2.3 Landscape and Open Space

VISION

The Diridon Station Study area, underserved and underutilized in terms of planned open space, will soon be transformed by new neighborhoods and land uses. Key to the plan is an exceptional park system that will provide amenities for existing and new communities alike and link the life of the residents and visitors of the City of San José with their larger ecological context. Inspired by people and place, the open space system will help integrate social and ecological factors to support a livable and sustainable urban environment.

EXISTING FRAMEWORK

The existing neighborhood that falls within the Diridon Station Area Plan is underserved in terms of a planned open space network. Particularly missing is a continuous recreational multi-use trail connecting Los Gatos Creek to the Guadalupe River Trail system. In addition, a public gathering place of ample size is missing. The area west of the existing railway lines and north of The Alameda is also not well connected to Downtown for pedestrians and cyclists.

STRATEGY

Various landscape and open space amenities are described in this section of the report within the context of the sub-areas in which they are located. These proposals should also be viewed as manifestations of the larger landscape and open space vision. Figure 2-3-1 illustrates the landscape and open space strategy for the Diridon Station Area and beyond. It shows that the range of ideas can be viewed as part of a system of open spaces, working from the City-wide context down to individual components at the local level. This hierarchy can be described as six types of open spaces which contribute to the environment and character of the station area plan, described in below.
Numbers refer to hierarchy of spaces described in ‘Strategy’ section of text
1. THE GUADALUPE RIVER AND LOS GATOS CREEK

The plan for the Guadalupe River and Los Gatos Creek, including parks and trails, is found in the existing master plan, including The Guadalupe Parkway and the Los Gatos Creek Master Plan. The completion of the Los Gatos Creek improvements between Santa Clara Street and Park Avenue will be the final section of a much larger trail and open space network which connects San José with surrounding communities and countryside, from the San Francisco Bay to the Santa Cruz mountains. This trail and park system passes through the heart of the Diridon Station area and will provide improved recreational opportunities and enhance north-south pedestrian and bike connections to the whole of San José, including residents and visitors to the Diridon area. The design of these areas will meet the established standards of existing Master Plans.

2. COMMUNITY PARK

The large 8-acre community park in the south-central zone will provide new and existing residents with a place for community gathering as well as a broad range of outdoor recreation activities. The activities and programs available within this park will also appeal to a wider audience beyond the immediate boundaries of the Diridon Station Area. The park should be designed with zones for both passive and active programs and specific park features may include the following (the exact program should be developed through a process of detailed community input):

- Day-lighting of Los Gatos creek as a natural amenity
- Amphitheater
- Perimeter walking path circuit
- Iconic picnic pavilion, visible from the street
- Children’s play areas
- Restrooms
- Open and multi-use lawn, capable of accommodating soccer or baseball
- Playcourt zone for basketball, tennis, etc.
3. GREEN FINGER AND PEDESTRIAN CONNECTION

Overlaid onto the Guadalupe Parkway, Los Gatos Creek and Community Park is the network of “green fingers” and pedestrian connection, which are intended to reach out and connect the larger public open spaces with the various neighborhoods within the plan area and to provide pleasant pedestrian and bicycle connections between the districts.

The green fingers are envisaged as wide linear parks (minimum 40 feet wide) with generous landscaping and a continuous, integrated bicycle and pedestrian pathway system, punctuated by active and passive programmed spaces. The green fingers will be designed for continuity and each could have a unique character expressed through program, plantings, furnishings and paving. An integrated system of shade canopies and seatwalls will support user comfort.

Some of the green fingers contain roads. These will be of sufficient width to allow separation of pedestrian and bike paths from the roads within a wide (minimum 30 to 40 feet wide) landscaped zone to one side of the road.

Pedestrian connection are streets and pathways that emphasize pedestrians and bicycles. They are a minimum of 20 feet wide as pathways and have wide sidewalks and bicycle routes when along a vehicular street.

Passive and active program elements and features along the green fingers and pedestrian connection may include:

- Quiet seating in contemplative garden spaces
- Interpretive elements and signage
- Social seating and picnic areas
- Game tables (chess/checkers)
- Children’s play areas
- Sport courts (basketball, volleyball, tennis)
FIGURE 2-3-2: OPEN SPACE NETWORK AND STREET CONNECTIONS
• Fitness circuit
• Drinking fountains
• Wayfinding and themed signage program

4. PRIMARY PUBLIC PLAZA

A new public plaza will be associated with the new high speed rail terminal and large enough to allow the visual impact of the terminal to be fully appreciated. The space will have a civic as well as a commercial focus. It will be quite different than any other public open space in San José; it will demonstrate the City’s commitment to creating a new transitional space and gathering place with a predominantly urban focus.

As the transition space, the plaza will accommodate high volumes of movement in different directions and provide a transition from the station area to the city. This is where the City welcomes the resident or visitor. Easy orientation will be essential; orientation to other transportation modes, pick-up areas, information points, destinations and a visible connection to downtown. Examples of civic spaces in the US that function as both transition and gathering spaces include Pioneer Square in Portland, Oregon and Bryant Park in New York City.

The public plaza will be highly visible to street frontage on at least one side of the plaza. Key features of the plaza include:

• Central, large multi-use space open for flexible set ups and large public gatherings
• Built-in audio/visual infrastructure for events
• Restrooms
• Smaller, quieter, subzones with trees, shade, and seating
• Integrated bike and pedestrian circulation through the plaza, connecting with adjacent through bike and pedestrian routes

Alternative plaza configurations are described in section 2.4 of this report. It is important that the new plaza be visible, at least partly, from Santa Clara Street, San José’s primary civic thoroughfare, so
that people who are moving through the area on foot, bike and car are aware of the presence of the plaza and are suitably intrigued to want to investigate and explore, either at that time or at a later date.

The land uses and block layout of the central core capitalize on the presence of the San José Arena and the proposed future ballpark on either side of the central zone. Both venues create a lively and active sports-related entertainment zone around the new station terminal. The urban plaza, which is intended to be used as an outdoor room with a well programmed range of activities will be centrally located within this entertainment zone and will be readily accessible by a diversity of patrons.

5. NEIGHBORHOOD SQUARES

At the local level, a network of smaller squares and plazas are distributed throughout the project area creating a focal point within each of the different neighborhoods. Figure 2.3.2 illustrates a network of possible nodes throughout the study area, many centered on significant intersections which could become memorable places. These nodes are located at a frequency which makes walking from one space to the next quick and easy, so that the entire study area benefits from improved pedestrian connectivity through an awareness of an evenly distributed and enjoyable collection of outdoor urban spaces. Equally important will be the connections between each of these spaces. The routes which connect these spaces to each other and to the surrounding neighborhoods should be understandable, pedestrian friendly and enjoyable environments in their own right.

Neighborhood squares would include places for community gathering, children’s play, and multi-use lawn, and ample shade. They could typically be located at new or existing intersections and could be defined by the buildings around the edges being ‘set-back’ on one or more corners. This arrangement could create room for activity areas, outdoor dining, playgrounds, passive areas, landscaping, trees and shade.
6. GREEN STREETS

Green streets are major east-west streets connecting the downtown with the Diridon Station Area and neighborhoods to the user. They are complete streets, meaning they amply accommodate all forms of transport, including bicycle and pedestrians. In addition, they are green because they have landscaping and seasonal street trees, which not only provide shade and seasonal color, but also can supply the means to treat storm water run-off in bio-swales and other organic treatments. As shown in Figures 2-1-1 and 2-3-1, The Alameda, Julian Street, and Park Avenue are designated as green streets.

EAST-WEST CONNECTIONS

Figures 2-3-3 and 2-3-4 illustrate how the existing east-west connector streets could be differentiated in terms of their mode share emphasis. Julian Street, The Alameda/Santa Clara, Park Avenue and San Carlos Street all serve important roles as primary cross-routes for vehicular movement. As a companion to these, St. John Street, San Fernando Street and Auzerais Avenue could receive streetscape improvements which de-emphasize vehicular travel and promote these cross-route as primary pedestrian and bicycle corridors.

THE WIDER CONTEXT

Figure 2-3-5 illustrates how the network of public open spaces within the project area relates to the network of existing parks and plazas in the surrounding neighborhoods. Emphasizing the connections between these places will become an important aspect of integrating the study area into its wider context. The connections also address community desires for east-west connectivity by promoting a well-connected city-wide grid of great outdoor spaces, many of which happen to be in the Diridon Station Area.
FIGURE 2-3-3: EXISTING EAST WEST CONNECTIONS - VEHICULAR EMPHASIS

- **Julian/St. James**: Strengthen the link to Downtown and North 1st Street.
- **The Alameda/Santa Clara St.**: The ceremonial street of the city, connecting past, present, and future.
- **Park Avenue**: A grand boulevard connecting Downtown to Diridon.
- **San Carlos Street**: Connecting Downtown to its Western neighborhoods.
FIGURE 2-3-4: EXISTING EAST WEST CONNECTIONS - PEDESTRIAN AND BICYCLE EMPHASIS

St. John Street
Create a strong pedestrian and bicycle link from the Innovation district to Downtown and North 1st Street

San Fernando St.
A pedestrian and bicycle alternative to Santa Clara St.

Auzerais Avenue
A neighborhood link to Downtown
FIGURE 2-3-5: WIDER CONTEXT OPEN SPACE NETWORK AND CONNECTIONS