2. SUMMARY OF EXISTING CONDITIONS

Historic Context

The first settlement in San Ramon developed in the mid-19th Century in the heart of the Crow Canyon Specific Plan area at the intersection of Deerwood Road and San Ramon Valley Boulevard. Since this earliest settlement, the community has been known by several names. It was first called Brevensville (for blacksmith Eli Breven), then Lynchville (for William Lynch) and Limerick for the many Irish settlers who came to the area. In 1873 when a permanent post office was established, it was called San Ramon.

During the 1860's, the village flourished, becoming a hub of community activity. The village center which organized itself along County Road No. 2, now known as San Ramon Valley Boulevard, included saloons, a jail, Chinese wash houses and blacksmith shops. In 1864 a stage line established by Brown and Co. connected San Ramon with Oakland through the valley. A church was dedicated in 1860, the general store was built in 1863 and students left their home-based classrooms to attend the San Ramon Grammar School in 1867.

Agriculture was the basis for the economy of San Ramon and the surrounding Tri-Valley communities, until suburban development began in the 1960's. In 1966, the new Interstate 680 freeway was completed through San Ramon to Dublin, accelerating the pace of growth considerably. For many years a sign "San Ramon Population 100" accurately reflected the number of people in the area. By 1970, the community, noted as "San Ramon Village" in the census, had grown to 4,084 people. Ten years later the town had grown to 22,356. In 1983, San Ramon voters decided overwhelmingly to incorporate as a separate city and took control over development, police, parks and other services.

Before construction of the I-680 freeway in 1966, San Ramon Valley Boulevard was the principal north-south link between Walnut Creek and Pleasanton and was fronted by the auto-oriented commercial uses typical of such highways. Over time, the area has added office and other commercial uses, and evolved into the City's primary service-commercial district with automobile sales and repair, construction contractors, building materials, warehousing and storage, and home repair services and maintenance supplies.

The environs of the Crow Canyon Specific Plan area have seen gradual development over the last

San Ramon Hall c.1911.

three decades. To the south, development in the Twin Creeks area began in 1969 and spread southward from Crow Canyon Road. In recent years, the area directly west and southwest of the Plan area has been opened with the extension of Deerwood Road and the construction of numerous multi-family housing developments. The Northwest Specific Plan area, directly to the west and northwest of the Crow Canyon Specific Plan area, is currently being planned for up to 829 new homes linked to San Ramon Valley Boulevard by the westward extension of Purdue Road.

The area of Danville immediately to the north of the Plan area is developed in single-family homes. The area immediately east of I-680 is characterized by commercial and retail development that occurred because of the direct freeway access and visibility.

Previous Planning Efforts

Following incorporation in 1983, the City initiated a series of planning efforts seeking to create a downtown for San Ramon in the Specific Plan area. The Downtown Specific Plan, which covered about 267 acres in the northwest quadrant of I-680 and Crow Canyon Road, was adopted on November 19, 1986. In May 1987, the Community Redevelopment Project Area Plan was adopted for the Alcosta Redevelopment Area (about 121 acres) and the Crow Canyon Redevelopment Area (about 484 acres, including the Downtown Specific Plan).

Realization of the downtown concept was frustrated by the development of Bishop Ranch, the Central Park, San Ramon Community Center and San Ramon Library, which shifted the community's focus southward and east of I-680, and diverted demand for the retail marketplace envisioned by the Downtown Specific Plan. A Request for Proposals to develop a downtown retail core was unsuccessful, and a new planning effort was undertaken for the entire Crow Canyon Redevelopment Area, culminating in adoption of the Conservation and Enhancement Program on April 23, 1991.

The Conservation and Enhancement Program replaced the Downtown Specific Plan's emphasis on large-scale land clearance and high intensity development in favor of a market responsive, business retentive approach. The Program called for the creation of a Redevelopment Overlay District with large lot dimensions intended to encourage the consolidation of sites that would otherwise be developed in unrelated increments.

To implement the Conservation and Enhancement Program, the Redevelopment Overlay and a Planned Development district were applied to portions of the Specific Plan area. For example, the narrow strip between San Ramon Valley Boulevard and I-680 was rezoned CT-R, which provides an incentive for lot consolidation in the form of increased floor-area ratio (FAR) and reduced landscaping.

The minimum lot sizes and incentives of the Conservation and Enhancement Program have not proven sufficient to encourage lot consolidation and higher intensity development in the Specific Plan area. Property ownership is highly fragmented, and the San Ramon Project Area Redevelopment Plan does not give San Ramon's Redevelopment Agency the power of eminent domain to facilitate site assembly.

Land Use Context

The Crow Canyon Specific Plan area ("Plan area") is located in the City of San Ramon to the west of Interstate 680 within the "Crow Canyon Planning Subarea," as described in the San Ramon 2020 General Plan (approved by the voters of San Ramon, March 5, 2002). Portions of the Plan area also lie within the "Crow Canyon Redevelopment Plan/Conservation and Enhancement Program." The 2020 General Plan is a document that guides development and manages important natural resources in the City. Per the General Plan's Land Use Diagram, the Plan area is primarily designated "Mixed-Use (FAR 0.70) Includes Residential (FAR 0.35)" with only a triangular-shaped portion along Crow Canyon Road designated "Parks (FAR 0.1)." Currently, the Plan area is designated with the following zoning districts: CS (Service Commercial), CS-R (Service Commercial with a Redevelopment Overlay), CT (Thoroughfare Commercial), CT-R (Thoroughfare Commercial with a Redevelopment Overlay), OL (Limited Office), OL-H (Limited Office with a Height Overlay), PD-R (Planned Development with a Redevelopment Overlay); and P (Parks and Recreation). Implementation of the Specific Plan will include amendments to the Zoning Ordinance consistent with direction and policies identified in the Specific Plan.

Site Vicinity Land Uses

To the west of the Plan area lies the Northwest Specific Plan area of which General Plan policy direction for future development includes urban neighborhoods with a variety of housing types, public/semipublic uses and parkland and open space areas. Specific land uses include preservation of open hillside areas and a concentration of multifamily residential uses. Also to the west continues the Crow Canyon Redevelopment Plan/Conservation and Enhancement Program area, where land uses include open space and multifamily residential uses (Pinnacle Crow Canyon, Promontory Pointe, and Stonepine developments) along with commercial retail uses (the Old Mill Commercial Center with a Home Depot and Staples).

To the east of the Plan area lies I-680 and the Town of Danville (north of Fostoria Way) with residential and office uses. The rest of the eastern surrounding area (south of Deerwood Road) includes other land within the Crow Canyon

Views of adjacent housing and a hillside along Deerwood Road.

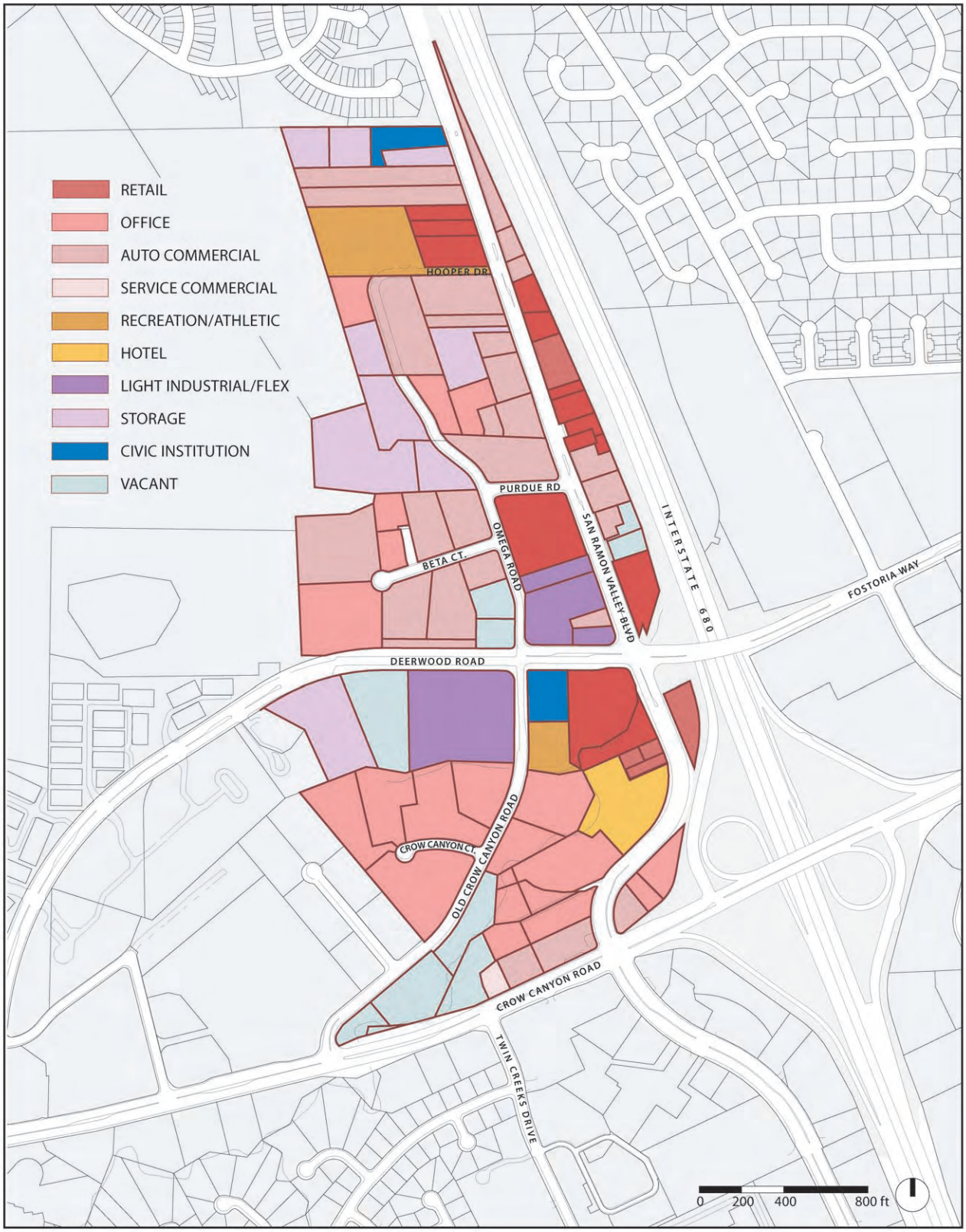

FIGURE 2-1

EXISTING LAND USE

Planning Subarea containing residential and commercial office/business park-related uses.

The northern surrounding area includes the Town of Danville's residential, multi-family development called the Danville Ranch development. The southern surrounding area (to the south of Crow Canyon Road) is comprised of several commercial retail complexes along San Ramon Valley Boulevard including Crow Canyon Shopping Place, Courtyard Center and Diablo Plaza. These complexes include a variety of commercial establishments such as retail stores, restaurants (fine dining and fast food), a supermarket, a drug store and banks. Professional financial and medical offices, educational services and other commercial uses are also located to the south of the Plan area along Crow Canyon Road.

Plan Area Land Uses

The Plan area is generally bounded by the City of San Ramon/Town of Danville boundaries to the north, Crow Canyon Specific Plan/Northwest Specific Plan boundaries to the west, Crow Canyon Road to the south and Interstate 680 and portions of the Town of Danville to the east. The 128-acre Plan area lies generally within the center of the 610-acre Crow Canyon Planning Subarea from Bollinger Canyon Road to Alcosta Boulevard towards the northern edge of the City boundaries. The subarea contains the earliest commercial development in the City, and since incorporation a variety of retail, office, and auto-related commercial developments have been constructed.

The Garden Store, Sierra Suites, Harley Davidson and Morgan's Masonry are established uses that are likely to remain.

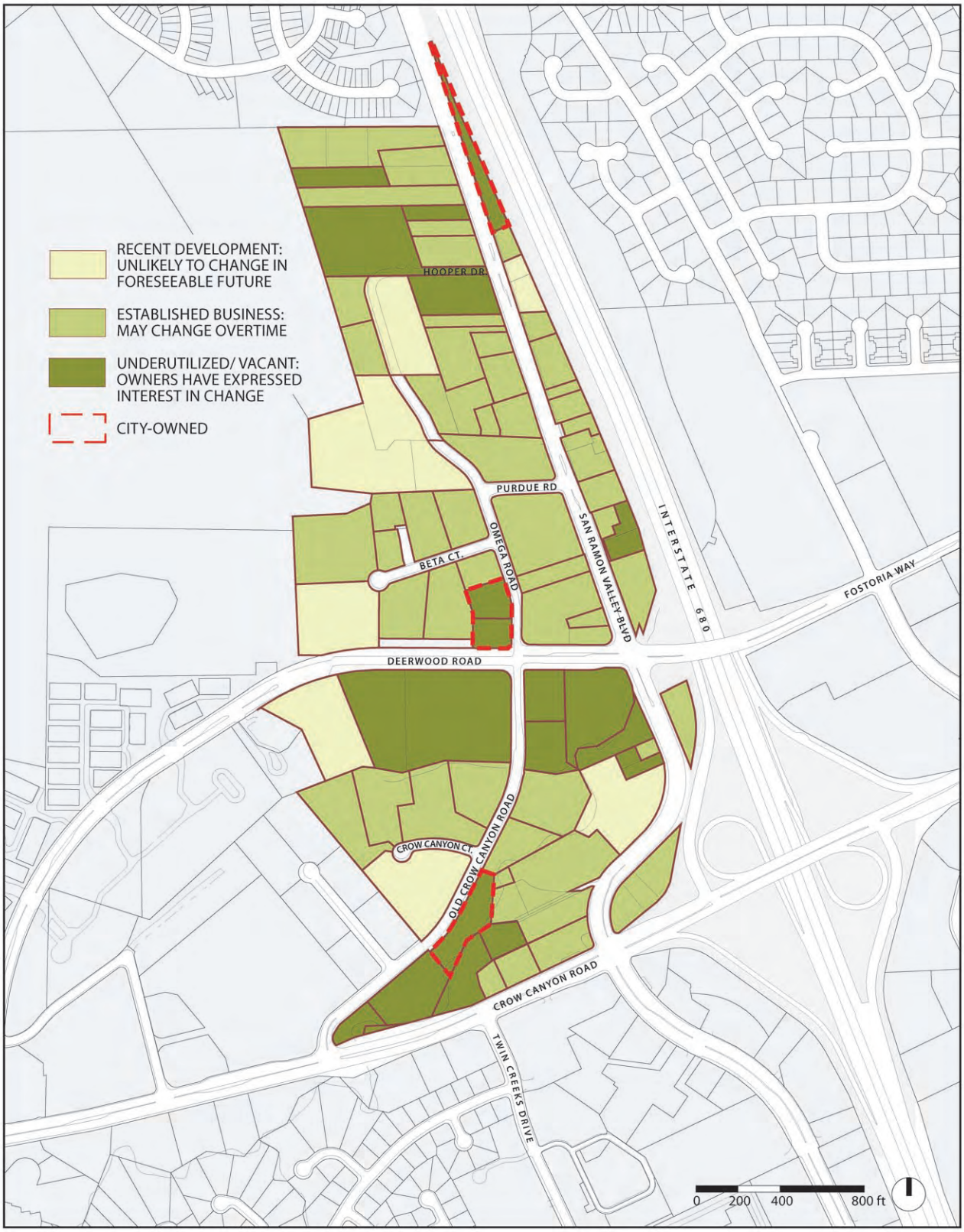

FIGURE 2-2

OWNERSHIP PATTERN/SUSCEPTIBILITY TO CHANGE

Specifically, the Plan area contains a variety of commercial and light industrial land uses ranging from auto-oriented services, to offices, retail and wholesale establishments and warehouse/storage facilities. Limited restaurants are scattered throughout the Plan area, as are visitor-serving uses (e.g., Sierra Suites Hotel), public storage facilities (SAF Keep Storage), mixed-use developments (Crow Canyon Commerce Center) and religious assembly uses (Gilead Bible Church and Grace Reformed Chapel). (See Figure 2-1.)

The area between Purdue Road and the San Ramon Creek tributary is most susceptible to change, because of the underutilized or vacant nature of the property. The San Ramon Redevelopment Agency owns 1.3 acres of land at the northwest corner of Deerwood and Omega Roads, part of which is vacant and part of which is used as a Recycling Center. South of Deerwood Road, the former Outpost Casino is now a restaurant and the former Athletic Club has been renamed the 1800 Wineshop. Both properties present opportunities for assembly and more intensive development. Immediately to the west, the Cortese family has expressed interest in redevelopment of its 7.7 acre property at the southwest corner of Deerwood and Old Crow Canyon Roads, subject to economic feasibility. However, on the north side of Deerwood Road between Omega Road and San Ramon Valley Boulevard, Morgan's Masonry building materials yard is an established use that serves both retail customers and wholesale contractors. The owners have expressed their desire to remain in business at this location.

The 128-acre Plan area is comprised of 96 private parcels in a variety of irregularly shaped configurations, with many less than an acre in area. There are four public properties within the Plan area, all owned by the San Ramon Redevelopment Agency, but only accounting for 3.5 acres or less than four percent of the developable portion of the Plan area. Figure 2-2 indicates the pattern of existing ownership, and, based on discussions with the property owners and an assessment of improvement to value ratios, illustrates potential susceptibility to change.

Aesthetics and Visual Quality

San Ramon's aesthetic character is defined by a combination of natural features and development, which have shaped the urban configuration and the components of the City. The City lies in the San Ramon Valley, which generally runs north-south and is oriented around both east and west sides of I-680, which is a designated state scenic highway, and the primary transportation corridor along the valley floor. (See Figure 2-3.)

The City's built environment is characterized mainly by low building forms. Commercial and light industrial uses are located along the valley floor and residential uses are found both in the valley and in recent years are increasingly more common on surrounding hillsides and ridges.

The Northwest Specific Plan Area abuts Crow Canyon.

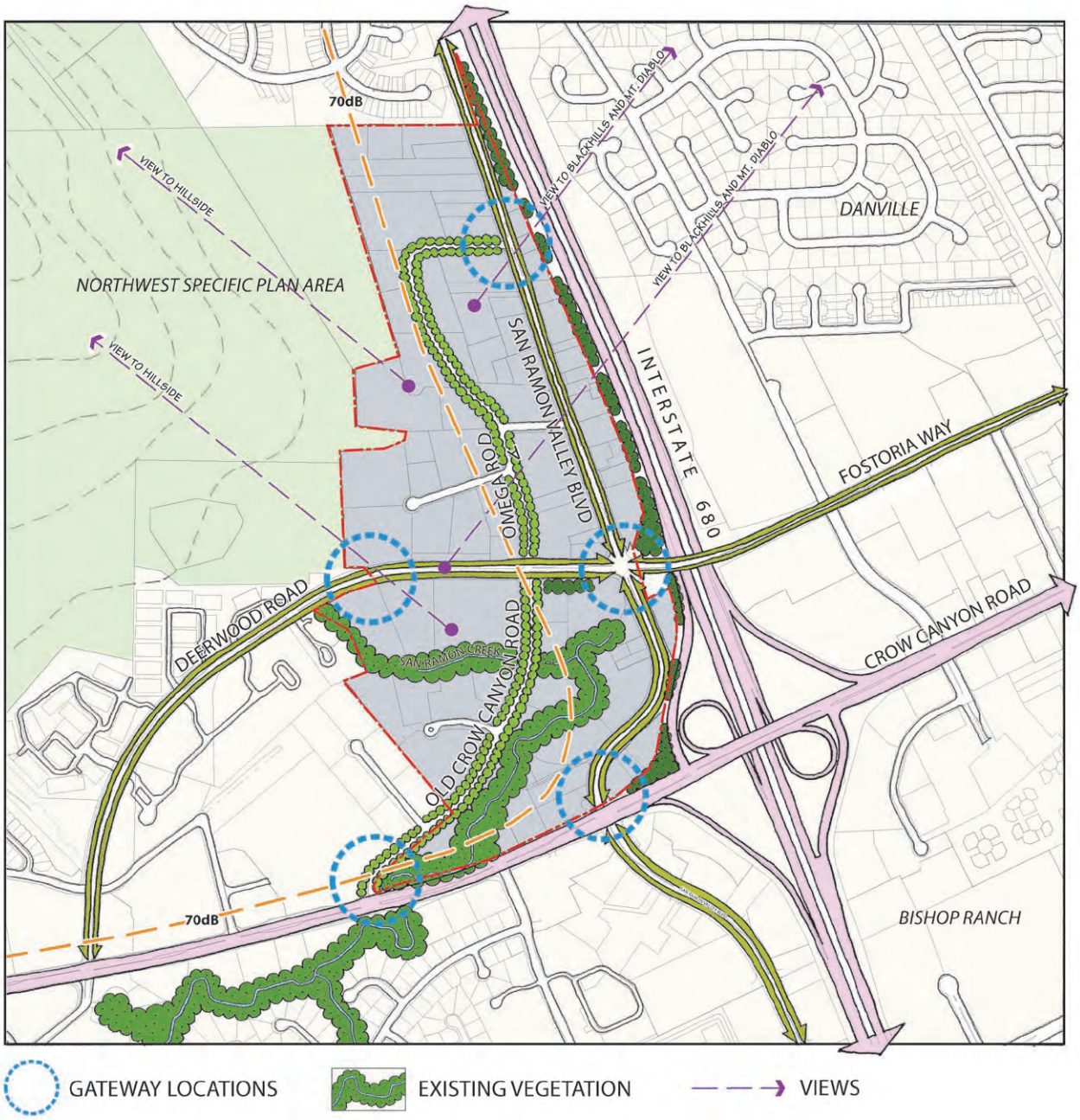

FIGURE 2-3

SITE CHARACTERISTICS/VISUAL STRUCTURE

Crow Canyon Specific Plan Area looking towards Mt. Diablo.

Commercial buildings are generally three to four stories, while residential structures are shorter, typically one to two stories. Commercial buildings are often set back from the street and contain onsite surface parking landscaped with trees or shrubs. Many buildings in San Ramon are painted in neutral tones such as brown and beige, which reflect the color of the hillsides surrounding the City for most of the year.

Primarily undeveloped hillsides rise to over 1,000 feet in elevation from the floor of the urbanized valley. To the west of San Ramon is the Las Trampas Ridge, with elevations of up to 1,200 feet. East of the City is the Dougherty and Sherburne Hills (725-825 feet). Mount Diablo, located approximately six miles to the northeast of San Ramon, rises to over 3,800 feet and is the most prominent natural visual feature in the area. The City's location on the valley floor surrounded by rolling foothills bestows "a panoramic sense of openness" for people living in the valley (General Plan, p. 4-30).

The visual character of the Specific Plan area is most strongly defined by San Ramon Creek and views of the surrounding hills. Although they are small streams, San Ramon Creek and its tributary have a dominant presence because of their heavy vegetation and the very tall trees that line their banks. At the southwest corner of the Plan area where Old Crow Canyon Road intersects Crow Canyon Road, the main channel hugs both streets and creates a strong image on the approach from the west. Further up Old Crow Canyon Road, the Redevelopment Agency-owned parcel provides a wide

Above: San Ramon Valley Blvd parallels I-680. Below: North of Purdue Rd, looking south from the Danville City Limits.

San Ramon Creek.

opening to the banks and stream. Further north, the streams are mostly hidden from the streets by buildings although the tall trees mark the streams' presence. Apart from the creek, the Plan area has four subareas with different visual characteristics.

South of San Ramon Creek and its Tributary. The area south of the San Ramon Creek and its tributary (about 500 feet south of Deerwood Road) is dominated by two- and three-story office buildings set amidst parking lots, the four-story Sierra Suites hotel and scattered one- and two-story professional office and service-commercial uses, principally fronting Crow Canyon Boulevard. Large stands of redwood trees visually punctuate the low-rise skyline between the office buildings in the foreground; eucalyptus trees are visible in the distance.

San Ramon Valley Boulevard, particularly the west side north of San Ramon Creek plus the entire east side, is a conventional auto-oriented arterial lined with one- and two-story commercial buildings. Some parcels have parking in the front yard, but the majority of the parking is at the side and rear, causing most buildings to be widely spaced, and creating no unified street wall. The lots on the east side of San Ramon Valley Boulevard are shallow (55 to 185 feet) with views through to I-680 and the hills beyond. A few small lots are vacant.

North of Purdue Road. The area north of Purdue Road along Omega Road and Hooper Drive is marked by a steep cross-slope falling 60 feet from the west boundary to San Ramon Valley Boulevard, affording good views of the east side of the valley. The area is dominated by one-story service commercial buildings, principally auto-related or storage, with a few small two-story office structures. Golden Skate is the only commercial-type use located in a tall one-story structure set back from the corner of Omega Road and Hooper Drive. There are two large vacant sites, one on Omega Road and the other on Hooper Drive.

Core Area. The area centered on the intersection of Old Crow Canyon Road and Deerwood Road is the historic center of San Ramon, but is now visually incoherent due to the variety of land uses, vacant lots and buildings, and underutilized and poorly maintained sites. Morgan's Masonry at the northeast corner of Deerwood and Omega Roads dominates the area because its high walls, stacks of building materials, and heavy truck traffic. Vacant and underutilized land includes the Redevelopment Agency-owned site at the northwest corner of Deerwood and Omega Roads, currently the site of the City's recycling center. A stand of very large eucalyptus trees line the southeast corner of the intersection.

Core Area looking north.

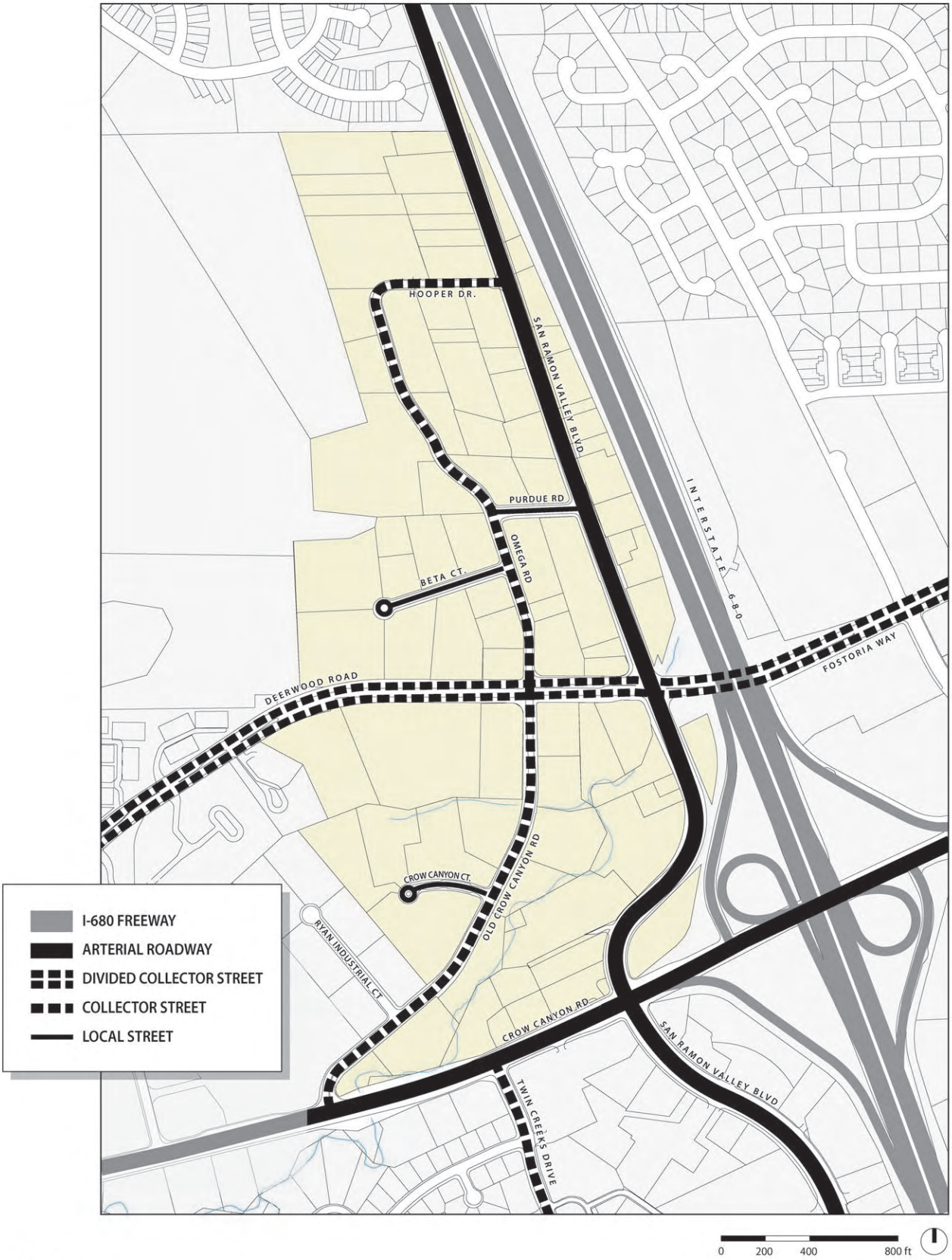

FIGURE 2-4

EXISTING CIRCULATION NETWORK

The I-680 and Crow Canyon Road interchange looking northwest.

Transportation Context

Roadway Network

The Crow Canyon Specific Plan area enjoys high levels of regional access, which is provided primarily through I-680 with its three mixed flow lanes and one high occupancy vehicle (HOV) lane in each direction. Within the Plan area, Crow Canyon Road provides an access interchange with I-680. (See Figure 2-4) Regional access to the area is also provided by way of the major arterial roadways, which in addition to Crow Canyon Road include San Ramon Valley Boulevard, Bollinger Canyon Road and Alcosta Boulevard.

Collector roadways, which distribute traffic from local streets to the major arterials, also serve the Plan area. These include Old Crow Canyon Road and Deerwood Road, which connect to Crow Canyon Road and San Ramon Valley Boulevard. All other roads within the Plan area are considered "Local streets". Hooper Drive and the northern stretch of Omega Road are currently privately-owned and the City is not responsible for their maintenance.

The City of San Ramon has established a policy requiring all streets to operate at a Level of Service (LOS) C or better. LOS measures the level of congestion from the best (A) to the worst (F). Except for the intersection of Bollinger Canyon Road and the I-680 Northbound Off-Ramp, which is operating at LOS D, all signalized intersections presently achieve this policy requirement. The unsignalized intersections of San Ramon

Valley Boulevard with Hooper Drive and Purdue Road operate at LOS D and LOS E respectively.

Two new streets are planned for the Plan area, and are incorporated into this Specific Plan. The General Plan calls for the extension of Twin Creeks Drive north from Crow Canyon Road, over San Ramon Creek to Old Crow Canyon Road. It also calls for the westward extension of Purdue Road from Omega Road to the Northwest Specific Plan area.

Transit System

Bus service in San Ramon is provided by the Central Contra Costa Transit Authority (CCCTA), which has two routes in the area, one along San Ramon Valley Boulevard, connecting Pleasanton to Walnut Creek, and a second which generally runs east and west along Crow Canyon Road and Tassajara Road, connecting San Ramon Valley to Danville. In addition to CCCTA, San Ramon is indirectly served by regional public transportation providers, including Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART), which has stations to the south in Dublin/Pleasanton and to the north in Walnut Creek, and the Altamont Commuter Express (ACE) train, which runs weekdays between Stockton and San Jose. These rail services are accessible by express bus service connections to BART stations. Private employers in the Bishop Ranch area provide shuttle bus service to BART and ACE, but do not currently circulate in the Crow Canyon Specific Plan area. (See Figure 2-5.)

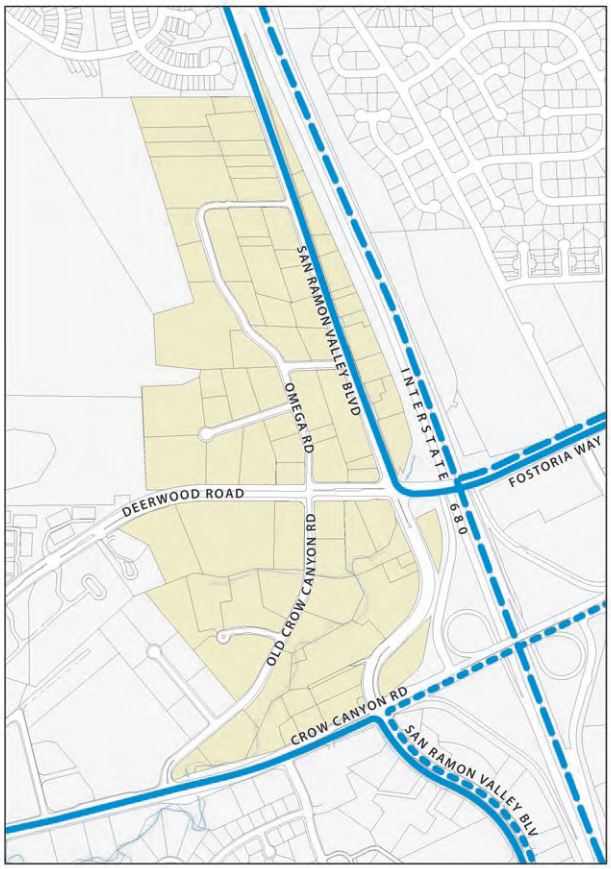

FIGURE 2-5
EXISTING TRANSIT ROUTES

Pedestrian and Bicycle Facilities

Within the study area pedestrians are served by sidewalks that are located on arterials, collectors, and most local streets which are built to City standards for pedestrian facilities. Crosswalks are provided at all signalized and some unsignalized intersections along San Ramon Valley Boulevard, and pedestrian call buttons and signal heads are provided at signalized intersections along Crow Canyon Road and San Ramon Valley Boulevard. Crossings include ADA compliant ramps. Only one private street (Hooper Drive) contains inadequate pedestrian facilities, a sidewalk gap along an undeveloped portion of the street. Other sidewalk gaps exist on Old Crow Canyon Road and the east side of San Ramon Valley Boulevard at the Danville Town limit. Most sidewalks in the study area are in good condition, while some appear to be temporary (e.g. asphalt path).

Class II bike lanes exist on San Ramon Valley Boulevard, Fostoria Way and Deerwood Road. The San Ramon Valley Boulevard bike lanes connect to a series of Class II bike lanes on the City's arterial street system. The Iron Horse Trail is accessible from the Crow Canyon Specific Plan area (via Fostoria Way), but bike lanes on Fostoria Way exist only on the I-680 overcrossing bridge and end at Crow Canyon Place, west of the Iron Horse Trail.

Market Overview

At the outset of the planning process in February 2003, an overview of the City of San Ramon's general market conditions was undertaken to determine the Specific Plan area's potential for residential, retail and office uses. Because many of the existing uses in the Plan area are economically healthy, it is important to consider both market demand for new uses and whether these proposed uses can command higher land values than the existing uses. If proposed uses yield higher residual land values than existing uses, landowners will have an incentive to create higher-intensity and more valuable structures on their properties. If proposed land uses are not more valuable than existing ones, property owners will have little reason to invest in new development. Therefore, it is critical that planning efforts for the Plan area incorporate land use types and densities that are financially feasible and in step with market demands. Key findings of the market analysis are summarized as follows:

Residential

The Plan area is a potentially competitive location for new multi-family for-sale or rental housing development. In particular, higher density housing (e.g., between 30 and 60 units per acre) could provide sufficient value and enough "critical mass" to infuse the area with a new residential character.

The residential market is the strongest and healthiest of real estate sectors in the San Francisco Bay Area and Tri-Valley at the current time, and it is this development type that is most likely to emerge as the primary driver of redevelopment in Crow Canyon. Despite the economic downturn, population levels and housing demand in the Bay Area have continued to increase, and housing

Mixed-use with ground floor retail and residential above.

prices continue to rise. While many households still prefer single-family detached product, increasing numbers of one- and two-person households, including singles, young professional couples, and empty nesters, are increasingly considering higher density product types. Some family households, for affordability or commute time reasons, are also considering some forms of more dense product in locations closer to their jobs. At the same time, the apartment market has been noticeably weakened by the economic downturn with rental rates and occupancy rates falling since the height of the growth cycle. The performance of the apartment market is, however, expected to improve as the economy improves.

New residential development will still need to carry with it sufficient value for developers to cover land costs, demolition costs, and existing use value, and still make a profit. The precise timing of when residential development values will reach this situation will depend on market cycles and the specifics of each site, though it is likely that densities on most sites will need to be over 30 units per acre to command sufficient value. Increases in the price of attached townhomes and condominiums in the City between 1998 and 2003 suggest that the value of higher density product is increasing. Few of these products have densities over thirty units to the acre, though the success of higher density projects, such as the Ivy Hill apartments and Regent Condominiums in Walnut Creek, signal an emerging demand for higher-density condominium and apartment development in the market area. It is projected that similar success could be achieved in San Ramon and Crow Canyon by offering quality design and amenities, ample on-site parking, convenience to shops and transportation, good security and competitive rental rates.

Retail

While there is little market support for regional comparison shopping, due to competing centers in Dublin and Walnut Creek, there is a limited amount of smaller scale, specialty retail that could be supported in the Plan area.

The market for regional retail expenditures in the market area is highly competitive with Broadway Plaza in Walnut Creek, Stoneridge Mall in Pleasanton, Hacienda Crossings in Dublin, and the Shops at Blackhawk in Danville serving most segments of regional retail. A new regional shopping center would enter the market at considerable risk. As a result, the new retail development in Crow Canyon will primarily need to tap into the neighborhood needs of the local community. Each new household is likely to bring new retail expenditures of over $20,000 each year. Much of this expenditure will leak to the surrounding shopping centers, but as new residential development occurs and the critical mass grows, the potential for retail development will expand.

New retail development would help to create a sense of place, providing a welcome destination for residents and visitors alike, as well as add value to the residential development. In the early stages of redevelopment, it is anticipated that retail will be added slowly, designed to complement new residential development (café, card shop, etc.); build on retail themes already present in the area such as furniture, gardening and landscape design; and, potentially, address existing retail gaps in the areas of home furnishings and apparel. The key to successful specialty retail in the Plan area will be in the physical design of shops and their relation to parking and the street as well as the type and mix of stores.

Pedestrian-oriented retail.

Office

The recent economic downturn has left the most of the San Francisco Bay Area with a large supply of vacant office space, in small and large, moderate and high-end buildings. The Tri-Valley is no exception, with vacancy rates above 20 percent. At some point, a sustained economic recovery will occur, inducing additional jobs and demand for office space. In the short to medium term, any new office development is a highly speculative and risky proposition, unless it is a build-to-suit for an owner-user.

Given these market conditions, it is not recommended that new office development be a focus of redevelopment efforts in the Plan area. Existing office uses in the area, many of which cater to small businesses and owner-users rather than corporate tenants, should be supported and new development of this type encouraged as selected opportunities arise.

The Vision: A pedestrian-oriented neighborhood with a mix of retail, office, residential and service uses.