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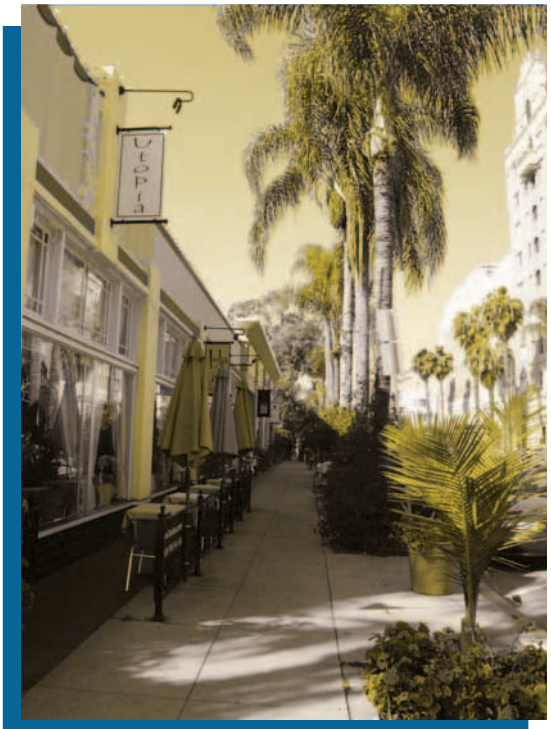
CHARACTER + CONNECTIVITY



CHARACTER

DOWNTOWN CHARACTER AREAS

Within the Downtown, there are a number of "character areas," which are discussed throughout the Downtown Plan. These areas have evolved over time, so that each has a unique feel and unique attributes that should be strengthened through new development and rehabilitation. The Downtown character areas are discussed on the following pages, and their locations are generally identified in Figure 2-1.

CIVIC CENTER

This area includes the Civic Center, public library, and Lincoln Park. It is a primary icon and gathering area within the City.

BUSINESS AND ENTERTAINMENT AREA

Downtown is the heart of Long Beach and the site of much development in the recent past. It is the business, retail, and tourism hub of the City, and also the home of many of the City's historic and cultural treasures. It is characterized by tall buildings; high vehicular, pedestrian, and transit traffic; and diverse building sizes and uses.

CHARACTER

WILLMORE HISTORIC DISTRICT

The northern portion of the Plan area includes parts of the Willmore City/Drake Park historic district, which features residences of the early 1900s and pleasant tree-lined streets.

EAST VILLAGE

East Village is the center of local arts and culture in the City. The eclectic neighborhood boasts a collection of privately owned businesses, galleries, shops, and a complementary street experience. Its nostalgic charm and diversity of uses attract both tourists and locals.

WEST END

The West End is located at the west side of Downtown, east of the I-710 freeway and Cesar Chavez Park. This district is defined by low-rise, single- and multi-family residential uses, and neighborhood amenities like churches and schools. This district represents the traditional neighborhoods with walkable streets and diverse housing types that characterize much of the City.

NORTH PINE

This area includes the northern portion of Pine Street, which has more neighborhood character than within the Downtown core. It also includes a variety of housing types, including multi-family buildings and condominiums.

FIGURE 2-1

Character Areas and Surrounding Neighborhoods

CHARACTER

SURROUNDING CONTEXT

While the development and design standards in Chapters 3 and 4 outline specific requirements for new development, new projects must also respond to the context of their setting and contribute to Downtown in a meaningful way. It's important to recognize that Downtown is actually a collection of neighborhoods and areas of distinct character that make it memorable. This Plan requires buildings to respond to their surrounding neighborhood and the character of their street and block with an urban design approach that is coherent, and a stylistic approach that balances innovation with architectural sensibility. Adjacent to the Downtown Plan study area are other notable neighborhoods in Long Beach that influence the character of the area.

Waterfront

The Long Beach waterfront is located to the south of the study area, defined by Ocean Boulevard as the boundary. The waterfront includes cultural, tourist and recreation attractions like the performing arts center, convention center, aquarium, and The Pike and Rainbow Harbor. These are linked by abundant public transportation. Much of the former industrial waterfront to the west has been transformed into business park uses.

Residential Neighborhoods

Residential neighborhoods surround the remainder of Downtown. To the east is Bluff Park and Alamitos Beach, an area of stately, oceanfront homes and mid-rise condominium buildings. The neighborhoods of Hellman and St. Mary's are located to the northeast, which are both traditional neighborhoods with Craftsman homes and other neighborhood uses. St. Mary's Medical Center is located within this community. North of Downtown are Drake Park and Willmore City, which together form a Historic District known for early 1900s residences.

CONNECTIVITY

THE IMPORTANCE OF CONNECTIVITY

The successful downtown is a destination. This is especially true for Long Beach with its unique waterfront location and its mix of uses that draw workers, residents, and visitors to the area and encourages them to move about and explore the different neighborhoods of Downtown. Conveniently and efficiently exploring the different areas of Downtown requires that they be interconnected in multiple ways, providing multiple choices as to how to move around and through the area.

The connectivity and mobility vision for Downtown is forward thinking and deliberately moves away from the typical suburban model and some of the downtown models that focused almost exclusively on maximizing the efficiency of vehicular movement and vehicular parking. The visioning process concluded that a dense, vibrant downtown could not be achieved by focusing on the automobile for moving people into and around the area. The Downtown mobility network must be a balanced network that provides transit as a viable alternative to the automobile, includes bicycle facilities integrated into the street system, and safe and engaging pedestrian corridors.

A fully balanced multi-modal mobility system has benefits beyond transportation. Where implemented there is typically increased economic and business activity, recreation, and increased support for social and cultural institutions. By providing appropriate and well-designed spaces for bicycles and pedestrians, the overall quality of life is elevated encouraging even more investment in quality development.

The vision of a balanced mobility network does not suggest that the network does not have priorities. The highest priority is on walking as the mode for moving within Downtown. This is followed by bicycles, the various forms of transit, and then vehicles.

CONNECTIVITY

The network in Downtown Long Beach consists of a combination of highways, streets, transit, and the pedestrian realm. Primary surface streets, regional and interstate highways, and major transit connectors all lead to Downtown. This access positions Long Beach as a regional hub, with connections to Los Angeles, San Diego, Orange County, nearby ports, and other regional destinations in Southern California. This network is illustrated in Figure 2-2.

Walkable streets and accessible transit are a crucial ingredient for a vibrant, multi-use community. Streets are the heart of the public realm and should accommodate a wide range of inhabitants beyond vehicles. The goal of the Downtown Plan is to restore the streets as places of community association and shared transportation, as it was historically in Long Beach.

DOWNTOWN STREETS

A number of important City thoroughfares converge in Downtown Long Beach. The streets are primarily in a grid with occasional diagonal streets, and a variety of types, sizes, character, and capacity.

Key Streets

Key streets in Downtown are either significant for being major thoroughfares or retail corridors, or because they provide iconic character and recognizable centers for neighborhood districts. Key mobility streets are illustrated in Figure 2-2.

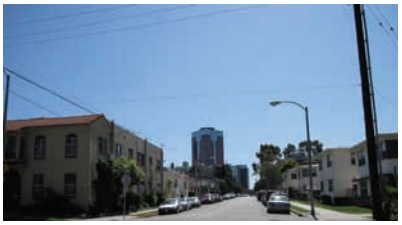
Major streets provide direct regional access to and from the Downtown core. They are generally wide, with multiple lanes, are accessible to highways, and carry high traffic volumes. Most of them are consistent with the grid. Others—like Alamitos and Ocean Boulevard—deviate from the grid to channel traffic to specific destinations and are important gateways into Downtown. These streets are shared by personal vehicles, buses, bicycles, and pedestrians, often as important retail corridors. Major streets create the form of the City and help to distinguish unique communities therein.

CONNECTIVITY

The regulations and guidelines presented in this plan will realize the goals put forth by the Guiding Principles. Below are visual representations of what some character areas can resemble once these new policies and guidelines are implemented.

LONG BEACH BLVD

In the Downtown core, high-quality design should incorporate modern, innovative architectural solutions, a higher minimum streetwall, and taller buildings in the transit-oriented areas.



WEST END

Architectural design standards west of the Downtown core should promote high-quality residential development with a minimum streetwall, landscaped setbacks, parkways, and street trees to enhance the pedestrian environment.

EAST VILLAGE

East of the Downtown core, architectural design should promote high-quality mixed-use development with pedestrian-oriented ground floors.

CONNECTIVITY

Overall Guidelines for Walkability:

1. *Strengthen existing pedestrian connections and streetscapes where possible, through the use of lighting, street furniture, landscape, and signage.*
2. *Incorporate mid-block connections, paseos, or small plaza spaces to enhance the pedestrian realm, and provide pedestrian gathering places and stopping points.*
3. *Provide pedestrian-oriented uses and pocket parks along pedestrian zones to encourage "eyes on the street" and active uses.*

Other streets, such as Pine Avenue, Ocean Boulevard, Linden Avenue, and Alamitos Avenue, contribute to distinct characters within the City. These streets offer great pedestrian activity because of a predominance of ground-floor retail, public spaces, and other places of interest. Many of these streets are found Downtown, as it is the center of culture and identity.

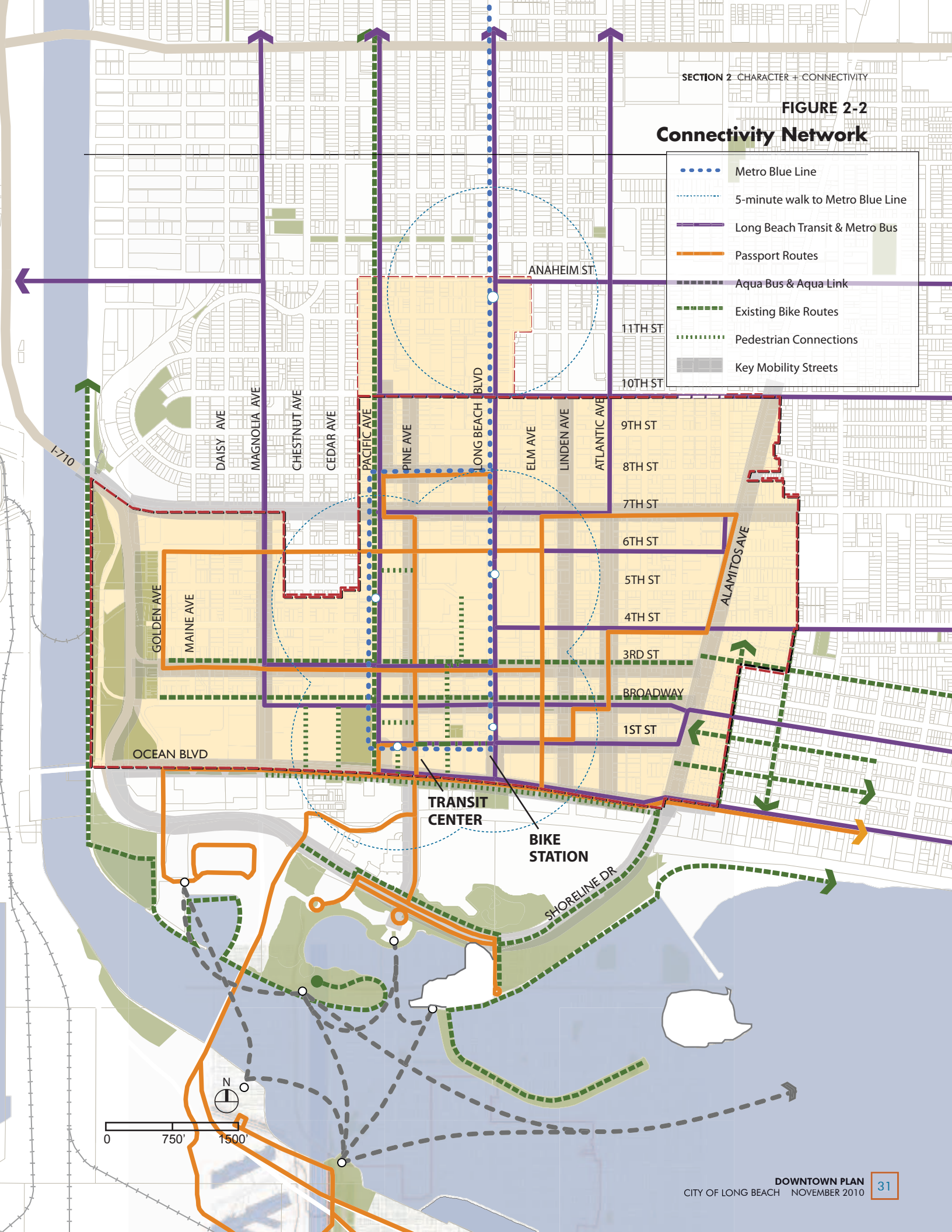
Neighborhood Streets

Neighborhood streets complete the street network, composing the neighborhoods and city fabric and connecting the major streets. They are typically narrower; post slower speeds; and allow for a greater commingling of vehicles, pedestrians, and bicycles than primary streets.

PEDESTRIAN CONNECTIONS

In several spaces, the public right-of-way is reserved for pedestrians, most notably the Promenade, which links City Place to the Transit Mall. Additional connections occur within privately owned courtyards that open to the street. The Civic Center features a pedestrian-only route between Broadway and Ocean Boulevard. Ocean Boulevard, an icon for the City, features wide setbacks that provide a pedestrian environment.

FIGURE 2-2
Connectivity Network



CONNECTIVITY

TRANSIT

Transit plays a key role in the mobility network of Downtown Long Beach. Parts of Pacific Avenue, 1st Street and 6th Street, and Long Beach Boulevard include the Metro Blue Line rail in the right-of-way. Additionally, a portion of 1st Street is reserved for bus traffic. These streets have a great amount of pedestrian activity as a result of their connection offerings and are significant activity centers in Downtown.

Los Angeles Metro System

The Metro Blue Line is a central feature of Downtown Long Beach. This light rail route connects to Los Angeles, surrounding cities, and greater Long Beach. Within Downtown there are four Blue Line stops, including an additional stop just north of Downtown on Anaheim Street. The entirety of the Downtown core is within a 5-minute walk of a Blue Line stop. This equals approximately one-third of Downtown.

The Long Beach Transit Mall, located at 1st Street and Pacific Avenue, is the junction of the Blue Line and multiple bus lines. Recent transit and pedestrian improvements at the Mall re-enforce its role as the center of transit activity in the City. In addition to the Blue Line, the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority also operates bus routes into Downtown Long Beach, with connections to the Transit Mall.

Local Bus and Water Taxis

Long Beach Transit, the local transit authority, operates an extensive bus system within the City. Several of its regular routes pass through the Downtown area. Bus routes operate mostly on primary streets, and most locations within Downtown Long Beach are within a 2-block distance from a bus route.

Long Beach Transit also operates bus routes for popular tourist destinations and areas of cultural interest. These include the Passport, the AquaLink, and the AquaBus, which provide links to activity centers throughout Downtown and the City. The reintroduction of the streetcar system may add appealing yet efficient means of traversing through the area's increasingly revitalized corridors.

Long Beach Transit also provides connections via water across the Harbor. The AquaBus operates a circular route to all attractions on the Harbor. The AquaLink is a larger vessel that travels farther to Alamitos Bay and also the Harbor destinations. Both of these options can be accessed from Downtown.

CONNECTIVITY

BIKEWAYS

The City of Long Beach would like to be the most bicycle-friendly urban city in the nation. The City and its residents developed a Bicycle Master Plan in 2000. This plan guides the development and maintenance of bicycle-friendly roads and bikeways, support facilities, and other programs. This Plan, which serves commuter and recreational riders, is currently being updated. A number of recreational bikeways and a Downtown street system already support bicycle use. The majority of the Class 1 bike lanes, those that are separated from vehicular paths, are located along the Los Angeles River and along the harbor through Shoreline Village. All of these are outside of Downtown.

Downtown contains a great asset for bicycle riders: the BikeStation. This commuter bike station, with 24-hour bike storage and amenities, was one of the first of its kind in the nation, and it set a precedent for bicycle use in Downtown. It is located in the center of Downtown, which is convenient for residents and acts as a promotional tool for bicycle use advocacy.

In 2008, the City began operation of City Bike Share, which encourages City employees to park their cars once and use bicycles to travel to nearby meetings, lunches, or errands. In 2009, the City was awarded funding to develop a Metro Blue Line Bicycle and Pedestrian Access Plan. This Plan will assess and recommend infrastructure and safety improvements to increase bicycling and walking to Metro Stations in Downtown and throughout the City.

Implementing a portion of the Bicycle Master Plan for Downtown, dedicated bike lanes have been completed on 3rd Street and Broadway. Completion of the planned bikeway facilities for Downtown will be the catalyst for achieving the most-bicycle-friendly goal.

Overall Guidelines for a Bicycle-Friendly Downtown:

1. *Establish pedestrian and bicycle priority zones on primary and secondary streets within Downtown. Use traffic–calming measures to ensure safety for bicyclists riding in the street, and at pedestrian crosswalks.*

2. *Promote shared transit, pedestrian, and cyclist use on key transit streets. Enhance the attractiveness of these streetscapes to raise user awareness and comfort.*

CONNECTIVITY

An important asset of Downtown is its relatively intact grid street system. The main goal as redevelopment continues is to ensure that this grid is maintained and, where possible, reestablished where past interruptions have occurred. Additionally, the coordination of all modes of transportation is a priority in the Downtown Plan.

The following is a summary of key goals identified for mobility in Downtown:

Overall Guidelines for Creating Great Streets:

1. *Maintain the historic street grid to promote the greatest number of mobility options, retain the historic scale of the streets, and preserve and/or establish new view corridors. Prohibit and discourage any interruption of the street grid.*
2. *Create new connections and corridors as larger sites are redeveloped. Require full vehicle and pedestrian access in new connections. Encourage pedestrian circulation by including mid-block connections in new developments, where feasible.*
3. *Promote shared parking, shared transit, and pedestrian and cyclist use on key transit streets. Enhance the attractiveness of these streetscapes to raise user awareness and comfort.*
4. *Provide active retail and pocket parks along pedestrian zones to encourage eyes on the street and active uses.*
5. *Include lighting along all streets, sidewalks, pedestrian connections, and on private property to ensure comfort and safety.*
6. *Establish pedestrian and bicycle priority zones in primary and secondary streets within Downtown. Use traffic-calming measures to ensure safety for bicyclists riding in the street, and at pedestrian crosswalks.*
7. *Ensure that entryways to all parking structures do not disrupt the pedestrian right-of-way on primary walking streets.*