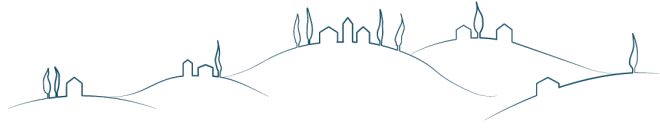


RICHMOND HILLTOP

EXISTING CONDITIONS MEMORANDUM



Physical Context, Open Space, and Urban Design

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Prepared for

City of Richmond, CA

Roberta Feliciano

Senior Planner, City of Richmond, CA

Roberta_Feliciano@ci.richmond.ca.us

Tel: 510.620.6662 | Fax: 510.620.6858

SITELAB urban studio

660 Mission street

#200

San Francisco, CA, 94105

415.852.6940

Staff

Laura Crescimano

Woody Hanson

Arthur Perez

Uzair Siddiqui

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Existing Conditions Memorandum

PHYSICAL CONTEXT, OPEN SPACE, AND URBAN DESIGN

1.0 Executive Summary

This Existing Conditions Memorandum identifies the following site observations and is an analysis of the physical conditions within and surrounding the plan area. This document provides an analysis of slope and topography, physical barriers, landscape features, development patterns, and built form as well as supporting case studies for relevant points of comparison in the Bay Area, including mall redevelopment projects. Constraints and opportunities listed in each section identify potential influences on the urban design of the forthcoming Richmond Hilltop Mall Specific Plan.

1.1 Topography and Landscape Overview

The Richmond Hilltop Specific plan area is located 1.5 miles to the south of San Pablo Bay and two miles to the east of San Francisco Bay, among the foothills of the nearby El Sobrante Ridge to the east and San Pablo Ridge to the southeast (Figure 1). The plan area is approximately 200 to 300 feet above sea level providing views of the bay to the north.

Consistent with its hilly surroundings, the plan area descends approximately 110 feet from southeast to northwest. Areas north and west of the site are an additional 60 to 100 feet below the plan area (Figure 2). Grade change across the plan area is generally not linear and is characterized by steep slopes between flatter development areas that limit visual continuity and pedestrian mobility (Figure 3).

The watershed of Garrity Creek connects this hilly region to San Pablo Bay. It is the marker of the neighborhood's natural setting and history. Garrity Creek surrounds the plan area and enhances its immediate environment. The creek is predominantly underground, including culverted segments below Hilltop Mall, Interstate 80, and the Hilltop Green residential development to the east of the plan area. According to the City of Richmond General Plan, the plan area presents opportunities to increase ecological value and public access to this riparian corridor.¹

The plan area's topographical characteristics are generally categorized by slopes reconciling grade changes and flat terraces of development and parking (Figure 4 and 5). Slopes are

¹ Richmond General Plan 2030 - Section 7: Conservation and Natural Resources - Wetland, Baylands and Riparian Corridors - page 5

typically located along streets, between parcels, and between parking lots where access is challenging—ranging from 25 to 45 percent grade (Figure 6). Terraces enable more even grading which results in easier mobility, accessibility, and development opportunities.

Constraints & Opportunities:

- The plan area descends over 110 feet from southeast to northwest. Encourage a variety of experiences that address the unique landscape and topographic characteristics around the perimeter of the plan area.
- Grade change across the plan area is generally not linear and is characterized by steep slopes between flatter terraces. Embrace the plan area's sloping topography and frame view corridors toward landmarks and vistas.
- Steep slopes descend from Hilltop Drive to Zones A, B, and C limiting access to the plan area. Identify locations along Hilltop Drive where structured parking can be embedded into the slope to reduce visual impact and create new connections to Hilltop Drive.
- Except for Hilltop Lake Park to the north of the plan area, there is limited public open space south and west of the plan area and no public open space within the plan area today. Create new public open space opportunities that prioritize programming for the current and future residents and employees in and around the plan area.
- Garrity Creek is underground within the plan area leaving a gap in the riparian corridor. Daylight Garrity Creek where possible. Augment the riparian corridor's ecological performance with native planting to match its regional profile and support a diverse habitat for wildlife.
- Garrity Creek provides great ecological benefits and was an important resource for the Huchiun people, an Ohlone tribe who used and occupied the area. The area was later occupied by the Standard Oil Company in the early 1900s and used for recreational purposes. Consider integrating interpretive art and signage near Garrity Creek or Hilltop Lake Park that provides information about the history and biodiversity of the plan area—including but not limited to natural history, and the Standard Oil Company.
- The plan area's elevated position exposes it to accelerated cool winds from the north and east during the winter months. Increase tree planting along the plan area perimeter to buffer from north and west winter winds, and freeway noise and air quality.
- The plan area slopes considerably from south to north, including a steep slope along much of the southern edge of the plan area along Hilltop Drive. Optimize the long

southern exposure of the plan area for solar orientation—capturing daylight and reducing shadow in buildings and open spaces.

- Slopes in the plan area are not universally accessible, and most do not provide a pedestrian connection whatsoever. Utilize slopes as unique landscape features in open space that can provide elevated vantage points within the plan area, and address accessibility challenges through ramps and switchbacks where required.
- A significant portion of the plan area is dedicated to surface parking and planted area is generally limited to steep slopes. Preserve healthy street trees along sidewalks, medians, and setback areas to maintain a mature tree canopy where it already exists. Expand and add new planting areas where possible to support tree growth and improve stormwater retention.
- There is no significant visual connection to the south of the plan area toward San Francisco Bay. Optimize future building heights with topography to enable views in all directions. Views of Point Richmond and the San Francisco skyline to the south and Mount Tamalpais State Park to the west may be possible.
- There is currently no public vantage point from Zone D into the open space to the north, nor a sidewalk or bike facility on Hilltop Mall Road along Hilltop Lake Park. Integrate public vantage points and trails or shared-use paths that provide access views of the riparian corridor in open spaces north and east of the plan area.

1.2 Built Form and Urban Fabric Overview

Development characteristics surrounding Hilltop Mall in Northern Richmond are generally characterized by residential subdivisions and large-format commercial buildings with a street network navigating the region’s hilly topography (Figure 10). Large arterial streets are framed by generous setbacks. Setback depth and design are generally inconsistent along arterial roads and on commercial properties, however, residential development is characterized by setbacks that are of a consistent depth or intentionally staggered.

The surrounding neighborhood is predominantly residential with a variety of single-family homes, duplexes, townhouses, and apartment buildings (Figure 11). The tallest residential buildings are four stories. Large-format commercial buildings—including retail, offices, warehouses, and car dealerships—are located north of the plan area and are predominantly one-story structures.

The plan area covers about 143 acres, an area that comparatively spans approximately 35 blocks of Downtown Richmond from First Street to Sixteenth Street and from Barret Avenue to Richmond Greenway (Figure 12). A limited number of access points to the plan area results in a large block structure, with intersections generally greater than 1,000 feet apart—nearly a quarter-mile or 5-minute walk. Plan area lots are typically a single-use— with rare instances of buildings with multiple tenants—and include ample parking (Figure 15). Buildings in the plan area are setback at minimum of 20 feet from the street, and more typically are setback 40 feet or more behind landscaped setback areas and surface parking lots. Lot coverage across all uses in the plan area is typically 50 percent or less.

Similar redevelopment projects in the Bay Area—including Stonestown Galleria in San Francisco (Figure 17), Santana Row in San José (Figure 18), and NewPark Mall in Newark (Figure 19)—while smaller than the plan area, provide relevant comparative examples of land use, block structure, density, and open space design. In all of the examples studied, projects build on the successful elements of the existing mall and consolidate surface parking into a mixed-use development. Density and the variety of uses on the site increase with building heights typically ranging in height from four to eight stories. In general, setbacks are limited between the street and new buildings, particularly at entrances to retail. Block length generally does not exceed 400 feet in length. The proposed plan for Stonestown Galleria includes a variety of open spaces ranging in scale, while Santana Row is centered around an enlarged median at the center of the site. Both strategies incorporate a range of programmatic elements and design features in their respective open spaces.

Constraints & Opportunities:

- Residential development is predominantly located south and west of the plan area. Consider locating neighborhood-serving commercial or community space to serve surrounding residents to the south and west as well as existing and new residents in the plan area
- Residential scale and density vary around the plan area with predominantly single-family homes to the south, and duplexes, townhomes, and apartments to the west, northwest, and northeast. Design of new buildings, particularly along the south side of the plan area should transition scale from adjacent residential development through height, width, setbacks, and/or stepbacks.
- Block length along the ring road is approximately 1/4-mile, two to three times that of a typical block in Downtown Richmond. Subdivide the plan area's block structure into shorter, walkable blocks. Increasing the number of intersections distributes traffic and reduces vehicle speeds.

- Lots are the scale of a full city block in Downtown Richmond, or larger. Consider a variety of lot sizes within the plan area to encourage a wider variety of building types and scales.
- The plan area is characterized by low-density development, with most buildings ranging in height from one to two stories, except in Zone D where buildings are typically three to five stories. Increase development intensity, including height, lot coverage, and mix of uses to support activity in the plan area.
- Outer zone buildings are generally oriented toward Hilltop Mall Road, Garrity Way, or other internal access to the lot—while steep slopes and rear yards generally face Hilltop Drive and Blume Drive. Accentuate primary access points to the plan area on Hilltop Drive and Blume Drive as gateways. Consider emphasizing existing features such as heritage trees or the water tower and introducing new features such as open space, public art, and statement architectural features in new buildings where existing elements don't exist.
- Lots are typically vegetated along the perimeter with buildings positioned roughly at the center surrounded by surface parking. Reduce impervious surfaces to reduce stormwater runoff through stormwater management integrated into building and landscaping design.
- Consider incorporating a variety of uses, including mixed-use buildings and housing options that range in affordability, height, design, unit size, unit mix, and amenities.
- Organize a varied network of open spaces—in scale, program, and design— providing a mix of leisure and recreational opportunities within a walkable distance of most residences.
- Add compatible uses that support activity around successful existing retail and institutional uses within the plan area.
- Rebalance existing streets to dedicate more space to pedestrian, bicycle, and transit facilities. Consider road diets where possible to avoid increasing overall street width.
- Consider introducing non-vehicular connections—such as a greenway or paseos—within the existing block pattern to improve walkability and safe mobility for pedestrians and bicyclists.

2.0 Introduction

2.1 Memo Purpose

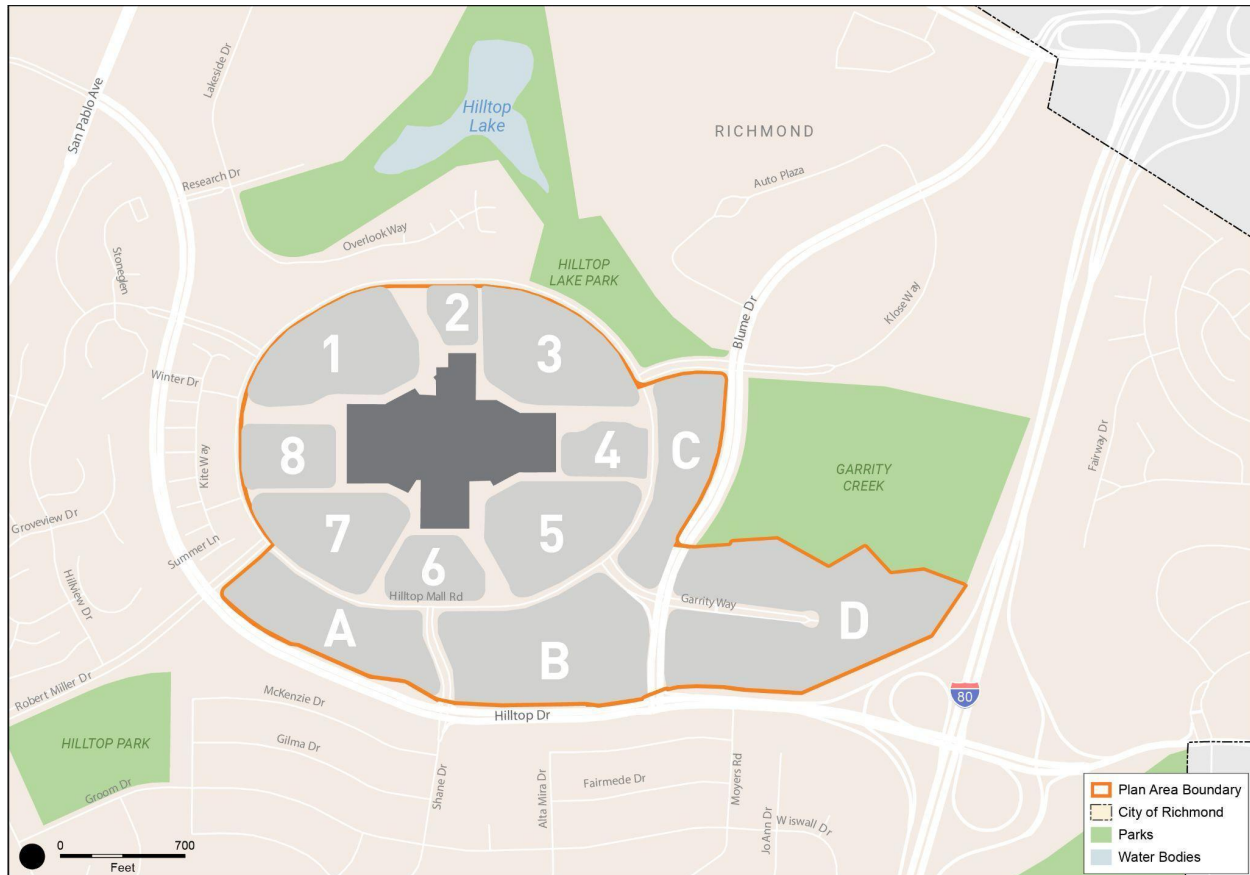
- Analyze the physical context and attributes of the plan area and its surroundings for consideration during community engagement and planning phase of the project.
- Identify typical conditions across the plan area and notable unique conditions that define the character of the plan area.
- Analyze physical constraints and resultant opportunities.
- Identify sensitive adjacencies to understand spatial relationships within and surrounding the plan area.
- Review similar Bay Area redevelopment projects as comparative examples to identify characteristics relevant to the plan area.

2.2 Memo Organization

This memorandum focuses on physical conditions related to urban design in the plan area, including topography, landscape, and buildings. The memo is organized into the following themes, each identifying existing physical constraints and redevelopment opportunities to be studied in the forthcoming specific plan.

- Topography and Landscape: Analyzing identifiable physical characteristics of the space between buildings, including topography, views, planting, and open space.
- Built Form and Urban Fabric: Reviewing common and unique characteristics among existing buildings, including scale, orientation, setting, access, architecture, and materials. Comparative Bay Area redevelopment examples are also included.

2.3 Plan Area Zones



Hilltop Mall Road encircles the shopping mall and its parking lots, splitting the plan area into two primary development zones—inside and outside of the ring road (Figure 12). The inner zone covers approximately 78 acres, and includes the mall building and the parking lots that surround it. The outer zone covers approximately 65 acres, and includes a wide range of commercial, institutional, hotel, and few residential uses. Refer to the above graphic. Areas are hereafter referred to using the following designations:

- The mall building is simply referred to as the “mall”.
- Mall parking lots are numbered 1 to 8 clockwise from the northwest. Each numbered section of parking is divided from the next by either a landscape buffer, an access drive, or both.

- The outer zone is labeled by letters A to D from west to east. Zones A, B, and C are located along Hilltop Mall Road, while Zone D is located east of Blume Drive along Garrity Way.

Streets often referenced in the memo include:

- Hilltop Drive, which establishes the southern boundary of the plan area. It connects the plan area's access roads to the Eastshore Freeway (Interstate 80) and San Pablo Avenue.
- Hilltop Mall Road, which establishes the northern and western boundaries of the plan area. It is sometimes referred to as the "ring road" which encircles the inner zone.
- Blume Drive, which establishes the eastern edge boundary of Zones B and C, as well as the western boundary of Zone D.
- Access roads to the plan area include (clockwise from northwest), Hillview Drive, Blume Drive, Klose Way, Shane Drive, and Robert Miller Drive.

3.0 Topography and Landscape

3.1 Relationship to the Bay

The plan area is located 1.5 miles to the south of San Pablo Bay and two miles to the east of San Francisco Bay (Figure 1). The bay is visible from the north edge of the plan area along Hilltop Mall Road over Hilltop Lake Park. Northwest of the plan area, Point Pinole Regional Shoreline Park represents the closest access to the shoreline. The regional shoreline is accessible from the plan area by Atlas Road and Richmond Parkway—an approximately 5-10 minute drive.

The plan area is located approximately five miles north of the southern Richmond bayfront—including the Harbor Channel and Inner Harbor Basin. There is no significant visual connection south to the Bay from the plan area. See Section 3.6 for more information on views and sightlines.

3.2 Topography

The plan area is located among the foothills of the nearby El Sobrante Ridge to the east and San Pablo Ridge to the southeast as they descend to the Bay. The plan area is located approximately 190' to 300' above sea level (Figure 2). The plan area descends over 110 feet from the highest point at the southeastern tip of the plan area (Zone D) to its lowest point at the intersection of Hilltop Mall Road and Hillview Drive in the northwest. Grade change across the plan area is generally not linear and is characterized by steep slopes between flatter terraces (Figure 3). See Section 3.5 for additional analysis of slopes and terraces in the plan area.

Hilltop Drive—along the southern edge of the plan area—is an arterial road with steep slopes descending into Zones A, B, and C. All access roads descend from Hilltop Drive toward Hilltop Mall Road and Garrity Way. Access roads northwest and northeast of the Hilltop Mall Road—Hillview Drive and Klose Way—are generally flat. The various elevations of inner zone terraces provide access to different levels of the mall (Figure 1). Zones 1, 4, and 5 provide access to the upper level of the mall and sit at a higher elevation than Zones 2, 3, 6, 7, and 8 which provide access to the lower levels of the mall.

Interstate 80 (I-80), which provides important regional vehicular access to the plan area, is located immediately east of the plan area. Zone D is elevated approximately 40 feet above I-80 which buffers the plan area from noise generated by highway traffic (Figure 1). Open spaces immediately north of the plan are 60 to 100 feet below the plan area enabling views toward the San Pablo Bay. Refer to Section 3.3 for additional information regarding open spaces near the plan area. The elevated position of Zone D on the east side of the plan area nearest I-80 reduces and buffers sound from the surrounding area, particularly to the north.

Nearby hills in the plan area's immediate surroundings include Hilltop Bayview to the north (+280'), Fairmede Hilltop to the south (+250'), Hilltop Green to the east (+320'), and Hilltop Village to the west (+260') (Figure 1). This hilly topography provides framed vistas, particularly to the north toward San Pablo Bay. Views and sightlines are further described in Section 3.6.

Constraints & Opportunities:

- The plan area descends over 110 feet from southeast to northwest. Encourage a variety of experiences that address the unique landscape and topographic characteristics around the perimeter of the plan area.
- Grade change across the plan area is generally not linear and is characterized by steep slopes between flatter terraces. Embrace the plan area's sloping topography and frame view corridors toward landmarks and vistas.

- Steep slopes descend from Hilltop Drive to Zones A, B, and C limiting access to the plan area. Identify locations along Hilltop Drive where structured parking can be embedded into the slope to reduce visual impact and create new connections to Hilltop Drive.

3.3 Nearby Open Spaces

The 36-acre Hilltop Lake Park surrounds Hilltop Lake immediately north of the plan area and provides the nearest public open space to the plan area. The park includes a YMCA and hiking trails that connect to Blume Drive at Klose Way. The next nearest public park is Hilltop Park, which is located approximately a quarter-mile southwest of the plan area. The 6-acre park includes a playground and basketball court but does not provide parking. There is presently no publicly accessible open space within the plan area.

Garrity Creek is a 3-mile-long creek extending from El Sobrante Ridge to San Pablo Bay.² The creek is fed by two springs from El Sobrante ridge and flows through Hilltop Lake to the north of the plan area.

Upstream from Hilltop Lake—which is exclusively fed by Garrity Creek—the creek is predominantly underground, including culverts below Hilltop Mall, Interstate 80, and the Hilltop Green residential development to the east (Figure 1). On the east of Blume Drive north of the plan area Zone D, there is a large open space with lush vegetation and daylight portions of the creek. This area serves ecological value but is not accessible to the public.

Downstream from Hilltop Lake to the north of the plan area, Garrity Creek is predominantly daylight flowing between residential neighborhoods to the nearest shoreline of San Pablo Bay west of Bayview-Montalvin. The riparian corridor provides an important ecological connection from marshland to upland landscape, however, it is not accessible to the public and is generally fenced off from public right-of-way.

The basin feeding this watershed was a fishing, hunting, gathering and harvesting area for the Native Ohlone—the Huchiun Band. They lived in villages, migrating from the shores of San Pablo Bay to the inland canyons along Garrity, Rheem, San Pablo and Wildcat Canyon creeks. The Huchiun seasonally settled in the Garrity Creek area which provided fertile land for harvesting. Before the Spanish explorations in 1797, around 10,000 Huchiun lived in the East Bay, subdivided into tribes of 250 individuals or less. In the decade that followed, the Huchiun

² USGS, Geographic Names Information systems, <https://edits.nationalmap.gov/apps/gaz-domestic/public/summary/224083>

were displaced or killed and their homeland was left essentially unpopulated.³ Members of the Ohlone tribes still live in the Bay Area and are highly interested in their pre-contact past and would be involved in the planning process through California regulations including Public Resources Code Section 21080.3, which requires agencies to consult with tribes during the CEQA process.

Organizations, including “Friends of Garrity Creek”, are actively seeking to protect the remaining open-air stream segments from new developments and projects that might alter the creek’s ecological and landscape value. According to The City of Richmond General Plan, the plan area presents opportunities to increase the ecological value and increase public access to the riparian corridor, saying in part “For residents, restored urban creeks provide a valuable connection to natural areas and create opportunities for recreation, education, and awareness.”⁴ Creek daylighting opportunities as an integrated open space feature within the plan area warrants further study.

Hilltop Lake is man-made and was first created by the Standard Oil Company, by damming Garrity Creek, as a recreation area for its employees in the early 1900s. Later, the California Department of Fish and Game stocked the lake with rainbow trout and channel catfish to encourage fishing.⁵

Constraints & Opportunities:

- Except for Hilltop Lake Park to the north of the plan area, there is limited public open space south and west of the plan area and no public open space within the plan area today. Create new public open space opportunities that prioritize programming for the current and future residents and employees in and around the plan area.
- Garrity Creek is underground within the plan area leaving a gap in the riparian corridor. Daylight Garrity Creek where possible. Augment the riparian corridor’s ecological performance with native planting to match its regional profile and support a diverse habitat for wildlife.
- Garrity Creek provides great ecological benefit and was an important resource for the Huchiun people, an Ohlone tribe who settled there. The area was later occupied by the Standard Oil Company in the early 1900’s and used for recreational purposes. Consider

³ Richmond General Plan 2030 - Section 14: Historical Resources - Native Americans - page 4.

⁴ Richmond General Plan 2030 - Section 7: Conservation and Natural Resources - Wetland, Baylands and Riparian Corridors - page 5

⁵ Janett M. Sowers, William Lettis & Associates - Historical wetlands research by the San Francisco Estuary Institute - Creek and Watershed Map of Richmond and Vicinity - Published by Oakland Museum of California - 2006.

integrating interpretive art and signage near Garrity Creek or Hilltop Lake Park that provides information about the history and biodiversity of the plan area—including but not limited to natural history, and the Standard Oil Company.

3.4 Orientation

Prevailing winds shift seasonally. From February to October when high temperatures average between 67 and 75 degrees Fahrenheit, winds are predominantly from the west—an area generally shielded by the elevated Hilltop Village neighborhood east of the plan area. The breeze is overall moderate, ranging from approximately seven to nine miles per hour. During the winter months, from November to February, the prevailing winds come from the north and east. The plan area is exposed in an elevated position along these edges which may accelerate wind speed. Temperatures in the winter are cooler—averaging 57 to 64 degrees Fahrenheit.⁶

Richmond is generally sunny during the summer months, with a 60 to 90 percent chance of mostly clear skies between June and October. The high solar aspect will provide direct sunlight to most parts of the plan area. However, winter months with a low solar aspect are wetter and more overcast. The 4,000-foot-long southern boundary of the plan area presents excellent year-round solar exposure for buildings and open spaces. However, the plan area slopes considerably from south to north—including a steep slope along much of the southern edge of the plan area facing Hilltop Drive—requiring further analysis to reduce shadow impact throughout the plan area will be important.

Constraints & Opportunities:

- The plan area's elevated position exposes it to accelerated cool winds from the north and east during the winter months. Increase tree planting along the plan area perimeter to buffer from north and west winter winds, and freeway noise and air quality.
- The plan area slopes considerably from south to north, including a steep slope along much of the southern edge of the plan area along Hilltop Drive. Optimize the long southern exposure of the plan area for solar orientation—capturing daylight and reducing shadow in buildings and open spaces.

⁶ WeatherSpark, 2021 Weather History in Richmond, CA - <https://weatherspark.com/h/y/551/2021/Historical-Weather-during-2021-in-Richmond-California-United-States#Figures-ColorTemperature>

3.5 Landscape Features

The plan area's topographical characteristics are generally categorized by slopes reconciling grade changes and flat terraces of development or parking at various elevations (Figure 3).

Slopes are typically located along streets, between parcels, and between parking lots where access is infeasible due to grade change. Most slopes are inaccessible and do not provide pedestrian connections—specifically at rear yards facing Hilltop Drive or adjacent access roads (Figure 6). In some locations—between Zones 3 and 4, Zones 5 and 6, and Zones 8 and 1—stairs are provided to enable pedestrian access between terraces, yet accessible ramps are not provided. Slopes vary across the plan area, but are approximately 25 to 45 percent grade and can resolve up to 20 feet in elevation change (Figures 7 and 8). The rear yard of Zones A and B along Hilltop Drive is the tallest slope (up to 50 feet) in the plan area and presents a lush planting buffer as the primary gateway to the plan area.

Terraces enable more even grading which results in easier mobility, accessibility, and development opportunities. The most notable terraces in the plan area are the inner zone parking lots which provide access to various levels of the mall (Figure 3). Terraces in the inner zone, as well as Zones A, B, and C align to the approximate grade of Hilltop Mall Road.

Most lots include a significant proportion of surface parking composed predominantly of impervious surfaces, particularly within the inner zone (Figure 3). These parking areas have limited stormwater retention, resulting in significant runoff during winter rain events and amplifying the urban heat island effect in the summer due to the limited planting and dark surface color.

The plan area's planting palette is a mix of shrubs along with medium to tall trees. The existing trees create a natural noise and air quality buffer, particularly along the southern and eastern edges of the plan area. Notable planting areas include:

- Inner zone slopes and medians, which include a mix of flora such as large species of Italian stone pines, coast live oaks, and poplars, along with medium and small hedges and plants.
- Mature tree canopies planted on slopes along the perimeter of the plan area. Large eucalyptus trees extend the length of Hilltop Drive, most significantly near the Blume Drive intersection, the primary entry to the plan area.

Constraints & Opportunities:

- Slopes in the plan area are not universally accessible, and most do not provide a pedestrian connection whatsoever. Utilize slopes as unique landscape features in open

space that can provide elevated vantage points within the plan area, and address accessibility challenges through ramps and switchbacks where required.

- A significant portion of the plan area is dedicated to surface parking and planted area is generally limited to steep slopes. Preserve healthy street trees along sidewalks, medians, and setback areas to maintain a mature tree canopy where it already exists. Expand and add new planting areas where possible to support tree growth and improve stormwater retention.

3.6 Views and Sightlines

The elevated position of the plan area provides vistas toward several Bay Area natural landmarks (Figure 7). The most notable distant view includes San Pablo Bay to the north from Hilltop Mall Road in the plan area (Figure 8). Views to the east and southeast from Blume Drive and Zone D are of El Sobrante Ridge and San Pablo Ridge, which frame the 125,000 acres and 1,250 miles of trails in the East Bay Regional Park District less than two miles away.⁷

Hilltop Mall Road to the north and Blume Drive to the east of Zone C provide immediate views to the Garrity Creek riparian landscape (Figure 9). These large open spaces frame the plan area with a serene environment and ecological habitat. There is currently no public vantage point from Zone D into the open space to the north, nor a sidewalk or bike facility on Hilltop Mall Road along Hilltop Lake Park.

The organic, curved orientation of streets throughout the plan area creates intimate sightlines framed by development and street trees to the west and south, as well as opening views onto the open spaces located to the north and east (Figure 9).

Constraints & Opportunities:

- There is no significant visual connection to the south of the plan area toward San Francisco Bay. Optimize future building heights with topography to enable views in all directions. Views of Point Richmond and the San Francisco skyline to the south and Mount Tamalpais State Park to the west may be possible.
- There is currently no public vantage point from Zone D into the open space to the north, nor a sidewalk or bike facility on Hilltop Mall Road along Hilltop Lake Park. Integrate

⁷ East bay Regional Park District: <https://www.ebparks.org/about>

public vantage points and trails or shared-use paths that provide access views of the riparian corridor in open spaces north and east of the plan area.

4.0 Built Form and Urban Fabric

4.1 Context Urban Fabric

Development characteristics surrounding Hilltop Mall in Northern Richmond are generally characterized by residential subdivisions, large-format retail, and car dealerships with a street network navigating the region's hilly topography (Figure 10).

Large arterial streets, including Hilltop Drive, Blume Drive, Robert Miller Drive, San Pablo Avenue, and Richmond Parkway are framed by generous setbacks providing a buffer to rear yards of adjacent developments. While some commercial uses have direct access to these arterial streets, most residential lots are accessed through smaller residential subdivisions. Setback depth and design vary along arterial roads and on commercial properties, but are of a consistent depth or intentionally staggered in residential neighborhoods (Figure 10). More recent residential developments to the west and north of the plan area—including single-family homes, duplexes, townhouses, and apartment buildings—are typically designed to be architecturally consistent with replicated floor plans irrespective of building orientation.

Single-family residential south of the plan area is typically composed of one-story structures of 900 to 2,000 square feet and with an attached garage—with some exceptions including a second story addition (Figure 11). These homes are generally older than those to the west of the plan area and are not of a consistent architectural style. Homes in this area have minimal ornamentation and low to moderately-pitched roofs with minimal eave depths. Typical facade materials include masonry, wood, and stucco.

Single-family homes and duplexes north and west of the plan area are typically larger than those to the south and were built later within organized subdivisions—each with consistent design elements unto themselves (Figure 11). Structures are generally two stories with facade materials like vinyl, wood, or stucco.

Townhouses in Hilltop Village to the west of the plan area and along Hilltop Mall Road are typically two to three stories—grouping two to five attached units. The townhouses located uphill along Hillview Drive are typically more generous in unit size and outdoor amenities than those at lower elevations which are higher density (Figure 11). Townhouse facade design typically includes horizontal wood panels painted in a neutral pastel color palette.

Apartment buildings range from small buildings with two levels and four units per floor (example: Stoneglen in Hilltop Village) to larger buildings with three to four levels and six to ten units per floor accessed from a single primary entrance (example: Bella Vista at Hilltop Apartment in Hilltop Bayview) (Figure 11). Larger apartment complexes are often gated and include centralized common open space and amenities—including pools and recreational facilities—which is otherwise uncommon among lower-density development. Apartment buildings are typically covered with beige-colored masonry, and covered with hip or gable roofs.

Large-format commercial buildings are located to the northwest and northeast of the plan area, including shopping centers, car dealerships, a movie theater, office buildings, and warehouses (Figure 11). These buildings are typically single-story steel structures, covered in coated steel sheets, masonry, or stucco. There are a few multi-story office buildings in this area built of prefabricated concrete panel facades to glass curtain walls. In almost all cases, these commercial structures have lot coverage below 50 percent.

Constraints & Opportunities:

- Residential development is predominantly located south and west of the plan area. Consider locating neighborhood-serving commercial or community space to serve surrounding residents to the south and west as well as existing and new residents in the plan area
- Residential scale and density vary around the plan area with predominantly single-family homes to the south, and duplexes, townhomes, and apartments to the west, northwest, and northeast. Design of new buildings, particularly along the south side of the plan area should transition scale from adjacent residential development through height, width, setbacks, and/or stepbacks.

4.2 Plan Area Block Structure

The plan area covers approximately 143 acres, measuring approximately 4,000 feet from east to west and 2,500 feet north to south (Figure 12). By comparison, the plan area length spans Downtown Richmond from First Street to Sixteenth Street and from Barret Avenue to Richmond Greenway—an approximately 35 block area (Figure 13). A limited number of access points to the plan area results in a large block structure, with intersections generally greater than 1,000 feet apart—nearly a quarter-mile or 5-minute walk. See Section 4.5 for scale relationships to Downtown Richmond and other redevelopment examples in the Bay Area.

The mall property within Hilltop Mall Road is approximately 78 acres—55 percent of the total plan area (Figure 12). The inner zone is an oval shape measuring approximately 2,400 feet from east to west and 1,900 feet from north to south. The mall building measures approximately 1,200 feet by 1,000 feet at the center of the inner zone covering 15 acres or approximately 20 percent of the total mall area. The over 60 acres of surface parking and landscaped area within the inner zone represent nearly 45 percent of the total plan area.

Lots in Zones A, B, and C facing Hilltop Mall Road have widths ranging between 150 feet to over 300 feet (Figure 12). Lot depths in these zones vary considerably, ranging between 200 to 600 feet deep. In many cases, these individual lot sizes—ranging from 1 acre to 3 acres—are approaching the scale of a Downtown Richmond block—measuring 220 by 540 feet. The largest lots in these zones are dedicated to institutional uses, including the Aspire College Preparatory Academy in Zone B and the Aspire School in Zone C.

Zone D lots facing Garrity Way are generally larger than those in Zones A, B, and C—averaging 250 feet or more in width. The largest lot in Zone D is The Tides residential development which is approximately 9 acres in total.

Constraints & Opportunities:

- Block length along the ring road is approximately 1/4-mile, two to three times that of a typical block in Downtown Richmond. Subdivide the plan area's block structure into shorter, walkable blocks. Increasing the number of intersections distributes traffic and reduces vehicle speeds.
- Lots are the scale of a full city block in Downtown Richmond, or larger. Consider a variety of lot sizes within the plan area to encourage a wider variety of building types and scales.

4.3 Plan Area Built Form

The plan area is characterized by low-density development, with most buildings ranging in height from one to two stories, except in Zone D where buildings are typically three to five stories. Lots are typically vegetated along the perimeter with buildings positioned roughly at the center surrounded by surface parking. Buildings are setback a minimum of 20 feet from the street but are more typically setback 40 feet or more. Lot coverage is typically 20 to 50 percent, meaning there is more unbuilt area than built area on each lot resulting in relatively low density—the net floor area ratio of no lot exceeds 1.0.

The mall is a complex building composed of four large-format retail anchors, connected by a central gallery (Figure 14). The mall has a flat roof with multiple anchors articulated through a taller roof height with multiple access levels depending on the elevation of the adjacent surface parking. Notable characteristics of the architecture are rounded corners and notched setbacks to reduce the perceived scale of the massing. The primary facade material is dark gray/brown masonry of various textures accentuated by awnings and marquees at primary entrances. Glazing is limited to the atrium skylight and primary mall entrances.

The two schools in the plan area are important anchor institutions. Both schools include recreational facilities on-site. Summit Public Schools (Tamalpais and Aspire Preparatory) in Zone B, is composed of two-story classroom buildings framing a recreational field and gymnasium. The facades are masonry panels with pops of color and projecting lattice awnings to provide shade. Aspire Richmond Technology Academy (Aspire Technology) in Zone C includes two single-story classroom stucco buildings with tile roofs. Play facilities are located west of the building along Hilltop Mall Road.

Commercial office and retail buildings in Zones A, B, C, and D are predominantly single-story, tilt-up concrete buildings, covered in neutral-colored stucco, with relatively little glazing and either flat or modified-hip tile roofs (Figure 15). Buildings in these zones are generally oriented toward Hilltop Mall Road.

Zone D includes two hotels, including the Extended Stay America and Courtyard Marriott (Figure 15). The Extended Stay America hotel is a simple three-story building covered in gray masonry panels with four regular gable bays. The Courtyard Marriott is a higher density, five-story, flat roof building with a varied facade grid composed of deeply inset windows. The Marriott is a deeply setback V-shaped building and is oriented at a 45-degree angle from any adjacent street.

There is one residential development in the plan area, located in Zone D (Figure 15). The Tides apartment complex is composed of ten, three-story buildings of Type V (wood-frame) construction and is gated from Garrity Way behind a leasing center—the only point of access. Building facades are made of stucco, incorporating multiple earthy colors. The design is

accentuated by a series of recesses and arched covered balconies. Roofs are flat with a hipped roof perimeter. Individual garage doors are accessed from a private drive that connects all of the residences.

Constraints & Opportunities:

- The plan area is characterized by low-density development, with most buildings ranging in height from one to two stories, except in Zone D where buildings are typically three to five stories. Increase development intensity, including height, lot coverage, and mix of uses to support activity in the plan area.
- Outer zone buildings are generally oriented toward Hilltop Mall Road, Garrity Way, or other internal access to the lot—while steep slopes and rear yards generally face Hilltop Drive and Blume Drive. Accentuate primary access points to the plan area on Hilltop Drive and Blume Drive as gateways. Consider emphasizing existing features such as heritage trees or the water tower and introducing new features such as open space, public art, and statement architectural features in new buildings where existing elements don't exist.
- Lots are typically vegetated along the perimeter with buildings positioned roughly at the center surrounded by surface parking. Reduce impervious surfaces to reduce stormwater runoff through stormwater management integrated into building and landscaping design.

4.4 Comparative Development Context

The location and scale of the Richmond Hilltop Specific Plan area present a unique redevelopment opportunity to envision a new neighborhood and new favorite places. The analysis below identifies relevant locations in the Bay Area that share programmatic relevance to ambitions of the forthcoming specific plan and may be used as comparative models to identify successful redevelopment opportunities. The analysis also illustrates solutions to compose mixed-use block patterns with larger retail footprints. Depending on the plan area's program and phasing, comparable design strategies could be implemented in the Richmond Hilltop Specific Plan Area.

Downtown/Iron Triangle, Richmond CA

Downtown Richmond is also referred to as the Iron Triangle because of the three major railroad tracks defining its boundaries—the Richmond Greenway (former Santa Fe Railroad) to the south, Union Pacific Railroad and BART to the northeast, and the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway

tracks to the northwest (Figure 16). The Iron Triangle is approximately 620 acres in total, composed of a typical urban grid with blocks that measure approximately 220 feet east to west and 540 feet north to south. Downtown is within approximately one mile of the Richmond BART station, which provides regional access.

Blocks are made up of predominantly small single-family lots, except for along MacDonald Avenue which serves as the primary mixed-use core of Downtown. The two blocks on either side of MacDonald Avenue between 1st and 15th Streets (approximately three-quarters of a mile) include the greatest variety and density with multi-family housing, commercial space, and institutional uses—such as public service buildings, schools, and hospitals. Typical small-format commercial lots on MacDonald Avenue are approximately 50 feet by 100 feet with buildings ranging in height from one to three stories. There are also more recent retail centers with larger format buildings setback from the street beyond surface parking. A number of empty lots along the corridor limit the continuity of activity in this area.

Along the Iron Triangle’s southern edge, the Richmond Greenway provides an east-west open space that serves as a safe active mobility connection for pedestrians and bikes between Downtown and the Ohlone Greenway and Point Richmond. The Richmond Greenway ranges in width between lots but is typically around 130 feet wide with a contiguous shared use path throughout with traffic-calming measures at most intersections. It offers several open space program elements including a green promenade, parks, sports fields, community gardens, and seating.

Many interpretive works of public art are located throughout the city, recalling Richmond’s past. A number of murals on building facades and underpasses depict scenes from the city’s industrial past.⁸

Stonestown, San Francisco, CA

Stonestown Galleria is a 41-acre site situated in southwest San Francisco along 19th Avenue/Highway 1, near Lake Merced and San Francisco State University (Figure 17). Stonestown is surrounded by a largely single-family residential neighborhood and multiple schools similar to the plan area. Unlike Hilltop Mall, Stonestown Galleria remains an economically successful shopping center and redevelopment is limited to the surrounding 27 acres of surface parking lots to further support and build on mall activity.

The redevelopment plan transforms Stonestown into a mixed-use town center including nearly 3,000 new multi-family residential units, 160,000 square feet of new retail, 200,000 square feet of office space, and 40,000 square feet of community space, all while retaining the parking

⁸ Richmond General Plan 2030 - Section 14: Historical Resources - Historically Themed Interpretive Works of Art - page 13.

required for the viability of the mall in consolidated parking garages. New buildings range in height from 30 feet to 190 feet, predominantly limited to 90 feet in height, typical of Type III over Type I (wood frame over concrete) construction. The new buildings will shape the skyline of the neighborhood while responding to surrounding neighborhoods through forthcoming design guidelines.⁹

Roughly 6 acres (approximately 15 percent) of the site will transform into a variety of parks and open spaces. New streets and alleys will be added to create walkable blocks around the mall. 20th Avenue is reconfigured from parking access to a new “main street” where additional retail is focused near existing mall entries.

Santana Row, San José, CA

At the time of its construction, the 40-acre Santana Row in San José was one of the nation's largest mixed-use projects constructed by a single developer (Figure 18). Located next to the Westfield Valley Fair Shopping Mall, at the crossing of I-280 and I-880, Santana Row turned the mall concept inside-out, creating an “urban village”. The project includes 1,200 multi-family residential units and a 200-room hotel, in addition to nearly 700,000 square feet of retail—including shopping, dining, and entertainment programs—in the heart of Silicon Valley.¹⁰

Modeled after European destination streets, four to seven-story mixed-use buildings face the “Santana Row Park”, a 4-block long street with a plaza at its center.¹¹ The street includes outdoor seating for restaurants, a central lawn and fountain, and retail pavilions—similar to a small version of Las Ramblas in Barcelona, Spain. Most buildings directly front the street, with limited or no setbacks at the ground floor which allows direct access to retail entrances and building lobbies.

The architecture also takes cues from Europe. Large contiguous structures are often designed with multiple facade systems suggesting the appearance of many individual buildings. Buildings range in the level of ornamentation, color, and material palette, however, a large number of buildings include details that mimic architectural styles commonly found in Western Europe in trim, cornice, and balcony design.

NewPark Mall, Newark, CA

The Greater NewPark Mall precise plan is a 125-acre site—including a mall and surrounding development similar to the plan area—located in Newark, south of I-880 (Figure 19). In 2021, the

⁹ Preliminary Project Assessment - Stonestown - Brookfield Properties - September 2021

¹⁰ SWA group: <https://www.swagroup.com/projects/santana-row/>

¹¹ ULI development Case Studies - Santana Row - 2004: <https://casestudies.uli.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/C034024.pdf>

city of Newark, California, adopted a NewPark Place Specific Plan to develop a local and regional destination through thoughtful land use design, including residential areas, retail and dining facilities, community venues, and inviting pedestrian-oriented streets and public spaces.¹²

The plan retains the existing mall and consolidates parking to the north along I-880 with new mixed-use development to the south. The proposed development includes up to approximately 1,500 multi-family residential units, 200,000 square feet of retail, 500,000 square feet of office, and 700 hotel rooms. Residential development is restricted to the mall parking lots within the ring road. Lots outside of the ring road are limited to commercial or hotel uses.

The block structure of the specific plan builds on the existing street pattern and creates an open space connection with the existing park. A pedestrian “strip” aligns with the southern and western edges of the mall, activated by ground-floor retail on both sides. The open space is predominantly made up of a network of small plazas, parklets, gathering areas, and paseos in addition to the large, existing Eucalyptus Grove on the south of the plan.¹³

Constraints & Opportunities:

- Consider incorporating a variety of uses, including mixed-use buildings and housing options that range in affordability, height, design, unit size, unit mix, and amenities.
- Organize a varied network of open spaces—in scale, program, and design— providing a mix of leisure and recreational opportunities within a walkable distance of most residences.
- Add compatible uses that support activity around successful existing retail and institutional uses within the plan area.
- Rebalance existing streets to dedicate more space to pedestrian, bicycle, and transit facilities. Consider road diets where possible to avoid increasing overall street width.
- Consider introducing non-vehicular connections—such as a greenway or paseos—within the existing block pattern to improve walkability and safe mobility for pedestrians and bicyclists.

¹² City of Newark, CA - NewPark Plan Specific Plan: <https://www.newark.org/departments/community-development/specific-plans-master-plans/greater-newpark-master-plan>

¹³ NewPark Mall Mixed-Use Project - Brookfield Properties - June 2021
<https://www.newark.org/home/showpublisheddocument/7665/637588314596430000>



RICHMOND HILLTOP

URBAN DESIGN MEMO ILLUSTRATIONS APPENDIX

June 2022

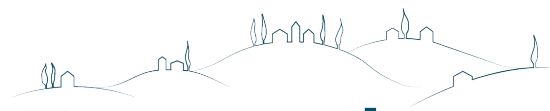
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BUILT FORM AND URBAN FABRIC

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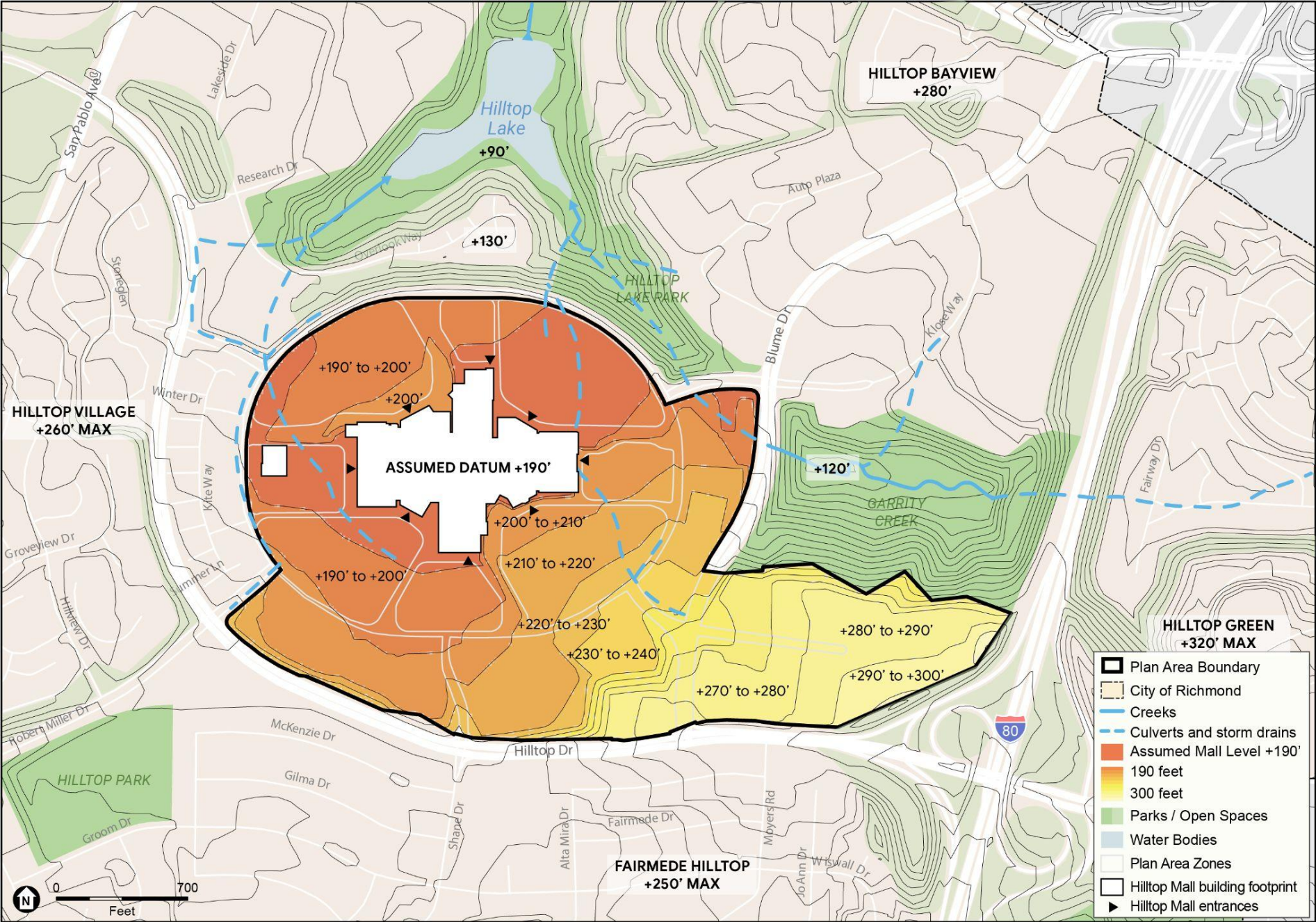


Topography and Landscape

Relationship to the Bay and hills

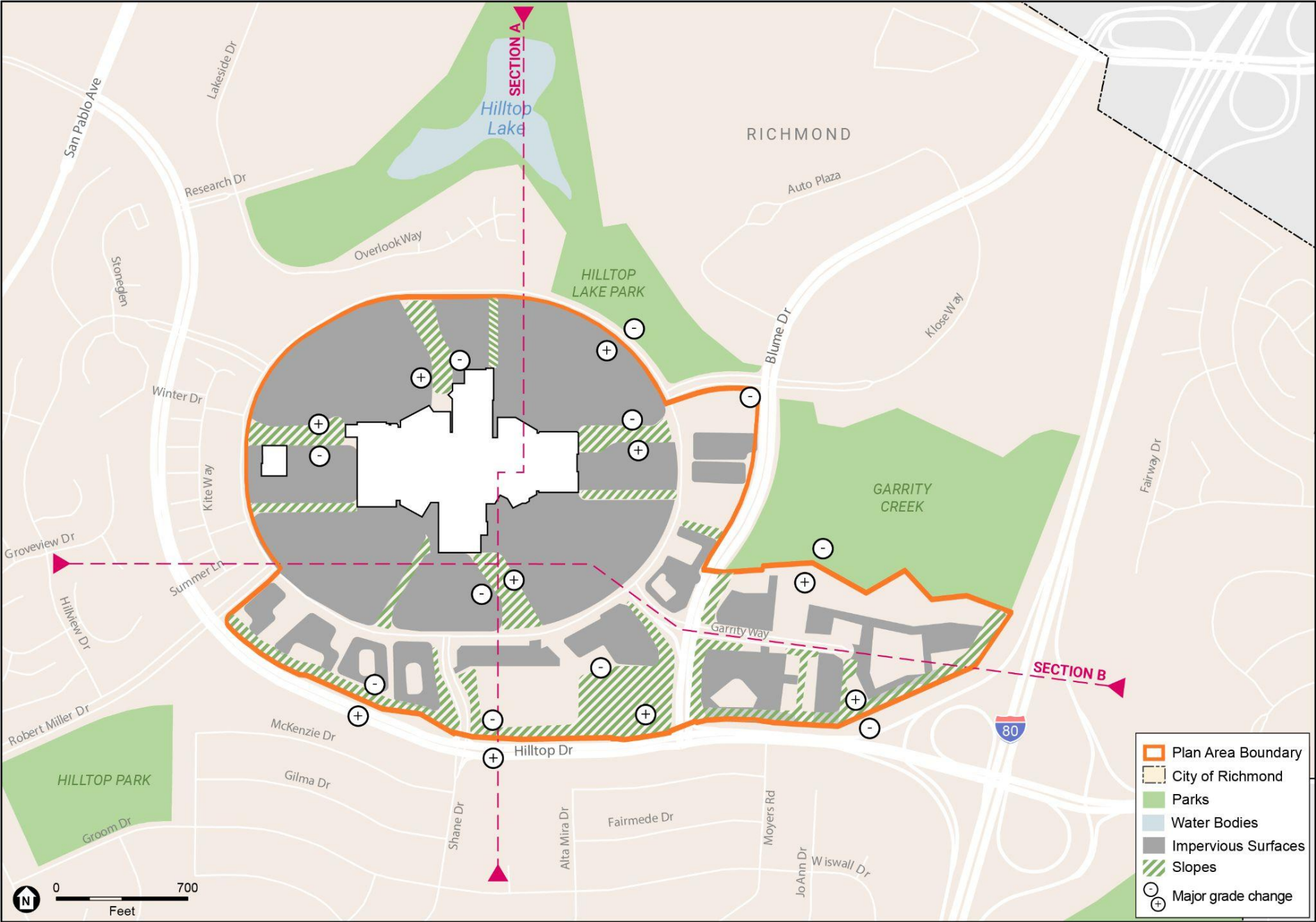
Figure 1





Landscape Features

Figure 3



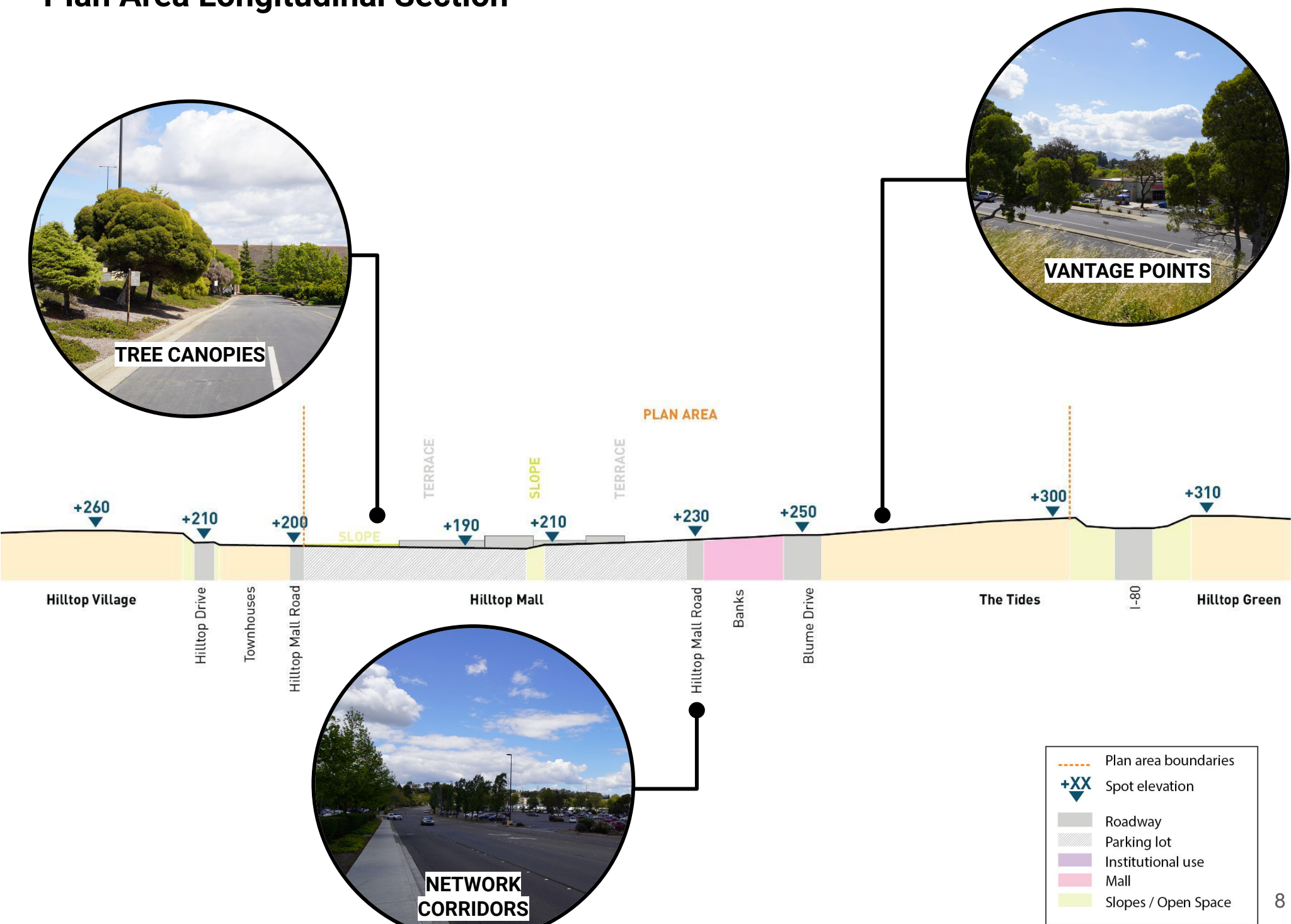
Plan Area Cross-Section

Figure 4



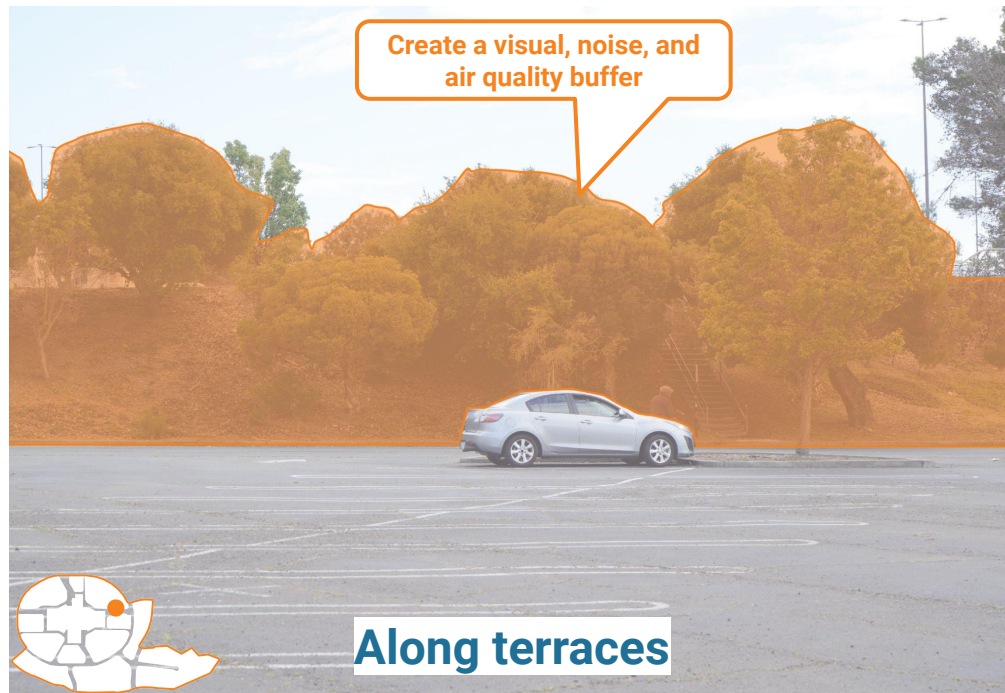
Plan Area Longitudinal Section

Figure 5



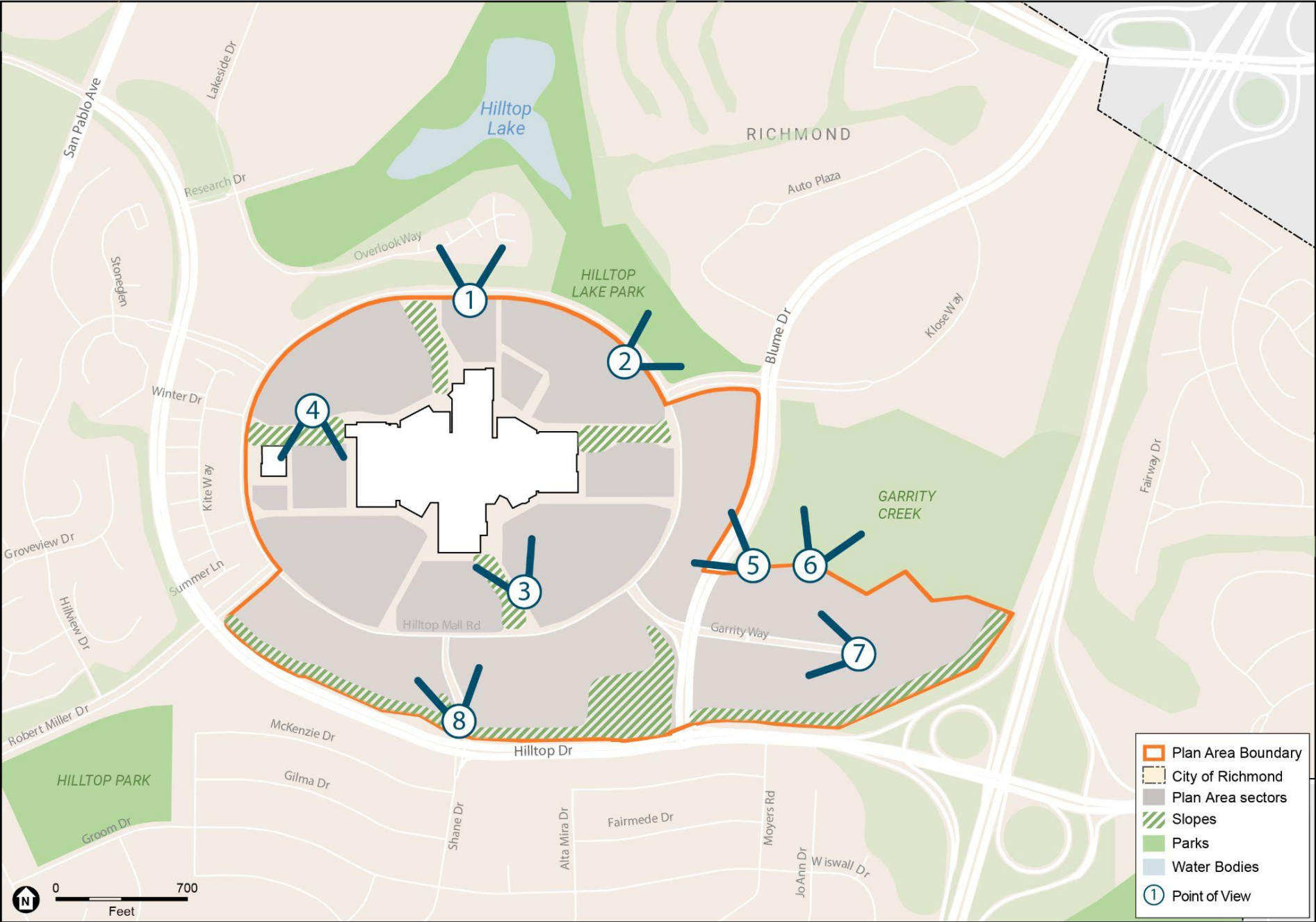
Typical Examples of Slopes

Figure 6



Views and Sightlines Key Map

Figure 7



Views and Sightlines - Inner Zone

Figure 8



Views and Sightlines - Outer Zone

Figure 9





Built Form and Urban Fabric

Context Urban Fabric

Figure 10



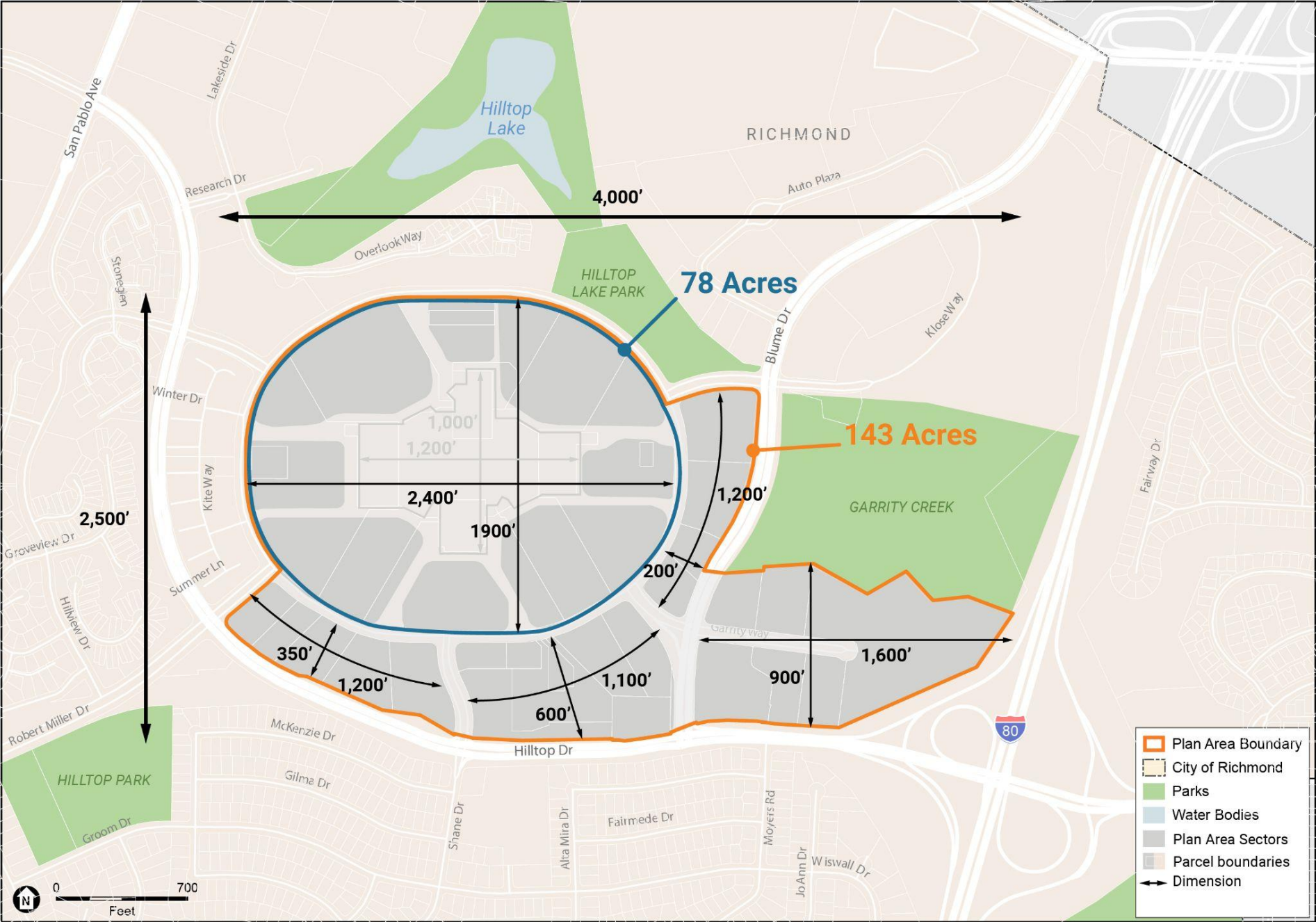
Context Built Form

Figure 11



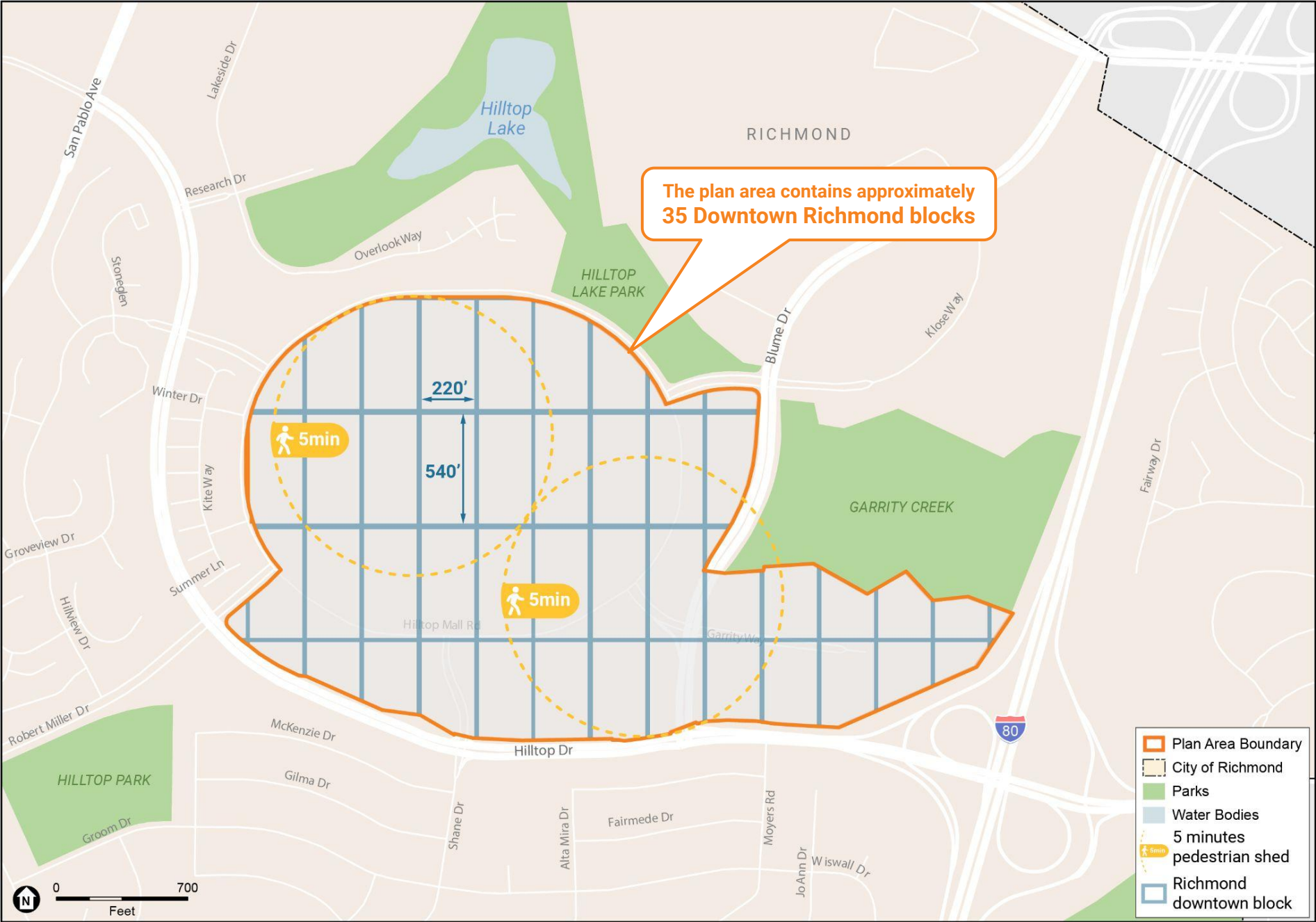
Existing Block Structure

Figure 12



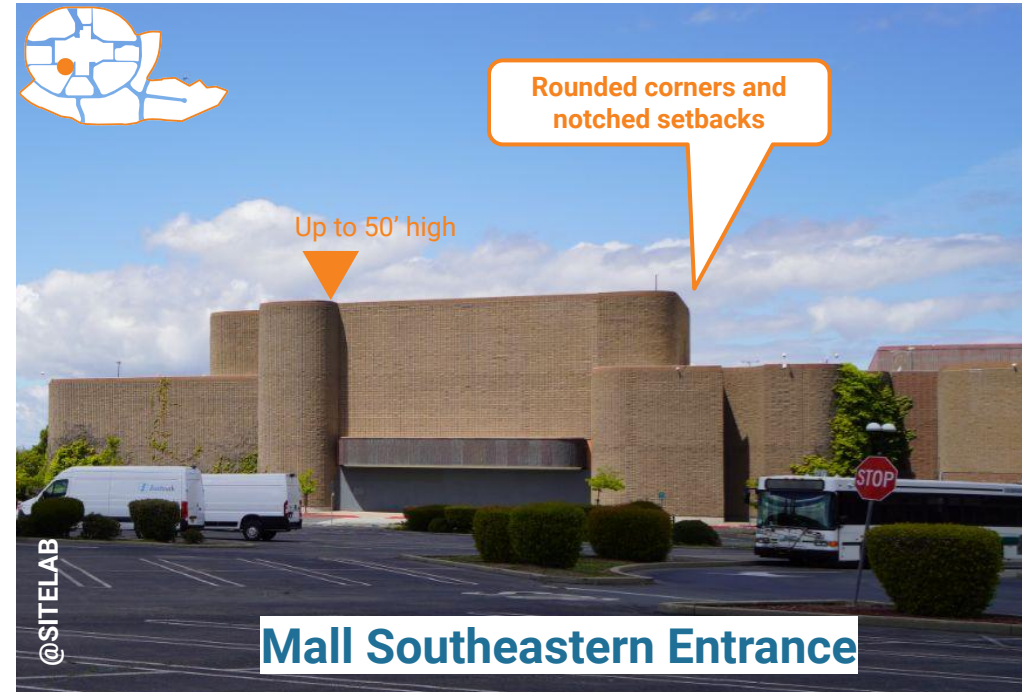
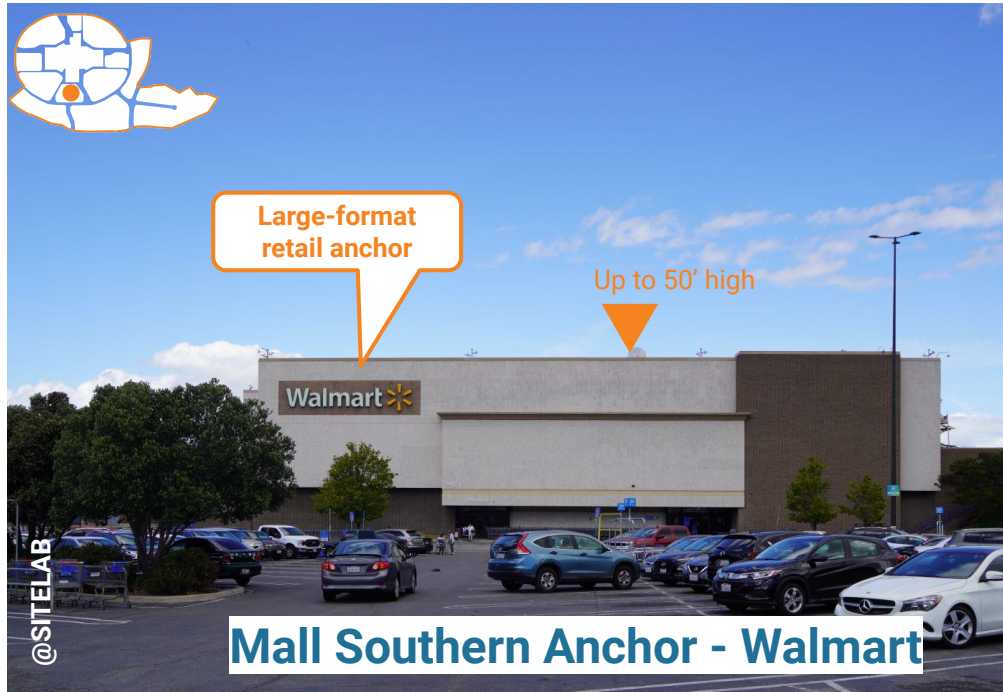
Block Structure Comparison to Downtown Richmond

Figure 13



Built Form - Retail and Institutional

Figure 14



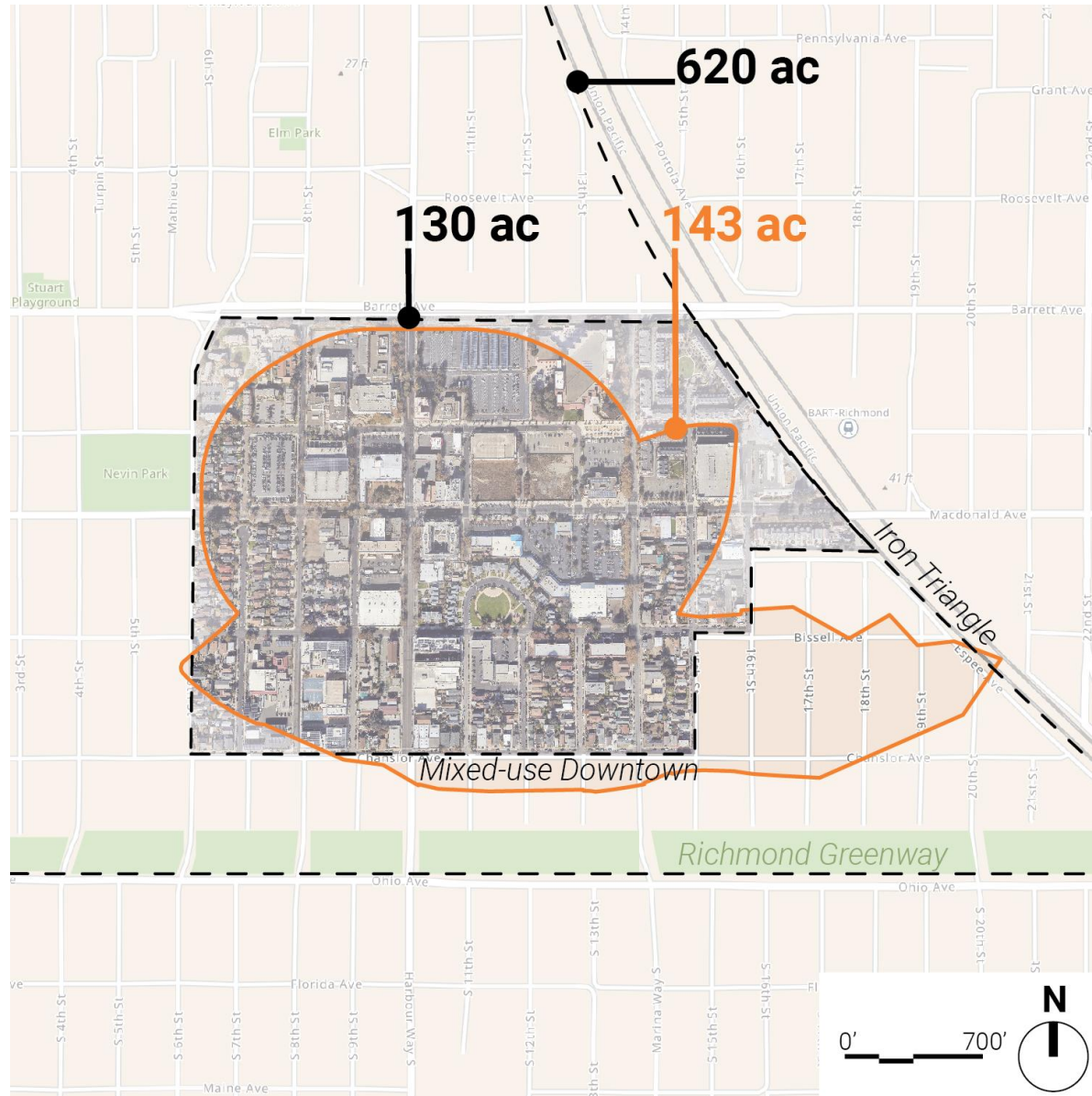
Built Form - Office, Hotel, and Residential

Figure 15



Case Study - Downtown/Iron Triangle, Richmond, CA

Figure 16



Program:

Iron Triangle: 620 acres

Mixed-use downtown: 130 acres

Urban grid: 220'x540'

Richmond greenway: average 130' wide x 1.5 mile long
(iron triangle portion)

Highlight:

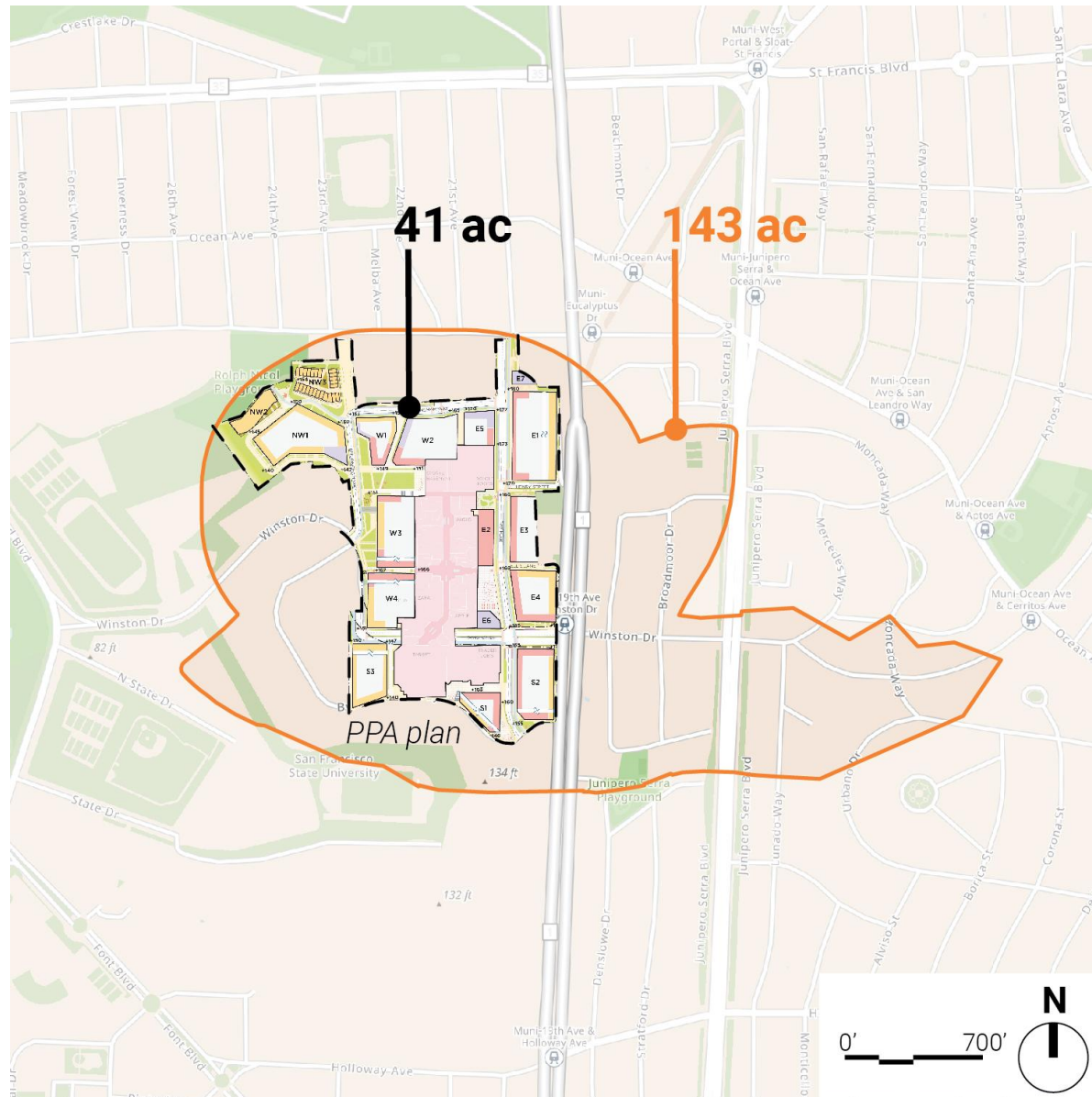
Typical small-format commercial lots on MacDonald Avenue are approximately 50 feet by 100 feet with buildings ranging in height from one to three stories. There are also more recent retail centers with larger format buildings setback from the street beyond surface parking.



Macdonald Avenue, Richmond CA

Case Study - Stonestown Mall, San Francisco, CA

Figure 17



Program:

Project area: 41 acres

Residential: 3,000 multi-family residential units

Retail: 160,000 sf

Office: 200,000sf

Community Spaces: 40,000sf

Open Spaces: 6 acres (15%)

Highlight:

New buildings range in height from 30 feet to 190 feet, predominantly limited to 90 feet in height, typical of Type III over Type I (wood frame over concrete) construction. The new buildings will shape the skyline of the neighborhood while responding to surrounding neighborhoods through forthcoming design guidelines.

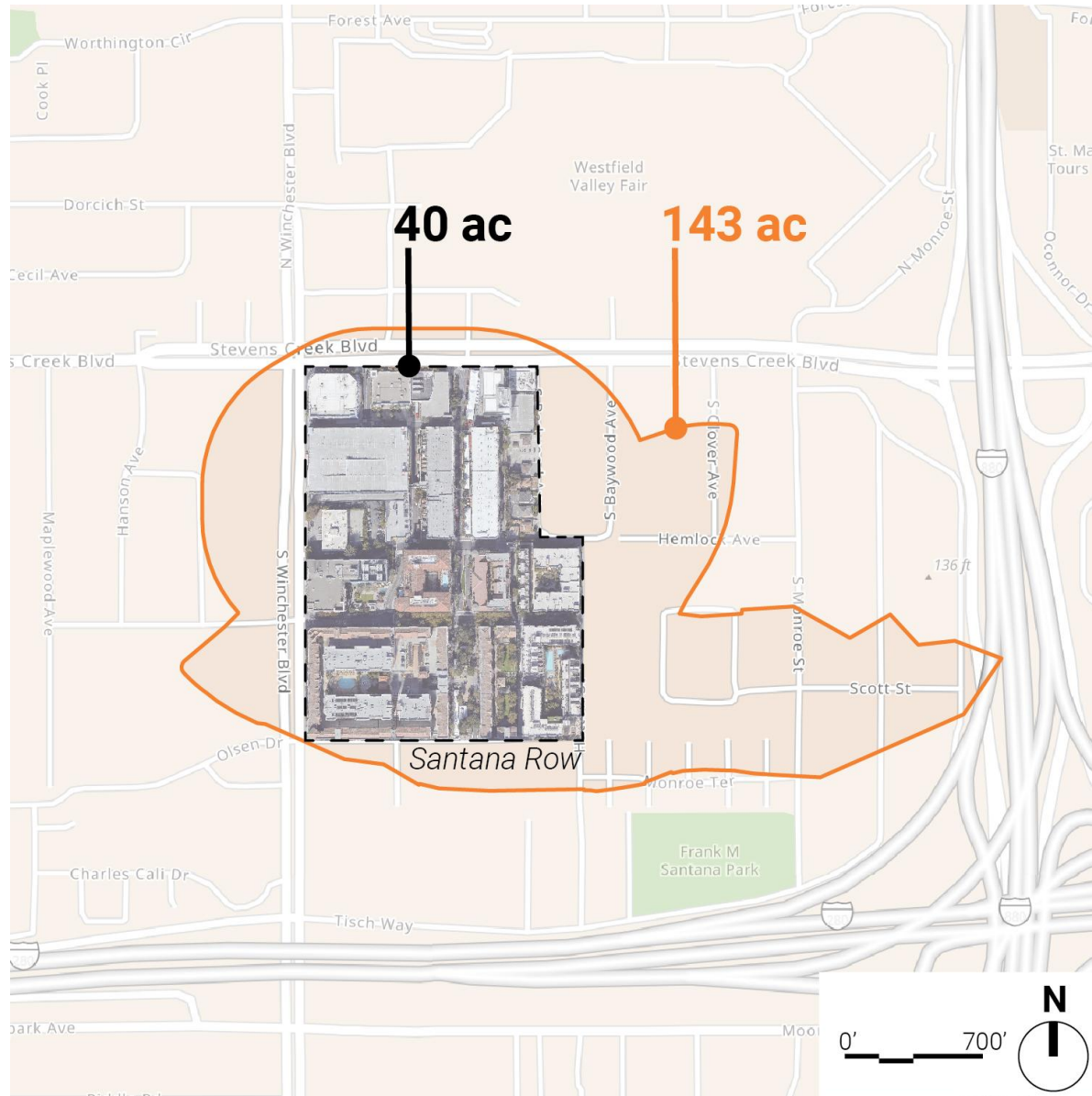


Source: Brookfield Properties, Stonetown Preliminary Project Assessment , September 2021

Stonetown, PPA plan

Case Study - Santana Row, San José, CA

Figure 18



Source: SWA Group & Federal Realty Investment Trust

Program:

Project area: 40 acres

Residential: 1,200 multi-family residential units

Retail: 700,000 sf

Hotel: 200 rooms

Highlight:

Modeled after European destination streets, four to seven-story mixed-use buildings face the “Santana Row Park”, a 4-block long street with a plaza at its center. The street includes outdoor seating for restaurants, a central lawn and fountain, and retail pavilions—similar to a small version of Las Ramblas in Barcelona, Spain.



Santana Row, San José, CA

Case Study - NewPark Mall, Newark, CA

Figure 19



Program:

Precise Plan area: 125 acres
Residential: 1,500 multi-family residential units
Retail: 200,000 sf
Office: 500,000 sf
Hotel: 700 rooms

Highlight:

The plan retains the existing mall and consolidates parking to the north along I-880 with new mixed-use development to the south. The block structure of the specific plan builds on the existing street pattern and creates an open space connection with the existing park.



Source: City of Newark, Greater NewPark Mall Specific Plan, April 2018

NewPark Mall, Specific Plan, Newark, CA