2. Existing Conditions

This chapter provides an overview of the existing conditions in the Specific Plan Area at the time of the Plan's drafting, Winter 2003. It documents and describes the physical and structural conditions of the Downtown that have informed the recommendations of the Plan. Should Plan Area conditions change to a degree that the realty upon which the Plan is based no longer applies, the City will need to revise both the strategies and policies contained within the Plan.

Regional Context

The City of Livermore is located 43 miles east of San Francisco in the Tri-Valley area, a geographic and economic sub-region of the Bay Area that includes the cities of Dublin, San Ramon, and Pleasanton. The Tri-Valley is bounded on the west by the Las Trampas/Pleasanton/Sunol ridge system and on the east by the slopes of the Altamont Hills. Livermore occupies 22.5 square miles of the Livermore-Amador Valley surrounded by the hills of these ridge systems (Downtown Context Map on page 2).

The Downtown Specific Plan area lies almost exactly at the geographic center of the City, about 1.5 miles from 1-580. The founders of the City set up its commercial core at the intersection of First Street and Livermore Avenue. The Downtown's high profile location along these two major thoroughfares has served to maintain its role as the identifiable center of the City.

A short distance south of Downtown is the South Livermore Valley. The rural landscape there is distinguished by wineries and vineyards. Downtown's close connection with this countryside has an enduring influence on its character.

History

In 1839, Englishman Robert Livermore and his partner Jose Noriega received a Mexican land grant of 48,000 acres. The property, Rancho Las Positas, encompassed much of present-day Livermore. After California was admitted to the Union, the 1851 California Land Act had the effect of relieving grant recipients of much of their

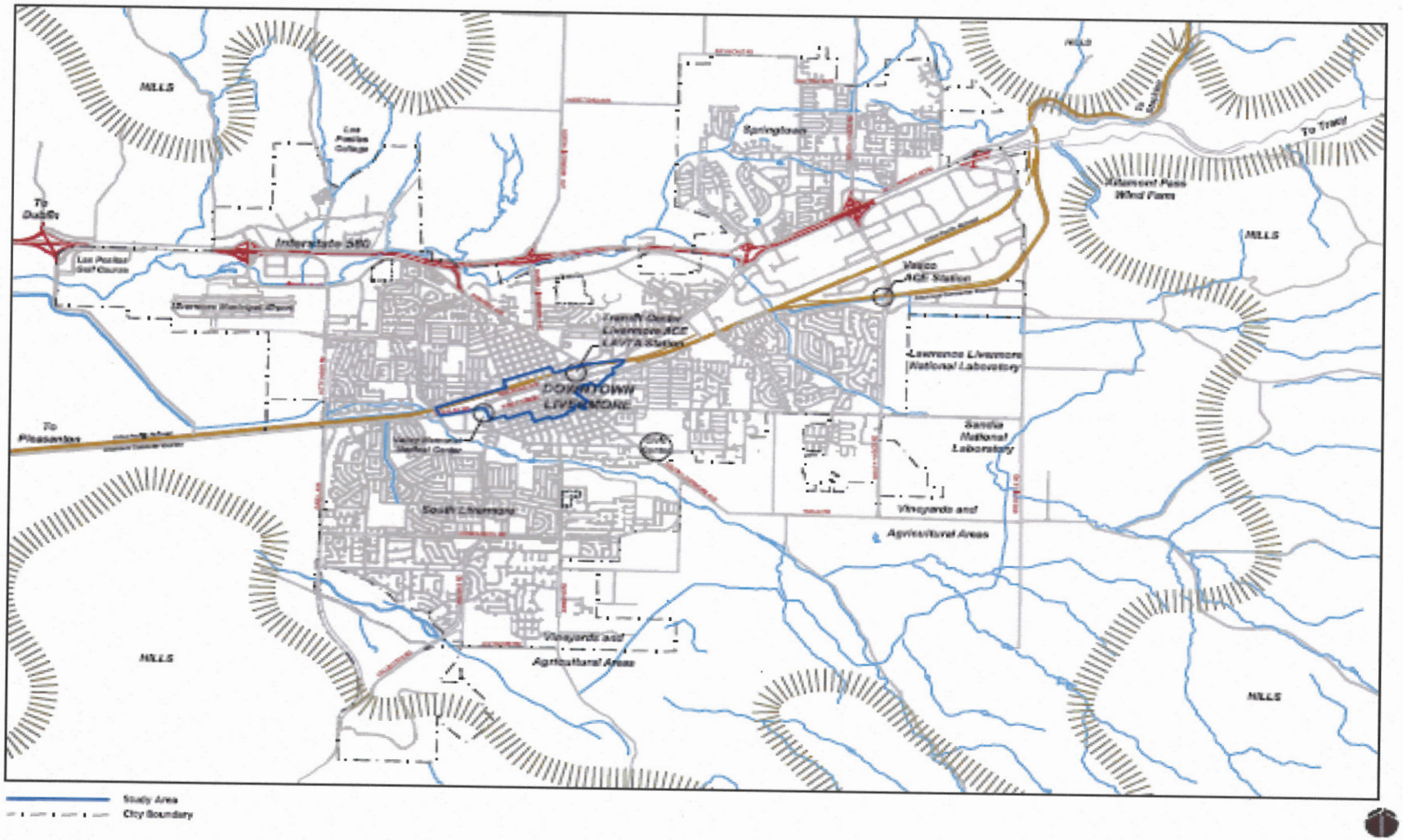

FIGURE 2-1: DOWNTOWN CONTEXT

holdings. Drawn to the area for the land grab, squatters took possession of some portions of Rancho Las Positas. The Central Pacific Railroad acquired a great deal of the rest as it pushed its way through the valley.

The 1849 California Gold Rush brought another round of fortune hunters and adventurers to the state. The influx of people created a demand for beef and the Tri-Valley's early economy focused on cattle raising. The switch to agriculture was made in the mid-1850's after a severe drought left more than half the livestock dead. Grain and hay became major crops for the valley. Viticulture was practiced from the region's beginnings. It began as an interest of Robert Livermore's and has since grown to be a prominent part of Livermore's culture.

Completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1860 made the long trip from back east to California possible in seven days. Impossibly low fares created by railroad price wars and the short travel time lured even more people to the state. Many of the travelers chose to end their journey once they reached the Tri-Valley area.

The City of Livermore was established in 1869 by William Mendenhall, who names the town after his friend Robert Livermore. The original town was laid out between Livermore Avenue to the east, Q Street to the west, Railroad Avenue to the north, and Fifth Street to the south. In its early days, Livermore was primarily an agricultural community; it also became a station stop for the Central Pacific Railroad after Mendenhall donated land for a depot at L Street and Railroad Avenue. Nearby Pleasanton ended up with a train depot as well, but Livermore was the first stop in the Tri-Valley area for trains coming west and the last stop for trains headed east. Livermore quickly became the hub of the Tri-Valley, and developed into a banking and commerce center for the local agricultural economy.

Establishments serving the numerous businessmen coming to the area sprang up around the depot. Land adjacent to the tracks filled with warehouses benefitting from the proximity to the railroad. First Street from Livermore Avenue to L Street was the focus of shops, restaurants, hotels, livery stables, theaters, as well as residences. Civic uses also contributed to the lively scene. Several buildings around the intersection of Livermore Avenue and First Street were used at various times as City Hall before it moved to South Livermore and Pacific Avenues in 1964. Until then, the comings and goings of the community and city staff were part of the town's daily activity. As the town grew, commercial uses extended east across Livermore Avenue to the Mcleod Tract, which became part of the town in 1875. Commercial uses also spilled over to Second Street. First Street, between Maple and L Streets, however, was undeniably Livermore's downtown and center.

In Livermore's early days, the lack of transportation and the need to be near the railroad required building close to the Core, but by the 1930's, the automobile allowed people to live further from the center. The city, like much of the rest of the Tri-Valley, began to expand in a low-density pattern. Many of its original farm fields were replaced with residential, shopping, office, and industrial areas, all served primarily by the automobile.

The establishment of Lawrence Livermore Laboratory and other major research facilities in the 1950's affected the character of the area in other ways. The population quadrupled in the first decade after establishment of the labs. The population increase was not as extreme in succeeding years, but a high level of growth was maintained and supported a continuing demand for housing. The completion of the Interstate freeway system in the 1960's and early 1970's opened unincorporated areas near Livermore to extensive single-family suburban development, and new residents began a mass migration to the periphery of the city.

The labs and other workplaces on the outskirts of town were followed by more facilities, which pulled jobs away from the center. The development of large office parks helped fuel job growth in the Tri-Valley area during the 1980's. With few sites suitable for such development, office and other large-scale commercial uses abandoned Downtown in favor of the large land parcels available along the 1-580 corridor. Shopping centers likewise found their way along major transportation corridors. As the functions of downtown left, so did the elements that had made it vibrant (Activity Centers diagram on page 5).

Community

In 2002, Livermore has an estimated population of 76,000. The 2000 Census shows significant differences between demographics for Livermore and for the state of California. Livermore is a relatively homogeneous community. About 82% of the population is white compared with 49% for the state. Livermore's median age of 35 is higher than the state's average of 33.3 with a markedly higher percentage of people between the ages of 35 - 54 than the rest of the state. Families make up a large proportion of the City's population with a larger percentage of the population in family households than the rest of the state. As of 2002, Livermore's median household income was $75,322 compared with the state's median of $47,493. Thirty-two percent of Livermore's population have completed a bachelor’s degree or higher compared with 27% for the state. These figures give the picture of a community which is on average better educated and more financially comfortable than the rest of the state. Families are started somewhat later in life and the heads of households are somewhat older than average compared to the state as a whole.

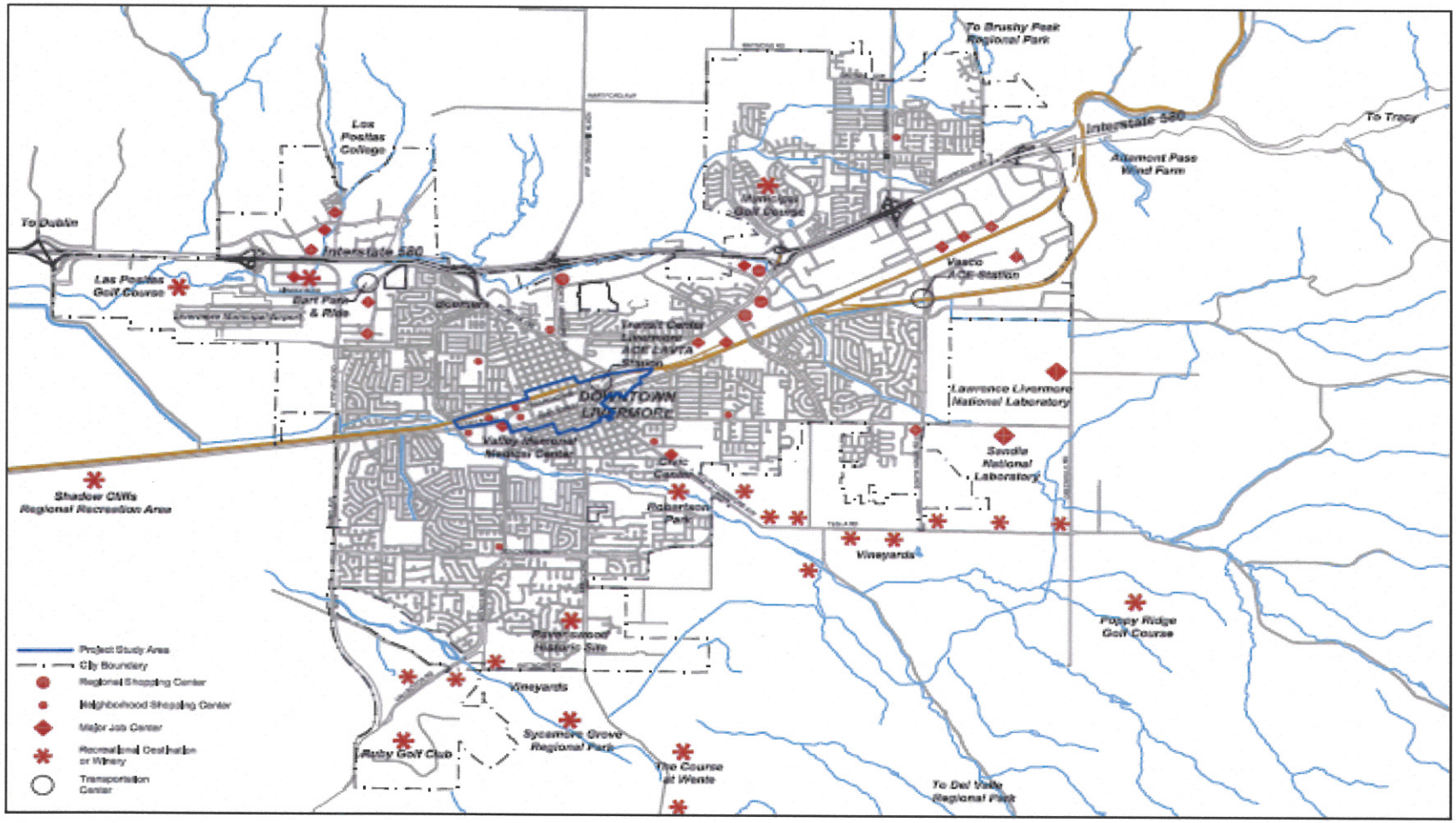

FIGURE 2-2: ACTIVITY CENTERS

City of Livermore

Livermore Downtown Specific Plan

The number of retirement aged people in Livermore increased during the 1990's, although the percentage of people aged 65 and over is still lower in Livermore than in the state. The census also shows a smaller percentage of people between the ages of 18 - 34 in Livermore than statewide. The problem of finding reasonably priced housing for both age ranges may be a factor in the differences. In 2002, the median price of a home was $314,600 compared with $211,500 statewide or $303,100 in Alameda County, and also in 2002, the median monthly rent in Livermore was $1,035 compared with $747 statewide and $852 in Alameda County. Livermore is a difficult place for the young to start out on their own and a difficult place for the elderly to stay unless they already own their home. The demographics suggest a need for affordable housing, particularly for these two groups.

Land Use and Development

The intersection of First Street and South Livermore Avenue is the point of arrival to Downtown. The Masonic Temple, the Schenone Building, and the Bank of Italy are local landmarks that serve to define the intersection and the character of the city. The flagpole in the median marks this spot as Livermore's historic center. However, the great expanse of street widths and their auto-dominated configuration make the intersection difficult for a pedestrian to navigate. The lack of building fabric and the gap between buildings at the northwest corner create a divide between the east and west sides of First Street.

First Street is Downtown's main commercial street. Between South Livermore Avenue and L Street, it is populated with restaurants and retail in a fine-grained collection of old buildings. Many of the structures have been remodeled to the point that almost all of their historic character has been lost. Nonetheless, even extensively remodeled buildings contribute to the Downtown context. Differing heights and widths of the buildings suggest their diverse periods of construction and add visual interest to the streetscape.

A large parking lot sits behind the storefronts on the north side of First Street between South Livermore Avenue and L Street. It is used by the surrounding Downtown businesses, but it is part of the strip center edging Railroad Avenue. The strip center has a large vacancy rate and the entire site is awaiting redevelopment.

There is less cohesive building fabric east of South Livermore Avenue. While some retail between Livermore Avenue and Maple Street fronts onto First Street, it is also placed back behind parking lots. The same is true for First Street west of

L Street. Many of the businesses are automotive sales and services with large parking lost in front. The busy traffic on the wide street and the lack of streetscape improvements discourage walking on the portions of First Street.

The Livermore Valley Center (LVC), a mixed-use development with a local performing arts theater, hotel, multi-screen cinema, and retail, is planned for the triangular site between Livermore Avenue, Maple Street, Railroad Avenue, and First Street.

Second Street between Mcleod and N Streets has a concentration of banks and offices offering financial and medical services. There is also retail and some residential on the street. Separate frontage parking lots for each of the businesses disrupts the continuity of the building wall.

Third Street has a mix of uses similar to Second Street's. It also has more parking lots and none of the streetscape improvements of Second Street. By contrast, the calm refuge of Carnegie Park and its flanking blocks of close-knit buildings contribute a sense of a pleasantly walkable neighborhood for this part of the street.

Railroad Avenue has a mix of auto-and industrial services, bars, and counter-culture type retail. It retains some vestiges of its industrial past, but any nostalgic charm from that earlier period is spoiled by the side street's heavy traffic, unimproved streetscape and large stretches of parking lots. New housing between L and P Streets is oriented inward and does not front the street. A large parcel of vacant land, formerly known as Tubbsville, is located between Railroad Avenue and the railroad tracks at L Street. It is slated for new housing. Two shopping centers on the west end of Railroad Avenue are without anchor tenants and have difficulty in attracting customers. These sites are prone to high vacancy rates and are particularly vulnerable to redevelopment.

Housing, which used to be part of Downtown's mix of uses has moved to its outer edges. There are a handful of dwellings left above retail on First Street in the historic Core as well as a few single-family homes on Second Street in the same area. On Third and Fourth Streets, the neighborhood fabric is mixed with both offices and housing. Single-family homes predominate beyond these streets. Multi-family development has been added to Downtown on Railroad Avenue between Land P Streets, and new housing is planned for east First Street between Inman and Wood Streets.

Only a quarter mile from the heart of the Downtown is the Transit Center. Pedestrian and vehicular linkages to it are not well established, although access is easier by car. The passenger drop-off zone for the Altamont Commuter Express (ACE) is located on the north side of Railroad Avenue as it curves toward First Street. Entry to the Transit Center is further east and may be reached by a circuitous route on foot. The continuing debate regarding Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) leaves unresolved issues of increased transportation options for Downtown.

The land uses and vacancies described above are shown in Existing Development and Vacant and Vulnerable maps, on pages 9 and 10 respectively. Developments which show high vacancy rates or other indications of poor economic performance are viewed as vulnerable to change. Developments which are still relatively healthy but due to changes in surrounding land uses may perform better in another location are viewed as somewhat vulnerable to change.

Pre-Specific Plan Land Use Policy

The Zoning which existed prior to the development and adoption of the Specific Plan was established consistent with the 1984 Urban Design Plan, and element of the City's General Plan. Zoning in existence in the Downtown prior to the adoption of this Specific Plan was developed around Livermore's historic Core and is described as the Downtown Commercial Core (DCC) shown on the Pre-Specific Plan Zoning map on page 11. The bulk of this District was bounded by the Union Pacific railroad tracks to the north, Third Street to the south, Livermore Avenue to the east, and L Street to the west. A small portion of the DCC extended down Livermore Avenue to Fourth Street. It included parcels fronting the east side of I Street to parcels fronting the east side of Livermore Avenue. The District was intended as a specialty retail center focused on First Street. Permitted uses included restaurants, specialty retail, goods and services, and banking on the ground floor. Instructional schools, studios, and offices were permitted on upper stories. Residential uses were conditionally permitted. Building heights were allowed to extend up to fifty feet.

East of the DCC was a Planned Development District (PO). Livermore Valley Center will be on the west portion of this District. A Commercial Service District (CS) was located north of this PD. This CS District was intended for uses which would have supported activities in the Central Business District (CBD), but were of a larger size and scale inappropriate for location in the CBD. CS uses generate relatively low pedestrian traffic and are not desirable for a central business district. Permitted uses were automotive sales and services, commercial entertainment, bars and restaurants, farm equipment, home improvement and contractors, copy and print shops, and hotel/motel. There was no building height limit.

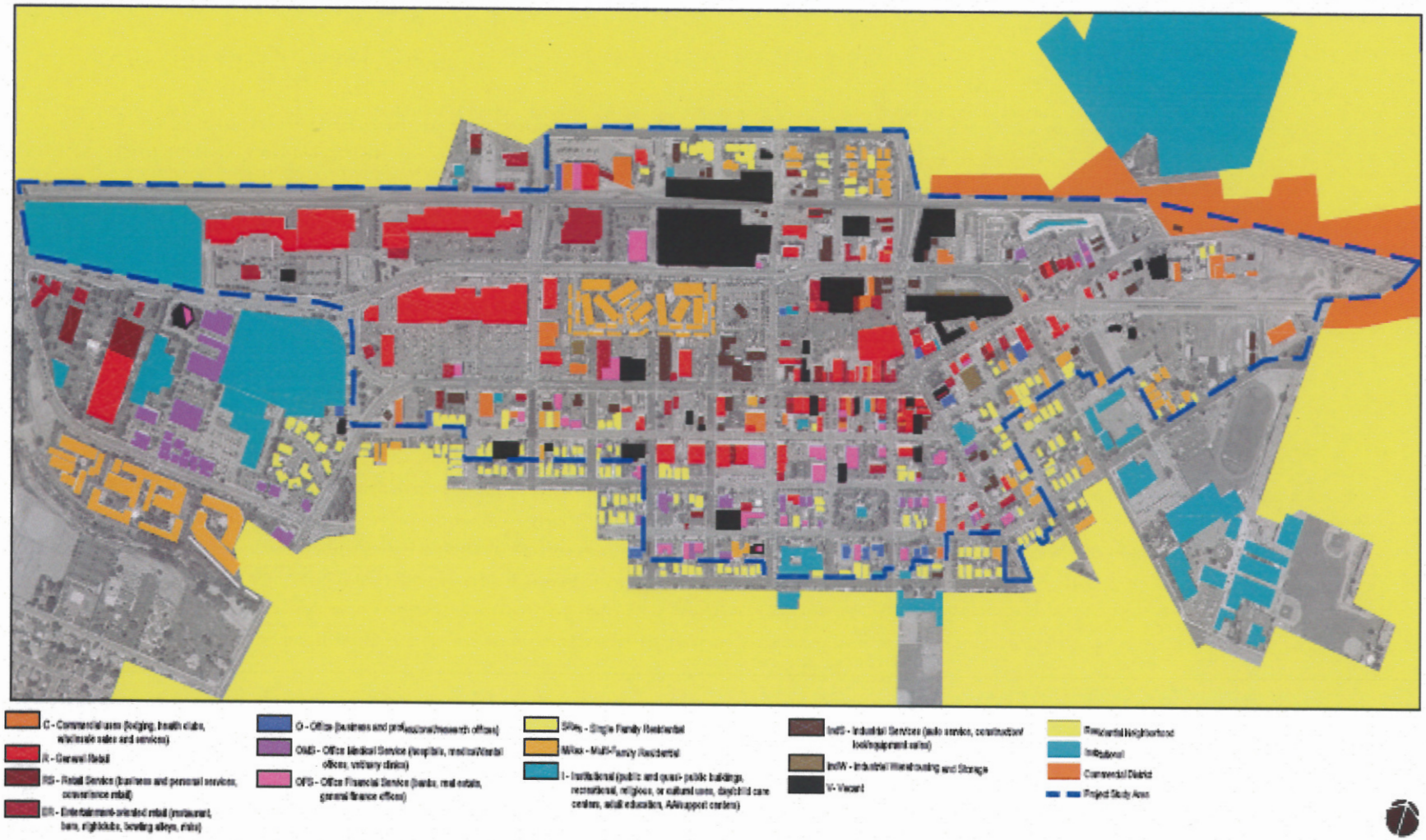

FIGURE 2-3: EXISTING DEVELOPMENT (As of May 2003)

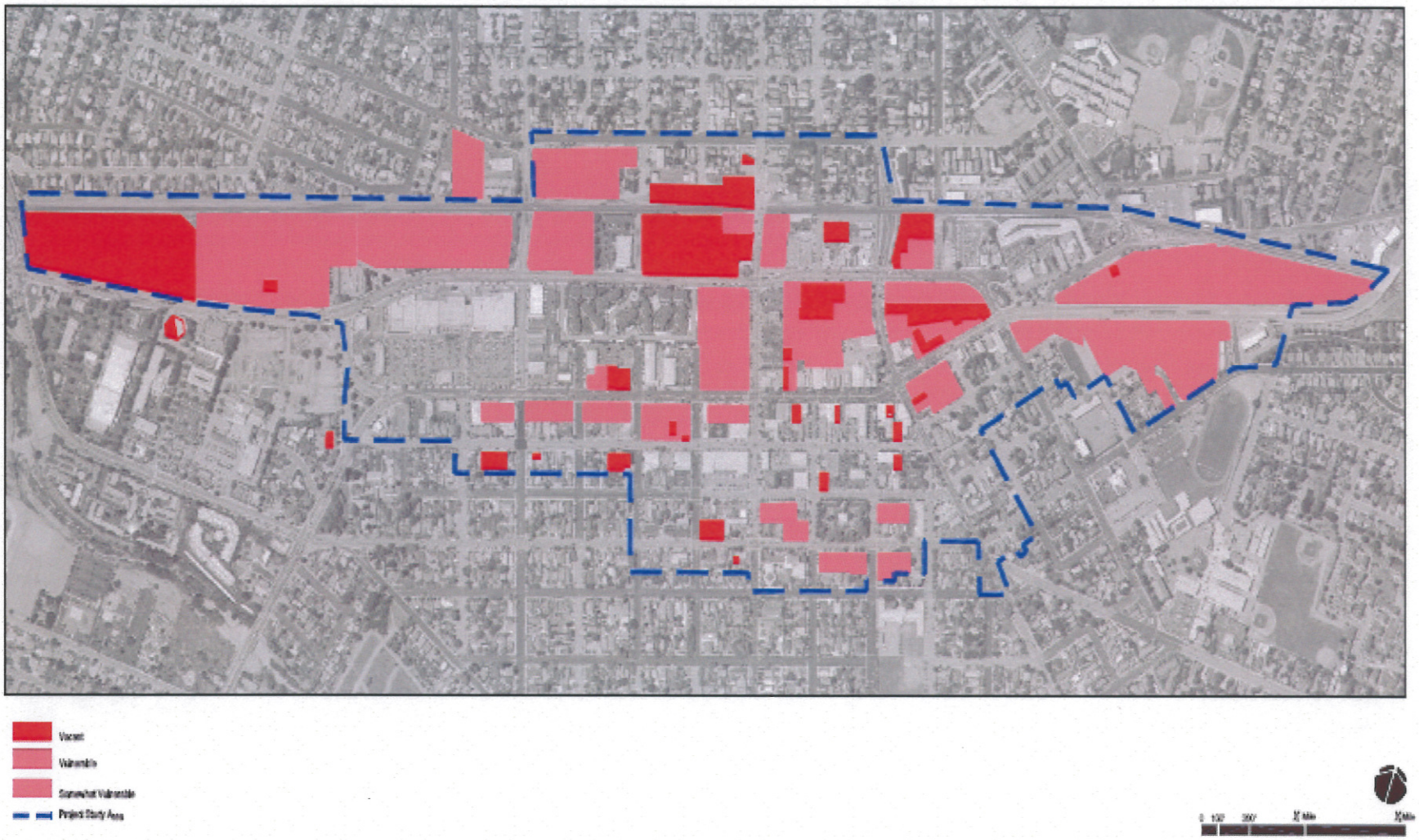

FIGURE 2-4: VACANT AND VULNERABLE SITES (MAY 2003)

City of Livermore

Livermore Downtown Specific Plan

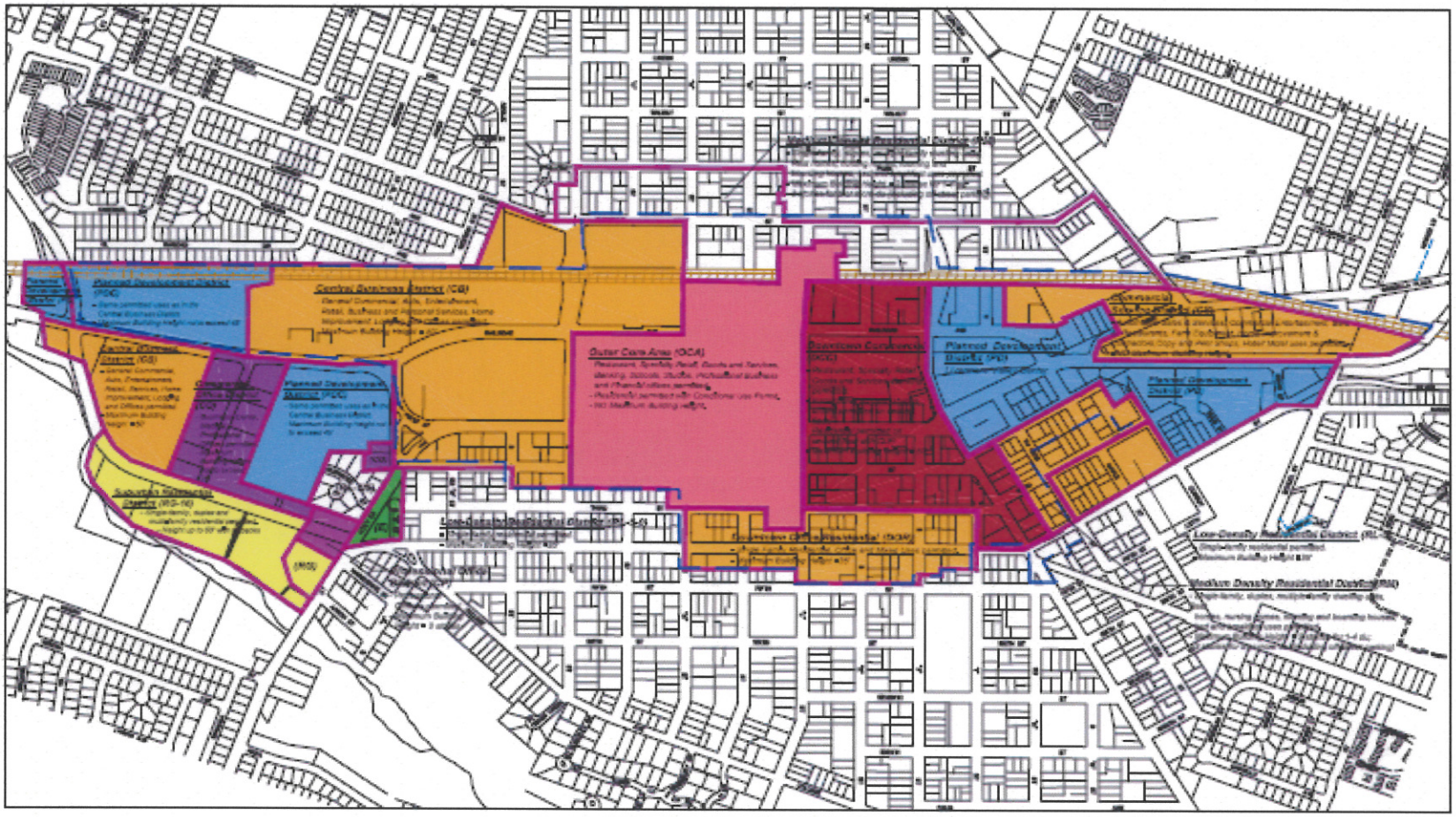

FIGURE 2-5: PRE-SPECIFIC PLAN ZONING (EXISTING 2003)

City of Livermore

Livermore Downtown Specific Plan

The Outer Core Area District (OCA) extended from the railroad tracks south to Third Street, and from L Street on the east to P Street on the west. It was intended as a support district for the DCC, by permitting uses which were not in direct competition with those in the DCC. Permitted uses included restaurants, specialty retail, goods and services, banking, schools, studios, professional business, and financial offices. Residential was permitted with a Conditional Use Permit, and there was no maximum building height in the district.

Bordering the OCA on the west was the Central Business District (CB). The limits of the district were the railroad tracks to the north and Second Street to the south, N Street to the east and Fenton Street to the west. This district was zoned to allow commercial and service uses which would not have been in direct competition with the Downtown Core area. Uses permitted were general commercial, auto, entertainment, retail, business and personal services, home improvement, lodging and offices. Building heights were allowed to extend up to fifty feet.

Buffering the residential neighborhoods south of Third Street was the Downtown Office-Residential District (DOR), and area which permitted the development of single-family residential, office and mixed uses. The intent of the DOR was to preserve the character of this historic residential district while allowing other compatible low intensity uses. The DOR allowed building heights to a maximum of thirty-five feet. Surrounding the greater Downtown area were several low and medium density residential districts (RL and RM) which were primarily single-family areas that also permitted multiple-family dwelling units, as well as compatible uses such as rest homes, nursing homes, rooming and boarding houses, and bed and breakfast uses.

2003 Redevelopment Area

Livermore's 2003 Redevelopment Area coincides with much of the Project Study Area, however, in some locations the boundaries are different. The Redevelopment Area extends further west beyond Murrieta Boulevard to Wall Street; its southwestern boundary generally follows Murrieta Boulevard east to Holmes Street where it coincides again with the Project Study Area boundary. Its northern edge is formed by the Union Pacific Railroad tracks to Olivina Avenue where it coincides with the Project Study Area boundary along Chestnut extending east. The boundaries for the rest of the 2003 Redevelopment Area are the same as for the Project Study Area as shown in the Redevelopment Area diagram on page 14.

The Redevelopment Area was defined in 1982 as part of the Livermore Redevelopment Agency's effort to improve the social, physical, and economic conditions of the Downtown Central Business District. Conditions in the Downtown at that time included a loss of business to suburban retail centers, a high vacancy rate in parts of the Downtown, development parcels created by the railroad realignment through the downtown, and parking problems. In an effort to overcome these obstacles, the City Council adopted the Downtown Redevelopment Plan in July of 1982.The Plan, developed by the City's Redevelopment Agency, is directly related to the development objectives of the Livermore General Plan. After the Redevelopment Plan was adopted, City Staff and the community underwent an extensive process to further define the goals, objectives and strategies that would be necessary to implement the Redevelopment Plan for Downtown Livermore. The resulting document, the Urban Design Plan/Redevelopment Strategy, was adopted in 1986 as an element of the City's General Plan.

Traffic and Circulation Patterns

Interstate 250 is the transportation spine of the Tri-Valley travel corridor. It connects the Bay Area with the Central Valley as shown in the Regional Access diagram on page 15. During the week it carries heavy commuter traffic; it also is a major truck route from distribution centers in the Central Valley to the Bay Area and from the Port of Oakland to the Central Valley. On weekends it carries large numbers of automobiles and recreational vehicles between the Bay Area and Sierra Nevada. Two major streets of Downtown, First Street and Livermore Avenue, connect to the freeway.

First Street is Livermore's primary east-west arterial; however, no east-west arterial traverses the whole width of Livermore. First Street is currently designated as State Route 84, and carries heavy commuter traffic and substantial truck traffic through the City. The City's plan to shift State Route 84 to Isabel Avenue should divert much of this through traffic off of First Street, out of Downtown.

Livermore Avenue is a major north-south arterial, one of the few to cross the railroad tracks and extend the length of Livermore. Traffic flow is good and the road has the capacity to carry more traffic. It forms a major intersection with First Street in Downtown. Additional north-south linkages through Downtown are limited by the railroad tracks. L Street

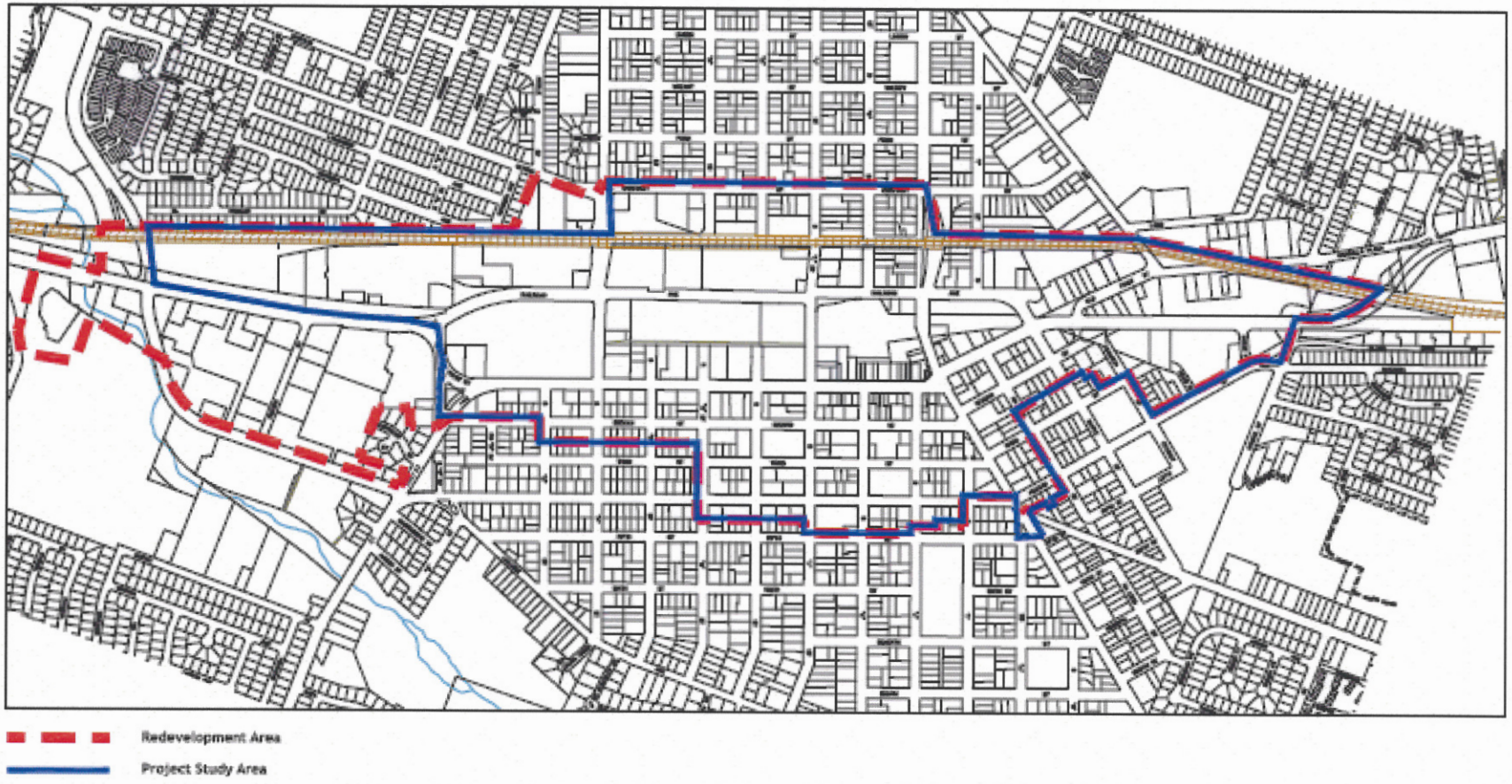

FIGURE 2-6: REDEVELOPMENT AREA

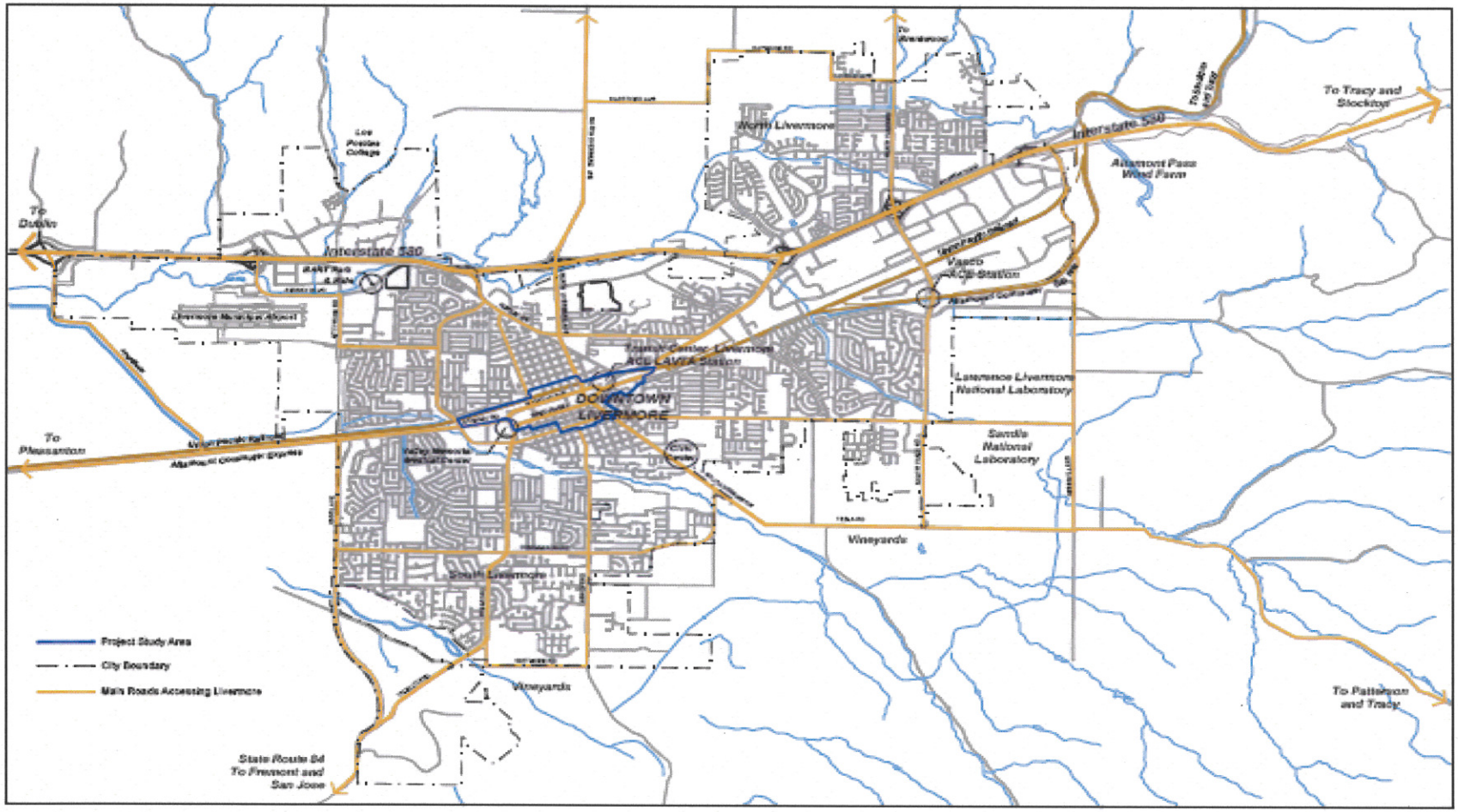

FIGURE 2-7: REGIONAL ACCESS

City of Livermore

Livermore Downtown Specific Plan

crosses the tracks at grade. Murrieta Boulevard, North Livermore Avenue and P Street pass under the tracks. Other north-south streets dead-end at the tracks.P Street is an important pedestrian connection for the residential neighborhoods north of the railroad tracks to the Safeway supermarket on First Street. Other primary connectors through Downtown include Railroad Avenue and Fourth Street. Railroad Avenue, which becomes East Stanley Boulevard at South S Street, connects Livermore with Pleasanton. It is part of the regional network of suburban arterials and carries a high volume of automobile and truck traffic.Fourth Street is a major street lined with a mix of residential, medical and financial services, and public facilities. Both streets are secondary to First Street in terms of traffic flow, but future plans to limit traffic on First Street will mean that significant volumes of traffic will be diverted to both Railroad Avenue and Fourth Street. Mitigations may be necessary to deal with the increased traffic diverted to these streets.

In 1986, council members from Dublin, Pleasanton, and Livermore, along with assistance from the staff of member jurisdictions, convened to develop a single transit system for the three cities. A Joint Powers agency was created and named the Livermore Amador Valley Transit Authority (LAVTA). It directs WHEELS, and inter-city bus system. Livermore has seven bus routes, three of which go to the Dublin/Pleasanton BART station. All seven routes stop at the Livermore Transit Center and make easy connections between routes and with the Altamont Commuter Express (ACE) as shown in the Public Transit and Circulation diagram on page 17.

First Street in Downtown is not served by public transit, but several bus routes operate on nearby streets.

The Altamont Commuter Express (ACE), a regional rail line between San Jose and Stockton, stops in downtown Pleasanton, on Vasco Road in Livermore, and in the Downtown.A shuttle service is available between the ACE stations and major employment centers. Combined with the shuttle service, ACE does provide a commuter alternative to 1-580 travelers to Dublin or Pleasanton.It does not, however, provide a direct route or service to employment centers such as the Hacienda Business Park in Pleasanton. In order to address increasing commuter patterns in the Valley, the Bay Area Rapid Transit District (BART) has been working closely with the Alameda County Congestion Management Agency on the 1-580 Corridor/BART to Livermore Study, and is currently assessing the possibility of extending BART to Livermore, including one alignment along El Charro Road to Stanley Boulevard and through downtown Livermore.

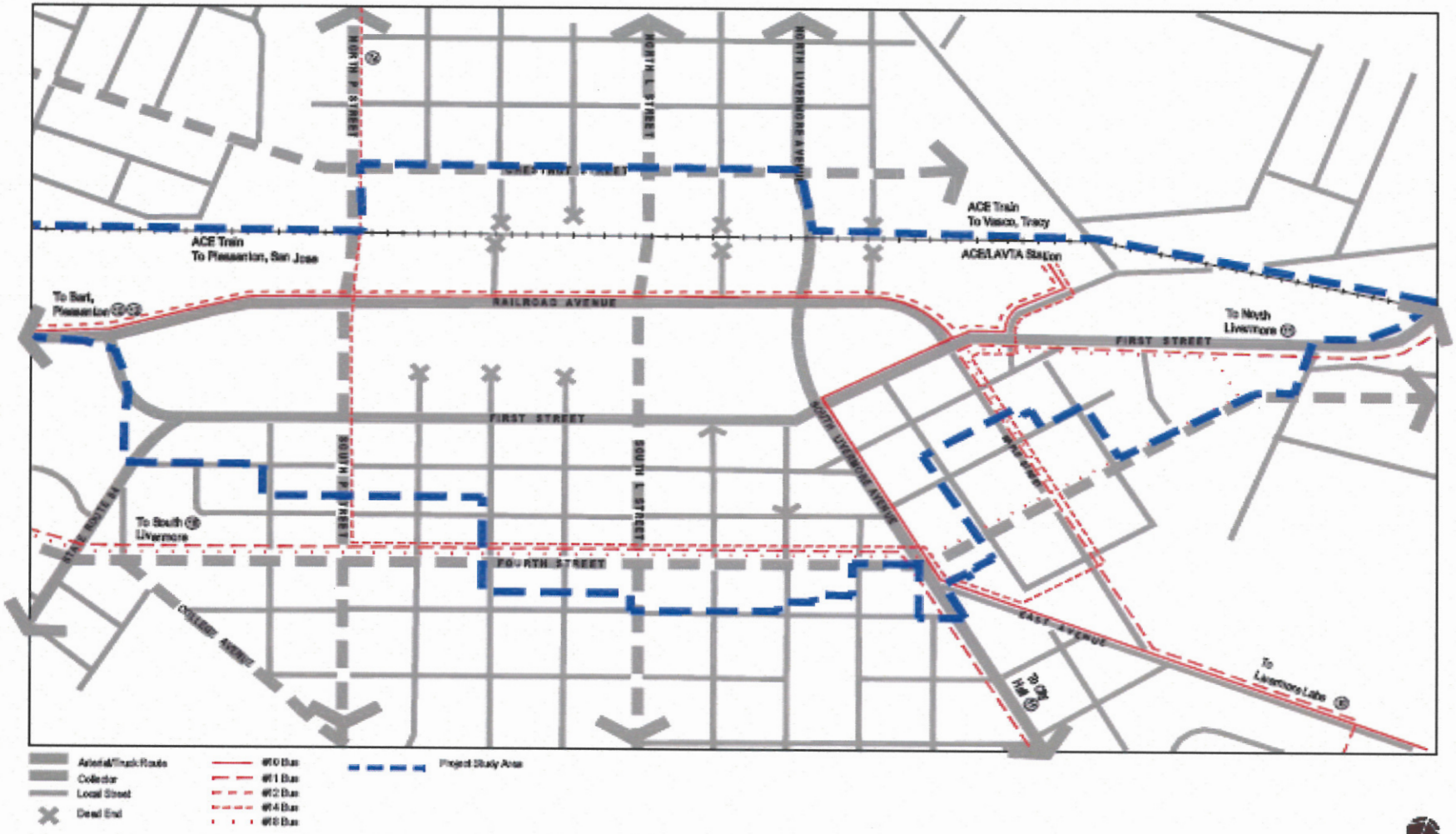

FIGURE 2-8: PUBLIC TRANSIT AND CIRCULATION (As of 2003)

City of Livermore

Livermore Downtown Specific Plan

Recreation and Open Space

Livermore as a whole has a generous amount of recreation and open space. Robertson Park, the Madieros Parkway, the Civic Center Area, Robert Livermore Park, Ravenswood Historic Site, and Independence Park are some of the major open space resources within City Boundaries. In addition, several regional recreational areas lie just outside the City's boundaries. Three-quarters of a mile west of the City is Shadow Cliffs Regional Recreation Area, and just south of Livermore is Sycamore Grove Regional Park. The agricultural lands and vineyards to the south and east of the City are another source of open space.

However, there is very little open space in Downtown itself, as demonstrated in the Existing Open Space diagram on page 19.At the intersection of Livermore Avenue and First Street is Lizzie Fountain on the northwest corner and a small park on the southeast corner. Carnegie Park on Third Street between J and K Streets is the most significant open space in Downtown. The park provides a garden setting for the historic Carnegie Library. Two small public open spaces, one on Railroad Avenue in front of the Brickyard Shopping Center and the other at the intersection of First and S Streets, are sufficiently far from the heart of Downtown and pedestrian activity to ensure a lack of use. Small pleasantly landscaped plaza areas exist in the bulb-outs at J and K Streets on First Street. A paseo, or walkway, on the north side of First Street between J and K Streets leads from First Street to a parking lot. For the most part, these open spaces are too small and separated from each other either visually or physically to provide sufficient open space for relaxation and/or recreation.

The most substantial public spaces within the Specific Plan area are the streets and sidewalks of Downtown itself. Streetscape improvements to First and Second Streets including bluestone and brick paved sidewalks, closely planted trees, and historically themed lighting help support a pedestrian -friendly environment, but they are limited to a small area of Downtown. Once out of that area, the wide streets are dominated by traffic and parking lots, particularly along First Street west of L Street. Little open space is actually dedicated to pedestrians in the study area.

Summary of Existing Conditions

Historically, Downtown has been the center of the City of Livermore. It was the center of both business and culture; the City's workplaces were located here, and Livermore's first residents built their homes around its Core. But today,

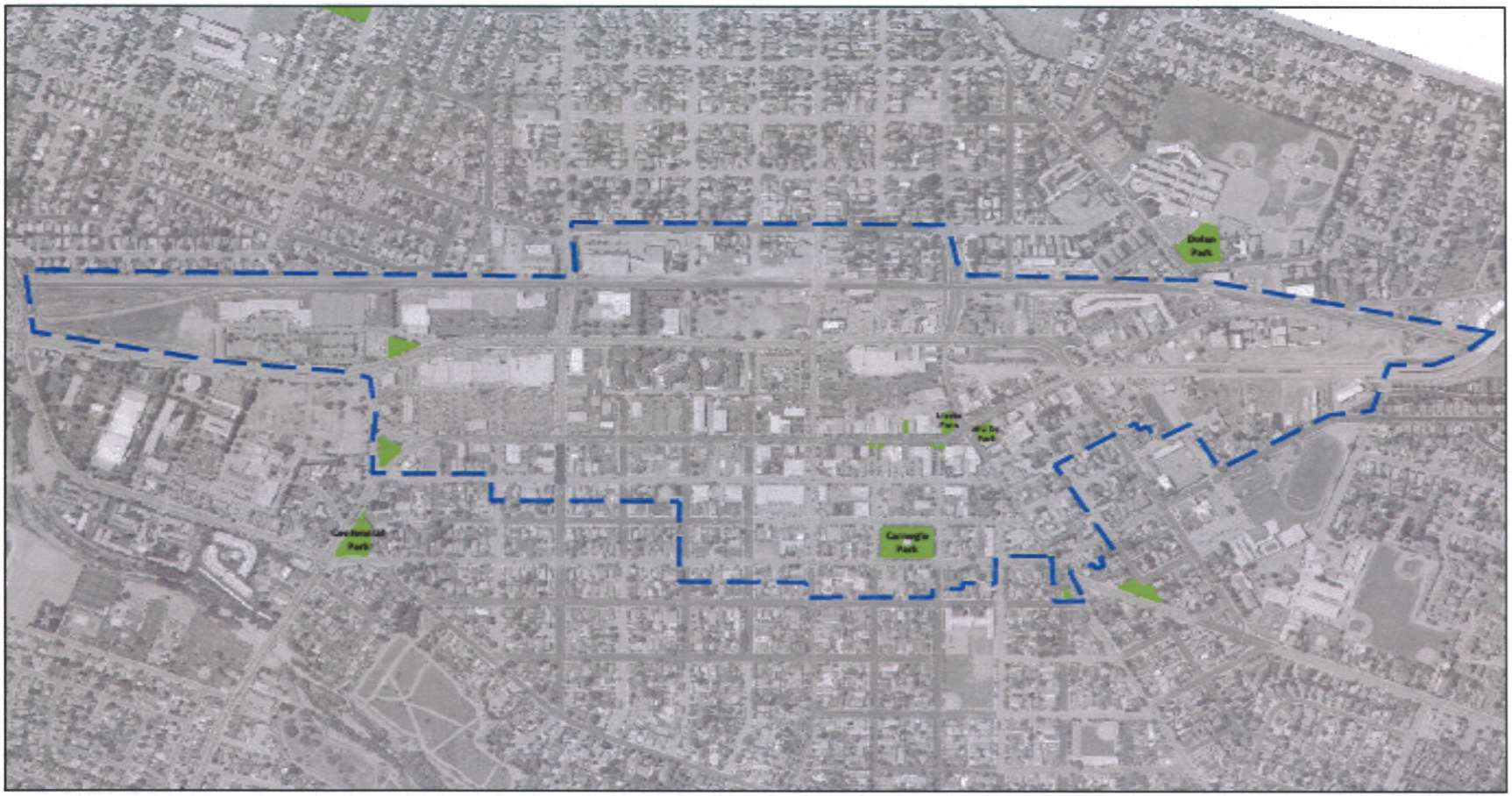

FIGURE 2-9: EXISTING OPEN SPACE

City of Livermore

Livermore Downtown Specific Plan

most of the elements that made the Downtown a place of pride for its early residents have moved elsewhere. In Livermore,as in other suburban cities, commercial and residential growth in outlying areas has contributed to the decline of Downtown. Residential development in Greenfield areas on the fringes of the City means that many of Livermore's residents live far from the City's historic center. Workplace locations and commuting patterns reveal that many commute out of the City, often long distances, for their jobs.More and more commercial uses have sprung up along the region's freeway and arterial frontages, changing the way consumers shop in areas outside of their city, often along their commute. As all of these uses- home, work, marketplace- become more and more diffuse,Downtown has lost its role as the "center of things".

While Downtown still serves as a location for commercial establishments, its viability as a retail center has suffered in its competition with the larger scale freeway stores.And the uses that remain are scattered throughout the greater Downtown. Retail establishments that stretch from Stanley Boulevard to Old First Street and from Railroad Avenue to Fourth Street are spread over too large an area. There is not enough proximity between them to enable sharing of customers or parking. The most memorable aspect of Downtown is its concentration of restaurants on First Street, but this is not enough to provide a focus for Downtown retail. It does not generate enough activity to encourage more retail development to locate Downtown.The few specialty stores remaining in Downtown are performing poorly and existing retail space in the Downtown Core is underperforming compared to state-wide standards.In terms of public space, Downtown no longer feels like the "center of the City". There are no civic buildings located Downtown, and there are few parks or open spaces in Downtown within which to take refuge from the constant stream of cars and trucks (A visual summation of Downtown's development is shown in the Patterns of Development and Change diagram on page 21).

Despite the challenges stated above, Downtown still holds a place in the hearts of Livermore residents. It is the setting for major community events, festivals,and parades, which draw a large number of people from the town and the region. It is slated to be the center for new cultural venues, with the planned Livermore Valley Center project. Even with few reasons to come Downtown, people still come. They come to dine at its restaurants, enjoy its festivals, and just to wander its streets.Once, Downtown was the lively heart of Livermore, and the community wants it to be that again.

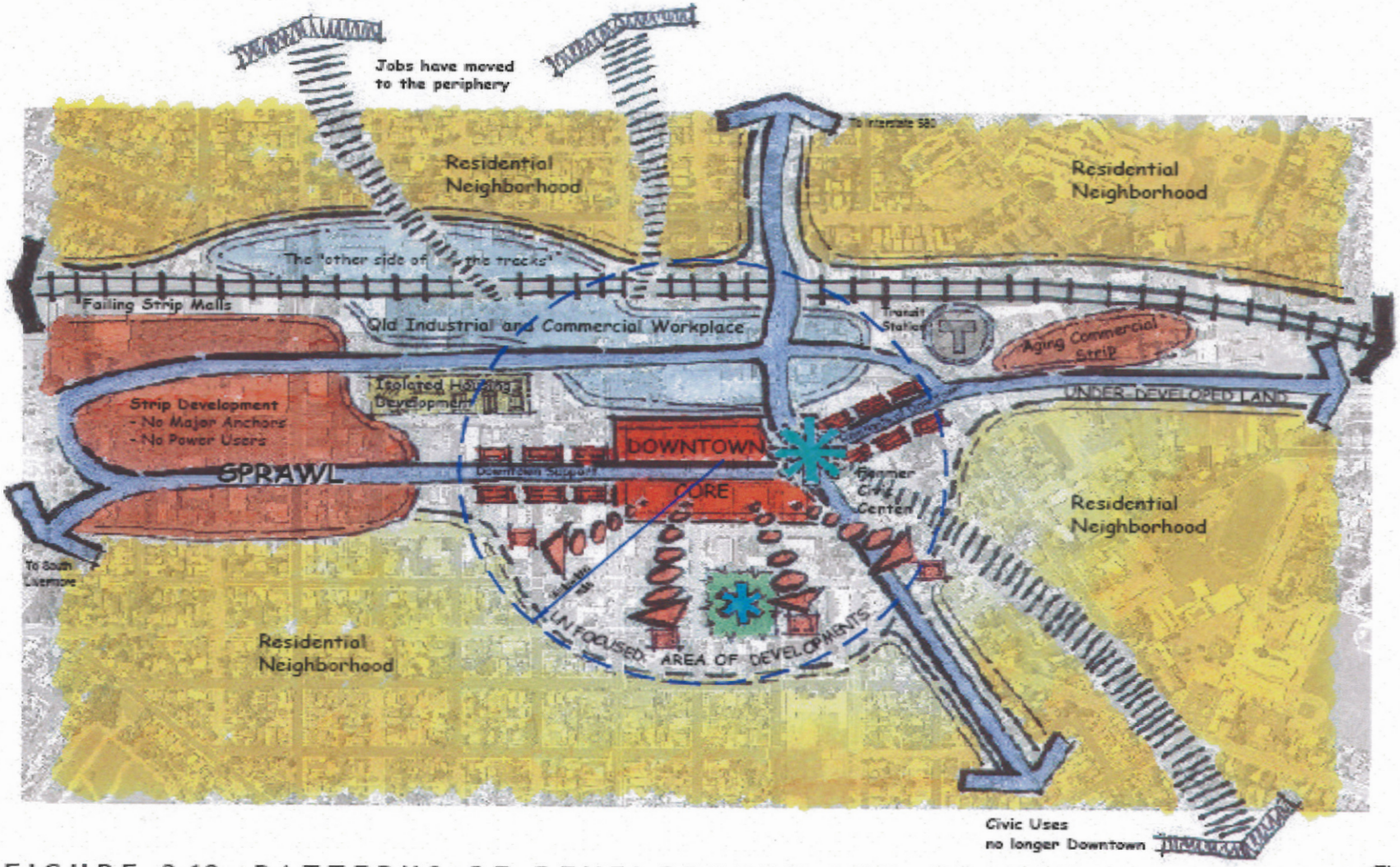

FIGURE 2-10: PATTERNS OF DEVELOPMENT AND CHANGE