



COUNTY OF SANTA CRUZ

PLANNING DEPARTMENT

701 OCEAN STREET - 4TH FLOOR, SANTA CRUZ, CA 95060
(831) 454-2580 FAX: (831) 454-2131 TDD: (831) 454-2123

KATHLEEN MOLLOY PREVISICH, PLANNING DIRECTOR

November 29, 2012

Agenda Date: December 12, 2012

Time: After 6:30 PM

Agenda Item: 6

Planning Commission
County of Santa Cruz
701 Ocean Street
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

Subject: Study Session on the Transit Corridors Plan for Sustainable Communities in Santa Cruz County, including discussion of DRAFT Vision, Guiding Principles, and Proposed Land Use Focus Areas

Members of the Commission:

As your Commission is aware, Planning Department staff have been working with a team of consultants to prepare the Transit Corridors Plan for Sustainable Communities in Santa Cruz County (the "Plan"). This project is funded by a grant from the California Strategic Growth Council. The first two phases, project initiation and documentation of existing conditions, have been completed, as has the initial round of public outreach and community workshops. This is an appropriate point at which to consult with your Commission to receive input and guidance for the next phases of work.

This study session is a joint meeting with the advisory group for the Plan, a group of approximately 25 citizens and agency representatives who also provide input to County staff and consultants. The project land use consultant will be presenting results from the first round of community workshops and a first draft of guiding principles and a vision statement. A list of proposed Land Use Focus Areas, small areas that will receive detailed analysis, will also be presented for discussion and feedback.

Background

As you may recall, the Board of Supervisors reviewed and approved the grant proposal to prepare this plan on August 17, 2010, accepted the grant award on September 27, 2011, and approved the consultant contract and scope of work for the project on February 14, 2012. We are now about one quarter of the way through the planning process. While the plan will ultimately affect the whole County, the area that is receiving the greatest amount of analysis is the area inside the Urban Services Line which includes the communities of Live Oak, Soquel, and Aptos, and major transportation routes including Soquel Avenue/Drive, Capitola Road, Brommer Street, 7th Avenue, 17th Avenue, Upper and Lower 41st Avenue, and State Park Drive. This portion of the County is referred to as the "plan area" (Exhibit B). The recommendations for land use and transportation related policies, programs, and regulations that will be developed for the urban

area are intended to be transferable, at least in part, to other areas of the County.

Status of the Work Program and Completed Products

The first substantive task in this process was collecting existing data and generating new information about the existing conditions within the plan area. For this task the consultant team collected data from a variety of sources including County GIS, the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County, the Regional Transportation Commission(RTC), the Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District, census data, traffic counts, and Department of Finance data. An economic report, which includes demographic and economic forecasts, was completed, as were new traffic counts at key roadway segments and intersections. The team also held a series of group interviews with dozens of business, real estate development, neighborhood, transportation advocate, school district and government agency stakeholders,

This task was completed at the beginning of October, and the Existing Conditions Report and two technical appendices were published on the project website on October 9th. Since that date, the consultant team and County staff have been working on the second project task, development of the guiding principles and community vision.

This second task involved gathering input from the public on their ideas for a sustainable Santa Cruz County. While the original scope called for only one public workshop, staff and consultants ultimately held 3 community-wide workshops in Live Oak as well as 3 smaller neighborhood meetings in Santa Cruz Gardens, San Lorenzo Valley and Watsonville.. The format for the meetings was a process called the “World Café”, wherein participants discuss topics in small groups at individual tables, periodically switching tables to converse with a different set of participants. The conversations were guided by questions that elicited the participant’s opinions and ideas about sustainability, both in general terms and relative to the County and their own neighborhoods. The six meetings have been summarized and the community’s original notes from the discussion have been photographed for inclusion in the record of this process. These summaries and photos are available on the project website at <http://transitcorridorsplan.org/workshops-and-meetings/community-workshops/>.

Draft Vision and Guiding Principles

The community and neighborhood meetings showed that the goals of reducing green house gasses, increasing affordable housing and transportation choices, providing access to good jobs, and identifying and enhancing good urban design are attractive to many County residents, while the specific solutions that were suggested to achieve those goals varied quite a bit among individuals and among meeting locations. The comments that were repeated in many locations concerned a variety of topics including: creation of safe, reliable, and convenient options for transportation, protection of existing open space, conscientious use of resources- especially water, and economic development in the forms of job training for County residents and creation of good local jobs.

On the more specific level we heard comments on topics that ranged widely: creating safe routes to school for children and parents, developing local food systems and promoting community gardens, reusing existing developed land and buildings for new uses, encouraging mixed-use and

a higher density of development in some locations, encouraging cooperation and local control among governmental agencies that impact planning decisions in Santa Cruz County, maintaining and fixing existing infrastructure including highways, sidewalks, bike lanes, and buildings that create distinct community character, working with the RTC on implementing the rail trail for pedestrians, cyclists, and commuter rail, maintaining protection of private property rights, promoting green business and eco-tourism, matching infrastructure investments to any increase in demand, and preserving the natural resources and parks that make Santa Cruz County a unique and desirable place to live.

The ideas from the public workshops and meetings, along with comments received via the Plan website comment forum "Open Town Hall," form the basis of the guiding principles and the vision statement included in draft form as Exhibit A. There are also a few topics that are included in the guiding principles and the vision that staff, advisory group members, and/or stakeholders felt were important but which were not mentioned as often by the public at the community meetings. These topics include fiscal sustainability as it pertains to the County's ability to provide services to the public, affordable housing options to assist the local workforce to live in proximity to their jobs, and increased coordination between the various local, state, and national government agencies that affect development and land use in Santa Cruz County. While these ideas did not rise to the top at the public meetings, they are nonetheless important topics that should be addressed by the Plan.

Proposed Land Use Focus Areas and Circulation Study Area

The next task in the planning process involves considering land use, transportation and design in more detail and at a smaller scale in a few selected locations. Ideally, these locations will illustrate a range of land use settings, constraints, and opportunities such that information from the analysis, though site specific, will be useful at other locations. To that end, and based on the information collected in the Existing Conditions Report, staff and consultants have preliminarily identified three Land Use Focus Areas and one Circulation Study Area for more detailed analysis. The proposed Land Use Focus Areas, as shown in Exhibit C, are: the area around Dominican and Sutter Hospitals, including the flea market and Commercial Way; the area between Rodeo Gulch and 41st Avenue north of the highway; the Soquel Avenue frontage road on both sides of the intersection with Mattison Lane, and an area defined by 17th Avenue, Brommer Street and the railroad tracks near the Simpkins Family Swim Center. The proposed Circulation Focus Area is Soquel Drive between Aegis and the rail crossing at Spreckles Drive, and State Park Drive south to Seacliff Drive/Center Avenue. This group of focus areas represents a diverse range of existing and potential land uses, and will provide locations to conceptually "try on" different combinations of uses and designs, providing a back drop for an informed community discussion.

Next Steps

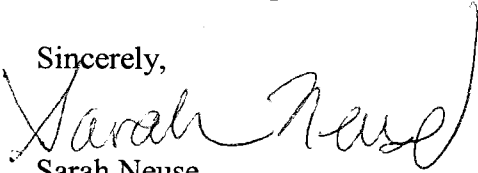
Following the study session with your Commission and the advisory group, the guiding principles and vision will be revised and a final version presented for consideration by the Board of Supervisors in January 2013. Once the guiding principles and vision are in place, staff and consultants will begin analysis of the focus areas. The next round of public outreach and participation will take place in the Spring of 2013. At that time we anticipate that the public will be discussing urban design options, site layout, land use configurations and circulation in the

Land Use Focus Areas and the Circulation Study Area.

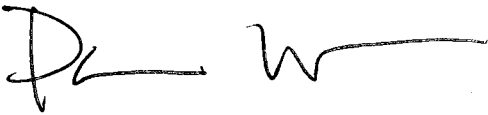
Conclusion

The topics covered in the study session will shape the development of the the Transit Corridors Plan for Sustainable Communities in Santa Cruz County over the next two years. Your input at this juncture is important, and we look forward to your input and an informative discussion.

Sincerely,



Sarah Neuse
Planner



Paia Levine
Principal Planner

Exhibits:

- A. Draft guiding principles and preliminary vision statement
- B. Map of the plan area
- C. Maps of the proposed Land Use Focus Areas and Circulation Study Area

DRAFT Guiding Principles for Sustainable Communities in Santa Cruz County

The follow principles are intended to guide the preparation of the Transit Corridors Plan for Sustainable Communities in Santa Cruz County. Following each principle are examples of related ideas expressed by residents at the Visioning Workshops. All comments received at the Visioning Workshops can be found at <http://transitcorridorsplan.org/workshops-and-meetings/community-workshops/>.

Following these guiding principles is a vision statement for sustainable communities in Santa Cruz County.

1. Transportation Choices. Develop safe, reliable, and efficient transportation choices to improve air quality, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, promote public health, and enhance quality of life.

Ideas from Workshop Participants:

- "Expand public transit options"
- "Maintain and improve existing bicycling and walking facilities"
- "Ensure safe routes to school for students and parents"
- "Encourage connections with the Rail Trail"
- "Increase connections between streets and cul de sacs/dead ends"
- "Remain mindful that not all residents can use bicycles for transportation"

2. Focused Development. Encourage the efficient use of land through compact development patterns when supported by market demand for new commercial, residential, office, or retail uses. New development should be located primarily within existing urban areas and should feature a mixture of uses and development intensities that support transportation choices including transit, cycling, walking, and carpools.

Ideas from Workshop Participants:

- "Match infrastructure improvements to increased needs"
- "Increase density at strategic nodes"
- "Make beautiful and compelling urban design a priority"
- "Compact Mixed Use Communities"
- "Create mixed use developments around neighborhood nodes"

3. Open Space and Resource Preservation. Preserve the County's unique natural resources and habitats by limiting new development outside the urban and rural services line. Inside the urban and rural services line, promote the reuse of existing structures or developed land, and ensure that open spaces and parks are protected, accessible, and open to all County residents.

Ideas from Workshop Participants

- "Match development to natural resource limits"
- "Consider water availability in future planning"
- "Promote local food production"
- "Preserve local agricultural land"
- "Pursue new open space amenities in underserved areas"

4. Housing Options. Expand housing choices for people of all ages and incomes to lower the combined cost of housing and transportation and to promote diversity in terms of age, income, and family size throughout the County.

Ideas from Workshop Participants:

- "Affordable, flexible housing stock"
- "Develop housing near or within services, jobs"
- "Socio-economic diversity through planning and implementation"
- "Variety of housing price levels at locations served by alternative transportation"

5. Fiscal Sustainability. Promote development patterns and specific land uses that generate revenues to provide the infrastructure and services necessary for thriving communities.

Ideas from Workshop Participants:

- "Pay as you go – don't build if you can't afford"
- "Don't add more local government debt"
- "Encourage businesses that generate tax revenue such as manufacturing"

6. Economic Vitality. Support locally-owned businesses that bind the community together and new businesses that generate environmentally friendly, well-paying jobs and local economic prosperity. Support efforts to train and prepare County residents to occupy locally available jobs.

Ideas from Workshop Participants:

- "Support ecotourism and green jobs"
- "Rejuvenate local commerce/business in town centers"
- "Develop quality education and training programs"
- "Green job development locally"
- "Promote green jobs and conventional jobs for sustainable wages"

7. Unique Community Character. Enhance the unique characteristics of communities by investing in healthy, safe, attractive, and walkable neighborhoods and efficient transportation choices between communities. Focus County investment within existing communities to increase community vitality, provide infrastructure efficiently, increase mobility, and promote social connections while protecting open space and existing community assets.

Ideas from Workshop Participants:

- "Honor existing town and village plans"
- "Preserve small town feel"
- "Maintain what we have and improve/renovate what exists"
- "More community plans"
- "Support improvement of existing structures that contribute to community character"

8. Governmental Coordination. Align policies and funding among local, County, regional, and State governmental agencies, including schools and colleges. Remove barriers to collaboration, leverage funding, improve local control over local resources, and increase the effectiveness of all levels of government that impact growth and development in Santa Cruz County.

Ideas from Workshop Participants:

- "Local control of government"
- "County cooperation with school district"

9. Inclusive Decision-Making. Encourage community and stakeholder involvement in planning and decision-making. Ensure that planning decisions are predictable, fair, forward thinking, and cost-effective.

Ideas from Workshop Participants

- "Protect private property rights while meeting community land use and environmental needs"
- "Shift the mindset from NIMBYism and exclusivity to inclusivity"
- "Community involvement in sustainable growth issues"
- "Implement our community vision while respecting our individual and property rights"
- "No planning behind closed doors"

A Vision for Sustainable Communities in Santa Cruz County

All parts of Santa Cruz County, both urban and rural, benefit from the increased vitality of more sustainable patterns of development and conservation. Within all neighborhoods, investments in transportation improvements have increased residents' transportation options, mobility and quality of life. The unique needs of the various communities are taken into account in County policy making and transportation decisions, allowing appropriate solutions for each area. The rural areas maintain the character and densities that recognize their topography and important natural resources, and that distinguish them from the urban part of the County. There are improved links among rural areas and between rural and urban areas.

Within urban areas, infill development has occurred on vacant and underutilized commercial properties along key transportation corridors. In some places, this development is mixed use with residential or office uses located above ground-floor commercial uses. The best characteristics of favorite areas, such

as the Villages and lower 41st Avenue in Pleasure Point, have been replicated elsewhere. Development is well-designed to support a walkable environment and a unique sense of place. Along key corridors, development is of sufficient intensity to support an active environment with transportation choices. New development provides a variety of housing types, and there are housing options that are affordable to households of all income levels. All residents who wish to can live within easy walking distance of activity centers that enhance community ties.

Transportation choices are such that residents can leave cars at home for some of their daily trips. Bike and pedestrian infrastructure has been optimized so that there is a good network of on-road lanes and sidewalks, supplemented by some off road facilities. It is easy and safe to walk or bike from one neighborhood or commercial area to another, as new connections supplement the existing grid pattern. The railroad and rail trail contribute to transportation and recreation choices, as well as enhancing the sense of community and the vitality of the industries that use the rail. The barrier created by Highway One between the ocean and inland sides of the County has been lessened by strategic improvement of crossings and connectivity to those crossings. Better functioning Highway One removes some pressure from local streets, increasing the reliability of travel.

Within all neighborhoods there are retail and other services that meet the needs of residents. Commercial centers feature quality design and convenient connections to neighborhoods for pedestrians and cyclists. Local businesses contribute to a distinctive sense of place and community pride, with high-quality jobs providing a living wage to residents. The area is attractive to knowledge-based industries that benefit from the County's unique assets, such as lifestyle enterprises, ecotourism, and sustainable industries. The environmental and social stresses of a large commuter population have been reduced by increasing the number of local well-paying jobs. All residents have the opportunity to benefit from this growth and prosperity – the area is known as a diverse and inclusive community with equal access to opportunity. A healthy local economy contributes to the fiscal sustainability of schools and public agencies and enables the County to provide the high quality services desired by all residents.

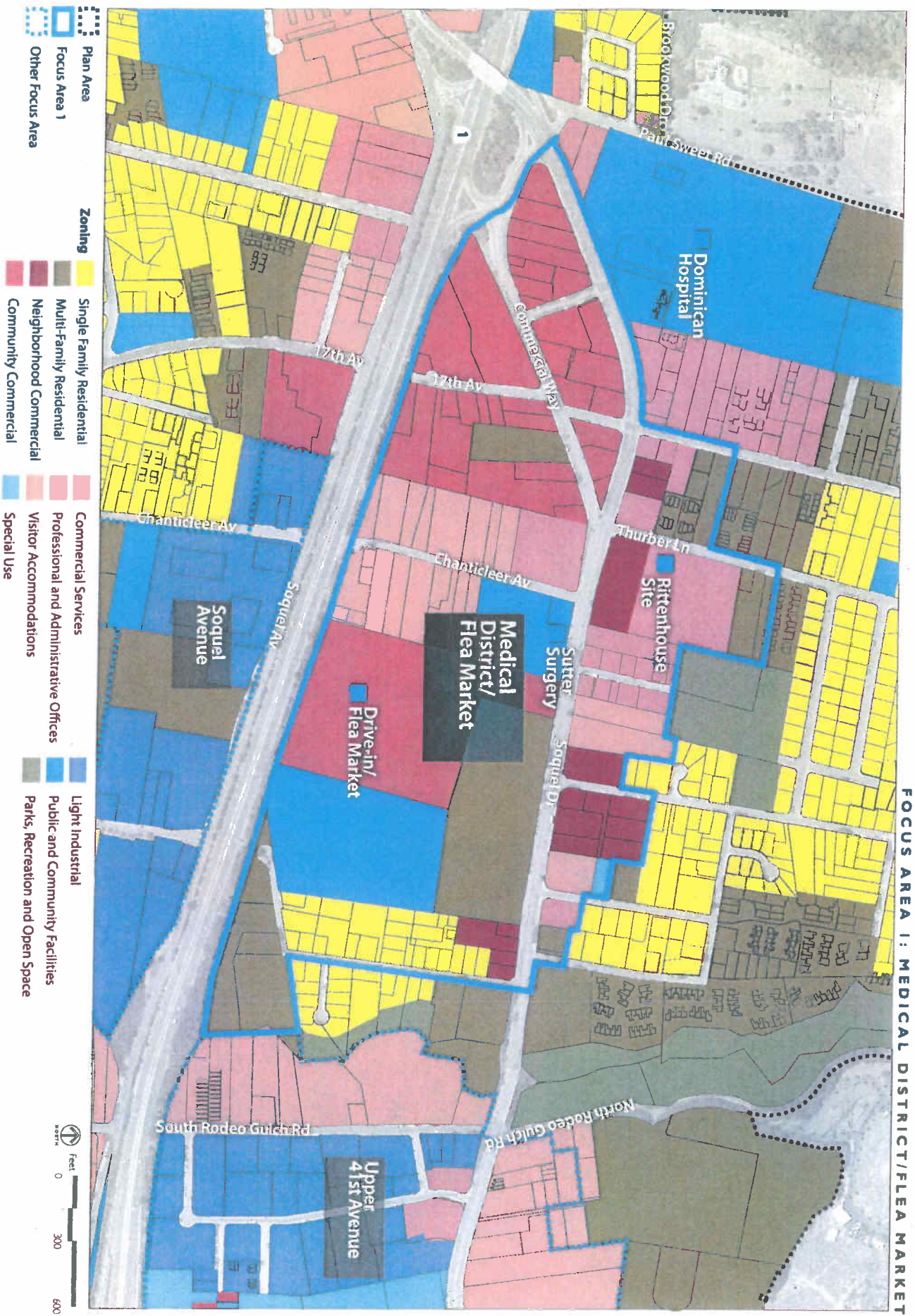
Development within urban areas reduces development pressure in rural areas of the County and helps to preserve valued open space. Development in the Plan area is environmentally friendly due to its location, density, and green building practices. Within the urban area open space and natural habitat are protected, and new development is designed to help protect these resources. The area is a part of a sustainable system of food production with community gardens, urban agriculture, and organic farming practices. Development is designed to minimize per capita consumption of resources such as water and energy.





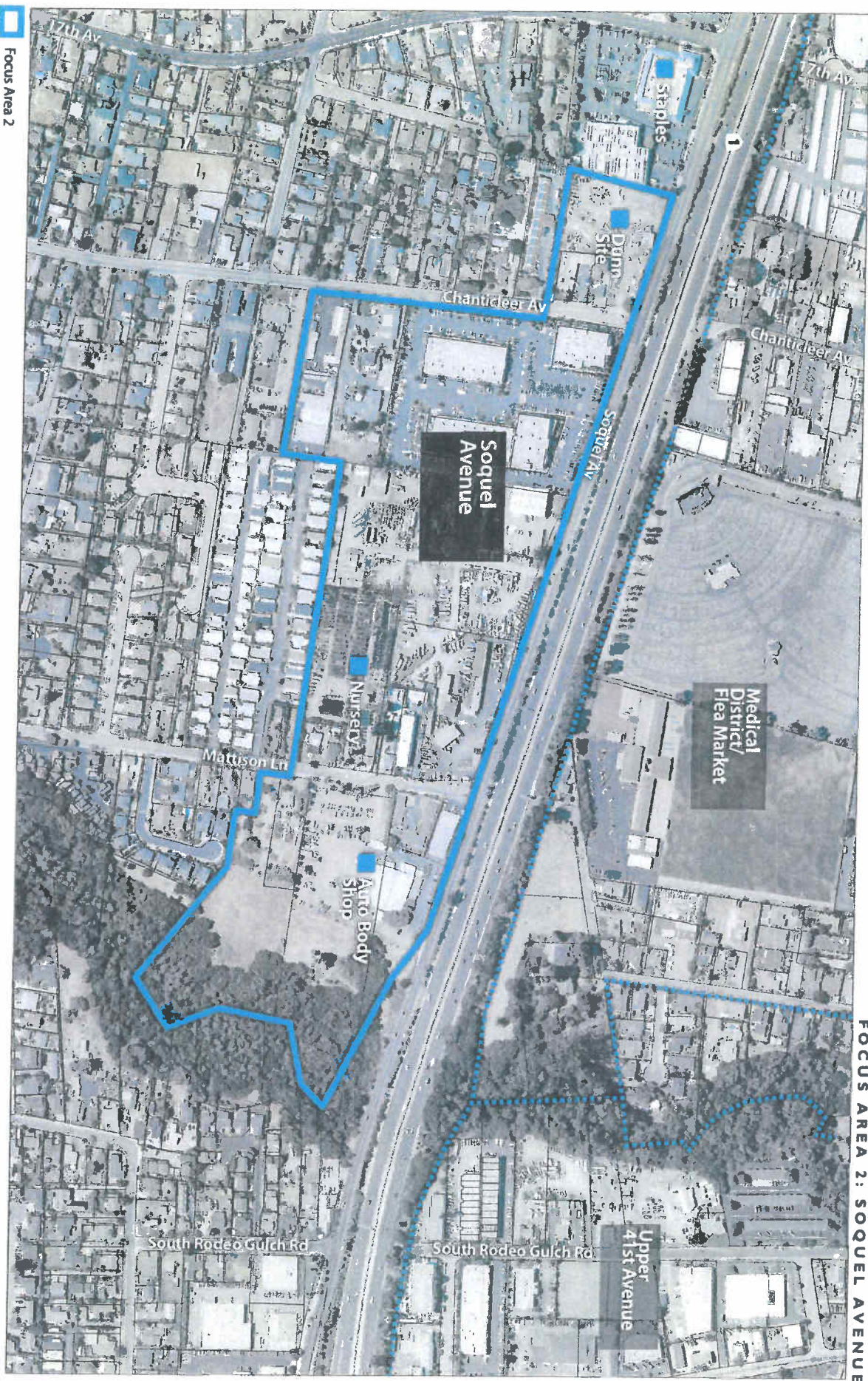
FOCUS AREA 1: MEDICAL DISTRICT/FLEA MARKET

EXHIBIT C

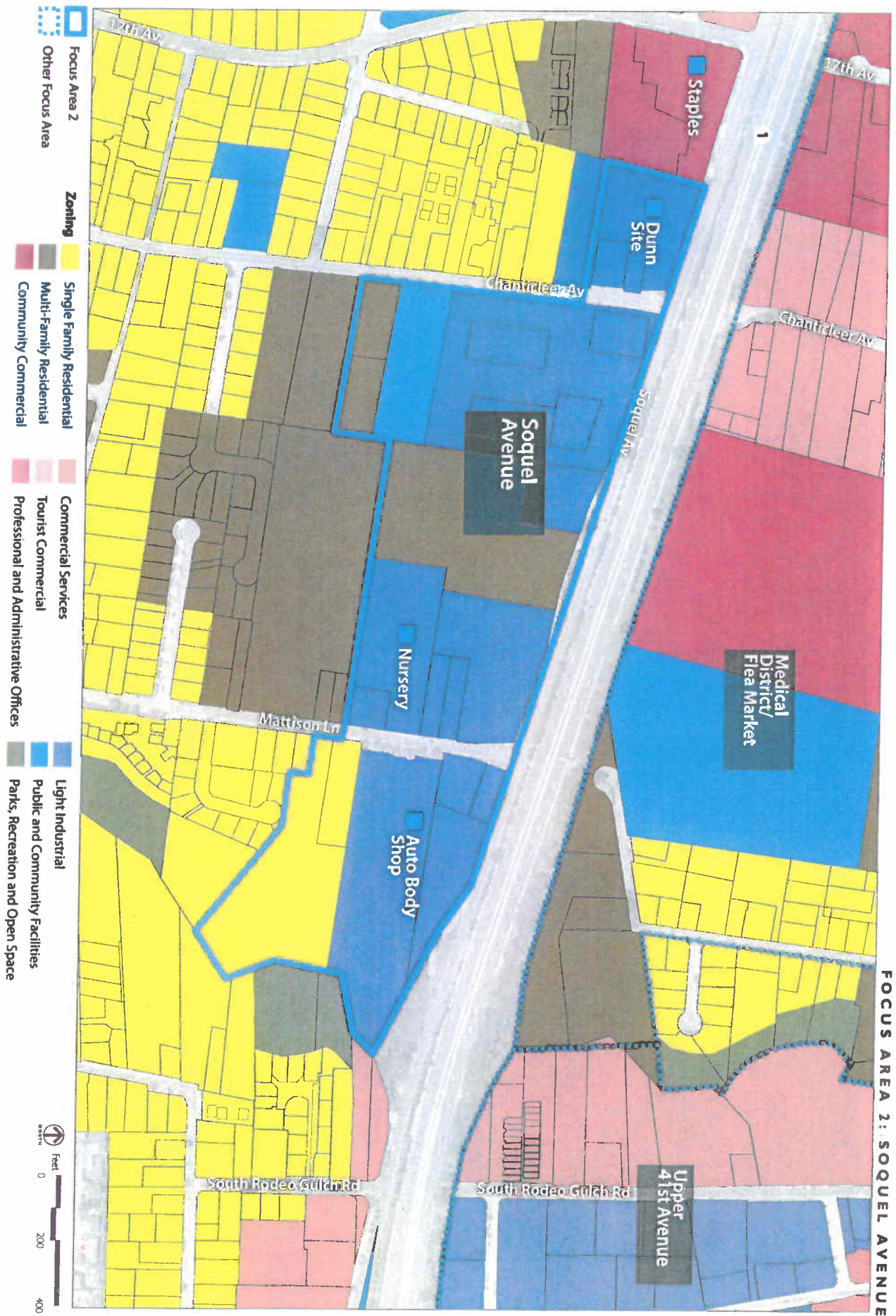


 Focus Area 2
 Other Focus Area

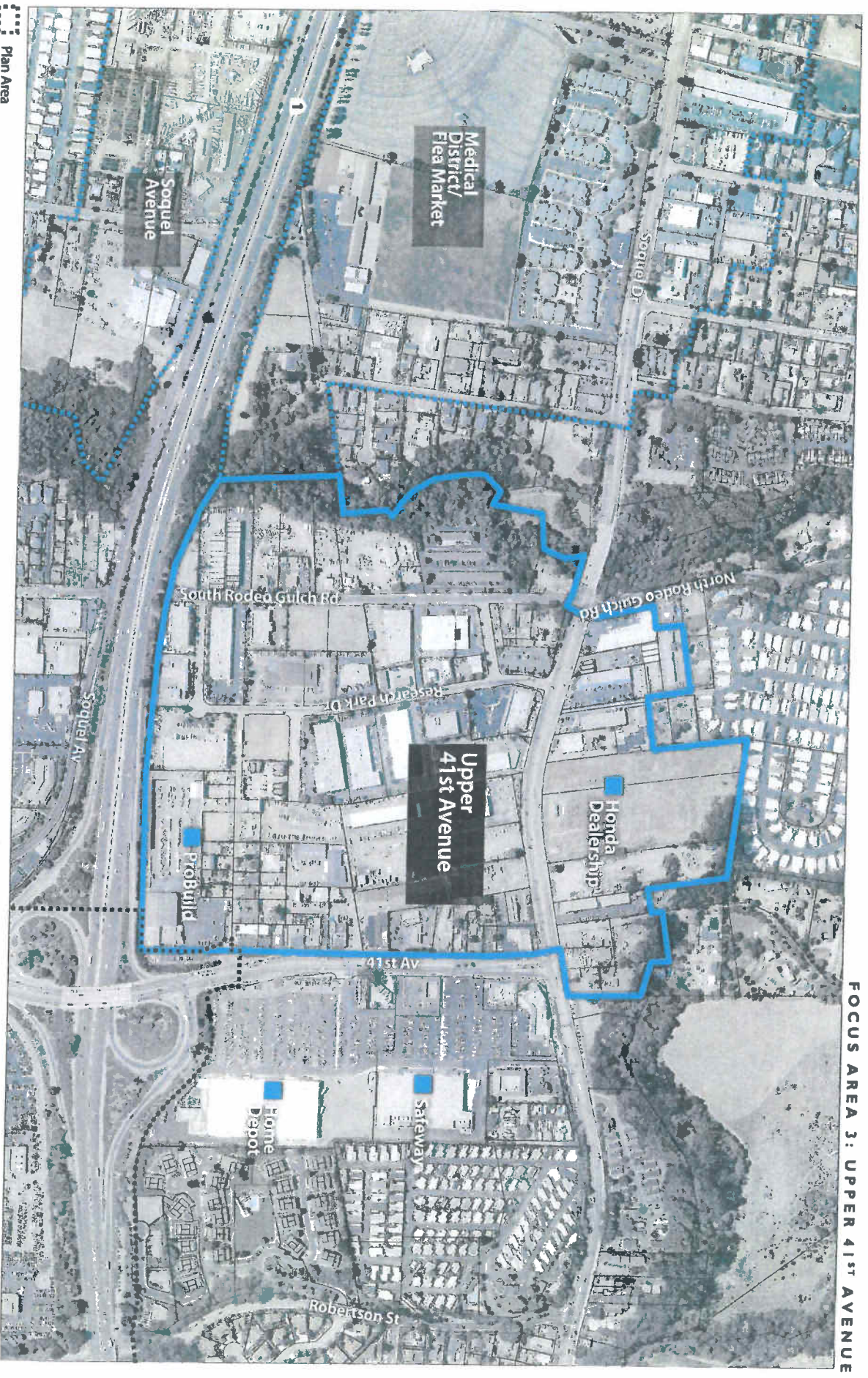
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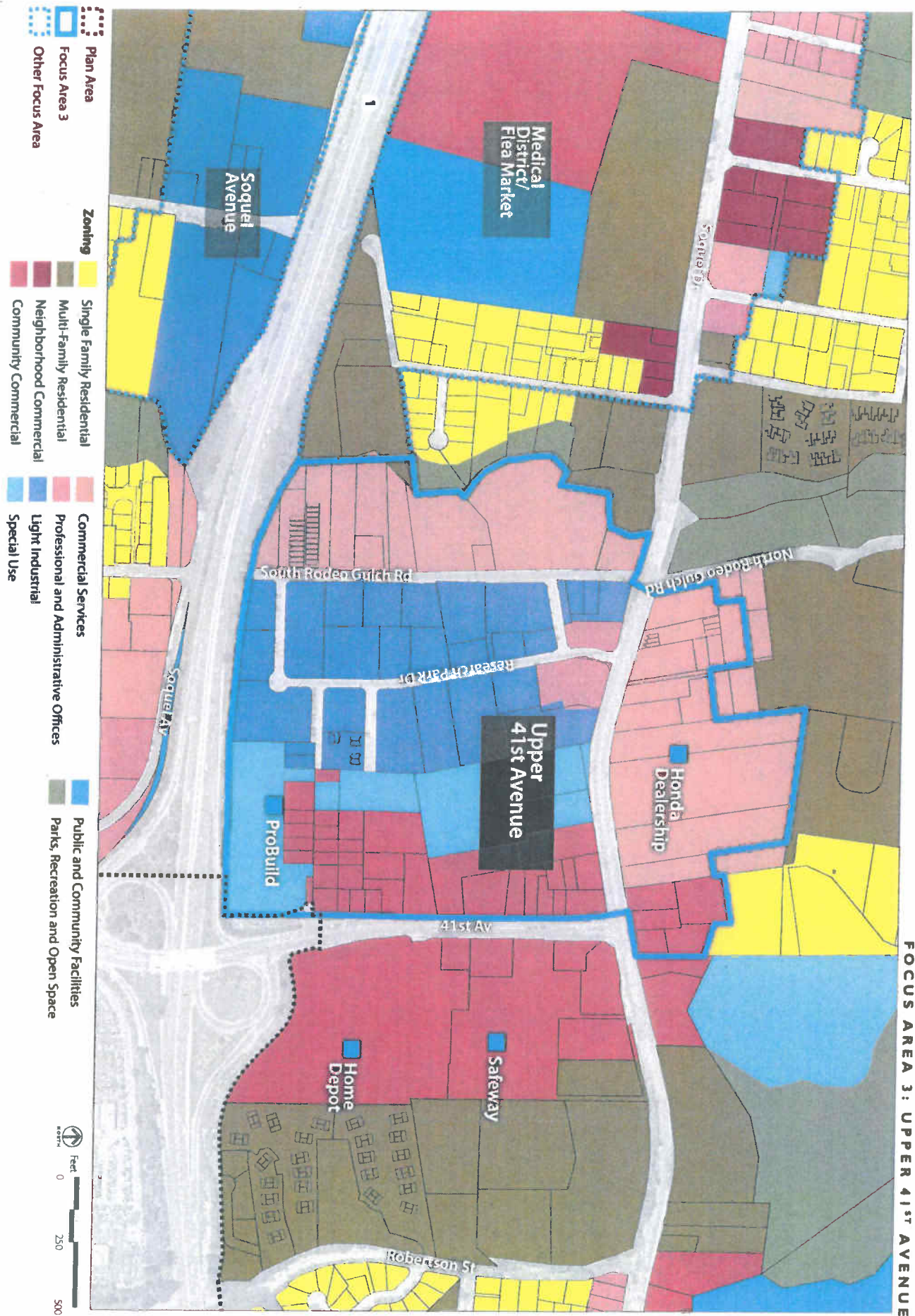
FOCUS AREA 2: SOQUEL AVENUE

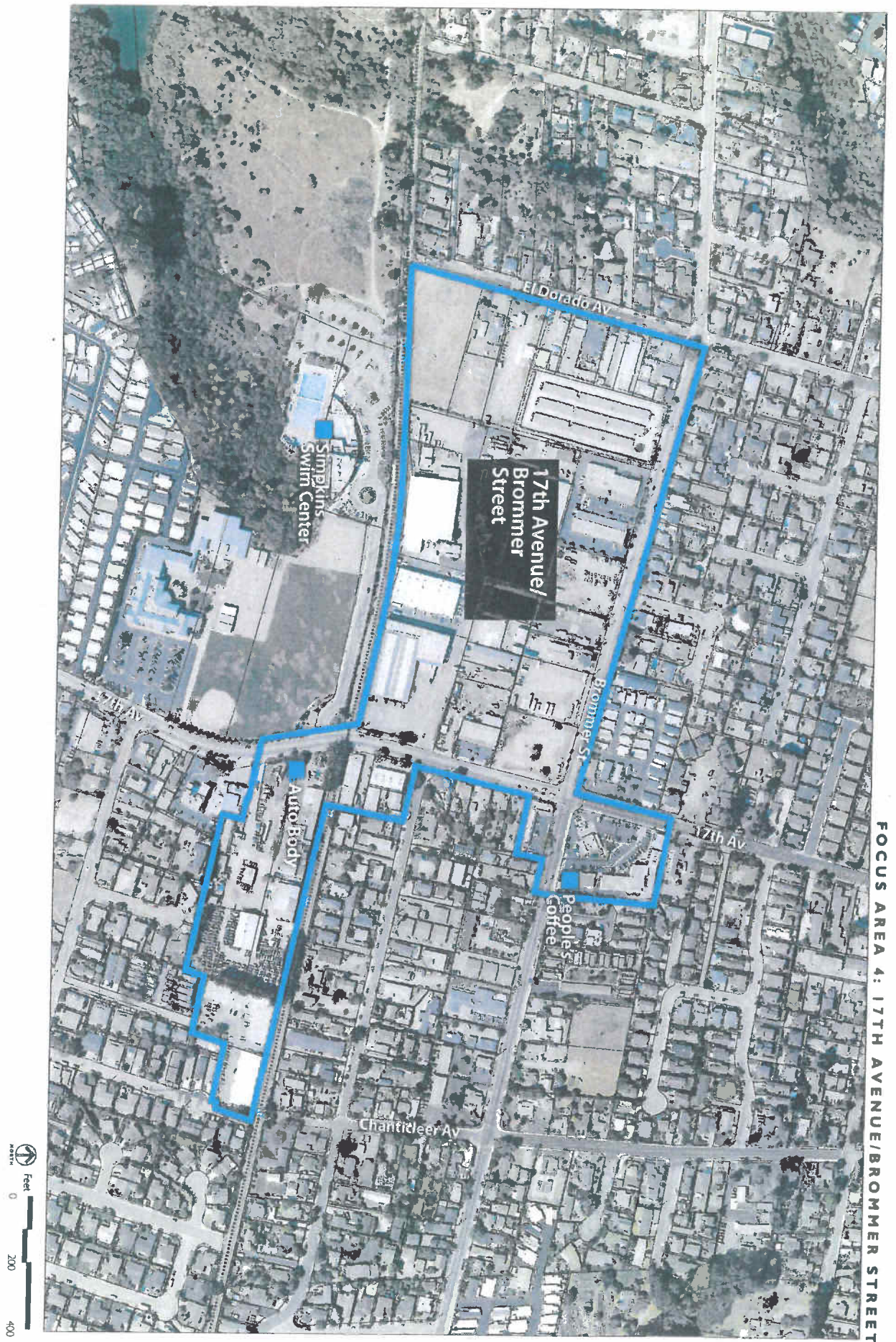


- Plan Area
- Focus Area 3
- Other Focus Area



FOCUS AREA 3: UPPER 41ST AVENUE





FOCUS AREA 4: 17TH AVENUE/BROMMER STREET

