



chapter 1

palm avenue

INTRODUCTION

The joy and pain of urban existence, the comfort or hardship of it, its efficiency or failure are influenced by the wisdom or the thoughtlessness with which streets are platted.

Charles Mulford Robinson

The Width and arrangement of streets. A study in Town Planning. (The Engineering News Publishing Company, 1911).



Palm Avenue

CHAPTER ONE

introduction

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THE REVITALIZATION OF PALM AVENUE presents an opportunity to transform the primary commercial spine of the City of Imperial Beach into a vibrant pedestrian and bicycle friendly ‘Main Street’ corridor composed of distinct districts and nodes. Palm Avenue, also known as State Route 75, is a six lane auto-oriented street that no longer supports the type of uses that it was originally designed to serve. Revitalizing the street through an urban design framework and a set of design guidelines, can spur positive change and shape new development opportunities.

Many ‘Main Streets’ of American cities and towns, such as Palm Avenue, have experienced decline in once vibrant social and economic activity. Their transportation function as thoroughfares has given way to highways that fragment communities. Their economic and social function as main streets has been supplanted by marginal and auto-oriented strip commercial uses.

This project builds upon Caltrans’ commitment to making State highways that also happen to be local main streets more livable. Cities and towns across California and America are seeking to re-establish their unique sense of community and identity through physical planning and urban design. They are bringing back their main streets, re-invented in a modern context to reflect the dynamic and diverse nature of contemporary society and market conditions.

“Main streets through a community that also happen to be state highways provide access to businesses, residential roads and other nearby properties. Main streets serve pedestrians, bicyclists, businesses and public transit, with motorized traffic typically traveling at speeds of 20 to 40 miles per hour. Main streets give communities their identity and character, they promote multi-modal transportation, support economic growth, and may have scenic or historic value. Caltrans recognizes the value of a main street to a community and understands that planners and designers need to address community values when developing highway improvements where state highways also serve as main streets. Caltrans is committed to early and continuous public participation to accommodate a community’s values into the planning and design of projects.

This booklet identifies Context Sensitive Solutions and Livable Community concepts that can assist communities and Caltrans in balancing community values with transportation concerns for safe and efficient operations for travelers, pedestrians, bicyclists, transit users, and highway workers.”

Caltrans Main Streets: Flexibility in Design & Directions, 2005

PROJECT BACKGROUND & PURPOSE

The purpose of the Palm Avenue Streetscape Master Plan is to propose streetscape improvements and urban design strategies that help support the common goal of creating a vibrant, safe and pedestrian and bicycle-friendly commercial hub along Palm Avenue. Key priorities include transformation of the six-lane highway to a “Main Street” environment based on Caltrans’ Main Street Design Guidelines, creation of a new desirable context that promotes new mixed use developments that provide amenities and services to the community, connection to surrounding residential neighborhoods, and reinforcement of the small-scale beach-town feel of the area.

The process for the streetscape master plan was initiated by the City of Imperial Beach as a major step in commercial redevelopment of the area. Primarily funded by a Caltrans grant, the master plan is intended to directly address the streetscape issues along Palm Avenue to help revitalize the primary commercial corridor of Imperial Beach.

For the purposes of this plan, the project study area was defined as an approximate one block area north and south of Palm Avenue. This area encompasses the “core” of the corridor, including many restaurants and shopping venues. It also provides a direct connection to the City of Coronado, the Pacific Ocean and beach front amenities.

FIGURE 1.1 PROJECT AREA



“Palm Avenue is a neighborhood-friendly, active, pedestrian-friendly, beautifully landscaped, well-designed, and vibrant commercial corridor. The mix of services supports community residents and visitors alike while generating necessary property tax, sales tax and Business Improvement District revenues to support future City improvements.”

Imperial Beach: The Big Picture, October 2000

PREVIOUS PLANNING EFFORTS

In 2000, City of Imperial Beach embarked on a community-driven process to identify the overarching vision for Palm Avenue that would lay the foundation to revitalize this important part of the City. This was articulated in the *Imperial Beach: The Big Picture*, October 2000.

Since then the City has conducted a number of studies to implement this vision. In March 2005, the Redevelopment Agency and City Council adopted the Five Year Implementation plan that included the Palm/Commercial Redevelopment Project. The plan proposed to improve commercial properties, replace inadequate public infrastructure, and improve and enhance affordable housing. In April 2005, the City conducted an Urban Waterfront & Ecotourism Study Strategy & Implementation Program in 2005 to spur economic development. This project resulted in a report which made recommendations for stimulating tourism in the City by capitalizing on its abundance of ecological assets.

In 2007, the City undertook the Bicycle Transportation Plan, to identify opportunities to increase bicycle use in the City. The findings of this study will inform elements of the Palm Avenue streetscape in terms of locating bicycle paths and providing amenities for bicycle riders.

CURRENT PLANNING EFFORTS

Besides completing the environmental analysis of the Bicycle Transportation Plan, the City is currently undergoing the Commercial Zoning Review for the commercial areas of Palm Avenue/SR-75, Seacoast Drive, Old Palm Avenue, and 13th Street/Imperial Beach Avenue. This review intends to explore development regulations in these areas for improving the design of commercial and mixed-use projects. Their ultimate goal is to achieve the community’s vision for Imperial Beach.

PLANNING PROCESS

Over the course of the past one and a half years from October 2007 to February 2009, city staff and consultants have worked with the community, elected officials, and other stakeholders to develop a plan that is both visionary and ready to be implemented. The schedule below shows the various events, milestones and outcomes of the process. Key events in the planning process have been interviews with key community stakeholders who live and work in and around the study area, three well-attended

community workshops and presentations to City Council and Design Review Board. Close coordination with Caltrans and consultants of concurrent projects including the Commercial Zoning Review Project, Bicycle Transportation Plan Project has been an integral part of the process.



Joint City Council and Design Review Board Session

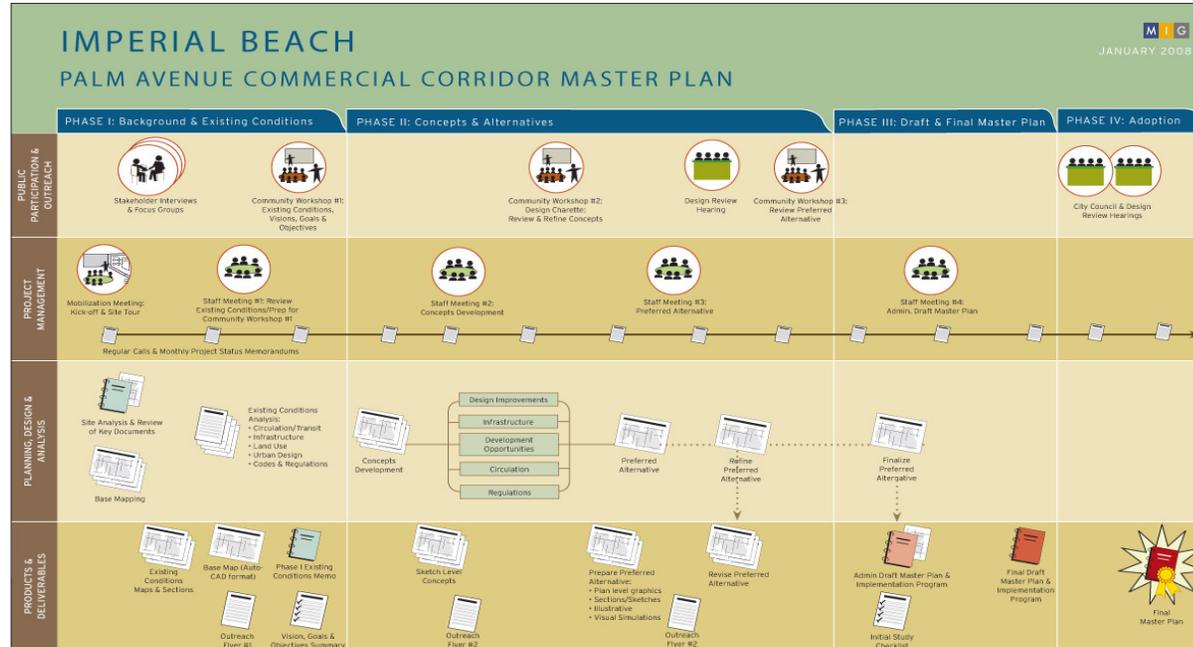


Community Workshop #2



Community Workshop #3

FIGURE 1.2 - PROCESS GRAPHIC



DOCUMENT OVERVIEW

Volume One of the Palm Ave. Streetscape Master Plan is organized in the following chapters:

Chapter 1: Introduction – explains the Plan’s background and purpose, provides an overview of recent and current planning efforts, and outlines the organization of the Plan document.

Chapter 2: Existing Conditions – synthesizes the existing conditions, highlights the regional and local context and identifies key assets, challenges and opportunities in the corridor’s revitalization process.

Chapter 3: Planning Framework – defines the five overarching common planning strategies specific to this project’s study area that will guide urban design along the corridor.

Chapter 4: Overall Urban Design Concept – presents the conceptual plan for the corridor including identifying sectors, nodes, and development opportunities, and highlighting key urban design parameters that will guide the character of the public realm.

Volume Two of the Palm Ave. Streetscape Master Plan is organized into the following chapters:

Chapter 1: Design Guidelines – details the urban design guidelines that will shape the character of the public realm including streetscape design and open spaces in the study area.

Chapter 2: Transportation and Circulation - identifies the existing traffic conditions and analyzes the traffic and circulation impacts.

Chapter 3: Appendices – include a preferred palette of streetscape furnishings and plantings, a traffic and circulation memo and an initial study checklist.