1. INTRODUCTION
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This chapter introduces the project and sets the context of the North Santa Rosa Station Area Specific Plan. The chapter provides a description of the project area, the relationship to other City planning documents, an overview of the planning process, the purpose of this plan, and the guiding project principles. It also explains the concept of transit-oriented development and the regulatory requirements of a specific plan document.

This chapter includes the following sections:

1.1 Specific Plan Area
1.2 Background
1.3 Purpose of This Plan
1.4 Specific Plan Requirements
1.5 What Is Transit-Oriented Development (TOD)?
1.6 Relationship to Other Documents
1.7 Guiding Project Principles
1.8 Planning Process and Outreach
1.9 Document Organization

1.1 SPECIFIC PLAN AREA

The North Santa Rosa Station Area Specific Plan (North Station Area Plan) is centered on an approximately one-half mile area around the proposed Sonoma-Marin Area Rail Transit (SMART) northern station site on Guerneville Road (southeast corner of Guerneville Road and the railroad). The Specific Plan area encompasses approximately 987 acres of land. Located along Highway 101, just north of the city’s Downtown, the Plan area includes a regional shopping center, large business park, and cultural center as well as established residential neighborhoods. The station area is mostly developed, though there are a few large, vacant parcels which afford unique opportunities for transit-supportive development. Since the land use and circulation pattern in the area is already largely established, a transit-supportive environment must be created by intensifying land uses, improving connectivity, and enhancing the physical environment.

Figure 1.1 shows the location and boundaries of the Specific Plan area. Additional information about the regional and local context of the Plan area can be found in Chapter 2, Existing Conditions & Opportunities.
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Figure 1.1
Specific Plan Area

Legend
- Specific Plan Project Area
- Proposed Station Site
- 1/2 Mile Radius from Station Site
1.2 BACKGROUND

The North Santa Rosa Station is one of 14 stations being planned by the SMART agency for a commuter rail service along the Northwestern Pacific rail corridor, from Larkspur in Marin County to its northern terminus in Cloverdale. Centrally located and serving the North Bay’s largest community, Santa Rosa will have two stations—the north station site and a site in Downtown’s historic Railroad Square. Due to the SMART agency’s budget constraints, the north Santa Rosa station was not initially included in the first phase of operations. However, in January 2012, the agency announced that the north station would be included in the first phase.

In December 2009, the City of Santa Rosa received a planning grant from the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) for the preparation of the North Station Area Plan and Environmental Impact Report (EIR). At the time the grant was awarded, the northern station site was planned on a vacant parcel south of Jennings Avenue (known as the WYE site). However, to provide better access and visibility for the station, in December 2010 the SMART Board adopted a new location at Guerneville Road, around which this Specific Plan is based.

With assistance from the MTC grant, the City of Santa Rosa contracted with and oversaw the consultant team that developed this Specific Plan and its supportive EIR, and work began on the project in April 2011.

1.3 PURPOSE OF THIS PLAN

The primary objective of this Specific Plan is to support future rail transit by increasing the number of residents and employees within walking distance of the SMART station by improving pedestrian, bicycle, auto, and transit connections, increasing residential density, promoting economic development, and enhancing aesthetics and quality of life. The Specific Plan is intended to provide guidance for private development and public investment over the next 20 to 25 years.

1.4 SPECIFIC PLAN REQUIREMENTS

The Specific Plan is an effective mechanism to implement the Santa Rosa General Plan by providing detailed direction to guide development within the Plan area. The Specific Plan is particularly helpful in creating a unique “sense of place” for the Station Plan area.

All specific plans must comply with Sections 65450–65457 of the Government Code. These provisions require that a specific plan be consistent with the adopted general plan of the jurisdiction within which it is located. Also, all subsequent subdivision and development, all public works projects, and zoning regulations must be consistent with the specific plan.

Section 65451 of the Government Code mandates that a specific plan contain:

- Statement of the relationship of the specific plan to the general plan.
• Text and diagrams which specify:
  – The distribution, location, and extent of the uses of land, including open space.
  – The proposed distribution, location, extent, and intensity of major components of public and private transportation, sewage, water, drainage, solid waste disposal, energy, and other essential facilities.
  – Standards and criteria by which development will proceed, and standards for the conservation, development, and utilization of natural resources.
  – A program of implementation measures including regulations, programs, public works projects, and necessary financing measures.

1.5 WHAT IS TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT (TOD)?

Transit-oriented development, or TOD, refers to the creation of compact, walkable communities centered around high-quality transit systems. If this type of development is executed to its full potential, it is possible to build neighborhoods that provide a higher quality of life without dependence on a car for mobility. Typical components of TODs include:

• Walkable design with pedestrian safety and comfort as the priority;

• Transit facility as prominent central feature;

• A regional node containing a mixture of uses in proximity including office, residential, retail, and civic uses;

• High-density, high-quality development within a walkable and bikeable half-mile around the transit facility;

• Designs that include the easy use of bicycles and other non-vehicular modes of transportation for routine trips; and

• Reduced parking within a walkable half-mile around the transit facility.

1.6 RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER DOCUMENTS

GENERAL PLAN

Adopted by the City Council in November 2009, the Santa Rosa General Plan 2035 is the guiding document for development in the city and Specific Plan area. The General Plan identifies the land use designations and circulation network and sets the direction for development standards found in the City’s Zoning Code. A careful review of the land use and livability, urban design, housing, transportation, public services and facilities, open space and conservation, economic vitality, and noise and safety goals and policies set forth in the General Plan informed many of the priorities of this Specific Plan and ensured consistency between the two documents. The following are some of the General Plan goals and policies that guide development and improvements in the Specific Plan area (a full list of
the key General Plan goals and policies is provided in Appendix B):

- **Goal LUL-A**: Foster a compact rather than a scattered development pattern in order to reduce travel, energy, land, and materials consumption while promoting greenhouse gas emission reductions citywide.

- **Goal LUL-G**: Promote mixed use sites and centers.

- **Goal LUL-I**: Maintain vibrant, convenient, and attractive commercial centers.

- **Goal LUL-J**: Maintain the economic vitality of business parks and offices, and Santa Rosa’s role as a regional employment center.

- **Policy H-C-11**: Provide opportunities for higher density and affordable housing development on regional/arterial streets and near the rail transit corridor for convenient access to bus and rail transit.

- **Goal T-A**: Provide a safe and sustainable transportation system.

- **Goal T-B**: Provide a safe, efficient, free-flowing circulation system.

- **Goal T-J**: Provide attractive and safe streets for pedestrians and bicyclists.

- **Policy UD-G-2**: Locate higher density residential uses adjacent to transit facilities, shopping, and employment centers, and link these areas with bicycle and pedestrian paths.

- **Goal EV-A**: Maintain a positive business climate in the community.

**ZONING CODE**

The Santa Rosa Zoning Code provides standards for development, including height restrictions, setbacks, parking regulations, allowed uses, and signage requirements, to name a few. These standards set the pattern and character of development in the city.

A wide variety of zoning districts are used in the Specific Plan area, consistent with the Specific Plan and the General Plan. Properties have been rezoned as part of the Specific Plan adoption process to ensure consistency and facilitate implementation.

This Specific Plan includes unique zoning standards and/or references standards in the City’s Zoning Code. Where the Specific Plan includes unique regulations, those unique regulations prevail within the Plan area. Where the Specific Plan is silent, subsequent development must comply with applicable regulations in the Zoning Code.

**DOWNTOWN STATION AREA SPECIFIC PLAN**

The northern Santa Rosa station is one of two stations being planned by the SMART agency for the City of Santa Rosa—the subject station, as well as the downtown station, located in historic Railroad Square. The boundaries of the two station areas
meet at College Avenue, between North Dutton Avenue and Highway 101.

In October 2007, the City Council adopted the Downtown Station Area Specific Plan, which is a similar document to this Specific Plan, but which focuses on the station located in Railroad Square. A primary objective of the Downtown Station Area Plan is to increase the number of residents and employees living and working within walking distance (one-half mile) of the downtown SMART station through the intensification of land uses in the Plan area.

The Downtown Station Area Specific Plan area encompasses approximately 650 acres and contains a diverse mix of land uses, development intensities, building heights, and circulation patterns. To preserve the character of these diverse neighborhoods while guiding appropriate development, the Downtown Station Area Specific Plan is divided into distinct subareas, which have unique characteristics that inform potential development and land uses. The land use framework sets development regulations for each of these subareas that include use, density, and height.

**GATEWAYS REDEVELOPMENT AREA**

A portion of the North Santa Rosa Station Area Specific Plan and the Gateways Redevelopment Area overlap, which would generally make some specific plan areas eligible for redevelopment funding. However, on February 1, 2012, redevelopment agencies in California ceased to exist. The Santa Rosa City Council is responsible to carry out previously existing redevelopment obligations of the Redevelopment Agency, such as the Owner Participation Agreement (OPA) between the Redevelopment Agency and Coddington Mall, which is overlapped by the Gateways Redevelopment Area and the North Station Area Specific Plan area. The OPA requires the mall owners to make specific physical improvements to the mall, including (1) upgraded infrastructure (sewer, water, and electrical distribution lines), (2) construction of a restaurant fronting on the northern side of the mall, and (3) renovation of the northerly mall entrance. All of the OPA projects are under way as of 2012. The OPA provides that the Redevelopment Agency will be responsible for paying for the design and cost of installing transit improvements, consisting of an upgrade to the existing bus transit island on the Range Avenue side of the mall and associated circulation improvements.

The Coddington OPA is significant for the North Station Area Plan because the infrastructure improvements will enable the mall owners to upgrade and modernize. The improvements committed by the OPA will not only serve as a catalyst for the further rehabilitation and improvement of Coddington Mall and improved transit service but, together with the vision of the North Station Area Plan, will also serve as a catalyst for improvements generally in the area.

During the development of the Gateways project, the Redevelopment Agency documented a number of blighted conditions in the Gateways subareas that overlap the Station Area boundary. The issues include the older 1960s small office buildings with lease vacancies, the outmoded design of the mall,
retail vacancies, acres of vacant parking, which contribute to the deteriorated condition of the area, the Old Trunk sewer line and Cleveland/Jennings water main, which need replacement, the industrial area on Foley, which needs toxic remediation, and the contaminated WYE site on Range Avenue. There is also a concern regarding inadequate intersection design at Range Avenue and Guerneville Road to support existing and future traffic volumes to support the SMART station.

1.7 GUIDING PROJECT PRINCIPLES

To guide Specific Plan development, a set of guiding project principles was generated through the public outreach process to provide the planning framework and project understanding. These principles created a starting point for development of the more detailed goals, policies, and implementation strategies found throughout the remainder of this Specific Plan. The guiding project principles are:

1) Establish a land use plan, zoning, and a policy and design framework that will guide future development activities.

2) Intensify land uses and increase residential densities in the project area to support future transit improvements and ridership and to exceed the Metropolitan Transportation Commission’s residential unit thresholds.

3) Improve pedestrian, bicycle, auto, and transit access in the project area.

4) Enhance connectivity between the station site and adjacent commercial, residential, educational, and governmental areas.

5) Improve aesthetics and public safety through physical design and streetscape improvements.

6) Develop and implement urban design standards that promote a walkable environment.

7) Enhance quality of life in the project area by providing parks, trails, and recreational opportunities.

8) Transform the project area into a vibrant and distinct place that people want to visit.

9) Catalyze economic development and promote economic competitiveness in the project area by providing employment opportunities.

10) Reduce greenhouse gas emissions by promoting sustainable transit-oriented development and practical alternative modes of transport to the automobile.

11) Inform the community about transit-oriented design concepts.

12) Maximize public participation in the specific plan process through a comprehensive community involvement strategy.
1.8 PLANNING PROCESS AND OUTREACH

Work on the Specific Plan began in the spring of 2011 with a series of stakeholder interviews and a comprehensive existing conditions and opportunities analysis, which is summarized briefly in Chapter 2. This analysis was used by the consultant team, the City, and stakeholders to understand key development opportunities and constraints in the project area. Following completion of the existing conditions analysis, the community outreach process began providing the public the opportunity to comment and provide input on the components of the Specific Plan. The public outreach strategy, described below and illustrated in Figure 1.2, included five community workshops and meetings with a Technical Advisory Committee.

STAKEHOLDER OUTREACH

The project team worked closely with property owners, business owners, and community groups with interests within and adjacent to the project site. The project team arranged one-on-one meetings with owners of properties designated as opportunity sites, property and business owners in business parks and industrial and retail areas, community interest groups, neighborhood associations, and others to provide information on the project and gather feedback.

Figure 1.2: Planning Process Flow Chart

TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) was an important component of the planning process. Technical experts provided guidance and invaluable feedback throughout the planning process. The TAC included representatives from City departments, local transit agencies, and SMART. TAC members attended a series of three meetings, each linked to one of the community workshops, and collaborated with the consultant team and City staff in the development of the Specific Plan.

VISIONING & COMMUNITY WORKSHOP #1

The first community workshop was held in early June 2011 to introduce the project, present the project guiding principles and existing conditions key findings, and receive input on issues and opportunities in the project area relating to land use, circulation, aesthetic, economic, and infrastructure improvements. In addition, the meeting provided an opportunity for participants to share their vision for what they would like the station area to become by 2035. Over 90 participants attended the event.

A clear set of vision concepts was derived from the stakeholder interviews and initial community workshop. The vision provided a framework for the development of the land use and circulation alternatives for the North Santa Rosa Station Area Specific Plan. The vision concepts created are described in Chapter 3, Vision.

LAND USE AND CIRCULATION ALTERNATIVES & COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS #2 AND #3

The second community workshop, held on June 29, 2011, was attended by approximately 75 people. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss transit-oriented development (TOD) principles and to communicate the market realities of appropriate future development prototypes. In addition, the workshop served as an important opportunity to gain an understanding of community priorities for development types and appropriate locations, and to provide direction for land use alternative development.

The information from the second workshop was used by the project team to generate two land use and circulation alternatives to guide future development in the project area. The alternatives presented two scenarios for growth over the next 20–25 years, one with a more intense growth pattern than the other.

In the third workshop, the two alternatives were presented and their similarities, differences, and unique characteristics discussed. Working in small groups, workshop participants discussed the potential benefits and drawbacks of each alternative. Rather than select a preference for one of the two alternatives, participants were asked to analyze elements of each alternative and identify the preferred components of each. After the workshop, this discussion was compiled and studied, along with technical traffic and parking analyses, infrastructure analysis, and a review of market conditions.
PREFERRED DIRECTION & COMMUNITY WORKSHOP #4

The preferred land use and circulation alternative was then created which included community preferred features from each of the two alternatives. The preferred alternative was presented to the community at the fourth community workshop. See Figure 4.1 Land Use Map for an illustration of the preferred alternative. Additionally, this workshop served as an opportunity to provide an overview of the TOD design standards and receive community comment.

FINAL PLAN & WORKSHOP #5

Based on community and TAC input, the project team developed this Specific Plan, which includes detailed guidance for development and improvements in the project area to implement the vision and preferred alternative. The draft components of the Specific Plan were presented at the fifth and final community open house.

1.9 DOCUMENT ORGANIZATION

The Specific Plan document is organized in sequential order based on a typical development process. The idea is to create an action-oriented Specific Plan that will create a physical framework to support the vision of a transit-oriented neighborhood. The Specific Plan includes the following chapters:

1) Introduction. This chapter explains how the Specific Plan document relates to other documents adopted by the City that may apply within the Plan area. Also included are the guiding project principles that have influenced the creation of the Specific Plan. Guiding project principles were established early in the planning process as a way to ensure continuity throughout the Specific Plan. The vision concepts, goals, and policies found in subsequent chapters are derived from the guiding principles.

2) Existing Conditions & Opportunities. This chapter provides a “snapshot” of what exists in 2012 in terms of physical conditions, demographics, regulatory structure, and surrounding context. It creates a useful starting point to lay the groundwork for subsequent chapters and to help gauge the effectiveness of the Specific Plan over time.

3) Vision. This chapter establishes the overall vision for the design and character within the Specific Plan area. All subsequent goals, policies, and design guidelines within the Specific Plan document support the vision.

4) Land Use Plan. This chapter guides the location and type of new development. The Land Use Plan establishes land use classifications and locates them within the Plan area on the Land Use Map.

5) Private Realm Development Standards, Design Guidelines, and Urban Design Policies. This chapter identifies how the built form should function and look to support TOD. The mandatory standards and policies, as well as the advisory guidelines, provide the ingredients
needed to shape the urban design character of the Plan area. All development activities within the Plan area are required to address the relevant standards and guidelines and demonstrate how the project supports the vision for the Plan area.

6) Circulation Plan. This chapter identifies the networks of roadways, paths, sidewalks, etc., to support multimodal mobility in the project area.

7) Public Realm Design Standards and Guidelines. This chapter provides the details related to the design of streets, pathways, public places, and other components of the circulation system.

8) Infrastructure and Public Facilities. In addition to the roadways described in the previous chapters, the Specific Plan also includes details related to how other infrastructure such as sewer, water, cable, and phone services will be provided to support new development. Public services such as police and fire are also included in this chapter.

9) Implementation Plan. The Specific Plan has many components, and its vision cannot be achieved overnight. This chapter establishes implementation actions, phasing, financing, and other information related to how the Specific Plan can implement the vision established in Chapter 3. The implementation actions are the physical improvements, programs, and projects that need to be carried out for the Specific Plan to be realized.

Goals and policies are included in many chapters of this Specific Plan. While the guiding principles and vision concepts described above provide the broad themes addressed by the Specific Plan, the goals and policies provide specific actions geared toward implementation. Goals and policies are included for each subject area (e.g., land use, urban design, transportation, and infrastructure). Goals provide the target, while policies identify a definitive course of action to reach the goals.