

- Chapter 2: Land Use
- Chapter 3: Streetscape, Building Design, and Development Standards
- Chapter 4: Circulation and Access
- Chapter 5: Environmental Resources and Quality
- Chapter 6: Public Facilities, Services, and Infrastructure
- Chapter 7: Implementation

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