

3 COMMUNITY CHARACTER

This chapter describes the existing physical character of Ocean Street, including its streetscape and buildings. It also identifies distinctive places in the Plan Area that attract people from throughout the community. The San Lorenzo River, adjacent to the Plan Area, is also a vital natural feature that contributes to the Plan Area's identity; therefore, this section discusses access to the river from the Plan Area.

A. Streetscapes

As a gateway for people arriving on Highway 17, it is essential for Ocean Street to provide a welcoming setting for visitors and residents alike. However, the existing character of Ocean Street does not convey a strong sense of arrival in Santa Cruz. This section describes the existing streetscapes within the Plan Area.

1. Street Configuration

North of Soquel Avenue, the configuration of Ocean Street is generally a wide, four-lane street with a center median; it widens at Water Street and Soquel Avenue to provide a turn lane. Figure 3-1 shows a street cross-section for Ocean Street near Glenwood Avenue, illustrating that there are two 12-foot travel lanes in each direction and a center median of 13 feet. Along much of the street, the planted area in the median is replaced by a left turn lane where necessary. On-street parking and bicycle lanes are also provided within the right-of-way. Sidewalk widths on Ocean Street typically range from 6 to 10 feet in this area, with 6-foot sidewalks on side streets.

Below Soquel Avenue, Ocean Street has no center median. Its width is further reduced south of Broadway, and there is only one southbound travel lane on Ocean Street between Barson Street and San Lorenzo Boulevard. Sidewalks in this area tend to be narrow, typically ranging from 5 to 8 feet wide. Figure 3-2 shows a cross-section for Ocean Street at Broadway, illustrating the narrower right-of-way. Bicyclists must share the road with automobiles on this part of Ocean Street.

In general, streets within the Plan Area have concrete sidewalks and asphalt paving in the roadway. However, red crosswalks with a simulated brick pattern have been used at the intersection of Soquel Avenue and Dakota Avenue, near the Soquel Avenue bridge.

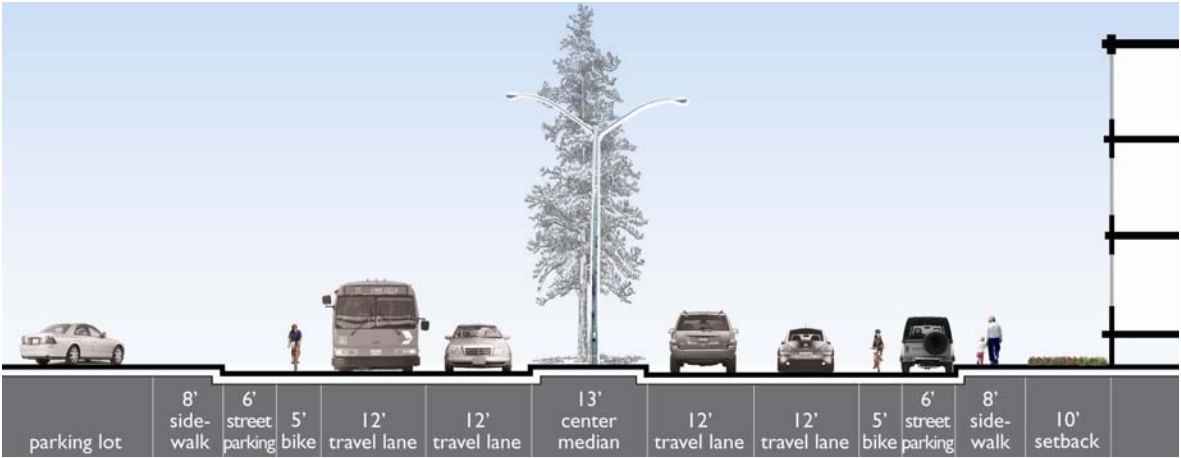


FIGURE 3-1
OCEAN STREET CROSS-SECTION AT GLENWOOD AVENUE

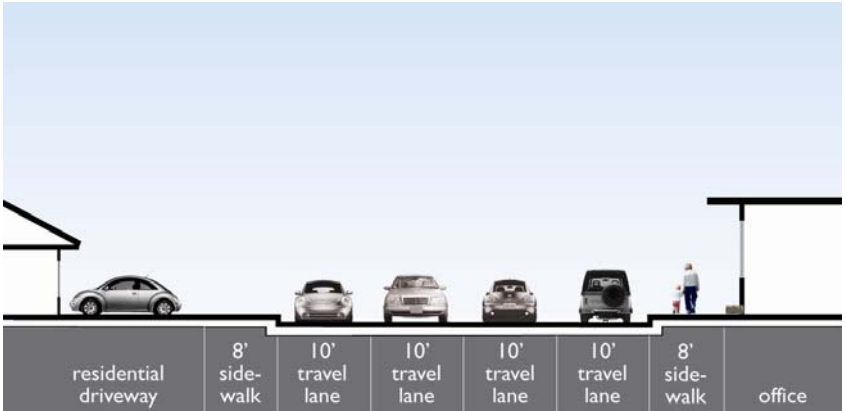


FIGURE 3-2
OCEAN STREET CROSS-SECTION AT BROADWAY

2. Signage and Banners

A small wooden sign, located at the Highway 17 exit in front of the Hampton Inn, welcomes visitors to Santa Cruz and identifies Santa Cruz's sister cities in other countries. Emblems of local community organizations are displayed beside this sign on wooden poles.

There are also multiple wayfinding signs throughout the area, which guide drivers to the beach, Downtown, parking locations, lodging, Highway 17 and historic sites. While these wayfinding signs have an attractive design that is coordinated with similar signs throughout the city, they are relatively small and can be difficult to read for drivers who are not familiar with Santa Cruz. Figure 3-3 shows the location of wayfinding signs that point to four of the city's main destinations. As shown in this figure, drivers are encouraged to use Soquel Avenue to travel to the beach via downtown and to reach lodging outside of the Plan Area; signs leading downtown encourage drivers to use both Water Street and Soquel Avenue. There are no wayfinding signs in the Plan Area that point to UC Santa Cruz, which attracts many out-of-town visitors, including conference attendees during summer months.



Seasonal banners are attached to light posts in Ocean Street's center median, advertising special events such as Santa Cruz County Symphony performances and the Open Studios Art Tour. These banners are found north of Soquel Avenue, where the center median is present.

3. Street Trees and Landscaping

On several parts of Ocean Street north of Soquel Avenue, the street's center median is planted with large redwood trees. There are also redwoods planted on each side of the Highway 17 offramp. The redwoods are designated as Heritage Trees and are expected to remain healthy for an



other 50 years, despite their constrained growing environment.¹ Any removal of these trees will require a permitting process that is subject to appeals.

Existing sidewalk widths constrain the ability to provide street trees. However, newer developments are generally required on a project-by-project basis to provide setbacks so that the sidewalk's width is at least 8 to 10 feet, which can accommodate trees while meeting Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility requirements.² Some of the existing trees along the corridor, such as the Hollywood Juniper (*Juniperus chinensis*), are located in a planting strip behind the sidewalk; they often do not provide a shade canopy and are



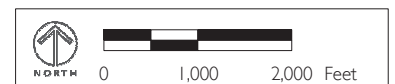
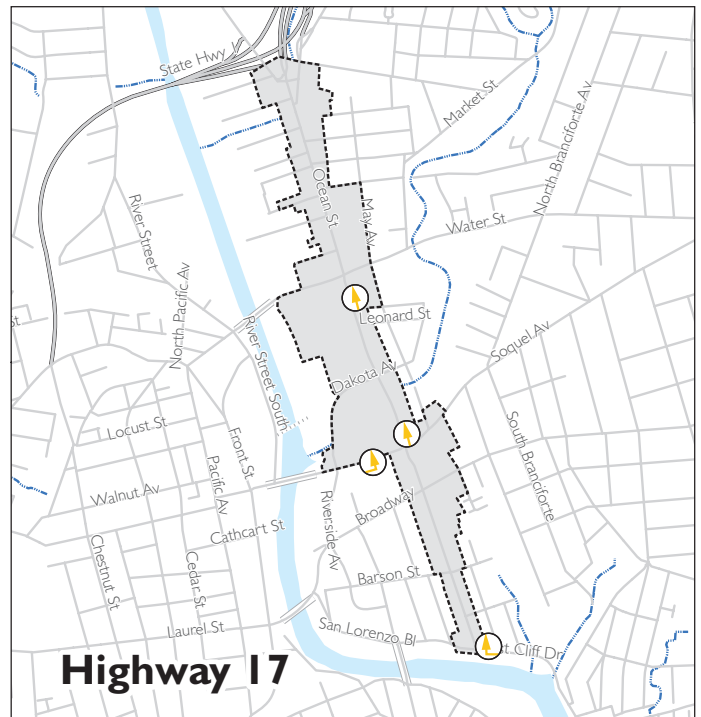
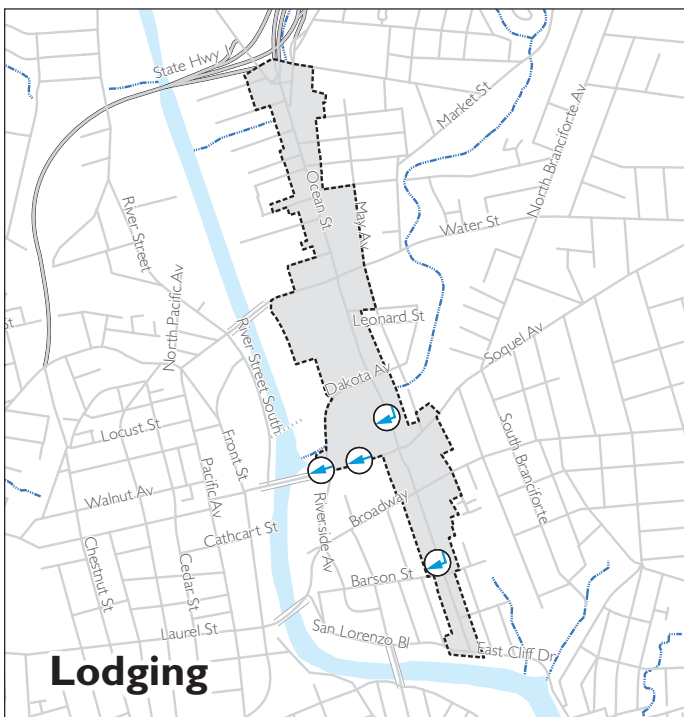
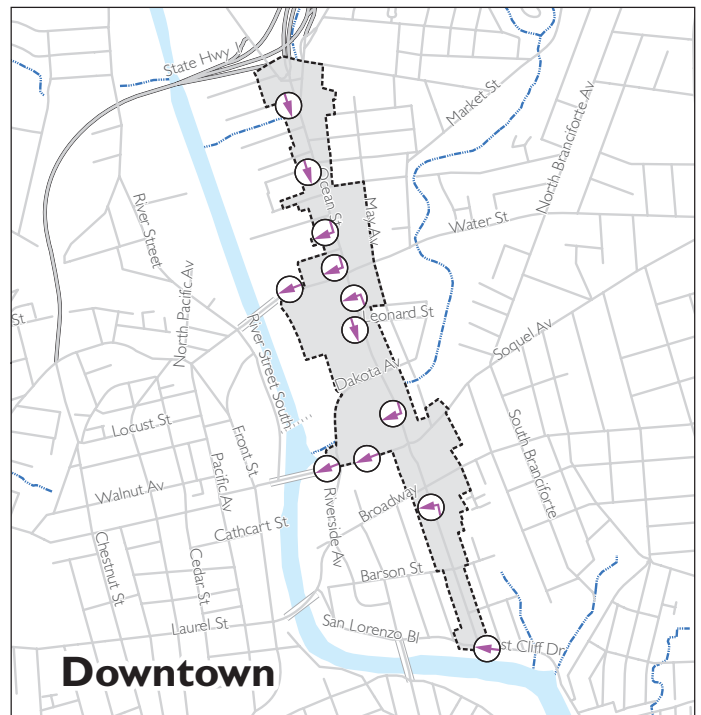
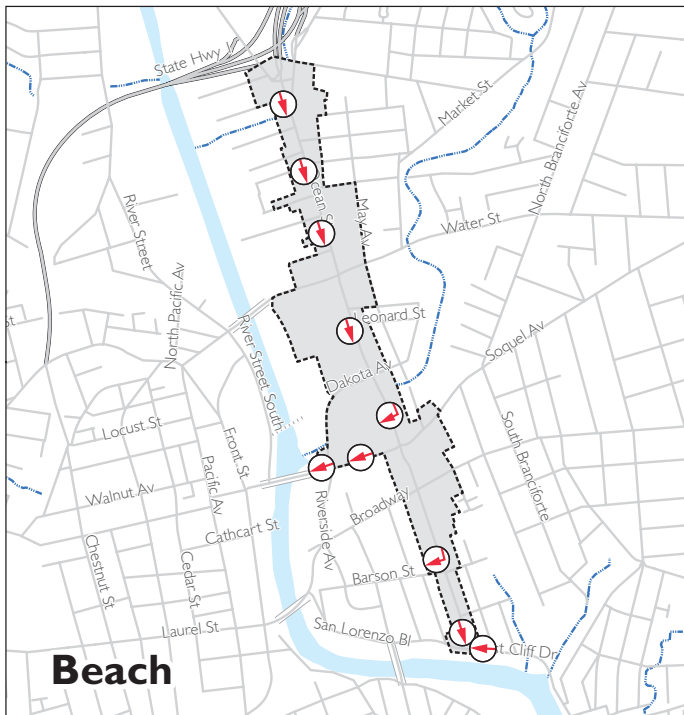
generally small enough to remove without permits. More recently, the City has encouraged the use of trees that provide more of a canopy, including the Columbia Sycamore (*Platanus acerifolia* 'Columbia').

Portions of Ocean Street that have narrow center medians, with no redwood trees, are typically planted with hedges and shrubs such as Indian Hawthorne (*Rhaphirolepis indica*). These plants are maintained and pruned by the city's Parks and Recreation department in order to maintain sight lines for drivers' safety. In addition, the City recently planted windmill palms (*Trachycarpus fortunei*) on Ocean Street just north of Soquel Avenue, as part of a project to reconfigure the median at this intersection. Other landscaping is found within the setback

area of individual buildings, including planted buffers between sidewalks and parking lots.

¹ Personal communication with Leslie Keedy, Parks and Recreation Department, City of Santa Cruz, November 2, 2007.

² Personal communication with Chris Schneider and Jim Burr, Public Works Department, City of Santa Cruz, October 30, 2007.



Source: City of Santa Cruz GIS, 2007; DC&E, 2007

FIGURE 3-3

DIRECTIONAL SIGNAGE

4. Street Furniture

There is very little pedestrian-oriented street furniture in the Plan Area. Benches and trash cans typically are found only at bus stops along Ocean Street. In addition, the street lights on Ocean Street have a very simple “cobra head” design and rise far above the ground, where they can light the roadway. The bridges at Water Street and Soquel Avenue include attractive, pedestrian-scaled lampposts that are mounted on top of the low walls at the edges of each bridge.

B. Buildings

In addition to streetscape improvements, the built form and architectural quality of Ocean Street also contribute strongly to its overall character. This section describes the existing buildings found within the Plan Area.

1. Architectural Character

Although buildings in the Ocean Street Plan Area vary widely in character, many appear to have been constructed during the mid-20th century. These buildings typically have very simple forms, with limited articulation and ornamentation. These buildings also have few human-scaled elements, such as awnings and pedestrian-oriented signage. However, the site design of a few motels and hotels incorporates setbacks for small, pedestrian-scaled fountains, landscaping and courtyards. Simple, inexpensive materials such as stucco and rock are typically used on building façades, although bands and patterns of color are sometimes employed to create added visual interest.



Newer commercial buildings typically provide more varied architectural details, including projecting window elements and roof overhangs, as well as a more varied palette of materials. Some buildings also draw from the architectural vernacular of the surrounding residential neighborhoods. For example, the Motel Santa Cruz, located at Ocean Street and Broadway, has peaked roof forms, bay windows and wood-shingle siding that is meant to evoke the nearby Victorian single-family homes.

Several commercial buildings within the Plan Area have their own distinctive, unique character. For example, Woodstove & Sun, located on Soquel Avenue, occupies a one-story commercial building whose façade includes Art



Deco-style ornamentation above the building's entrance, as well as a varied color treatment that helps to emphasize the entry. The Royal Taj restaurant, also located on Soquel Avenue, has an unusual Asian-influenced roofline. In addition, the Resource Center for Nonviolence on Broadway is located in a historic house and is painted with a variety of colorful murals.

Residential buildings in and around the Plan Area are primarily a mixture of pre-World War II one- and two-story homes, along with postwar duplexes and multi-family dwellings that differ drastically from the older homes in their rooflines, massing and ornamentation. Newer condominium developments provide more varied architecture, such as Mission-style embellishments along the roofline.

2. Building Heights and Setbacks

The buildings along the upper Ocean Street corridor are primarily a mixture of one-story retail establishments with varying setbacks from the street, as well as surface parking lots that also front onto Ocean Street. A few retail buildings meet the back of the sidewalk and provide storefront windows that create visibility into the building for pedestrians. Buildings south of Soquel

Avenue have fairly consistent and small setbacks. Many buildings in this area are single-family and multi-family housing and are smaller in scale compared to the rest of Ocean Street.

Figure 3-4 shows that building heights in the Plan Area range from one story to six stories, with a predominance of one- to two-story buildings. Motels and hotels along the corridor are typically two to three stories; one exception is the University Inn & Conference Center, parts of which are five stories. Although the Santa Cruz County Government Center is five stories tall, it is set back behind an expansive parking lot that separates the building from Ocean Street, diminishing its presence along the corridor.

3. Street-Facing Entrances and Driveways

In some of the Plan Area's buildings, the primary entrances to commercial businesses are oriented towards the street and located near the sidewalk, encouraging people to arrive at the business by foot. However, some entrances are set back behind parking lots, so that pedestrians must traverse the parking lot to enter the business. Figure 3-5 shows where commercial building entrances are located for two different parts of Ocean Street. This diagram also illustrates that many different businesses are located along the corridor, each one occupying a relatively small site.

Figure 3-5 also shows the locations of driveways with curb cuts, which are used by vehicles to enter and exit parking lots. Because the driveways and curb cuts interfere with pedestrian movement, a greater density of driveways indicates that there are more potential conflicts between vehicles and pedestrians. However, it should be noted that not all driveways attract equal amounts of traffic. Although the southern portion of Ocean Street has many driveways, they primarily serve single-family homes, which have relatively few vehicles crossing each driveway.

4. Building Signage

Commercial buildings along Ocean Street include many different types of signage. Nearly all businesses have a wall-mounted sign that identifies the

business. Some of these are internally lit, while others use external illumination. In most cases, these signs have been placed so that they do not obscure the building's architectural details. Some businesses located near the street also use projecting, or "blade," signage to identify their business.

Multi-tenant buildings typically use freestanding signs to identify each tenant. In many cases, these signs are well integrated with the architecture of the adjacent building; for example, the Soquel Ocean Center's freestanding sign includes a trellis-like element along its top that matches a similar detail on the site's building.

Many of these freestanding signs are also scaled so that they can easily be seen and read by pedestrians as well as drivers. However, many individual tourist-serving businesses, such as fast-food restaurants, gas stations and motels, have their own freestanding signs that are designed to be highly visible to drivers. For example, the Santa Cruz Diner has a tall freestanding sign with supports that are painted with a highly-visible checkerboard pattern.

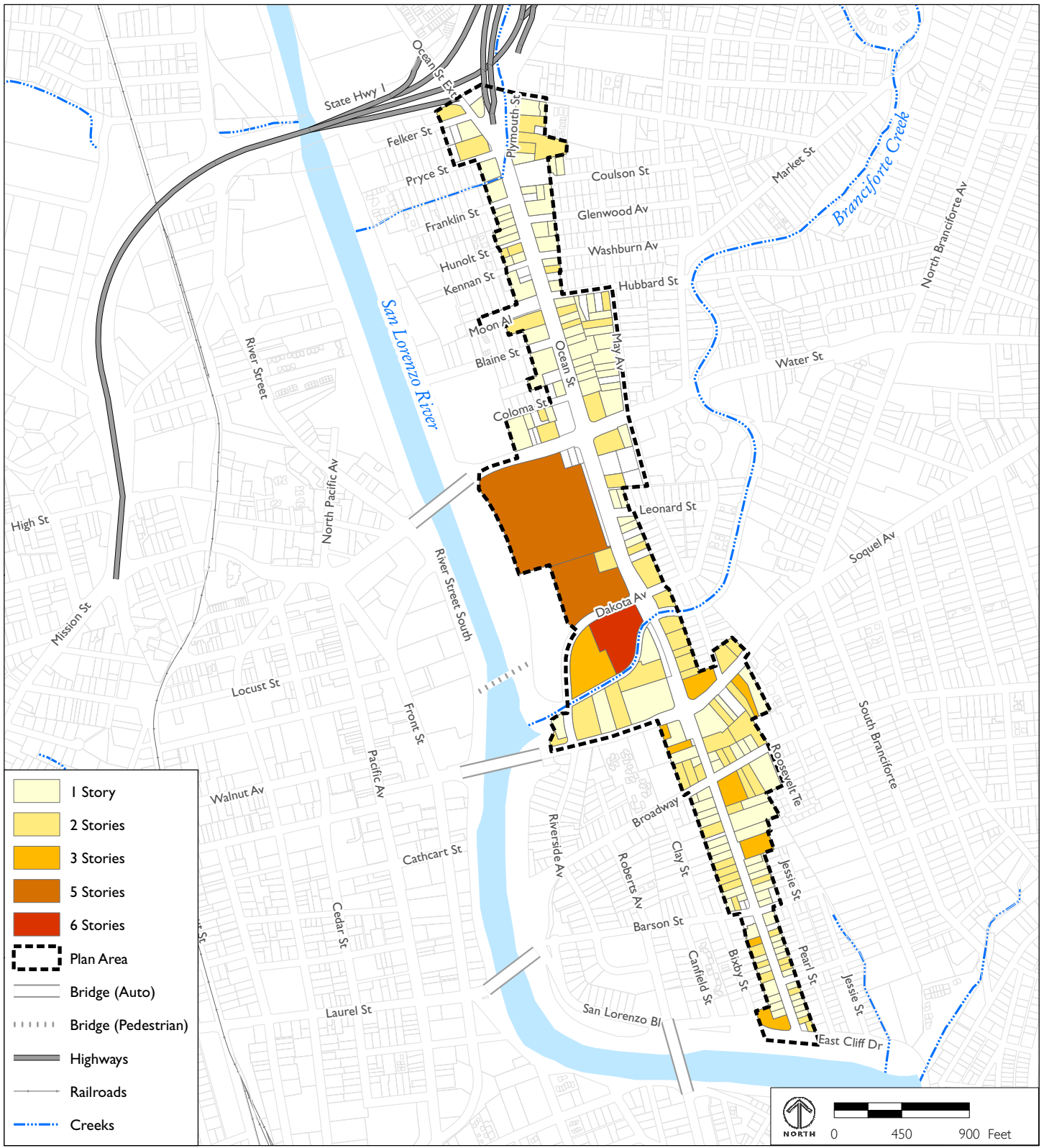


C. *Destinations and Landmarks*

There are a variety of places in the Plan Area that have an identifiable presence in the community and attract both visitors and residents. The following are brief descriptions of several places that serve as notable destinations or landmarks; their locations are

shown on Figure 3-6.

- ◆ **Gateway Signage.** A small wooden sign, visible from the Highway 17 exit, marks visitors' arrival in Santa Cruz.
- ◆ **Santa Cruz County Visitor Center.** The Visitor Center is operated by the Santa Cruz County Conference and Visitors Council. Its employees provide visitors with information about Santa Cruz's main attractions, special events and activities.



Source: City of Santa Cruz GIS, 2007; DC&E, 2007

FIGURE 3-4

BUILDING HEIGHTS

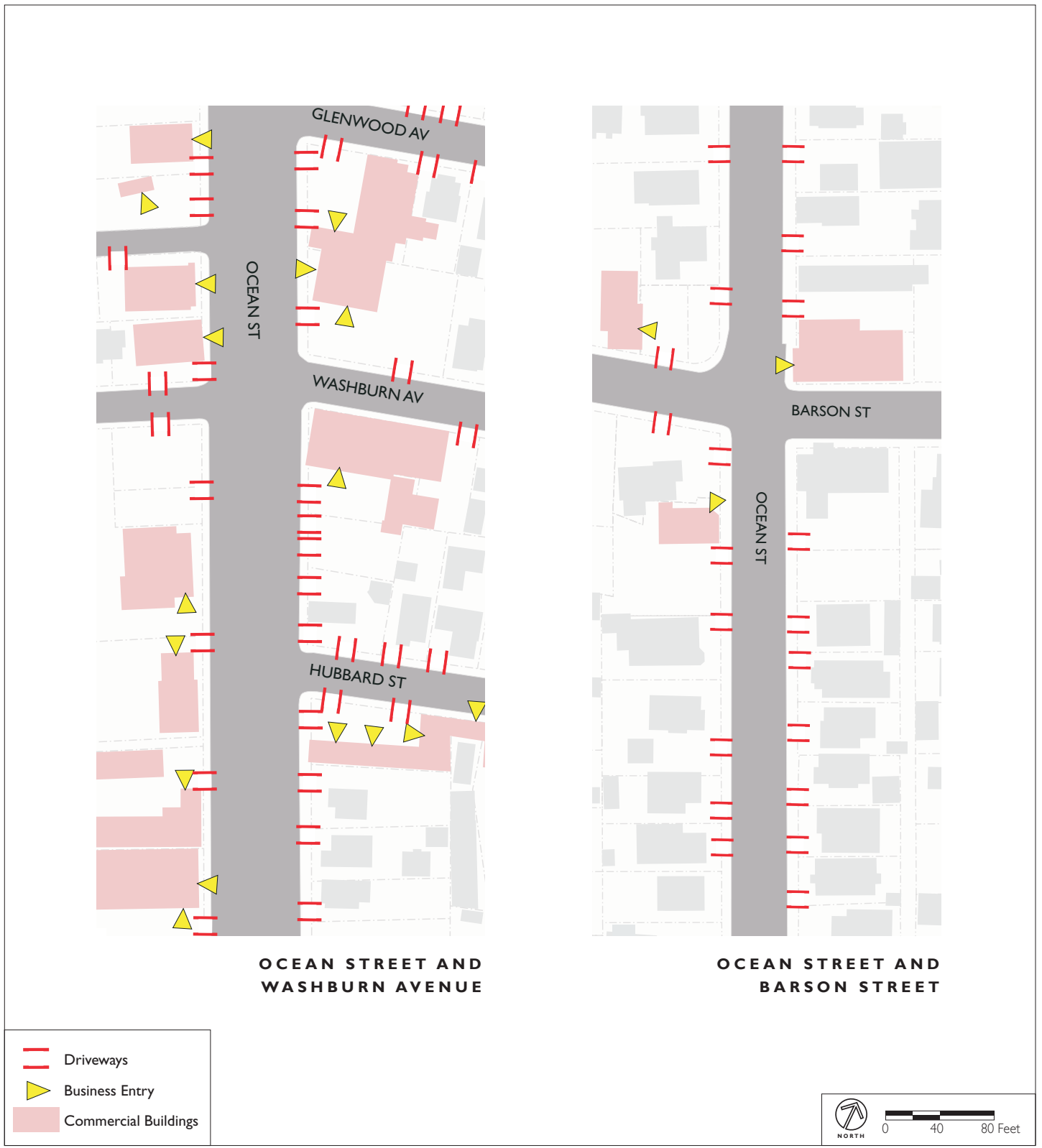


FIGURE 3-5
DRIVEWAYS AND COMMERCIAL BUILDING ENTRANCES

- ◆ **Fins Coffee.** This café—one of the few on Ocean Street—serves a variety of coffee drinks and pastries; it also provides a small stage for live performances.
- ◆ **Marianne's Ice Cream.** This popular venue for fresh, homemade ice cream has been around for more than thirty years and attracts both residents and visitors of Santa Cruz. Marianne's also sells wholesale ice cream to businesses around the Bay Area.
- ◆ **Santa Cruz Diner.** This diner is one of the few 24-hour eateries in Santa Cruz and is popular for budget and late-night dining.
- ◆ **County Government Center.** Santa Cruz County's offices, and many of its courtrooms, are located at Ocean Street and Water Street, in the heart of the Plan Area. The Government Center draws employees from throughout the region, as well as many other visitors who need to do business with the County.
- ◆ **San Lorenzo Park.** This park is located next to the San Lorenzo River and has a pedestrian bridge connecting to Downtown and Pacific Avenue. The park includes a playground area, a duck pond and a bowling green, as well as areas for special events.
- ◆ **University Inn and Conference Center.** This hotel, located next to the County Government Center and San Lorenzo Park, provides space for visitor lodging; many of its rooms are also used as student housing for UC Santa Cruz during the academic year. The ground floor of the hotel includes conference and banquet facilities that are used for a wide variety of meetings.
- ◆ **Soquel Ocean Center.** This commercial center at Soquel Avenue and Ocean Street includes several restaurants, as well as a variety of other retail stores, that serve people from throughout Santa Cruz.
- ◆ **Resource Center for Nonviolence.** This international organization has been in operation since 1976 and is dedicated to peace and social justice issues.

- ◆ **Santa Cruz Art League.** The Santa Cruz Art League was founded in 1919 and is partially sponsored by a grant from the Cultural Council of Santa Cruz County. It promotes and supports the local visual and performing arts.
- ◆ **Ocean Market & Deli.** This neighborhood market, located at Ocean Street and Barson Street, provides a convenient place for local residents to buy some of their groceries.

D. Access to the River Levee

The San Lorenzo River is located to the west of the Ocean Street Plan Area. The river is not generally visible from the Plan Area, although it can be

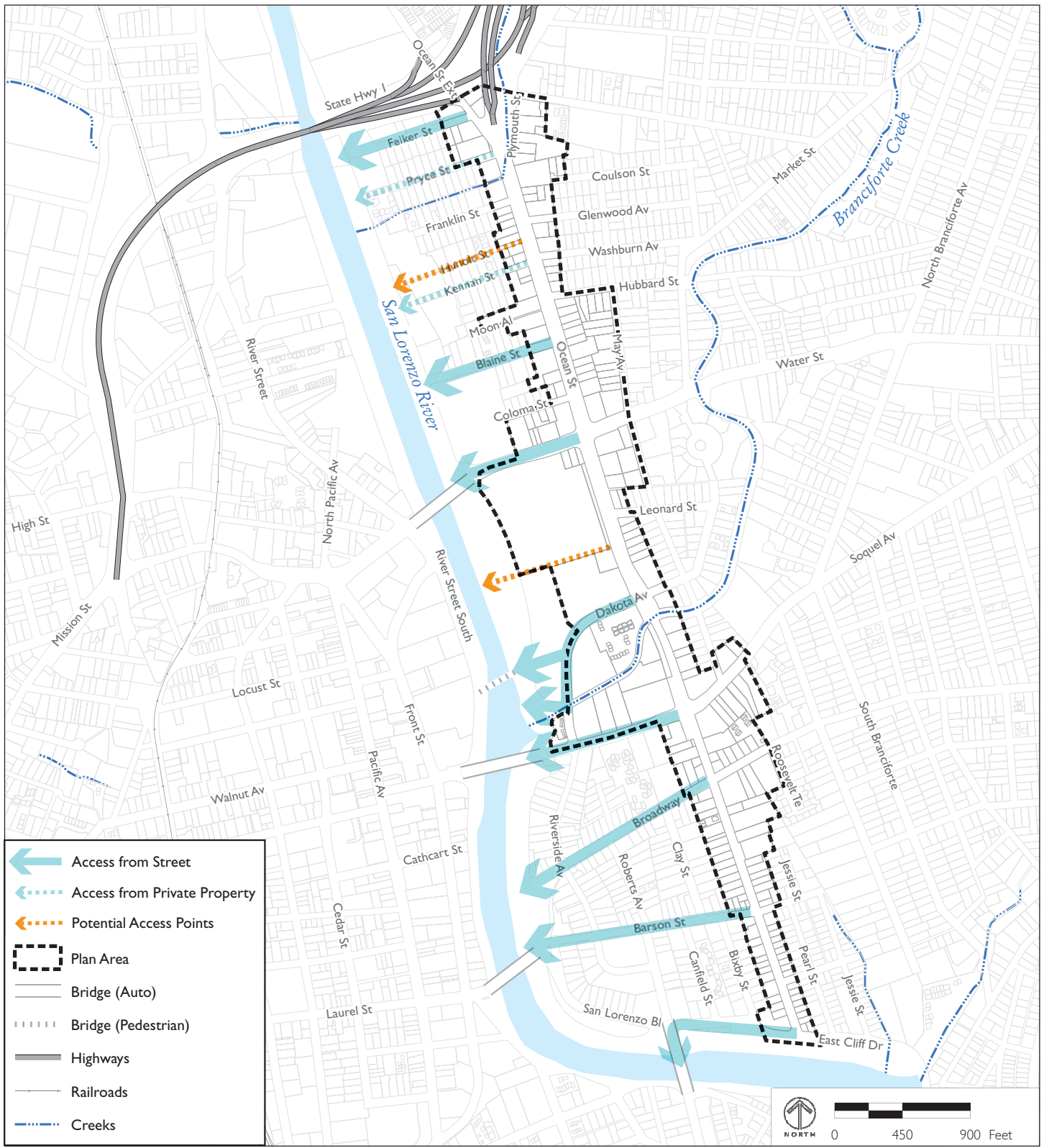


viewed from San Lorenzo Park as well as the bridges that cross the river. In addition, when approaching the end of Ocean Street at San Lorenzo Boulevard, there is no visual connection to the river, because it is cut off by a high levee.

The top of the river's levee has a paved path that is used by pedestrians and bicyclists and can be accessed from several locations near the Plan Area. Figure 3-7 shows different locations where the river levee can be accessed. The major public access points are located between Water Street and

Soquel Avenue, as well as from San Lorenzo Park. In addition, there are two residential streets west of the Plan Area that provide access to the river levee.

There are also less visible access points to the levee that cannot be seen from public streets and do not have signs indicating that they provide river access. These access points are typically reached by walking through privately-owned multi-family residential properties. In one of these locations, an agreement with the City requires the property owner to provide public access; however,



Source: City of Santa Cruz GIS, 2007; DC&E, 2007

FIGURE 3-7

RIVER LEVEE ACCESS

this access is through a gate that can be locked, and there have been disputes over the hours when the gate is required to be open.³ Some of these informal access points have steep or unpaved ramps up to the levee that may not be accessible to people with disabilities.

E. Branciforte Creek

The lower reach of Branciforte Creek crosses through the central part of the Plan Area between Dakota Avenue and Soquel Avenue, then discharges into the San Lorenzo River. Because the creek runs in a deep concrete culvert and is fenced off from public access, it generally serves as a divider, separating properties on opposite sides of the creek. Development adjacent to the creek typically does not face the channel directly. Although the creek is difficult to see while driving, it is more visible to Ocean Street pedestrians as they cross the creek.



³ Personal communication with Alex Khoury, Planning and Community Development, City of Santa Cruz, October 24, 2007.

CITY OF SANTA CRUZ
OCEAN STREET OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS
COMMUNITY CHARACTER