



The Springs Specific Plan

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES SUMMARY

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Prepared for:

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INTRODUCTION

The Issues and Opportunities Report provides a means of identifying and focusing the community's attention on the key issues and opportunities that have emerged during the community outreach process. Identification of the issues and opportunities that are of major concern or importance to the community is a key step in the development of an effective Specific Plan. This information will provide a foundation for further discussion, problem solving, strategizing and policy development that will shape the development of project alternatives and ultimately lead to a Specific Plan that will achieve the community's vision.

This report includes a summary of the input received from the community during the initial stages of the Springs Specific Plan process through a series of community workshops, a bilingual survey, written comments received from the public and input from the Specific Plan Community Advisory Team (CAT). A complete list of comments is provided as an attachment to this report. The report was also influenced by the Existing Conditions Report that was prepared for the Specific Plan.

The input summarized in this report reflects the opinions of those who chose to participate in the public outreach process and should not be interpreted to represent a consensus of the entire community. Further, this report is not static and it is expected that new issues and opportunities may be identified as the process moves forward.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The issues and opportunities described in this report were compiled from a wide range of sources including public input from three community workshops, responses to the community survey, written comments submitted by the public, input from the Specific Plan Community Advisory Team (CAT), and findings from the Existing Conditions Report. A brief description of these sources of information is provided below. A more detailed discussion of the community workshops, bilingual survey, Community Advisory Team (CAT) and the information contributed by each is provided in the sections that follow.

Community Workshops

The Springs Specific Plan team held three public workshops between February 2016 and June 2016 at Altimira Middle School and Sonoma Charter School. The workshops provided an opportunity for the community to offer their thoughts on what they value about their community and what important issues should be addressed in the Springs Specific Plan.



Community Survey and Correspondence

A community survey was made available in English and Spanish from June 20 through August 16, 2016. The survey was posted on the Springs website and printed copies of the survey were available at La Luz and La Michoacana. One hundred and sixty-one completed surveys were received.

The Springs Community Advisory Team

The Springs Community Advisory Team (CAT) was formed to represent the community in the development of the Specific Plan. The CAT will coordinate with County staff and the Springs Specific Plan consultant team throughout the development of the Specific Plan.

Existing Conditions Report

The Existing Conditions report provides key supporting information for this document and for the Springs Specific Plan as a whole. It provides information on a wide range of topics, including demographics and economics, land use, community health, housing, transportation, public facilities and utilities, natural resources, recreational and cultural resources, safety, and noise. The report does not contain policies; it is solely intended to provide a foundation or factual context for policy decisions. The Existing Conditions Report findings helped to identify key issues in the various aforementioned topical areas.

COMMUNITY INPUT SUMMARY

This section provides a description of the input received from the community during the initial stages of the Springs Specific Plan development process. Community workshop comments are provided in their original form as attachments to this report. Survey results are also included in the attachment section. The attachments are available for review at Sonoma County, Permit and Resource Management Department, 2550 Ventura Ave, Santa Rosa or on-line at <http://thesprings.specificplan.org>.

COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS

Three community workshops were held between February 2016 and June 2016 to inform the public about the Springs Specific Plan. Community residents, business owners, and stakeholders attended workshops at Altamira Middle School and Sonoma Charter School. The workshops provided an opportunity for the public to offer their thoughts on what they value about their community and what important issues should be addressed in the Springs Specific Plan.

Participants of the three community workshops held at the outset of the Springs Specific Plan process provided extensive input that will be used to craft the Springs Specific Plan. Workshop attendees participated in a range of activities and exercises designed to gather information on community priorities, values, and focus areas for the Springs Specific Plan. Workshop participants also provided input on land use and circulation that will be used to develop the Springs Land Use and Circulation Map Alternatives.

The mapping activities provided opportunities to identify where new land uses should be located, key community focal areas that should be protected or expanded, and circulation issues that should be addressed through roadway improvements, traffic calming measures, or enhancements to the bicycle and pedestrian network.

Each workshop included a presentation by the consultant team that explained the role of the Springs Specific Plan, an overview of the Springs Specific Plan process, and an opportunity for the workshop participants to ask questions and seek clarification on the process and the role of the community. Workshop participants were asked to complete activities and exercises in order to provide information to the Springs Specific Plan team. Each workshop focused on different themes and topics to be addressed in the Springs Specific Plan. Following is a summary of the components of the workshops and an overview of the community input that was received.

WORKSHOP #1: SPECIFIC PLAN INTRODUCTION AND COMMUNITY VISION

The first community workshop was held on February 29, 2016 at Altimira Middle School. Participants were given an introduction to the Springs Specific Plan process and an overview of the contents and development of the specific plan. Workshop participants were asked a series of questions, and answers were placed on post-it notes and attached to poster boards throughout the room.

1. Vision

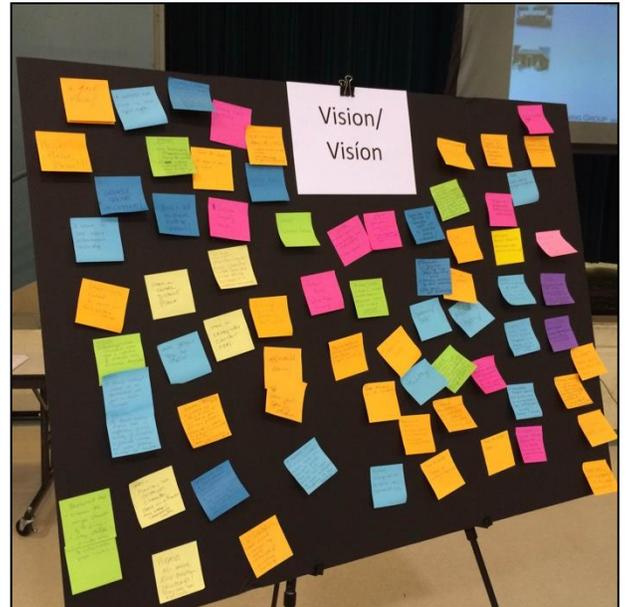
- What ideas do you have for the future of the Springs?
- What would make your community better?
- What three things would you like to see accomplished by 2035?

2. Assets

- What do you value most about the Springs?
- What makes this a special place to live or work?

3. Challenges

- What issues are facing the Springs that need to be addressed in the Specific Plan?



The most common responses to these questions are listed below (in no particular order). The full set of responses received during the Workshop 1 is provided in Attachment A.

1. Vision

- Centrally located community plaza
- Diverse and multi-cultural environment
- Alternative transportation opportunities (bicycle, pedestrian, and transit)
- Affordable and mixed-use housing
- Locally-owned small businesses
- Farmer's market
- Community events
- Park space and other recreational areas
- Safety along Highway 12
- Rural and historic character
- Revitalization of underused parcels and parks

2. Assets

- Diverse socioeconomic and ethnic population
- Unique and eclectic identity
- Rich history and architectural character
- Semi-rural character of the surrounding area
- Locally-owned retail and restaurants
- Working class population
- Natural surroundings/backdrop
- Walking distance to amenities

3. Challenges

- Inadequate parking
- Traffic congestion
- Access to alternative transportation
- Lack of workforce and affordable housing
- Safety for bicycles and pedestrians
- Bicycle path connectivity
- Lack of business diversity
- Lack of community center
- Landscaping along Highway 12
- Litter along the Highway
- Preservation of diversity
- Gentrification

WORKSHOP #2: LAND USE AND CIRCULATION PRIORITIES

The second workshop was held on May 16, 2016 at Altimira Middle School. Participants provided input on preferred land use types and locations, as well as needed circulation improvements and connections.

Interactive Mapping Activities

Workshop participants were divided into small groups and asked to provide input by marking-up land use and circulation maps. After the workshop, the land use and circulation maps from Workshop 2 were provided to La Luz Bilingual Center, La Michoacana, El Verano School, and the Springs Alliance. Members of the public were then able to visit the aforementioned locations and mark-up the land use and circulation maps with their comments and suggestions. Members of the Springs Community Alliance provided comments on the maps at their June 2016 meeting. This provided an additional opportunity for those members of the community who were unable to attend the second workshop to provide input on the land use and circulation improvements needed in the Springs. All maps created during Workshop 2 and subsequent community outreach are included in Attachment B.

LAND USE MAPPING ACTIVITY

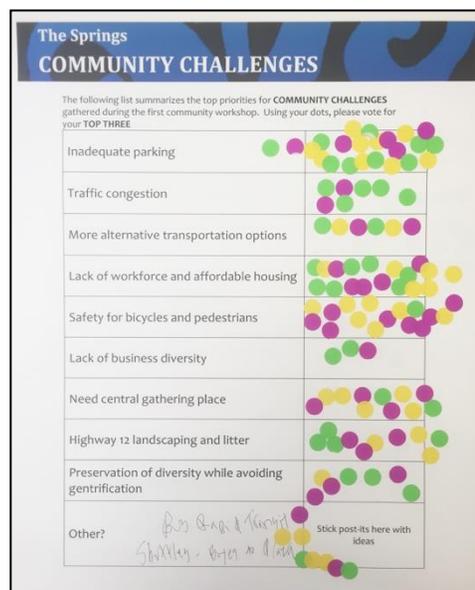
Workshop participants were divided into small groups of four to eight people and were asked to identify land use needs and locations for mixed use buildings, restaurants, retail shops, local services, apartments/condos, single family homes, and community gathering areas (e.g. plaza, farmers market, etc.) and to provide any other thoughts or input that the group developed. Key themes from the land use mapping activity are summarized below.

- Provide a community gathering location adjacent to Highway 12
- Increase the variety of retail shops and commercial services within the Springs Specific Plan Area
- Develop mixed-use buildings along the Highway 12 corridor and on large lots on Donald Street
- Expand the variety of housing choices on vacant parcels along Donald Street, Robinson Road, Thompson Avenue, and Siesta Way, with lower density housing located further from Highway 12 and higher density housing located closer to Highway 12
- Develop medium and high density housing along the Highway 12 corridor and in the vicinity of the corridor

INTERACTIVE CIRCULATION MAPPING ACTIVITY

Following the land use activity, the workshop participants remained in small groups and were asked to identify transportation and circulation needs related to sidewalks and paths, bike lanes, transit, roads, and parking, as well as to provide any other thoughts or input that the group developed. Key themes from the circulation mapping activity are summarized below.

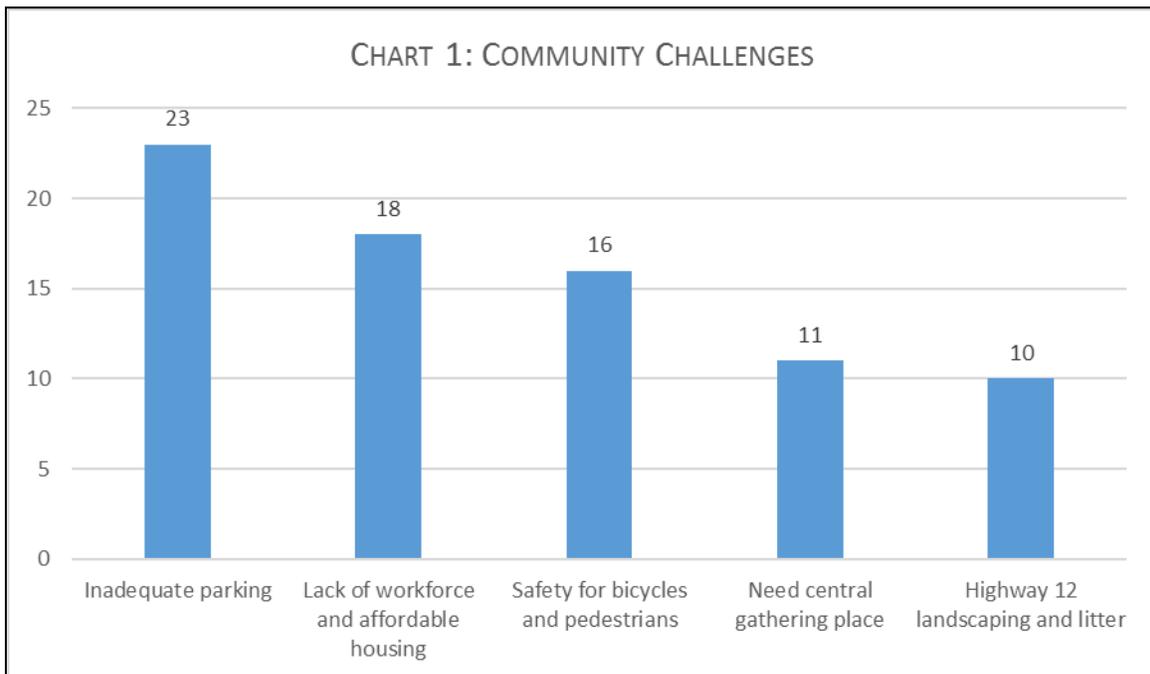
- Provide parking garages and lots adjacent to Highway 12
- Increase safety for bicyclists and pedestrians by adding more street lighting, such as between Central Avenue and Vallejo Avenue
- Re-time the traffic lights along Highway 12
- Construct sidewalks in areas that are currently lacking and improve existing sidewalks that are not pedestrian-friendly
- Provide more bus stops along Highway 12 and maintain or improve existing bus stops
- Install a pedestrian crossing light along Highway 12 at Central Avenue
- Install a crosswalk at the intersection of Highway 12 and Encinas Lane

**Key Challenges**

Workshop participants were asked to identify the top three community challenges facing the Springs based on input from the previous workshop. They were also given an opportunity to identify new themes/topics. Participants were then asked to vote on the following community challenges:

- Inadequate parking
- Traffic congestion
- More alternative transportation options
- Lack of workforce and affordable housing
- Safety for bicycles and pedestrians
- Lack of business diversity
- Need central gathering place
- Highway 12 landscaping and litter
- Preservation of diversity while avoiding gentrification

The top five responses are shown in the chart below with the corresponding number of workshop participants who voted for each issue listed.

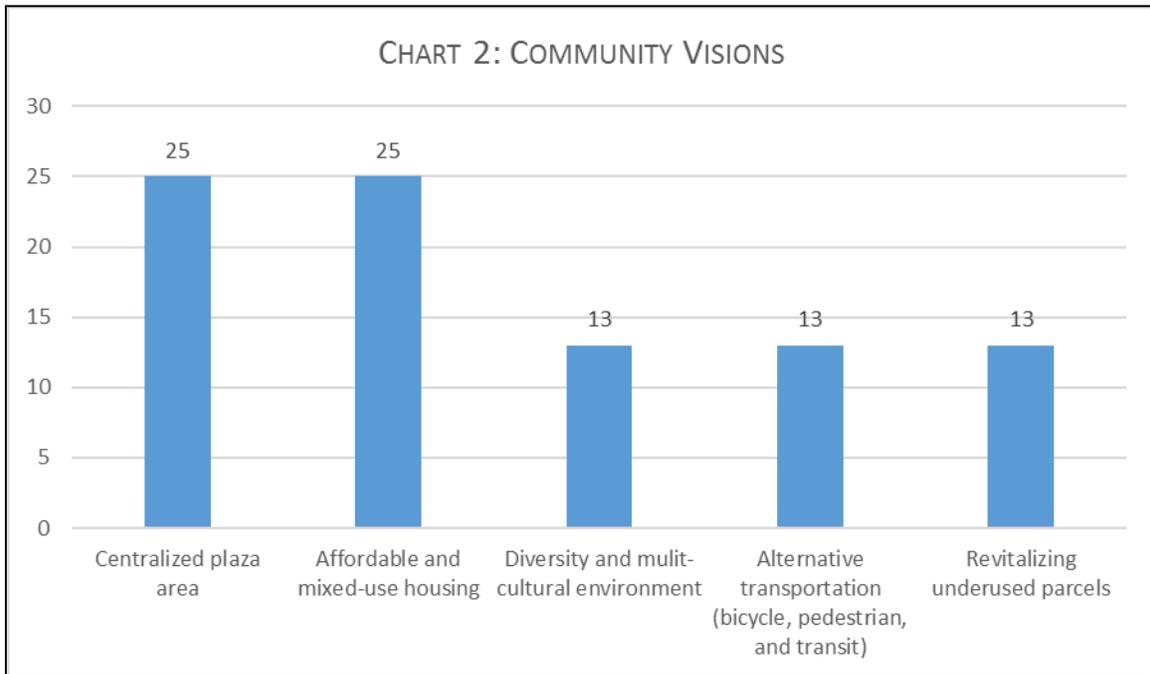
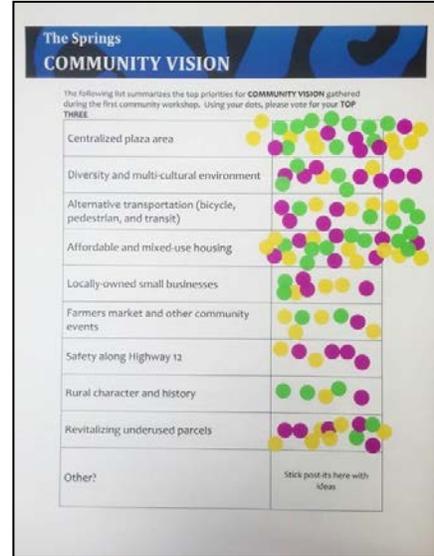


Community Vision

Participants were also asked to identify the three most important elements of the community's vision for the Springs based on input received at the previous workshop. They were also given an opportunity to identify new characteristics or features to enhance the common vision being developed. Participants were then asked to vote on the following elements:

- Centralized plaza area
- Diversity and multi-cultural environment
- Alternative transportation (bicycle, pedestrian, and transit)
- Affordable and mixed-use housing
- Locally-owned small businesses
- Farmers market and other community events
- Safety along Highway 12
- Rural character and history
- Revitalizing underused parcels

The top five responses are shown in the chart below with the corresponding number of workshop participants who voted for each element.



WORKSHOP #3: COMMUNITY DESIGN

The third workshop was held on June 29, 2016 at the Sonoma Charter School. Participants provided input on preferred architectural styles of those that currently exist in the Springs and completed visual preference surveys using photographs of various types of residential and commercial uses.

Existing Design and Development

Workshop participants were divided into groups of four to eight people and asked to provide their notes and comments on the forms provided. The groups were also given two posters to use for reference when completing the form. One poster had photos of existing commercial, retail, office, and community uses. The other had photos of existing residential buildings.

The groups were then asked to do the following:

1. Identify three examples of good design in the Springs
2. Identify two or three features that make each location or building appropriate and desirable for the Springs
3. Describe new design features that should be used in the Springs (i.e. building types, building details, public space features, etc.)

Feedback from this activity is summarized below and detailed comments are provided in Appendix C.

EXISTING COMMERCIAL, RETAIL, OFFICE, AND COMMUNITY USES

- Locate mixed-use buildings in the central core area along Highway 12
- Maximize parking areas while considering aesthetics from Highway 12
- Preserve the historical Mission-style buildings and facades. Ensure that future development respects this historic, local architectural style
- Support the use of color that is eye-catching, fun, and inviting and reflects the diverse character of the area
- Create inviting retail and community uses by incorporating cohesive color schemes, landscaping, and outdoor gathering spaces

The Springs Specific Plan
Existing Commercial, Retail, Office, and Community Uses



The local example of a commercial building that received the most positive feedback during the workshop was the Barking Dog. Commenters praised the building as a good blend of the old and the new. They also liked the building’s historic elements, architectural detailing, warm colors, and outdoor seating.



The Sonoma Mission Inn was also a favorite for its historic significance, architecture, color and landscaping. And although El Molino Central was not included on the poster of existing commercial buildings, it was praised by many participants for its “classic” and “elegant” architectural design, color treatment, and outdoor seating. The mission style architecture of the Fiesta Plaza did not generate much enthusiasm among workshop participants. It appears that authenticity may have been a factor in the groups’ lukewarm reaction to the Fiesta Plaza.



EXISTING RESIDENTIAL USES

- Construct residential uses with sufficient setback from major roadways in order to provide areas for landscaping, porches, and/or shade trees
- Preserve historic designs (Mission revival, adobe) while avoiding cookie-cutter designs
- Provide intimate and inviting shared spaces, particularly within high density residential developments
- Provide shade trees and front yard spaces to promote pedestrian use along the corridor

The examples of local residential structures that garnered the most positive responses were the mission revival buildings numbered four and six on the “Existing Residential Uses” activity poster. Community members appreciated the structures’ historic facades which complement the history of the area. Textured building materials and treatments, such as adobe and stucco, were also preferred over cookie-cutter designs. Commenters indicated that they would prefer to preserve or rehab original building facades and other architectural elements where possible. Additionally, commenters had a preference for mixed-use buildings along the Highway 12 frontage with residential on the top floors and commercial on the ground floor. This would encourage walkability and community engagement along the busy corridor.

Many workshop participants indicated that the residential buildings labeled nine and ten on the activity poster were good examples of multi-family housing that works well in the community. Commenters praised the design of residential building nine because of the building setbacks which allow for an abundance of shade trees and other landscaping. On the other hand, the multi-family bungalows in residential building ten were preferred due to the shared auto court which promotes community and neighborhood engagement.

The Springs Specific Plan
Existing Residential Uses



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Visual Preference Survey

Workshop participants were divided into groups of four to eight people, and asked to make comments on the visual preference survey posters provided. One poster had photos of mixed-use commercial, neighborhood specialty commercial, and neighborhood grocery uses. The other poster had photos of small lot residential, multifamily residential, and duplex/fourplex residential buildings. Groups were asked to identify one or two pictures that contain design features that are most desirable for the Springs. For each picture on the posters, groups were also asked to identify the particular features that make the building attractive as well as those that would be inappropriate for the Springs. Key themes from the visual preference survey are summarized below.

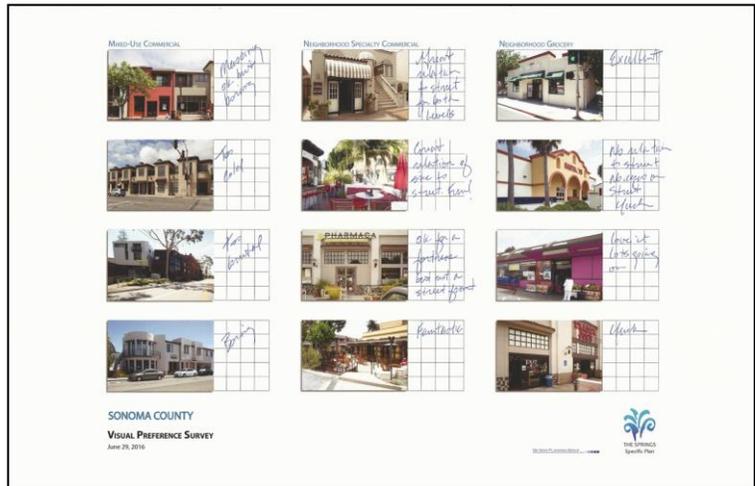
MIXED-USE COMMERCIAL, NEIGHBORHOOD SPECIALTY COMMERCIAL, NEIGHBORHOOD GROCERY

There were a wide range of opinions among workshop participants, however, some strong preferences emerged during the design preference activities. The groups showed a strong preference for outdoor dining areas, particularly when enhanced with greenery. Small scale neighborhood commercial buildings were clearly favored over large, corporate structures. Participants rejected monotonous, boxy architecture and massive blank walls in favor of buildings with architectural interest, paned windows, and awnings. The commercial buildings shown to the right received the most positive comments of the examples provided for this design activity.



Recurring comments received during the summary group discussion which followed the Mixed Use and Commercial posters activity included the following preferences:

- Outdoor dining areas and other outdoor gathering spaces
- Approachable, small scale neighborhood commercial buildings
- Architectural detailing and interesting window treatments
- Inviting spaces with awnings, greenery, and trees for shade
- Avoid expansive, blank walls without windows
- Avoid boxy, monotonous buildings



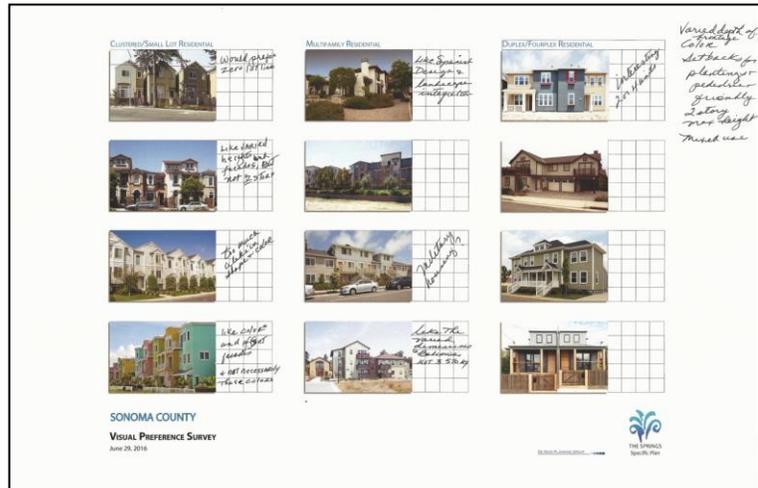
- Avoid massive buildings that are out of scale with the community
- Avoid corporate buildings and big box stores
- Locate mixed-use buildings in the central core area along Highway 12
- Maximize parking areas while considering aesthetics from Highway 12
- Preserve the historical Mission-style buildings and/or facades and ensure future development respects this historic, local architectural style
- Create inviting retail and community uses by incorporating a mix of color schemes, landscaping, and outdoor gathering spaces
- Include a variety of masses and rooflines, particularly in two-story, mixed-use structures
- Encourage local, small scale neighborhood commercial buildings versus large big box stores
- Include roadway setbacks in order to create inviting spaces with awnings, landscaping, and trees for shade

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

CLUSTER/SMALL LOT RESIDENTIAL, MULTIFAMILY RESIDENTIAL, DUPLEX/FOURPLEX RESIDENTIAL

Recurring comments received on the Residential poster included the following preferences:

- Construct residential uses with a sufficient setback from major roadways in order to provide areas for landscaping, porches, and/or shade trees
- Preserve historic designs (Mission revival) while avoiding cookie-cutter design
- Provide intimate and inviting shared spaces, particularly within high density residential developments
- Value shade trees and front yard spaces to promote pedestrian use along the corridor
- Incorporate a variety of building materials and color schemes
- Avoid “auto-centric” designs with highly visible garage doors and driveways, particularly along Highway 12
- Ensure that the style and facades of future structures integrate with existing architecture within the Springs
- Develop buildings at an appropriate scale for the community



COMMUNITY SURVEY

The County received 161 completed surveys. Approximately 80% of respondents live in the Springs area. The top responses to the survey questions are summarized below. Some survey respondents did not answer all questions, so the individual responses may be less than the total number of surveys. Appendix D includes a complete summary of all survey responses, including the fill-in-the-blank responses where ‘Other’ was an optional answer.

1. Question: “Do you live in The Springs?”

- Yes (80%)

2. Question: “What would you like to see more of in The Springs?”

- Public gathering places (53%)
- Parks and recreation (53%)
- Shops (41%)
- Restaurants (36%)
- Housing (31%)

3. Question: “What type of housing is needed in The Springs?”

- Housing affordable to working families (50%)

- Housing for all income levels (40%)
 - Rehabilitate existing housing (35%)
 - Duplex, triplex, and fourplex units (35%)
4. **Question:** “What would make walking around The Springs easier and more enjoyable?”
- Crosswalks with flashing lights (56%)
 - Public plaza (54%)
 - Trees and planters (53%)
 - Shade structures (37%)
 - Benches (38%)
 - More sidewalks (36%)
5. **Question:** “What would make bicycling around The Springs easier and more enjoyable?”
- Bicycle paths separated from the road (58%)
 - More bicycle lanes (46%)
 - Bike racks (41%)
 - Better street lighting (31%)
6. **Question:** “Do you use the bus?”
- No (68%)
 - Occasionally (27%)
 - Frequently or always (5%)
7. **Question:** “Would you use the bus more often if buses . . .
- Ran more frequently? Yes (54%)
 - Bus stops had benches? Yes (34%)
 - It took less time to get to your destination? Yes (42%)
8. **Question:** “If you could make one improvement to the Springs, what would it be?”
- More parking
 - More recreational opportunities for children and youth
 - More restaurants and stores that serve the community
 - A new public plaza
 - Community-oriented events and festivals
 - More subtle color schemes
 - More vibrant color schemes
 - More trees and green areas
 - Increased public safety

COMMUNITY ADVISORY TEAM

CAT Meeting #1. At its February 1, 2016 meeting, the members of the CAT identified key issues facing the Springs and their vision for the Springs 20 years into the future. CAT comments are summarized below.

ISSUES

PLAZA

- The community needs a central gathering place (plaza) that can be configured and used for a variety of events and activities
- Expand the plaza vision to include pedestrian-oriented shops and uses that orbit around the plaza
- We need more community events

HOUSING

- We need to strike a balance between being able to live in the Springs (safe, affordable housing) and keeping the area beautiful with respect to the hills, greenfields, oak trees, etc.
- Housing is an essential issue
- Need workforce housing to keep existing residents in the area
- Students suffer from the lack of housing
- Many people move from the area because they can't afford the housing
- Need to increase development intensity and densities
- Need to be thoughtful about locations for increased density
- It would be good to have housing at east/west crossroads for easier ingress/egress
- Families that live in the community should continue to have access to housing
- Vacation rentals should be addressed
- Need to consider how to increase housing without resulting in gentrification

HIGHWAY 12 CORRIDOR/TRANSPORTATION

- Corridor needs to be more attractive and safe
- Provide more pedestrian and bicycle linkages and mobility
- People feel trapped by Highway 12 traffic. It's difficult to cross the Highway.
- Traffic speeds on Highway 12 are a problem
- Congestion is increasing
- More plantings are needed along the corridor and amenities such as trash receptacles
- We need more parking

GENERAL COMMENTS

- The Specific Plan can help generate more investment in the community. Community participation and buy-in is important.
- Be careful to preserve the “soul” of the Springs
- Need to continue enhancements to the area that were started long ago
- Show potential developers that the community has gathered together to identify what it wants
- More new and exciting businesses that draw people
- Maintain an inclusive community
- Be careful of over expanding or being extremely prescriptive
- Continue to provide community services and make resources and classes more readily available
- We need to reach out to the disenfranchised
- Improve access to services by increasing transportation options
- Encourage integration of both the Latino and non-Latino communities
- Consider climate change and impacts to vulnerable communities
- Hillside backdrop should be protected and public access increased
- Need water retention for trees

VISION FOR 20 YEARS FROM NOW

- Continued sense of community
- Would like to still see the hills and pastures in the area
- Would like for people to have a better life and affordable housing
- Would like to see more families walking down Highway 12
- Create a gathering space that the community can be proud of
- Would like to see more festivals, music, and art that reflects ‘our’ identity.
- A destination that remains diverse, inclusive, and affordable to current residents
- Joyful place with an integrated Latino community
- Celebration of food and food security (farmer’s market)
- Incorporate softscape (native trees, edible landscaping) into hardscape to provide balance and beauty
- Respectful community
- Family-oriented community
- Better place for people to walk from one place to another
- More walkable neighborhoods with pedestrian access to services, ice cream, stores, post office, etc.

- A community with shared goals and aspirations regarding mobility, diversity, and inclusion
- Still funky with thoughtful development that adds integrity to the community
- A community that allows the working and middle class to live here
- Provide services so that the community does not have to travel far for goods and services
- Improve quality of life and eliminate blight while retaining affordability
- A community plaza
- Community-oriented stores, such as a botánica
- Art galleries featuring folk art and Latino art
- Outdoor seating areas

CAT Meeting #2. At its July 25th, 2016 meeting, the CAT was provided with an overview of the community input received from Community Workshops 1 through 3. The CAT was asked to provide input on land use options for potential infill and revitalization sites throughout the Springs for the development of land use and circulation alternatives. CAT comments included the following:

- Designate the Donald Street/Verano Avenue area for continued residential uses (no mixed use, community plaza, or non-residential use in this neighborhood)
- Recognize that mobile home parks and low density residential uses (e.g. bungalows along Highway 12) provide a source of affordable housing and should be preserved or enhanced
- Provide housing in a human fashion and incorporate elements that humanize development
- Buildings along Highway 12 should be oriented toward the corridor
- Suggested locations for a community plaza included Boyes Avenue near Post Office, Boyes Food Center area, or Sonoma Mission Inn parking lot (Hwy 12/Vallejo Ave)
- Fenced parcels that front Highway 12 should be discouraged
- Consider a shuttle to improve circulation and address parking
- Plan for walkable services near high and medium density residential uses
- There is a need for a Day Labor Center

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The Springs Specific Plan will address a variety of issues, including land use, housing, transportation, and community design. This report discusses issues and opportunities for three key topic areas. These topic areas are based on the key points of discussion and areas of concern raised in the community workshops. The topic areas are as follows:

- **Land Use and Housing**
- **Transportation and Circulation**

- **Community Character and Design**

LAND USE AND HOUSING

As noted in the Land Use section of the Existing Conditions Report, the Springs Specific Plan area currently includes 15.74 acres of commercial, 2.77 acres of offices, 1.47 acres of industrial, 3.35 acres of mixed-use, 90.6 acres of residential, 3.59 acres of public facilities, and 15.6 acres of vacant land.¹ Residential uses in the Springs include 267 single family units, 22 condominium or townhome units, 134 duplex through fourplex units, 212 multifamily units, and 64 units in a mobile home park.

There are two new developments in progress in the Springs. The Sonoma Springs Mixed Use development, located near the intersection of Vailetti Drive and Highway 12, includes 6,450 square feet of neighborhood commercial uses and 100 multifamily units, including 60 affordable family units and 40 affordable senior units. A mixed-use project located at the intersection of Highway 12 and Siesta Way (18590 Highway 12) will include 2,315 square feet of ground floor office space and two residential units on the second floor.

WORKFORCE AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

A common concern raised by the public during the community workshops was that the Springs area currently lacks sufficient workforce and affordable housing. Survey respondents also indicated that there is a need for more housing of various types in the Springs, including single family and multifamily (duplexes, fourplexes, apartments).

Affordable housing typically refers to housing that restricts rents based on household income limits established by the state or federal government. Affordable housing is typically restricted to households having incomes that are 80% or less of the County median. Workforce housing has a much broader meaning and generally refers to housing that is affordable to working households. Workforce housing may include single family and multifamily housing that is affordable to households with either lower or average income levels. Workforce housing can also mean housing that is specific to a particularly workforce, such as permanent and seasonal housing for agricultural employees and housing for tourism-oriented workers.

A variety of strategies may be used to ensure that future development includes a range of housing types and affordability levels. These strategies may include an increase in density to encourage more housing on specific parcels or more flexibility regarding the housing types allowed on residential parcels. The Specific Plan may incorporate these strategies and others to facilitate the development of more multifamily housing including duplex units, triplex units or apartments. Policy language may also be included to encourage or require mixed-use as part of new commercial development or second dwelling units as part of a new residential subdivision. The Specific Plan might also provide policy language that encourages smaller unit sizes. The incorporation of these strategies and others into the Specific Plan could be used to increase access to housing in the planning area.

IN-FILL AND UNDERDEVELOPED PARCELS

Approximately 39.7 percent of the housing within the three local Census Tracts is renter-occupied. In addition, an estimated 32 percent of all households are occupied by a single resident and approximately 40 percent of households include an individual 65 years of age or older.

Under current zoning regulations, second dwelling units of up to 1,000 square feet are generally permitted on parcels that are at least 5,000 square feet in size and served by public sewer. Second dwelling units

¹ Sonoma County Assessor's office

are less expensive to construct than conventional apartments, create mixed income neighborhoods, and tend to meld into the community creating increased density that is practically invisible. Second units also provide independent living for elderly family members who need some assistance from family. In addition, these units generate a supplemental source of income for families and seniors. Still, construction and permitting costs may be a deterrent to some property owners.

Recent legislation now allows local jurisdictions to adopt regulations to allow junior accessory dwelling units.² Junior accessory units are contained entirely within an existing single family residence and are provided with a second entrance from the exterior of the building. These units are no more than 500 square feet in size and have a small efficiency kitchen. At the time of this writing, the County was in the process of developing an ordinance to allow junior accessory units in the unincorporated area.

Since a large portion of Springs residents are renters, second dwelling units and junior accessory units may provide some relief in the tight rental market that currently exists in Sonoma County. A parcel by parcel examination of the current potential for second dwelling units, as well as the identification of potential obstacles, is necessary to determine the specific policy objectives that would encourage the creation of more second dwelling units.

COMMUNITY-ORIENTED RETAIL, SERVICES, AND AMENITIES

During the public workshops, many members of the community expressed a desire for public space and more locally oriented commercial uses and services. An increase in community-serving businesses and services, coupled with improvements to the bicycle and pedestrian system, could alleviate some of the parking and traffic congestion issues by making it more convenient for local residents to walk or bike. Further, increasing the amount of community oriented retail, commercial, and service uses would help to minimize the number of trips Springs residents must make to Sonoma and other nearby communities in order to complete daily shopping tasks and access services.

COMMUNITY GATHERING SPACE

A common theme among the majority of community members was that the Springs needs a central gathering place along Highway 12. Development of a community plaza would create more of a “downtown” feel and contribute to a greater sense of community. Additionally, a vibrant central business district would attract more people to the commercial corridor which may spur economic growth and increase tourism.

A number of suggestions for the community gathering space were received including the following:

- Multi-purpose area that could accommodate retail gatherings, farmer’s markets, food truck parking, concerts, cultural events
- Surround with pedestrian-oriented shops
- Green space
- Seating
- Shade

² AB 2406: Junior Accessory Dwelling Units. Approved by Governor Brown on September 28, 2016.

As part of the Specific Plan process, potential sites for a community plaza will be identified. The Specific Plan may also include language to encourage the development of a plaza and identify compatible and complementary land uses surrounding the plaza area.

MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENT

Mixed use developments consist of a complementary mix of uses such as residential, retail, and other commercial uses in the same building or in close proximity. The classic example of a mixed-use project is a building with commercial uses on the ground floor and residential uses above. Compatibility issues are addressed through performance standards, careful site layout and building design, rather than by separating uses into single use zones. An increase in mixed-use development would contribute to the housing stock while providing more community-oriented uses in the Springs. Development of mixed-use structures, particularly near existing Sonoma County Transit bus stops, may increase transit ridership by bringing more residents and destinations within convenient walking distance of a bus stop. Mixed-use development would also provide increased opportunities for commercial development along Highway 12. Appropriate locations identified by the community for development of mixed-use buildings along Highway 12 include the area north of Encinas Lane and in, or near, the Springs central commercial district.

UNDERUSED AND VACANT PARCELS

Underutilized and vacant properties are scattered throughout the Springs area. Underutilized and vacant parcels oftentimes represent opportunity sites for new development that can serve as catalyst projects in the revitalization of an area. Developing larger, cohesive projects can reinforce the desired character of a community, provide synergy with a mix of uses, increase higher density housing opportunities, provide a ridership base for transit, and create additional locations for public gathering areas (e.g., pocket parks, mini-plazas, outdoor seating areas) within projects. Larger projects may also create an opportunity for shared parking between residential and commercial uses.

Underutilized and vacant parcels within the Springs are mainly in private ownership. Opportunity areas for revitalization generally consist of multiple smaller parcels with multiple owners. This can make parcel assembly for larger projects challenging as developers would need to work with multiple owners or owners would need to work collectively to develop their land. The Specific Plan may provide development incentives to encourage lot consolidation such as density bonuses, reduction in parking requirements, or more flexible development standards (setbacks, height, open space, etc.). Such incentives may induce multiple property owners to work together, sharing ideas and costs, and developing projects that meet the needs of the community.

TRANSPORTATION AND CIRCULATION

The Specific Plan area is comprised of irregular polygonal street grids and generally small parcel sizes. There are 23 intersections along the Highway 12 corridor with an average distance 375 feet between intersections. Intersection spacing of 200 to 400 feet is considered a comfortably walkable scale. It is important to note that of the 23 intersections, however, only eight currently include marked pedestrian crosswalks across Highway 12.

TRAFFIC ALONG HIGHWAY 12

During the community workshops, many members of the public complained that traffic congestion along Highway 12 has become an issue. Some traffic relief may be realized once the Highway 12 project is complete. The new center turn lane will reduce “friction” for through traffic and the new bicycle lanes and sidewalks will encourage more walking and bicycling. Other strategies to further reduce congestion

along Highway 12 include re-timing the traffic lights, consolidating private driveways where possible, and restricting left-turns onto and off of the highway at intersections where alternative routes exist.

INADEQUATE PARKING

Many members of the public have identified parking as a major issue in the Springs area. The recent Caltrans Highway 12 Corridor Improvements removed some of the much-needed parking along the highway. Additionally, many residents, employees, and customers park illegally due to the limited parking availability. Many business owners are concerned that customers are deterred from visiting their businesses due to the lack of parking. Some business owners were also concerned that some residents of the adjoining neighborhoods park their cars in the commercial area, further reducing the availability of parking for customers.

A variety of strategies have been used by other communities to address a local parking shortage. Many of these strategies (listed below) will be examined to determine those that are best suited to the Springs and have the greatest potential to alleviate the current parking shortage.

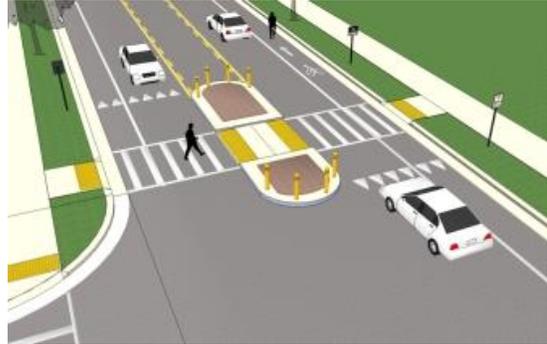
- Develop one or more parking lots or garages with convenient access to the Highway 12 central business district
- Identify potential changes to street standards to provide additional parking along Highway 12 and side streets. e.g. Limit the length of time vehicles may park in prime parking locations.
- Require new development to provide innovative on-site parking. e.g. underground parking, podium-style parking, or parking structure.
- Create a parking district. Install parking meters or impose in-lieu fees on new development to fund new parking lot construction, shuttle service, etc.
- Develop a residential parking permit program to limit public parking in certain locations
- Develop a process for shared parking agreements between businesses.
- Facilitate agreements with private parking lot owners for use of lots during community events or during their non-business hours.
- Develop an incentive program for shared parking (e.g. allow increased development intensity in exchange for projects that provide on-site parking in excess of zoning requirements for shared use.)
- Create a bicycle loan program
- Install bicycle racks along Highway 12 in central commercial district

SAFETY FOR BICYCLISTS AND PEDESTRIANS

During the community workshops, many members of the public complained that walking and biking along some portions of Highway 12 is unsafe and expressed a strong desire for a pedestrian and bicycle-friendly corridor. While the recent Highway 12 Corridor Improvements have vastly improved bicycle and pedestrian facilities, safety and convenience for bicyclists and pedestrians remain an issue for area residents.

Safety is a key component of a vibrant pedestrian-friendly commercial area, as is the presence of convenient walking routes and street crossings. Methods typically used to create a pedestrian-friendly environment include the following:

- Continuous Sidewalks. Extend sidewalks in locations where there is a gap in the sidewalk network.
- Crosswalks located near bus stops.
- Crosswalk Warning Lights. Install warning lights at key pedestrian crosswalks along Highway 12 to increase driver awareness. Warning lights should be considered near schools, bus stops, midblock crosswalks, and areas anticipated to have high pedestrian volumes.
- Traffic Calming. Implement traffic calming measures such as curb bulb-outs and pedestrian refuge islands.
- Adequate Lighting. Ensure that there is sufficient street and building lighting.
- Walkable scale. Strive to maintain shorter block lengths of 400 feet or less and provide crosswalks at regular intervals on Highway 12 to reduce the total distance that pedestrians need to walk before reaching a crossing.



With respect to block spacing and distance between crosswalks, there is one particularly difficult segment in the Springs area: the stretch of Highway 12 between Siesta Way and Donald Street is 1,400 feet. One potential solution would be to install a lighted crosswalk with an incorporated curb bulb-out midway along this segment, such as at Encinas Lane or Academy Lane. In addition to this new crossing, it may be possible to establish several additional marked crossings at intersections throughout the corridor to supplement the eight existing crosswalks. Reducing the distance between marked crosswalks, particularly in areas with high pedestrian activity, will help to improve pedestrian circulation and driver awareness of pedestrians.

Ensuring that bicycle lanes are clearly marked would enhance bicycle safety along the Highway 12 corridor. One potential technique to further emphasize the presence of bicyclists is to use green colored pavement for bicycle lanes as a supplement to other bike lane markings. The green colored pavement may be used for the entire length of the bicycle lane or in areas where autos and bicycles interface with one another, such as near intersections.

Lights and luminaires have been installed along most of Highway 12 within the Plan area as part of recent and past corridor improvements. The only segment where pedestrian-scale lighting is missing is between Encinas Lane and Harley Street. There are still some cobra head street lights at most intersections and in some residential neighborhoods. In terms of lighting, one strategy to promote a pedestrian- and cyclist-friendly corridor is to increase lighting in particularly vulnerable areas, such as on side streets in the central business district and near parking areas where pedestrian circulation remains active at night.

Implementation of traffic calming measures such as curb bulb-outs and community gateways at the north and south entrances to the Springs would also increase safety for pedestrians and bicyclists by alerting drivers that they are entering a populated community.

INCREASE ACCESS TO PUBLIC TRANSIT

The vast majority of Springs residents that travel outside of the community for work and amenities commute by automobile. Currently, Sonoma County Transit provides transit services to the Springs area with four bus routes (30, 32, 34, and 38). Only Route 30 runs on a daily basis. In addition, there are only three bus stops that have shelters along the 1.7-mile Highway 12 corridor between Agua Caliente Road and Verano Avenue.

In order to increase public transit ridership, and thereby reduce vehicular congestion along Highway 12, transit services should be expanded by increasing both the number of routes with daily service and the frequency of bus service. Improvements to existing bus stops should also be made such as installing benches, shelters and bicycle racks at all stops.

General pedestrian improvements such as eliminating sidewalk gaps and providing high-visibility crosswalks along Highway 12, particularly near bus stops, would also help to make the use of transit more convenient and attractive.

COMMUNITY CHARACTER AND DESIGN

The character of the Highway 12 corridor is, as a whole, suburban. There are a few areas that are more rural in character. Commercial, residential, and light industrial uses front the highway. The highway alignment is predominantly straight with three widely spaced bends. The highway's visual character transitions gradually at each stretch between the bends.

The issues and opportunities related to community character and design have been determined based on public comments received at community workshops, input from the Springs Community Advisory Team, and review of the Existing Conditions report. The issues and opportunities related to community character and design are discussed in detail below.

STREET TREES

The Highway 12 corridor currently lacks consistent landscaping and mature shade trees in many areas. Although there are many mature trees in the project area, a regular street-tree pattern does not exist along the highway or along most residential streets. One factor which may have resulted in inconsistent landscaping along the corridor is that the setbacks from Highway 12 vary considerably from property to property. There are also many wide driveways and parking lots which do not include landscaping. Additionally, many intersecting streets do not have sidewalks, curbs, or gutters, which make the edge definition in those locations ambiguous. Finally, many trees were removed during the Highway 12 improvement project.

The lack of landscaping and shade trees along the corridor has been identified as an issue by many community members. These important landscape features enhance the community and increase the walkability of an area.

LANDSCAPE MAINTENANCE

Litter and unkempt landscaping along the Highway 12 corridor were identified as issues by some community members during the public workshops. A Specific Plan policy that provides for the installation of trash and recycling receptacles in key areas, such as the central commercial district and near bus stops, may help to reduce litter along the corridor. The Specific Plan may also include a policy encouraging an attractive and well maintained corridor. A policy requiring that new development be conditioned to require ongoing maintenance of landscaped areas may also be helpful.

REDEVELOPMENT AND REHABILITATION

The Specific Plan can include tools to encourage the rehabilitation of existing structures as well as the redevelopment of underutilized or blighted properties. Methods to encourage rehabilitation and redevelopment may include providing fee reductions or waivers for targeted areas, proactively designating a portion of the County's Community Development Block Grant or HOME funds for residential and commercial rehabilitation in the Springs, reducing parking requirements or allowing off-site parking, and rezoning property to facilitate more intense residential and commercial uses so that property owners would not have to request a General Plan Amendment and rezone in order to build at higher residential densities or commercial intensities.

Due to the small size of the Springs Specific Plan area, the rehabilitation and redevelopment of existing structures along the corridor could be an important revitalization tool. The rehabilitation of existing structures which exhibit historical characteristics (i.e., Mission revival architecture) would strengthen the architectural character along the Highway 12 corridor. Additionally, redevelopment of deteriorated structures may increase housing and other community-oriented uses within the limited footprint of the Springs area.

COMMUNITY-ORIENTED PRINCIPLES

Community-oriented principles focus on building complete neighborhoods where residents have the opportunity to live, work, play, shop, and learn within a convenient walking distance. A Specific Plan can play an important role in creating a more sustainable and inviting community by including policies and guidelines that promote walkability, a wider variety of land uses, mixed-use development, improved circulation and architectural features with pedestrian appeal.

For example, walkable communities may be promoted by allowing greater building setbacks to provide space for outdoor seating and dining along the sidewalk. This encourages residents and visitors to enjoy a leisurely stroll along the corridor or stay to socialize, as opposed to making one stop and leaving the area. Providing public space, both large and small, for social interaction is an important component of a vibrant, pedestrian-oriented community. Creating visual interest by providing large storefront windows, murals and flower boxes, as well as installing awnings for shade and protection from inclement weather are other strategies to encourage walking.

ARCHITECTURAL CHARACTER

Strong community character and design are central features of livable and economically vibrant communities. Poorly designed development can result in long-term adverse economic impacts by diminishing the community's attractiveness and making it less desirable as a place to live, work, and visit. Therefore, it is important for the community to establish design directives that can be used to create the kind of place it desires.

With the potential for new development and redevelopment in a mixed-use setting, there is an opportunity to create a strong sense of identity that respects the community's rich history and cultural diversity. Design guidelines, developed as part of the Specific Plan, may be used as a tool to ensure that new development is not only well-designed, but tailored to harmonized with the community's existing notable architecture. The Design Guidelines may be used to identify preferred architectural styles or specific design elements that would contribute to the areas historic character.

DESIGN GUIDELINES

Workshop and survey participants identified the need for community spaces, including a plaza and several small public or semi-public spaces throughout the community. While participants had differing opinions regarding the use of color, commenters identified a strong desire for a cohesive feel to the community and the need for public improvements that are pedestrian friendly.

Design guidelines can enhance the character of the area by addressing the need for community space, color and design, community art, landscaping, shade, and building setbacks, massing, and design. The design guidelines can also ensure that signage and windows contribute to the aesthetic appeal of the area and that buildings are oriented towards the Highway, to create an interesting streetscape that promotes walking and increases safety.

The current Highway 12 Design Guidelines, adopted in 1994, are advisory and are not mandatory. The public will be given an opportunity to review and comment on the new draft Design Guidelines, including whether some or all of the provisions should be mandatory or implemented with flexibility.