



Introduction ◀

City of Downey

Downtown Specific Plan



1. Introduction

1.1 Vision

The Downtown Downey Specific Plan was initiated by the City to guide growth and development in Downtown, encourage economic revitalization, and create a lively center of activity for the City. The Specific Plan establishes 131 acres as mixed use and looks to create unique districts with specific development standards and design guidelines. Downtown Downey is envisioned as a vibrant urban center providing a wide array of dining, working, living, shopping, entertainment, and cultural opportunities all within a short walking distance.

Downtown districts have been established based on the existing building patterns within each area. The Downtown Specific Plan seeks to preserve and enhance the features that provide each district with its unique character, while simultaneously improving the liveliness and aesthetics of the overall Downtown area. The overarching objectives for the Specific Plan area are to:

- ▶ Establish Downtown Downey as a diverse area with a variety of activities to support and entertain all ages;
- ▶ Promote the Downtown as an economic core creating new employment opportunities;
- ▶ Strengthen pedestrian, bicycle, and transit-oriented characteristics while ensuring access for automobiles;
- ▶ Preserve and enhance the unique character of existing structures;
- ▶ Identify Downtown as a cultural center for Downey; and
- ▶ Concentrate growth in Downtown while respecting and preserving surrounding residential neighborhoods.



Downtown
Downey
Specific Plan
Objectives

A vision of
Downtown
Downey as
envisioned by
the Specific
Plan

Section 1
Introduction

1.2 History/Background

Image:
Crawford
Street
(Downey Ave.)
at First Street
(Firestone
Blvd.) around
1880

(Courtesy of the
Downey Historical
Society)



When Downey was founded in 1873, the developers might well have used the slogan of today's City seal: "Downey . . . Future Unlimited." The history of Downey begins with a 96-acre parcel of Rancho Santa Gertrudes that became the central district of a community called "Downey City." The town derived its name from John Gately Downey, an Irish immigrant who had come to

California during the Gold Rush and succeeded to become Governor of California. He helped build the economic foundation of Southern California, effecting a transition from an open cattle range to an agricultural district of small farms.

Downey's strategic location was, and continues to be, an important asset in its economic viability and growth. As early as 1889, when political factions from Santa Ana met with officials from Los Angeles County to discuss the creation of Orange County, Downey was chosen as the obvious meeting place. By the turn of the century, Downey was the undisputed center for business and social life in the area.

Initially, much of the City's development patterns were determined by the expansion of the railroad. Development of the City proceeded slowly. The 1873 tract map established 16 blocks, reserving 10 acres for a railroad station for the Union Pacific Railroad on its route between Los Angeles and San Diego. As of 1900, the native landscape had been cleared and roughly 300 homes had been established in the district. Over the years, Downtown Downey continued to grow to include a courthouse, post office, schools, churches, businesses, and more houses located in Downtown near Downey Avenue and Firestone Boulevard (then Crawford and Front Streets). One of the first buildings in Downey was the Christian Church located at the corner of Fourth and New Streets. The construction of the church marked the beginning of the present Downtown.

Many Downey pioneers had achieved success in business and politics in Los Angeles County. From 1900 to 1917 was perhaps the "Golden Age" of Downey. In this era, a citrus cooperative was formed, the Downey Board of Trade (later renamed the Downey Chamber of Commerce) was organized, and the streets were lighted up with electricity. Around this time, World War I sparked local interest in the aviation branches of the military. The result was the establishment of a number of major aviation business enterprises in Downey.

Online Link:
For more
information on
Downey's history
visit:

<http://www.downeyhistoricalsociety.org/>

Throughout the years a number of aviation companies operated in Downey, including: Vultee Aircraft, North American Aviation, and Rockwell International, which was later bought by the Boeing Company whose facilities produced systems for the Apollo Project, and the space shuttle. This industry thrived in the City for 70 years, ending when the former Rockwell plant was converted to the Downey Landing development.



Image: Apollo 11 Space Capsule returns to Downey after its flight to the Moon, 1969

(Courtesy of the Downey Historical Society)

Despite the introduction of the aviation industry and railroad station, the City of Downey remained an agricultural area growing grain, corn, castor beans, and various fruits well into the 1940s. Following the end of World War II, however, Downey, like many cities in the area, experienced significant population and economic growth with the end of the war. In 1940, the population of Downey was approximately 12,000 and by 1960, it had surpassed 86,000. The orange groves were rapidly replaced by light industry and tract homes. Downey was one of the first suburban "planned communities" with quality homes, schools, and retail centers. The movement toward incorporation escalated with the population explosion of the 1950s and 1960s.



Image: Downey Avenue looking south from above Fourth Street, around 1947

(Courtesy of the Downey Historical Society)

Image:
Avenue
Theater on
Downey
Avenue,
between
Second and
Third Streets,
1960s

(Courtesy of the
Downey Historical
Society)

With the growth in population and new development in Downtown, one of the first significant investments in redevelopment occurred in 1967 with the widening of Downey Avenue. The realignment resulted in several blocks of new storefronts and landscape improvements. In the 1970s, the City began the first steps to confront the issue of downtown revitalization. In the years since the adoption of the Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy in 1978, several successful projects have been completed, including: Embassy Suites/Mimi's Cafe and the Civic Center complex. In 1990, a \$100 million remodel and expansion at Stonewood Center Mall was completed. Other recent additions to the City include the opening of the Green Line light rail station in 1994, the Gas Company's Energy Resource Center in 1995, and the Krikorian Theatre Complex and City parking structure in 1997.



In the 1990s, Downey again faced the challenge of revitalizing Downtown. A Blue Ribbon Committee made up of City representatives, business leaders, and residents analyzed the downtown area in 1991. The result was the creation of the Downey Avenue Street Fair, started by the Chamber of Commerce in 1994. Held on Brookshire Avenue, the fair draws over 20,000 people to Downtown each spring. The City would like to see the street fair moved to Downey Avenue in upcoming years as the Downtown is redeveloped. The revitalization of Downtown has become one of the City's greatest priorities to ensure that Downey flourishes in the twenty-first century.

1.3 Project Setting

1.3.1 Regional Context

The City of Downey is located approximately 13 miles southeast of downtown Los Angeles in southeast Los Angeles County. Downey is a mid-size city of an estimated 113,469 residents, occupying approximately 12.8 square miles. Jurisdictions neighboring Downey include the cities of Paramount, Bellflower, Norwalk, Santa Fe Springs, Pico Rivera, Commerce, Bell Gardens, and South Gate. Downey has convenient access to several major freeways, including Interstate 5 (I-5), Interstate 105 (I-105), Interstate 710 (I-710), and Interstate 605 (I-605), drawing businesses and offering housing opportunities for commuters working in downtown Los Angeles. Throughout the years, Downey has been highly recognized for its centralized location, top medical facilities, quality residential neighborhoods and schools, and an unmatched family lifestyle. Exhibit 1.1 illustrates the regional context of the Downtown Downey Specific Plan area.

Exhibit 1.1: Regional Context Map

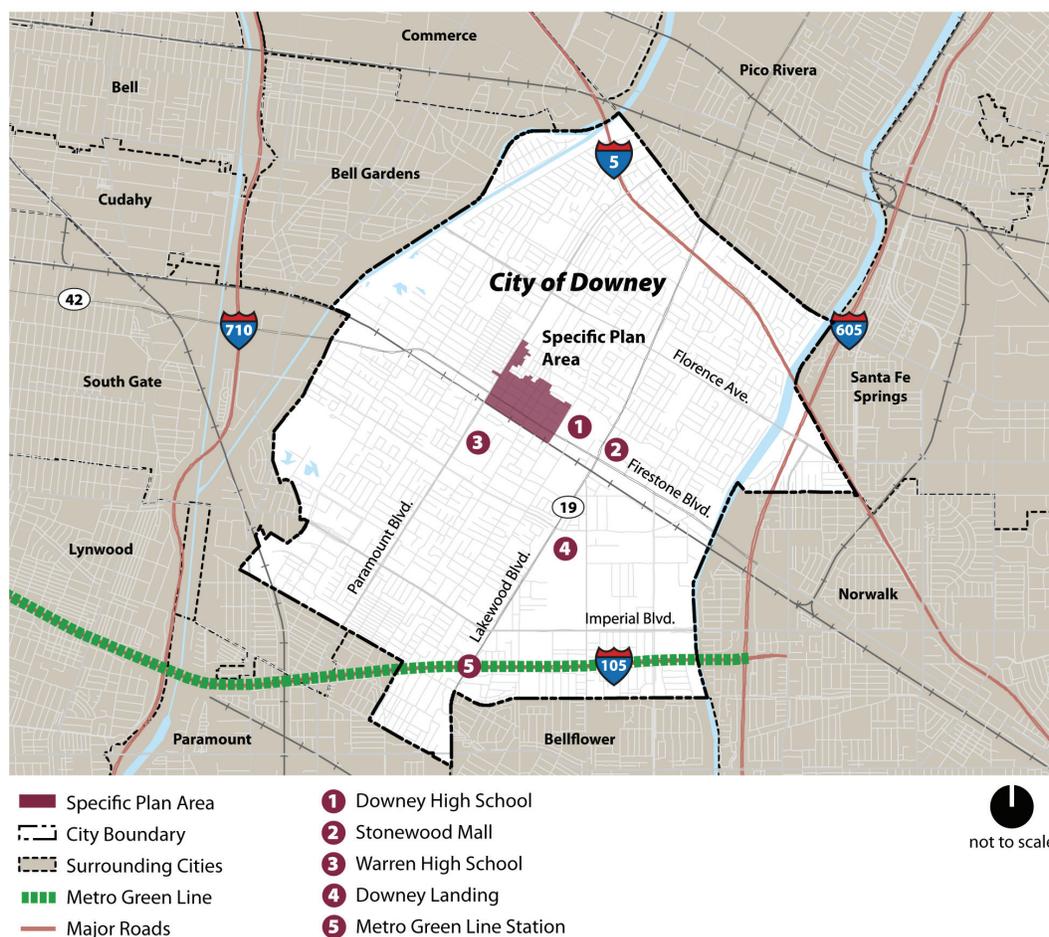


Exhibit 1.1 Regional Context Map Section 1 Introduction

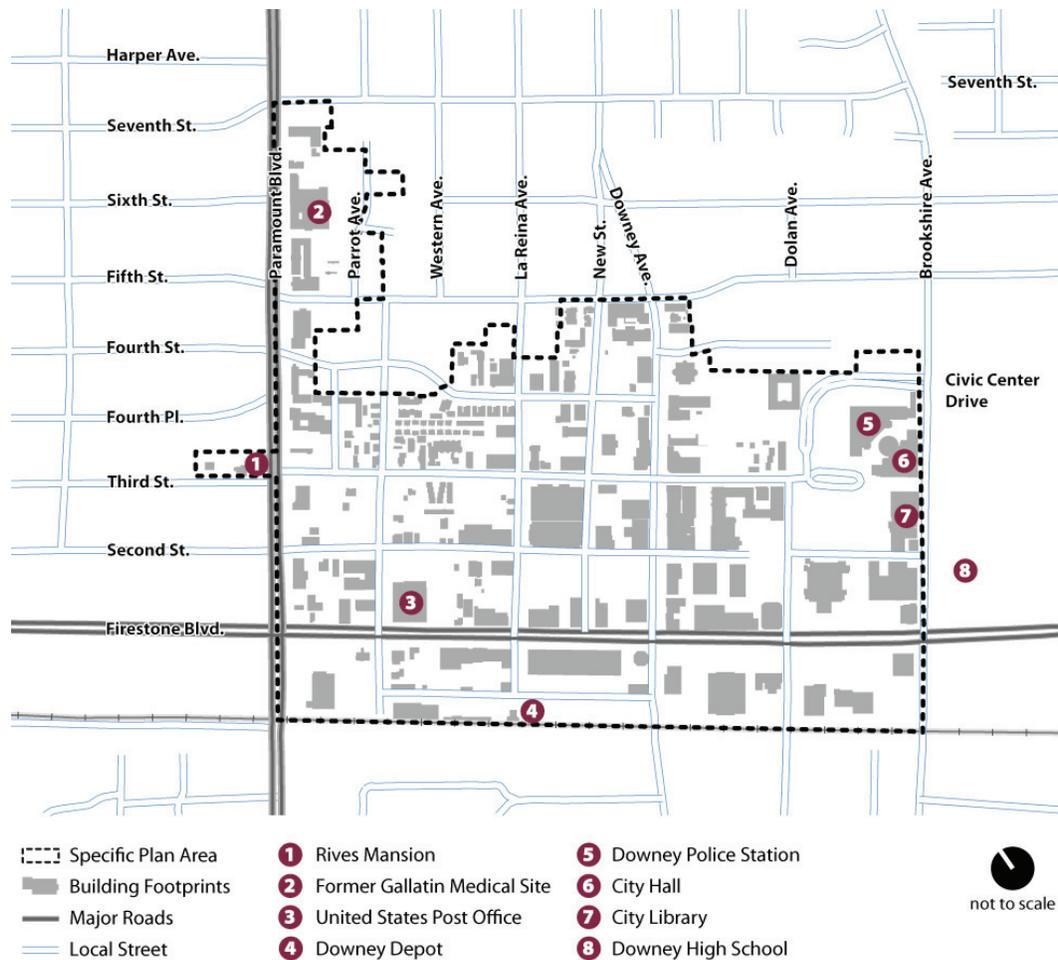
Exhibit 1.2 Community Context Map

Section 1 Introduction

1.3.2 Community Context

Historically, the area around Downey Avenue from Firestone Boulevard to Fifth Street has been identified as the Downtown district of Downey. Downtown Downey is at the center of the community, containing major landmarks such as City Hall, the City Library, the Civic Theater, the Downey Depot, and the Rives Mansion. The Specific Plan boundaries are loosely formed by Brookshire Avenue to the east, the Union Pacific railroad right-of-way to the south, Paramount Boulevard to the west, and an irregular northern boundary along Fourth Street, extending to Fifth Street in areas and including the former Gallatin Medical site. The Rives Mansion, located at the northwest corner of Third Street and Paramount Boulevard, has also been included in the project area. The Specific Plan area consists of approximately 131 acres situated near the geographic center of the City of Downey. Exhibit 1.2 illustrates the location and boundaries for Downtown Downey.

Exhibit 1.2: Community Context Map



1.4 Consistency with Local and State Regulations

1.4.1 State of California Government Code

Section 65451 of the Government Code requires that specific plans include text and diagrams that specify all of the following:

- ▶ The distribution, location, and extent of the uses of land, including open space, within the area covered by the plan
- ▶ The proposed distribution, location, and extent and intensity of major components of public and private transportation, sewage, water, drainage, solid waste disposal, energy, and other essential facilities proposed to be located within the area covered by the plan and needed to support the land uses described in the plan
- ▶ Standards and criteria by which development will proceed, and standards for the conservation, development, and utilization of natural resources, where applicable
- ▶ A program of implementation measures including regulations, programs, public works projects, and financing measures necessary to carry out the specific plan
- ▶ A statement of the relationship of the specific plan to the general plan.

This Specific Plan is designed to meet the requirements of the State of California Government Code. The Specific Plan is adopted by City Council ordinance and thereby establishes the zoning regulations for the development of the Specific Plan area.

1.4.2 2025 General Plan

As shown in the City of Downey 2025 General Plan, the Specific Plan area is currently designated Mixed Use (MU), with the exception of the Gallatin Medical site, which is designated Office (O) and Medium Density Residential (MDR); and the Rives Mansion, which is designated Office (O) and Low Density Residential (LDR). The MU designation was established through Vision 2010, the 1992 City of Downey General Plan to allow for flexibility of land uses in specific areas of the City. In Downtown, this land use designation is intended to facilitate combined commercial and residential uses, implementing Smart Growth strategies. Prior to the creation of the MU designation, Downtown was designated exclusively commercial with no opportunity for residential development. The Mixed Use designation allows for residential densities of up to 24 dwelling units per acre. Exhibit 1.3 indicates the General Plan designations in Downtown.

The primary challenge to development in Downtown is the high demand for parking in the eastern portion and overabundance of parking supply in the western half. Consequently, a Downtown Plan overlay was also created to establish flexible parking standards, generally reducing the number of spaces required based on the assumption that within Downtown, residents are able to

Online Link:
For information visit:

www.leginfo.ca.gov

To view the 2025
City of Downey
General Plan
visit:

<http://www.downeyca.org/>

Exhibit 1.3 Existing General Plan Land Use Designations

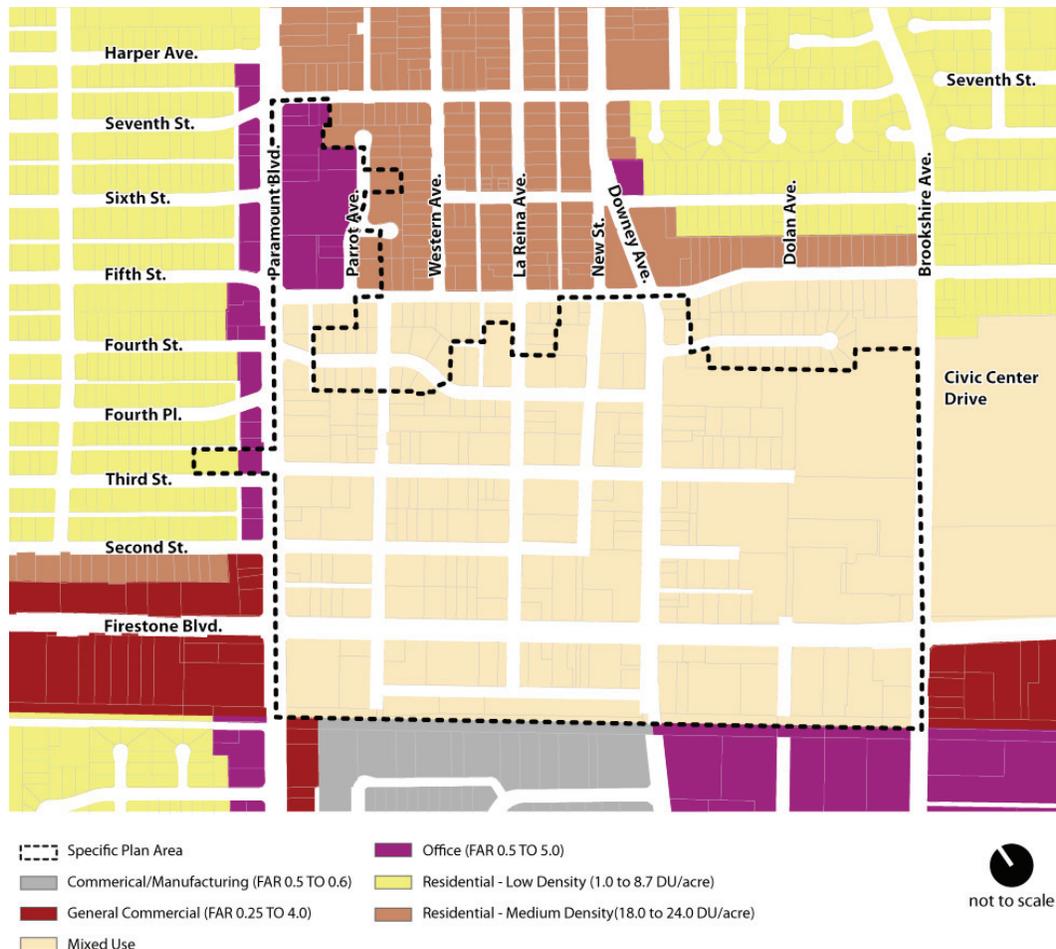
Section 1 Introduction

park once to visit multiple tenants. To further enhance the effectiveness of the flexible parking standards, the City has taken an active role in providing public parking both on the street and in structures, thereby reducing the parking requirements for tenants operating in the area.

In contrast to the Downtown core, the Gallatin Medical site and the Rives Mansion are designated Office (O) in the 2025 General Plan. This designation is generally designed to promote the development of professional and medical offices. The Office designation in the Gallatin area is more specifically intended to allow for the redevelopment of medical uses on the site, maintaining the jobs and services that were historically provided to the community. The Specific Plan area also includes small pockets designated for residential uses. There are several properties designated medium-density residential along Parrot Avenue, and the western half of the Rives property is designated low-density residential.

A General Plan Amendment has been prepared to modify land use designations on these parcels from Residential and Office to Mixed Use. A General Plan Amendment will be adopted concurrently with the adoption of this Specific Plan and upon adoption of the General Plan Amendment; the Specific Plan will be consistent with the General Plan. Please refer to Appendix A for a detailed description of Specific Plan consistency with additional elements of the General Plan.

Exhibit 1.3: Existing General Plan Land Use Designations



1.4.3 City of Downey Zoning Code

The Specific Plan area currently includes a virtual plethora of zoning, ranging from Multifamily Residential to General Commercial and Professional Office to General Manufacturing. The majority of the parcels in the Specific Plan area are zoned commercial, specifically Central Business District (C-3) with a few small sections on the northern end of the area zoned General Commercial (C-2) and Multiple Family Residential (R-3) as shown in Exhibit 1.4.

Exhibit 1.4: Existing Specific Plan Zoning

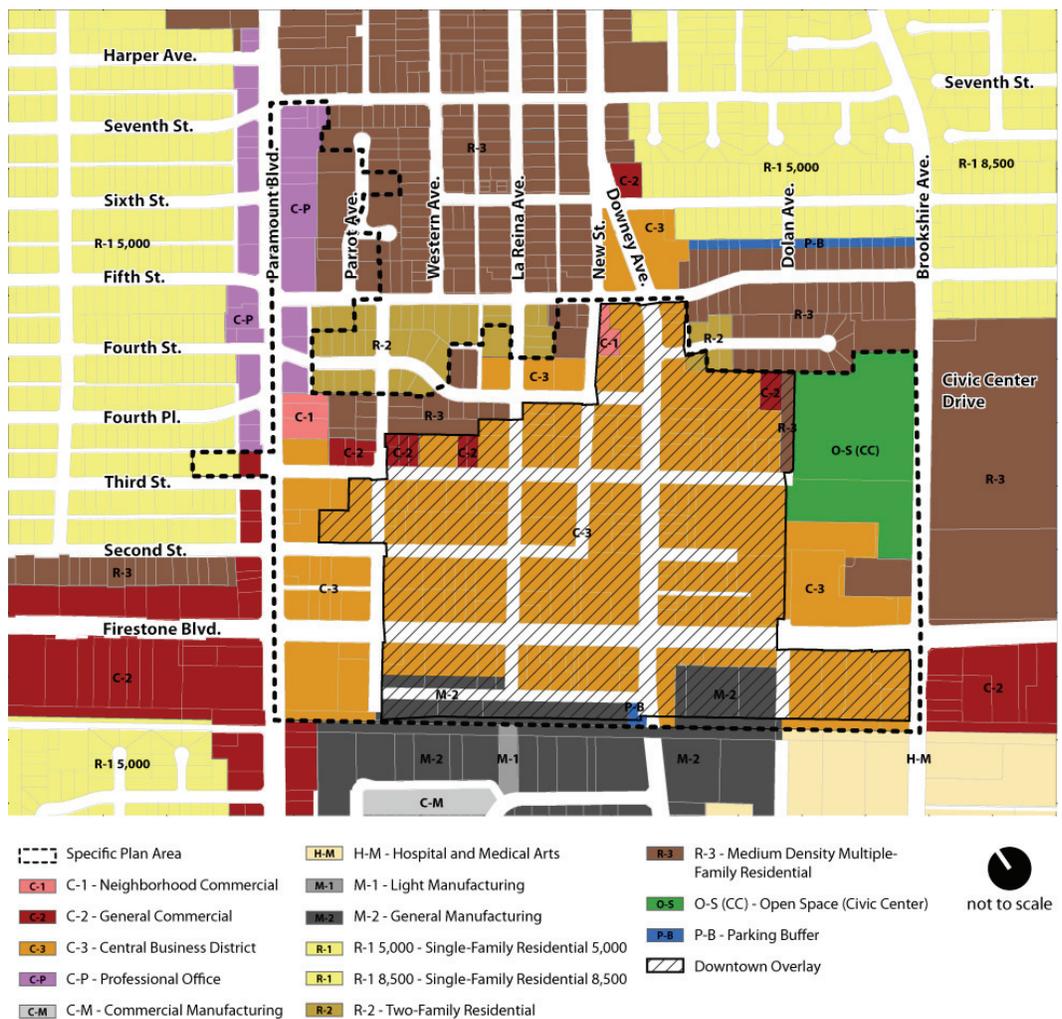


Exhibit 1.4 Existing Specific Plan Zoning

Section 1 Introduction

The C-3 zone was created specifically for Downtown to allow for the development of intense commercial and service uses. The C-3 zone is intended to provide opportunities for a wide variety of goods and services in establishments whose operating characteristics attract them to a central location in the City and which require good exposure in a readily identifiable and accessible setting. The existing development standards for the zone are focused on the compatibility of downtown uses with abutting noncommercial development and ensuring that the impacts of older development, heavy traffic, or other operating characteristics are minimized. South of Firestone Boulevard, along the railroad tracks, there are a few parcels zoned General Manufacturing (M-2) including the Downey Depot. Additionally, along Paramount Boulevard, the Gallatin Medical site area is currently zoned Professional Office (C-P) which allows medical and professional office uses. The

In October of 2000, the City Council adopted the *Downtown Plan for Downey's Historic Downtown District*. The Downtown Plan was a zoning amendment that simplified the zoning in Downtown from seven zones to one Mixed Use zone in the form of an overlay. The Downtown Plan Overlay Zone (D-P) established permitted uses, development and parking standards, sign standards, and allowances for outdoor dining, vending machines, and newspaper racks.

The implementation of the Specific Plan will establish the zoning for the Downtown Downey Specific Plan including the land use districts introduced in Chapter 2. The Downtown Downey Specific Plan land use districts will establish regulations to implement General Plan goals, policies, and objectives and will provide for superior development by allowing a greater degree of design and land use flexibility within the framework of a site-specific development plan.

1.5 Document Organization

The Downtown Downey Specific Plan includes seven chapters, each providing information and guidelines for the development and implementation of the uses within the boundaries of the Specific Plan area. A brief description of each chapter is provided below.

- ▶ **Introduction:** The introductory chapter provides general information about the Specific Plan, the history and location of Downtown, a project summary, and discussion of consistency with State law and local governing documents.
- ▶ **Land Use Districts:** The Land Use chapter describes the five land use districts identified for Downtown, and provides a Land Use District Map and a Table of Permitted Uses.
- ▶ **Design Guidelines and Standards:** The Design Guidelines and Standards chapter provides specific standards for how buildings in the Specific Plan area can be developed, including setbacks, parking requirements, as well as guidelines to enhance the architectural style of existing and future buildings. This chapter provides guidelines for design features including: streetscapes, signage, lighting, rooflines, and other design elements found Downtown.
- ▶ **Mobility Plan:** The Mobility chapter identifies established and planned conditions for roadways within the Specific Plan area, including contextual exhibits and conceptual street sections. This chapter also explores options for alternative forms of transportation in Downtown, including bicycles, buses, and walking.
- ▶ **Parking Plan:** The Parking chapter identifies parking strategies for the Downtown Specific Plan area and addresses how the City can better utilize over-parked districts and create shared parking opportunities for under-parked areas.
- ▶ **Infrastructure Plan:** The Infrastructure chapter provides information about accessibility to key utilities and public services including water, sewer, energy, police, fire, and other services necessary to develop the area.
- ▶ **Administration and Implementation:** The Administration and Implementation chapter identifies strategies to execute the recommendations put forth in the Specific Plan. This chapter also includes the necessary steps to implement the Specific Plan document and the actions required to modify the Plan.
- ▶ **Appendices:** Two appendices accompany the Specific Plan. The first compares the goals and policies of the adopted 2025 Downey General Plan to the goals and guidelines found in the Specific Plan. The second provides definitions of terms used in the document.

