

CHAPTER 2 Downtown Vision



A. Introduction and Vision

This chapter describes the community's vision for Downtown Hemet, the community engagement process, the districts and neighborhoods in the Specific Plan area, and the importance of arts and culture as a key component of Downtown's future.

The preparation of the Downtown Hemet Specific Plan was guided by an ongoing and collaborative public engagement process that included community, stakeholder and decision-maker input, and which is summarized in this chapter. This input to the process resulted in key themes and elements that were repeatedly expressed as the vision for Downtown Hemet.

Downtown Vision

Downtown Hemet is the vibrant community hub of the San Jacinto Valley. It is the centerpiece of community identity, activity, culture and governance. With its well preserved and diverse architecture, historic buildings and small town charm, Downtown Hemet is a unique and identifiable destination. The traditional street grid pattern and tree-lined streets support shopping, dining, entertainment, and civic activities. The historic commercial core is ringed by stable single family neighborhoods, the revitalized Hemet Stock Farm, multi-generational activities at Weston Park, and a vibrant transit-oriented district with housing and employment opportunities. The various districts of Downtown are linked by easy and safe pedestrian and bicycle connections in a walkable, accessible and sustainable environment. Downtown Hemet takes pride in its local traditions and history, including its agricultural past, the celebrations of the Ramona Pageant, and a rich arts community.



A vision for the heart of Downtown Hemet – façade improvements for the historic Hemet Theatre, revitalized North Harvard Street, and new downtown mixed use development as envisioned by Steve Covington, a community member and local business owner.

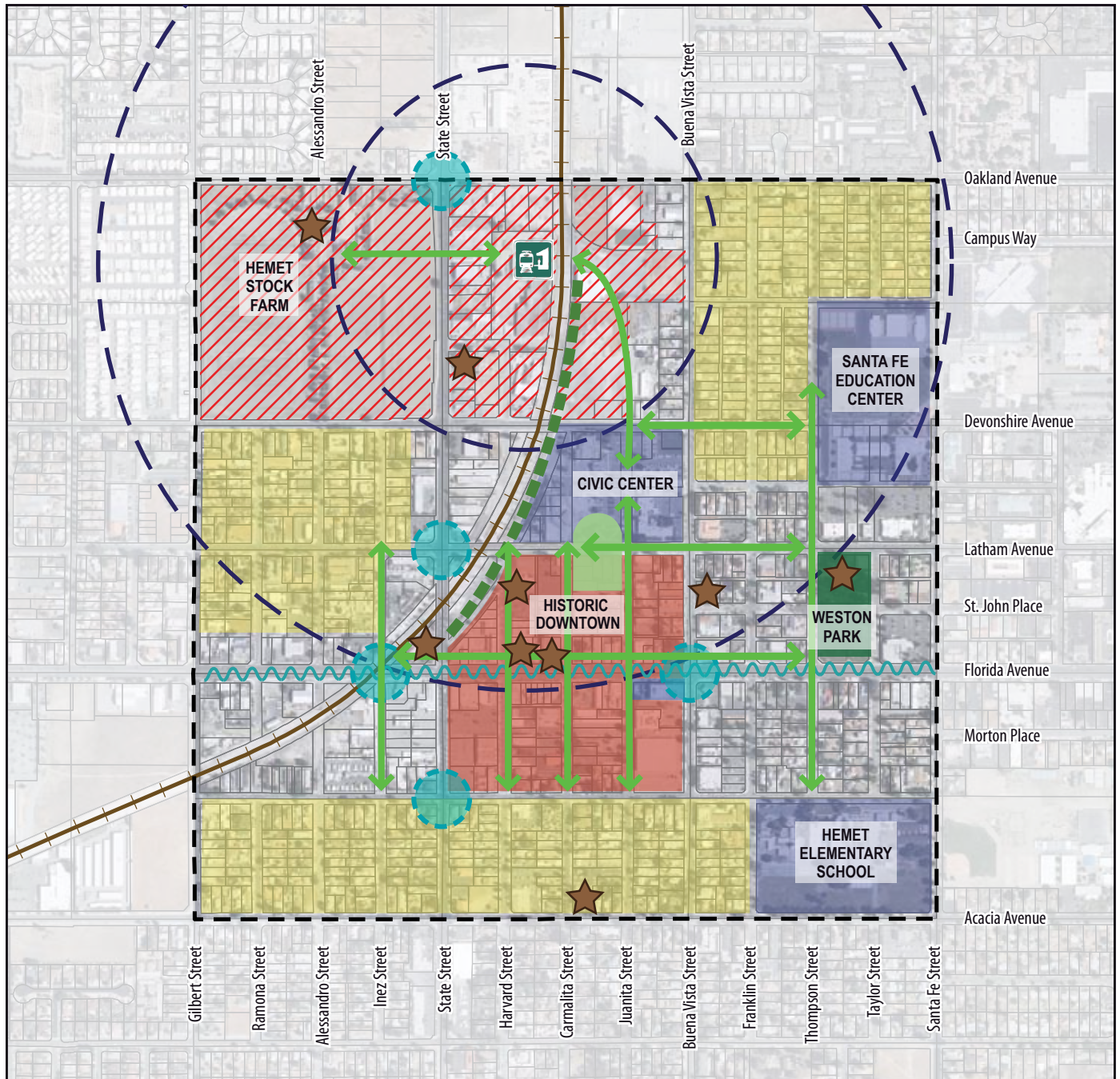


Source: Steve Covington

B. Community Engagement

Early and ongoing public involvement was solicited so that the community had ample opportunity to help direct the concepts and recommendations of the Downtown Hemet Specific Plan, and to ensure that the Specific Plan expresses the vision, goals and ideas of the community as a whole. The community engagement process included the following:

- **Public workshops.** Community members provided input to the Specific Plan at three milestone stages of the project through interactive group discussion and feedback on the topics and direction of the Specific Plan. These workshops were productive in discussing key issues, concerns and preferences, and in generating community support for the Specific Plan. The first workshop presented the background and purpose, existing conditions, and key opportunities (identified in Figure 2-1) for the Downtown, and solicited input from the community on their issues, goals and ideas. The second workshop presented the preliminary land use, circulation and urban design plan, and gathered input on the overall land use and design framework for the Downtown as well as circulation and parking concepts. The third workshop presented and obtained feedback on the Public Review Draft Specific Plan.
- **Meetings with the Downtown Advisory Committee (DAC).** The DAC consisted of approximately 25 members, including Downtown property and business owners, City Council and Planning Commission representatives, and involved and interested community members. The role of the DAC was to supplement the public workshops with further discussion and review of the concepts and direction of the Specific Plan, and to provide continuity and feedback throughout the duration of the project. Continued involvement of the DAC after plan adoption and during the various phases of implementation will help ensure the success of the Specific Plan.
- **Focus group interviews with key stakeholders.** These interviews were conducted at the beginning of the project to gain an understanding of the stakeholders' goals, visions and ideas for the future of Downtown. The stakeholders included City Council members, City Manager, various community groups, representatives of the tourism industry, property owners, commercial realtors, and local merchants. These interviews generated valuable discussion and input for the direction of the Specific Plan.
- **Study sessions with the City Council and Planning Commission.** These study sessions provided decision-maker continuity and feedback throughout the duration of the project, and generated significant dialogue and provided valuable direction during the preparation of the Specific Plan.

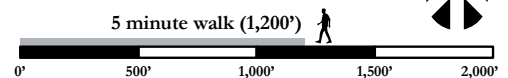


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| Specific Plan Boundary | Capitalize on Potential Opportunity Sites |
| Rail Right-of-Way/ Future Transit Line | Create Civic Open Space/Plaza |
| Future Transit Mobility Hub (approximate location) | Improve Weston Park with Active Recreational Uses |
| 1/4 & 1/2 Mile TOD Radius | Create Pedestrian and Bicycle Connection Along Rail Right-of-Way |
| Notable Historic Resources | Improve Pedestrian Linkages between Major Destinations |
| Preserve Residential Neighborhoods | Improve North/South Movement across Florida Avenue |
| Increase Infill Development in Historic Downtown Core | Create Gateways into Historic Downtown Core |

FIGURE 2-1

Land Use and Design Opportunities

DOWNTOWN HEMET SPECIFIC PLAN



- **Downtown Hemet Specific Plan project website.** The website was launched at the onset of the project and regularly updated to inform the public about the project background, purpose, content, and schedule, as well as solicit public comments. The website educated residents and business owners about the specific plan process and progress, posted milestone products, encouraged attendance at the workshop and public meetings, and ensured continued involvement throughout the project.
- **On-line community survey.** The survey included questions about Downtown's assets and challenges, land uses, public improvements and amenities, traffic and parking, and the need for employment and housing. In addition, hard copies of the survey were handed out to those individuals that would rather answer the survey on paper, and those responses were entered into the survey database. Over 100 responses were received, and the tabulated survey results, which were presented at the second Community Workshop, Downtown Advisory Committee Meeting, and joint Study Session with the City Council and Planning Commission, provided a great deal of insight into the opinions and attitudes toward the Downtown.



Community members provided extensive input to the future of Downtown Hemet at several public workshops held throughout the planning process.

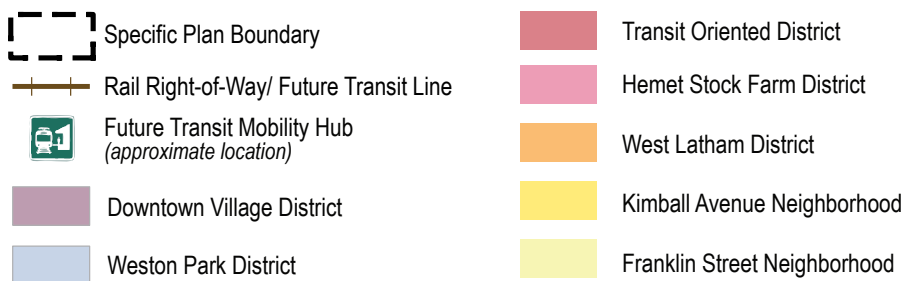
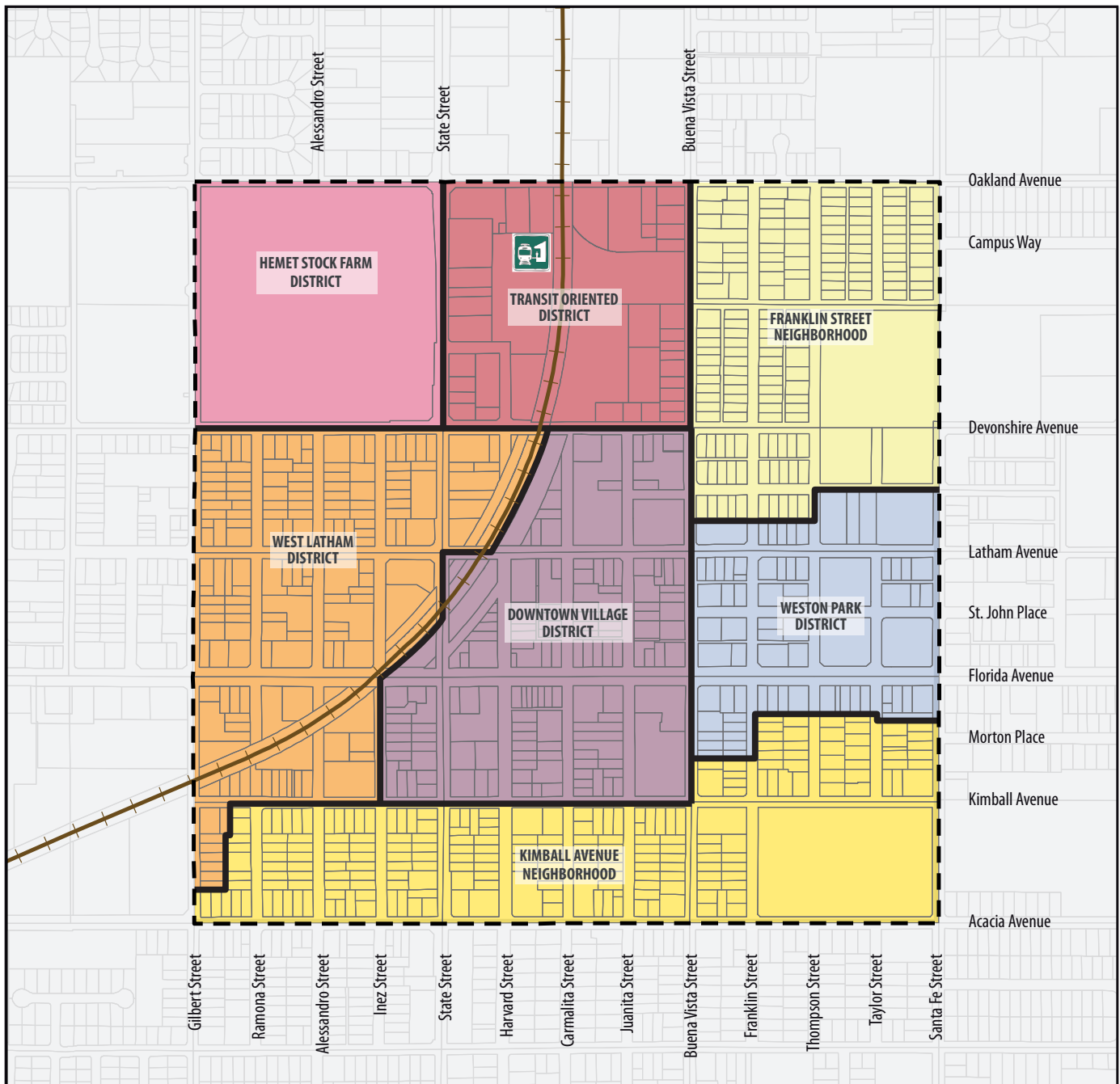
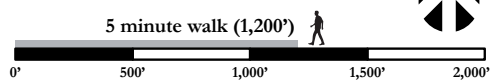


FIGURE 2-2

Specific Plan Districts / Neighborhoods

DOWNTOWN HEMET SPECIFIC PLAN



C. Downtown Districts and Neighborhoods

As part of the planning process, several recognizable districts or neighborhoods were identified that contribute to the overall identity of the greater Downtown area. The districts/neighborhoods were created based on areas comprised of similar uses, consistent character, historical community context, and future land uses. Each district/neighborhood contributes to the overall image of Downtown Hemet. The Downtown districts/neighborhoods are identified in Figure 2-2 and described below.

Downtown Village District

The Downtown Village District is the historic commercial core of the City of Hemet, and includes many of the City's historic commercial buildings, a traditional grid street pattern, and the Civic Center. Traditional architecture and buildings oriented to the street make the Downtown Village District a vital area for pedestrian-friendly shopping, entertainment and civic activities. Sensitive infill development is encouraged that maintains and enhances the District's "main street" character, and retailing and civic functions.



The Downtown Village District is the civic and historic core of the City, and is pedestrian oriented in nature with a "main street" character. North Harvard Street has recently seen some revitalization activity with improvements to properties and businesses along this distinctive street.

Transit Oriented District

The Transit Oriented District is the anticipated location of a future transit mobility hub in Downtown Hemet. The City is working with the Southern California Regional Rail Authority (SCRRA), Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC), and others to bring mass transit (bus and rail) and a transit mobility hub to Downtown Hemet. The new transit mobility hub is planned to become a multi-modal center surrounded by higher density residential, office and mixed-use projects on what is currently primarily vacant and underutilized land. A bike and pedestrian path along the rail line that connects the transit mobility hub with historic downtown core and civic center area is also envisioned.

The large vacant and underutilized properties in the Transit Oriented District are anticipated to become the site of a future transit mobility hub in Downtown Hemet.



Rail transit in other Southern California communities has resulted in transit oriented development opportunities around the stations.



Weston Park District

The Weston Park District covers the area surrounding historic Weston Park, and primarily includes medical and professional offices as well as residential uses. The District's proximity to the Hemet Valley Medical Center to east is an asset that all new development in this area could build upon. As such, it is the City's goal to maintain and increase medical office and similar uses to support the expanding Hemet Valley Medical Center. It is also the City's goal to improve the Weston Park as a more active, recreational community park. Well-designed multi-family residential and offices are encouraged to increase activity around Weston Park and complement the retailing environment in the Downtown Village.



Historic Weston Park is the heart of the Weston Park District, which contains many medical office uses that support the Hemet Valley Medical Center located to the east of the Specific Plan Area.

West Latham District

The West Latham District is comprised of various land uses, including retail and commercial uses along Florida Avenue and North State Street and a mix of single family and multi-family residential uses. The section of Florida Avenue within this district contains primarily auto-oriented commercial uses, which provide a transition from the pedestrian oriented Downtown Village District to the shopping center-oriented businesses further to the west. It is anticipated that the area will change over time and the City will encourage the adaptive reuse of buildings to uses such as restaurants, office and specialty retail as well as encouraging new infill development commensurate with the size and scale of surrounding buildings. This district also contains a residential neighborhood that is intended to accommodate a mix of residential uses, and slowly transition to more well-designed medium density residences to support and complement the nearby transit station.



The West Latham District contains a mix of commercial and residential uses, and provides a transition from the pedestrian oriented Downtown Village District to the larger-scaled shopping centers to the west of Downtown.

Hemet Stock Farm District

As noted in the 2030 General Plan, a prominent future development site within Downtown Hemet is the Hemet Stock Farm, a privately-owned 36-acre property. W. F. Whittier, one of Hemet's founding fathers, built the Hemet Stock Farm to satisfy his passion for trotting races. A cottage originally built in 1888 as a bunkhouse is located on the property along with a half-mile race track, grandstand, historic entrance drive and original farm structures. It is a goal of the City to build on the Hemet Stock Farm's character and history to create an exceptional mixed-use project that is a community and tourist destination. The site's history should guide its future redevelopment as a mixed-use district that preserves its historical integrity and complements Downtown Hemet. In 2007, a draft specific plan was prepared for the Hemet Stock Farm by the property owner, but was never adopted due to the economic downturn. While this plan was not pursued, it generated excitement and momentum for what the site could become.

The historic Hemet Stock Farm has cultural significance to community. Adaptive reuse of the site provides opportunity to create a unique mixed use project that preserves its unique landmarks and contributes to the identity of Downtown Hemet.



The Hemet Stock Farm as re-imagined in the 2007 draft specific plan. Under the requirements of Downtown Hemet Specific Plan, this site will be master planned to ensure the same level of high quality development and historic preservation.



Source: The Hemet Stock Farm Specific Plan, Draft, 2007

Franklin Street and Kimball Avenue Neighborhoods

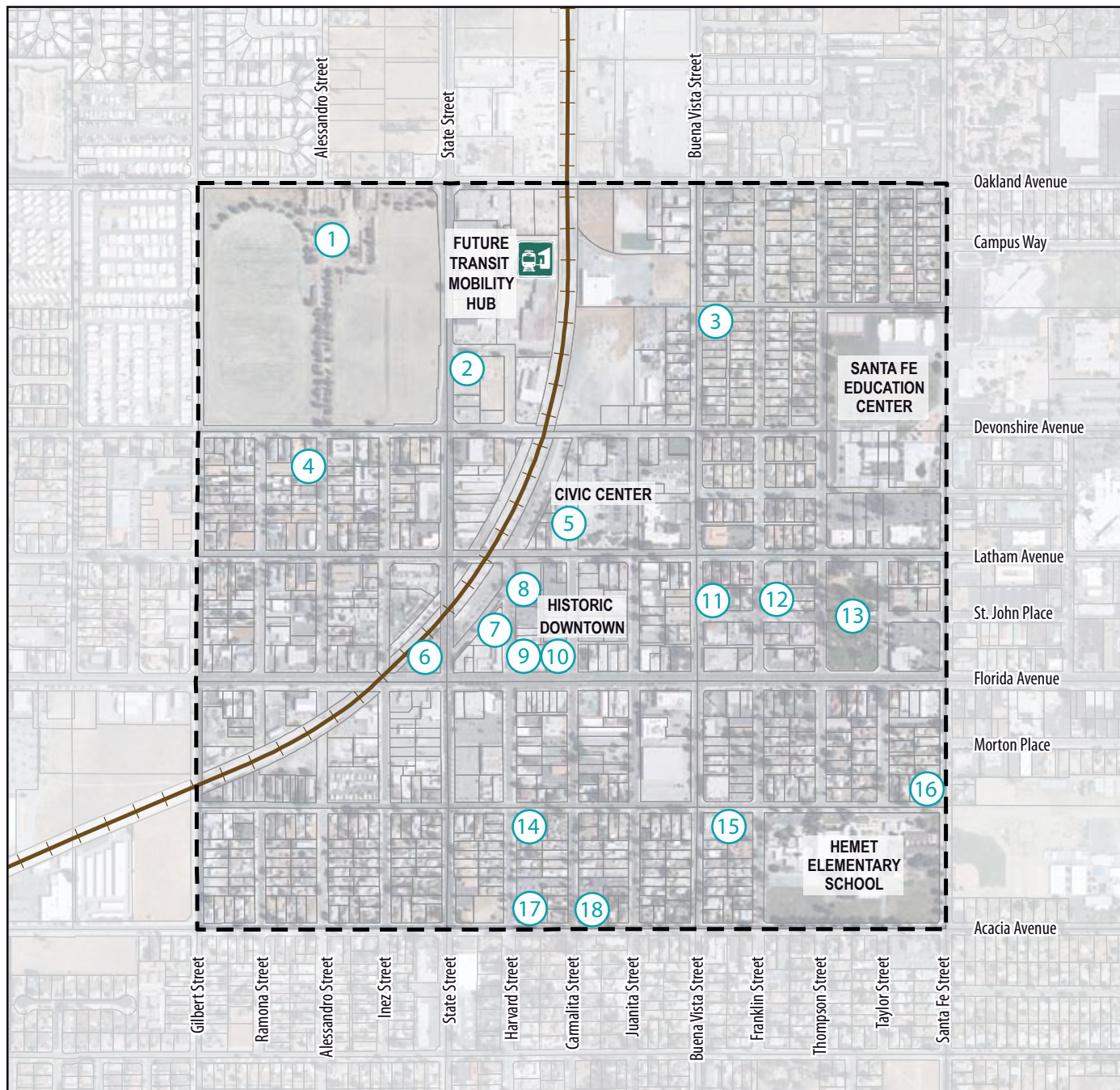
As described in the 2030 General Plan, the Franklin Street and Kimball Avenue neighborhoods have historically complemented Hemet's downtown core by housing residents who worked or shopped in the core area. The neighborhoods' history has shaped its current land uses, and due to its proximity to and symbiotic relationship with the core area, this historic integrity should be maintained and enhanced where neighborhoods are stable and well maintained. Development of infill lots in this area should be of a compatible scale and density to the surrounding neighborhoods. In addition, several homes have been converted to office uses in a sensitive manner along portions of Kimball Avenue and State Street. This pattern will likely continue and creates a distinct character along these streets.



The Franklin Street and Kimball Avenue neighborhoods are two of Hemet's oldest neighborhoods and the historic and traditional homes support and contribute to Downtown's character and fabric.

D. Arts and Culture in Downtown Hemet

As part of the community engagement process, arts and culture were identified as integral to the future vision for Downtown. Currently, Downtown Hemet is home to several cultural and arts resources, including the historic Hemet Theatre, the site of the former Hemet Stock Farm, Hemet Museum in the historic Santa Fe Depot building, and the Fingerprints Youth Museum. In addition, there is an active arts community, including the Diamond Valley Arts Council and a thriving community of local artists, which is continually striving to expand opportunities for the arts and cultural enrichment. The major Downtown cultural and art facilities, including the many religious institutions Downtown, are identified in Figure 2-3. This list is not intended to be comprehensive, but includes the major institutions and organizations that contribute to Downtown Hemet's unique environment of



Specific Plan Boundary

① Hemet Stock Farm ★

② Meier House ★

③ Grace Chapel

④ Latin American California Conference Pentecostal Holiness Church

⑤ Hemet Public Library

⑥ Hemet Museum / Santa Fe Depot ★

⑦ Diamond Valley Arts Council (DVAC)

⑧ Victorian Bridal Museum / Hemet Valley Art Association / Old Opera House ★

⑨ Bank of Hemet Building ★

⑩ Historic Hemet Theatre ★

⑪ Unity Valley Church ★

⑫ Hemet Christian Assembly

⑬ Weston Park ★

⑭ First Assembly of God of Hemet

⑮ First Presbyterian Church

⑯ Calvary Foursquare Church

⑰ First Church of Hemet

⑱ Episcopal Church of the Good Shepard ★

★ Notable Historic Resource

FIGURE 2-3

Key Cultural, Religious, and Historic Facilities

DOWNTOWN HEMET SPECIFIC PLAN

5 minute walk (1,200')

0' 500' 1,000' 1,500' 2,000'



quality cultural resources. Collectively, these resources add significant value to the Downtown community, and there is great potential to expand art and culture in Downtown Hemet to the point where it becomes an identifying force for the community and economic vitality of the city.

It was also noted during the community involvement process that Downtown Hemet's natural and built environment, including historic Harvard Street, create a sense of historical and physical identity and provide a solid foundation for the arts to grow. Hemet is anchored by its natural setting in the San Jacinto Valley with the backdrop the San Jacinto Mountains, and built setting with the architecturally and historically significant buildings in a traditional street grid pattern. These qualities define Downtown Hemet's physical uniqueness in relation to other cities. It is the combination of Downtown Hemet's setting, architecture, history and cultural facilities that provide a synergy in which arts and culture should be able to expand and thrive with the revitalization of Downtown.

In addition, while not located Downtown, the City of Hemet is home to the historic Ramona Bowl Amphitheatre, a 5,400-seat natural amphitheater that aims to be the regional center for arts and entertainment in the San Jacinto Valley. It is the home of the Ramona Outdoor Play, formerly known as (and still commonly called) the Ramona Pageant, an outdoor play staged annually in the spring since 1923. This well-established cultural event is regionally recognized in Southern California. With additional branding, marketing and integrating Ramona Pageant festivities into the Downtown, it can serve as an asset to invigorating the Downtown as a destination for arts and culture.



The Hemet Museum, Hemet Theatre, Diamond Valley Arts Council gallery, and Ramona Pageant festivities all contribute to the art and cultural resources in Downtown Hemet. Local art and culture demonstrate community pride and create a desirable image for the Downtown to attract economic development.

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