

30 Wildlife Center Element

3.0 VILLAGE CENTER ELEMENT

3.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The City of Belmont's Central Business District has historically been centered in the vicinity of the intersection of Ralston Avenue and El Camino Real. However, because retail and work space is scattered throughout the downtown area, to date there is no clear center or focal point for the community. Throughout the Downtown Task Force meetings and discussions, this lack of a clear "sense of place" has been a major, common theme. The key element to the revitalization of Downtown Belmont clearly hinges on the City's ability to create this "sense of place" through practical, realistically achievable redevelopment efforts.

The following Village Center Element describes the opportunities which can be utilized by the City to formulate a new shopping core area and community downtown focus. This section provides an overall goal and a set of objectives for developing a Village Center, and sets forth a series of guidelines which are designed to act as a "blueprint" to direct the future development of this center. The Village Center concept relies on a great deal of cooperation and partnership between public and private redevelopment efforts. Planning guidelines are intended to provide future public/private partnership developers with a great deal of certainty while retaining flexibility in formulating final development plans for the Village Center.

3.2 BACKGROUND

3.2.1 Carrying Out The General Plan

The existing City General Plan identifies the need and desire for creating a new business center within the Downtown. Recognizing that this center should respond to a variety of social, economic and real estate issues, each of which needs to be carefully evaluated prior to the development of an overall plan, the General Plan set forth a policy stating that "The City" shall prepare a Central Business District Plan to coordinate public and private efforts to achieve the following objectives:

- a. To create a community focal point with a lively and attractively designed mix of retail, office, governmental, cultural, entertainment, and housing uses.
- b. To provide for concentration and intensification of general retail uses forming the core of the Central Business District.
- c. To encourage uses such as legitimate theater and restaurants which attract people to the area after normal business hours.

- d. To encourage location of professional and administrative offices on the perimeter or above sidewalk level of the Central Business District.
- e. To explore opportunities for mixed use development, especially of senior citizen housing with retail uses.
- f. To provide pedestrian connection between the Central Business District and Twin Pines Park by means of landscaped malls or other devices.
- g. To assemble parcels of sufficient size to provide space for integrated groups of shops and related uses.
- h. To provide adequate, conveniently located off-street parking.
- i. To improve the attractiveness of the CBD through sign controls, consistent sidewalk and street furniture design, landscaping and encouragement of good building design.
- j. To provide for convenient and safe movement of vehicles, bicycles and pedestrians within the Central Business District and between the Central Business District and adjacent areas.
- k. To provide space for commercial uses which do not jeopardize the primary function of the Central Business District as a retail center.
- 1. To establish a workable ratio of office to retail uses in the Central Business District.

These objectives have been incorporated and further refined within this Village Center Element based upon market evaluation studies, community input, and financially realistic redevelopment strategies available to the City.

3.2.2 Retail Market Opportunities

According to detailed market analysis, the City of Belmont is losing significant amounts of retail sales in both the convenience retail and comparison retail sectors to larger retail shopping centers located in other nearby cities. The loss of sales in these categories indicate opportunities for revitalizing the downtown retail center of Belmont. The total leakage of sales demand generated by the population of the City of Belmont is equal to that which could support 400,000 square feet of convenience and comparison retail space (EPS, 1987). However, not all of this space could be recaptured in a downtown center.

There certainly appears to be a realistic demand for approximately 100,000 square feet of convenience retail space based on anticipated sales levels. The convenience retail sector provides those goods and services for which residents tend to prefer a convenient, local store or

establishment rather than a large comparative retail center. Such uses may include drug stores, food stores, eating and drinking places and specialty items.

Based upon the amount of sales dollars probably spent outside the city, the population of Belmont could also support approximately 300,000 square feet in comparison retail space.

However, in order to capture the sales which are currently "leaking" to other centers, such as Hillsdale Mall and Fashion Island, Downtown Belmont would have to compete heavily for these sales: a financially high-risk strategy for redevelopment.

A more financially conservative and practical approach, which produces the basis for the Village Center concept, is to combine specialty and comparison retail goods with convenience goods, restaurants and entertainment centers at one central location. The combination of these uses would attract a broad range of shoppers, but would primarily cater to the needs of local residents. By providing more opportunities for such goods and services within the local area, Belmont residents will be more likely to contribute to the local tax revenue, rather than shopping in other cities and allowing those potential tax dollars to "leak" out of the local economy.

3.2.3 Private/Public Partnerships

To achieve the creation of a Village Center through redevelopment, two major and interrelated issues appear crucial. First, a major retail base which can act as a catalyst for additional redevelopment is a consistent ingredient in most, if not all, of successful redevelopment efforts. Since it is unlikely that a major department store could be lured from one of the nearby regional shopping malls, a major supermarket is seen as essential to "anchor" other potential commercial uses in the project. The Safeway Store in Downtown Belmont has been waiting to formally submit an application for an expansion of its store to a "Super-Safeway" until an overall plan for the Downtown is agreed upon. Such an expansion would provide the essential "anchor tenant" which is recognized as key to the Village Center concept.

Secondly, the Village Center concept is seen not only as a community focal point with the potential to accomplish a great number of public objectives, but it is also a very financially sound strategy for private investment. However, redevelopment of the Village Center concept will involve business relocation, and the removal of existing structures in addition to normal property acquisition, construction costs and financing. Quite often, the fragmented ownership in downtown areas and additional costs of lengthy property assembly are seen as obstacles for private investment and development. The City of Belmont can participate in a variety of ways to help eliminate or reduce these obstacles in a manner which is acceptable and beneficial to existing property owners and business proprietors. The City has a variety of regulatory and fiscal capabilities which can be used to leverage a minimal public investment to assist private redevelopment efforts. These capabilities include providing cash subsidies and financial leverage from tax increment and bonding sources, backing private loans, and invoking the power of eminent domain to assemble land holdings and obtain right-of-way. These capabilities and their

potential role in assisting private redevelopment are more fully discussed in the Implementation Element, Section 7.0 of this Plan.

3.2.4 Village Center Development Concept

The Village Center Element, which is to guide the development of a Village Center project, is focused on the two block area bounded by Ralston Avenue, El Camino Real, Waltermire Street, and Sixth Street as shown in Figure 3.1. This area currently contains a variety of small commercial and office uses, an office building containing 20 separate offices, and the existing Safeway store.

Initially, several alternatives were evaluated which were based primarily on a specialty shopping center concept of approximately 150,000 square feet extending over three blocks from Ralston to O'Neill Avenue. These schemes included relocation of the Safeway Supermarket from the block it currently occupies and both surface and structure parking. Additional market trade area consideration and economic feasibility analysis led to the conclusion that a more compact, urban approach to the Village Center development was justified. The resulting scheme can accommodate from 130,000 to 185,000 square feet of retail use on two blocks rather than three by using surface and underground parking. The City Council determined in March, 1992, that the removal and rebuilding of all two blocks of the Village Center was not economically feasible due to changing market conditions, land prices, demand for office space, absorption rates, the recent recession, and overall costs.

The overall concept for the Village Center is to maintain the key components of design, community focus, and expanded retail opportunities recommended by the Downtown Task Force. At the same time, some scaling down of high cost items, land acquisition, and total development size is necessary to reduce financial risk and assure economic feasibility. The concept calls for one overall coordinated development plan which can be built in phases over a period of years to reflect the availability of City, Redevelopment Agency, and private sector resources. The recommended development concept, as shown in Figure 3.2 consists of a primary retail anchor, with complimentary retail and personal, professional, and business services. Along the northern Village Center Block, the development concept encourages taking advantage of land assembly opportunities along the high profile El Camino Corridor, retention and renovation of existing complementary commercial buildings, and creative reuse of single underutilized building sites. Retail expansion and renovation adjacent to an anchor tenant on the south block will help retain and attract restaurant, coffee house, and other convenience retail uses.

As shown in Figure 3.1, the Village Center would retain and enhance many of the small groups of shops, primarily comparison and convenience retail, on the block between Ralston and Emmett Street. As land assembly opportunities arise, this block could be augmented with a secondary magnet retail tenant or group of retail shops along the high profile El Camino frontage. The Village Center provides for an expanded food store on the block between Emmett and Waltermire Streets as the main retail anchor for the two block area.

3.3 VILLAGE CENTER GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

3.3.1 Village Center Goal

Because of its major importance in the revitalization of the entire Downtown planning area, the Citizens Downtown Task Force has concentrated a majority of its time and efforts towards defining a specific vision of what the Village Center should be; how it should look, what its role should be in enhancing the lifestyle of the community, the particular market which it should target for retail sales, and the overall role of public and private redevelopment efforts necessary for its implementation. The direction of the recommendations of the Downtown Task Force regarding architectural theme, mix of use, and pedestrian interplay between the two blocks is retained in the scaled down, revised Village Center Plan.

The vision for the Village Center is expressed in the following overall goal and objectives of this element of the Specific Plan. The direction of the recommendations of the Downtown Task Force regarding architectural theme, mix of use, and pedestrian interplay between the two blocks, is retained in the scaled down revised Village Center Plan.

GOAL:

CREATE WITHIN DOWNTOWN BELMONT A COMMUNITY FOCAL POINT WHICH CAN FUNCTION AS THE CENTER OF THE CITY'S COMMERCIAL, CULTURAL AND ENTERTAINMENT ACTIVITIES.

OBJECTIVES:

The following objectives, derived from the existing General Plan and from input provided by the Citizens Downtown Task Force, describe the program by which a unique and distinct community focal point, or Village Center shall be established:

1. Land Use Development Program Objective

Provide a lively, attractively designed mix of retail, office, cultural and entertainment uses in one central location in Downtown. Provide for a concentration and intensification of convenience and specialty retail uses, thereby capturing a greater share of the economic "leakage" which occurs as Belmont residents shop in other communities.

2. Village Center Design Objective

Provide a cohesive overall design for the Village Center which unifies its appearance and is complementary to the outlying portions of Downtown Belmont. The development of the Village Center should have a positive visual impact on the El Camino Real and Ralston Avenue corridors.

3. Community Enhancement Objective

Provide a location for public activities and ceremonies, and a gathering place for residents to enjoy their downtown environment.

3.4 VILLAGE CENTER DEVELOPMENT POLICY AND PROGRAM

This section of the Specific Plan provides policies and general program guidelines to direct the future development of the Village Center. This framework should be referenced as a means to evaluate future development proposals for the Village Center District. Guidelines regarding special retail uses are intended to identify the type of opportunity envisioned while allowing future private redevelopment with a great deal of flexibility in preparing retail programs for the Village Center.

DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM OBJECTIVE. Provide a lively, attractively designed mix of retail, office, cultural and entertainment uses in one central location on Downtown. Provide for a concentration and intensification of convenience and specialty retail uses, thereby capturing a greater share of the economic leakage which occurs as Belmont residents shop in other communities.

3.4.1 Commercial Land Use Development Policy. A community commercial center approach characterizes the commercial use mix and orientation envisioned for the Village Center.

Development Guideline. The following land use and public accessibility development guidelines should be followed:

1. Acceptable uses within the Village Center should include specialty household goods, furniture stores, gifts and china, bakery (retail), specialty gourmet foods, wines and liquor, bookstore/coffee shops, camera/photo shops, arts and crafts outlets, antique dealers, clothing boutiques, delicatessen, movie theater/entertainment uses, sports and outdoor goods, and restaurants. A supermarket and associated convenience goods and services including personal care and professional services.
2. The location of various types of uses within the Village Center should correspond to their relative need for access and public exposure. Comparison and convenience retail uses should be located on first floor locations, restaurant uses should occupy first and second floor locations,

professional and personal services uses should occupy second and third floor spaces, and office space may be located on the third or fourth floor. All retail uses should be easily accessible to the pedestrian shopper.

3. Permit up to 3,000 square feet of first floor building area to be used for banking services provided that (a) this use is deemed by the City to be compatible with the marketing plan for commercial space, and (b) provided that the banking services are not located in prime retail locations which would be more appropriate for retail use. If the banking services are deemed appropriate then the City should encourage the Agency to recruit tenants for this space from existing banking services tenants in the Village Center area.

3.4.2 Land Use Intensity Policy. The maximum building intensity within the Village Center District shall be a floor area ratio of 0.75.

Guideline. The intensity of development is anticipated to range from approximately 110,000 to 164,000 square feet of commercial development with full implementation of all parking opportunities. The actual development will depend upon the amount of parking which is to be provided and the project scale deemed most feasible by the project developer. It should be noted that available parking directly controls the amount of commercial space that may be developed, however, additional space is possible without a required parking component due to the advantages of shared parking resources. For instance, development of public parking in City right-of-ways and satellite lots, together with limited structural parking could support additional square feet of commercial development. The following development range as shown in Table 3.1 is possible.

TABLE 3.1 VILLAGE CENTER RECOMMENDED DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

Land Use	Low Sq. Ft.	High Sq. Ft.
Commercial/Retail Restaurants	50,000	77,200
Food Stores	42,000	49,000
Office-Professional/ Personal Service	<u>18,000</u>	<u>27,800</u>
	110,000	154,000

3.4.3 Redevelopment Project Area Policy. The Village Center project area is established for the two blocks between Ralston, El Camino Real, Waltermire and Sixth Avenue and is designated as a redevelopment project area.

Development Guideline. The following development guidelines are provided:

1. The Block between Emmett and Waltermire should accommodate an expanded grocery/market shopping area. The recommended development program for this block is as follows:

Food Stores	42,000 to 49,000 square feet
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The existing food store should be encouraged to continue in operation, and the City should support an expansion of up to the maximum range to accommodate a supermarket containing specialty and convenience goods.

2. The development program for the balance of the Village Center on the block between Ralston and Emmett should be developed in an integrated and compatible manner to the supermarket block. Joint use of parking and amenities between blocks should be encouraged to maximize a unified appearance and operation of the combined development. Flexibility in the intensity of development of the Village Center is encouraged, while maintaining a maximum intensity of 0.75 FAR. Transfer of development rights may be permitted among and between lots in the Village Center blocks and on adjacent blocks south of Ralston and West of El Camino Real, and parcels may exceed their respective FAR's, provided a permanent transfer of development rights is recorded between "sending" and "receiving" lots.

3.5 VILLAGE CENTER DESIGN POLICY AND PROGRAM

DESIGN OBJECTIVE: Provide a cohesive overall design for the Village Center which unifies its appearance and is complimentary to the outlying portions of Downtown Belmont. The development of the Village Center should have a positive visual impact on the El Camino Real and Ralston Avenue corridors.

3.5.1 Development Concept Plan Policy. The Village Center should be designed as an architecturally cohesive, functionally integrated, commercial project. The focus should be new development to provide anchor tenants, facade improvements, and expansion of viable groups of clustered shops on the northern block, outdoor restaurant use, and pedestrian circulation enhancement to encourage multi-purpose auto trips.

Design Guidelines. The following guidelines are recommended:

1. **Parcelization Guideline.** The Village Center should utilize the existing block pattern of Downtown Belmont. Through traffic on Emmett Street should be discouraged, and this right-of-way should be used to provide for pedestrian circulation. Palm Street should not be extended as a through street within the Village Center. However, access to the interior circulation system should be provided at the intersection of Palm and Waltermire.
2. **Building Line Setback Guideline.** Building setbacks along El Camino Real and Ralston should allow for the construction of a sidewalk adjacent to the curb and a single row of street trees where Urban Streetwall type frontages are required. In areas with Landscape Building type

frontages sidewalks may be curb-adjacent or meander depending on available landscape setbacks. Building frontage guidelines are further explained in policy 4.5.4 in the Urban Design Element.

Setbacks along Sixth Street between Waltermire and Emmett Street should provide for a uniform building line of storefronts. Setbacks along all streets should be intensively landscaped with street trees that contribute to long-term improvement of these roadways as attractive boulevards, consistent with Policy 4.55 of the Urban Design Element.

3. **Building Height Guidelines.** Building heights within the Village Center should vary from one to three stories. Heights above two stories may be allowed for prominent landmark features such as a clock or bell tower architectural element.
4. **Parking Guidelines.** Parking for the Village Center and the Safeway Block should be separated to break up large areas of surface paving.
 - a. **Parking spaces** should be provided based upon an estimated peak demand of 4 spaces per 1,000 square feet of floor area, consistent with established city parking requirements (Section 8, City of Belmont Zoning Ordinance) and the parking guideline of this Plan, Table 6.5. Shared parking opportunities for office and restaurant uses should be encouraged, as discussed in Policy 6.8.4 of this Plan. Such shared parking may result in a lower parking demand than the standard of 4 spaces per 1,000 square feet.
 - b. **First floor uses** should be adjacent to or have easy access to adjoining parking.
 - c. **Public parking** along Waltermire and Emmett should be maximized to reduce reliance on on-site parking lots. Satellite public parking areas should be utilized to encourage perimeter village center parking and increase foot traffic for nearby retail stores. Large parking areas should be shielded from El Camino Real through placement behind buildings or a combination of intensive landscaping and berming. Any structured parking should be designed to allow for the maximum amount of natural light feasible.
5. **Architectural Theme Guideline.** The Village Center project shall follow a Wood Residential theme which shall feature a multi-level project of varying heights and one to two tower elements.

3.5.2 Interim Traffic Circulation Improvements Policy. Interim traffic improvements set forth in the Traffic and Circulation Transportation Element should be implemented in phase with the Village Center.

Development Guideline. See Traffic Circulation and Transportation Element Objectives and Policies under Section 6.5 Interim Improvement.

3.5.3 Redevelopment Implementation Policy. A flexible redevelopment approach to implementation of the Village Center project should be followed as set forth in the Implementation Element.

Administrative Guideline. See 7.0, Implementation Element, 7.5 Redevelopment Program Policies, Policy 7.5.1 Village Center Redevelopment Policy and Administrative Guidelines and Actions.

Community Enhancement Objective. The Village Center should provide a location for public activities and ceremonies, and a gathering place for residents to enjoy their downtown environment.

3.5.4 Open Space Policy. The Village Center shall contain a prominent public open space area, such as a public plaza and fountain within a minimum size of 2,500 square feet as a community gathering place. The open space area shall be centrally located so as to be conveniently accessed by all of the Village Center retail uses.

Design Guidelines. The following design guidelines are recommended:

1. The plaza should be delineated with special pavement treatment and street furniture. Such a plaza should be incorporated into the public right-of-way of Emmett Street.
2. Adjoining private development should be designed to compliment the public open space by orientation of store entrances, architectural features, and pedestrian access to the open space.
3. The public plaza should be made available for community events, musical entertainment, and other public announcement and entertainment uses.

3.5.5 Open Space Linkage Policy. A landscaped pedestrian walkway shall be provided to link the Village Center to the Twin Pines Park (See Urban Design Element).

3.5.6 If the Emmett House, located at 843 Ralston Avenue, is determined by the City Council to be of significant historic or architectural interest it shall be incorporated into Village Center Block #2 (the Ralston block). Should incorporation of the Emmett House into the Village Center not be feasible, then the Emmett House should be relocated elsewhere within the Downtown Area if feasible.