

# INTRODUCTION 1

The City of Ceres first began to develop in the 1870s in what is presently known as Downtown. Daniel Whitmore, the town's first resident, built a home on Fifth Street after he came to Ceres hoping for economic gain. Soon after Whitmore arrived, others began to settle the area, opening businesses around Fourth Street and along what is today known as State Route 99.

The City has since expanded its boundaries and increased significantly in population, particularly during the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s. Downtown remains one of the potential primary commercial and civic areas in Ceres, but other commercial areas, such as Mitchell Road, have lessened its economic significance within Ceres. In addition to the impact of citywide growth on the Downtown economy, State Route 99's emergence as a major regional connector has had a profound impact on the physical urban character and function of Downtown.

Downtown is currently home to a mix of neighborhood-serving businesses, offices and civic buildings, all surrounded by residential neighborhoods. Despite Ceres' recent growth, Downtown has experienced relatively little investment, particularly from the private sector. In 2007, a citywide strategic planning process was undertaken to begin formulating a vision for the City of Ceres. One of the cornerstones of that vision was the resurgence of Downtown as a key destination point. As a next step, the City decided to undertake a comprehensive community visioning and planning process focused specifically on Downtown. The result of these initiatives is this Specific Plan, which describes and illustrates a clear vision for the area and provides a policy and regulatory framework for achieving this vision.

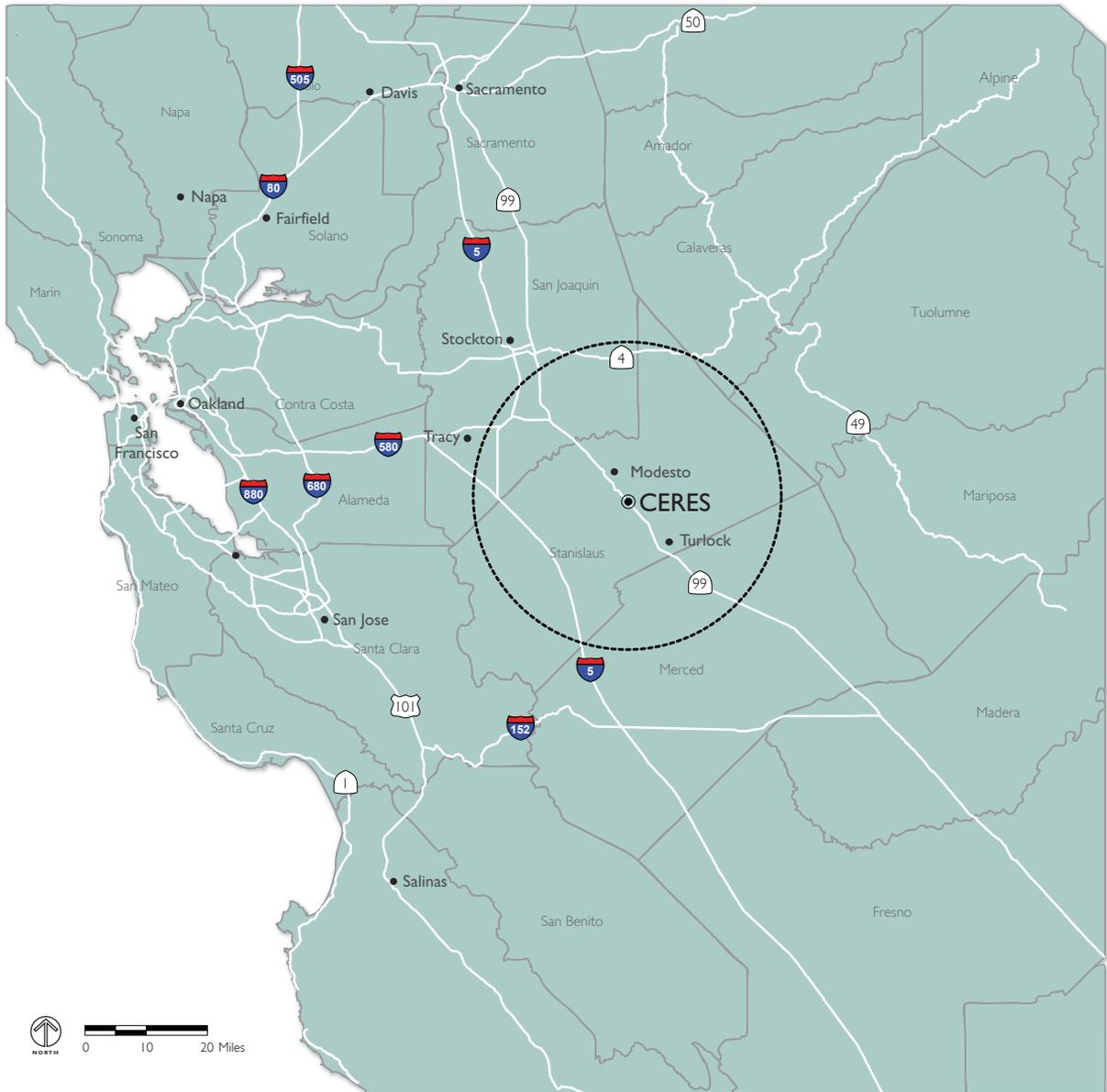
Throughout this document, the Specific Plan Area is also referred to as "Downtown." The Downtown Specific Plan builds off of the goals identified for Downtown in the General Plan to promote a rich mix of retail, residential, office, government, cultural and entertainment uses in Downtown. The Specific Plan also responds to policies in the General Plan focused on providing a pedestrian orientation, clear parking strategies, and physical improvements.

This chapter discusses the regional and local setting, purpose of and public process associated with the Downtown Specific Plan.

## A. Regional and Local Setting

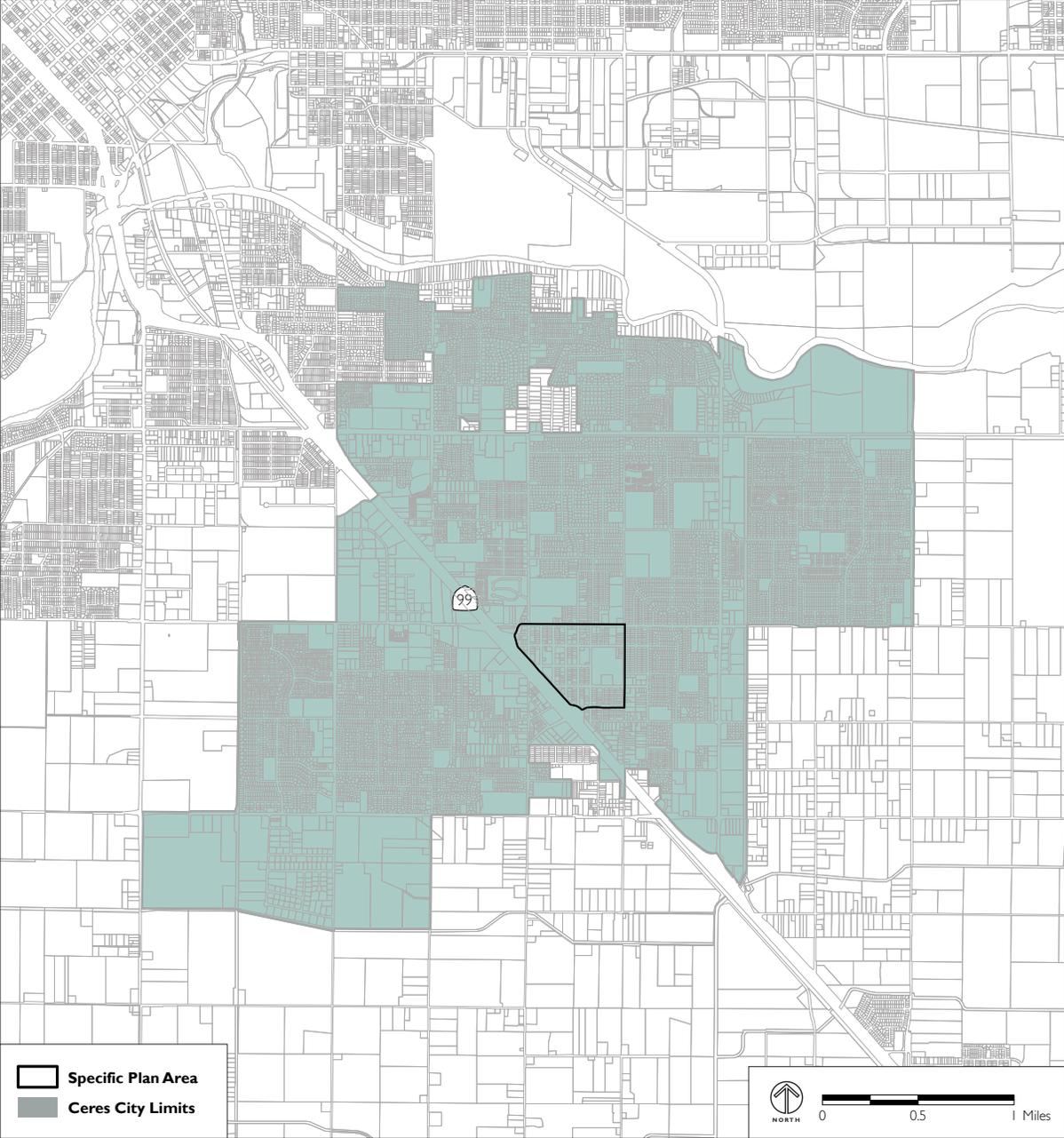
The City of Ceres is located in Stanislaus County, five miles south of Modesto and 13 miles north of Turlock. Ceres is bisected by State Route 99, the major north-south thoroughfare through the eastern side of California's Central Valley. Figure 1-1 shows the project site's regional location.

**FIGURE 1-1** Regional Location



The Specific Plan Area is located in the central portion of the city, just east of State Route 99. Figure 1-2 shows the local context of the Specific Plan Area.

**FIGURE 1-2** Local Context



## B. Specific Plan Area

The Specific Plan Area encompasses approximately 121 acres and includes all of Downtown. The Specific Plan Area is bounded by El Camino Avenue to the west, Whitmore Avenue to the north, Ninth Street to the east, and Park Street to the south. The Specific Plan Area is shown in Figure 1-3.

State Route 99 provides the major regional and local access route to Downtown. Access to State Route 99 is available from Whitmore Avenue, Second Street and Fourth Street within Downtown. Whitmore Avenue provides primary access to Downtown from the eastern areas of the city.

**FIGURE 1-3** Specific Plan Area



## **C. Purpose and Intent of the Plan**

This Specific Plan is intended to serve as the primary document and reference guide for future development in Downtown. This Specific Plan provides the community and decision-makers with clear documentation of the Downtown vision. Furthermore, it is intended to provide a clear policy and regulatory framework by which future development projects and public improvements will be reviewed. To augment these provisions of the Plan, guidance on design, potential public investments, and implementation strategies are provided. Potential opportunities for public-private partnerships, where the City would agree to work in concert with a developer in a mutually beneficial relationship to complete a project, are also identified.

## **D. Community Planning Process**

The Downtown Specific Plan was developed using an intensive public engagement process, which is described below.

### **Initial Steps**

The Downtown Specific Plan process began in late 2007. As an early outreach effort, a community survey was administered to Plan Area residents to gain an understanding of topics most important to them. Existing conditions in the Specific Plan Area were also examined as an initial step in the planning process. The findings of this process are summarized in Chapter Two of this document, and a more detailed review of existing conditions is provided in the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) conducted for this Specific Plan.

### **Stakeholder Interviews**

As a first step in working with the community, it was important to discuss the Downtown with those closest to it and with inside knowledge of the existing Downtown environment. To address this, the DC&E consultant team held discussions with several stakeholders to assess their perception of the Plan Area, identify important issues, and understand how stakeholders thought Downtown could be improved. Interviewees included staff members from various City departments, property owners, business owners, residents, school district personnel, and community service organization representatives. The information provided a foundation of understanding with which the planning process for Downtown could move forward, including providing insight that would inform the Community Workshops to follow.

### Community Workshops

The Community Workshop series began with a Visioning Workshop (Workshop #1) that was attended by approximately 35 people. Goals identified at this workshop included increasing visibility of Downtown, exploring new forms of housing, providing a new public gathering place, and improving Fourth Street conditions and business viability. Following the first workshop, City staff had a booth to publicize the Specific Plan process at the annual Street Faire.



Community Workshop #2.

At Workshop #2, participants were encouraged to engage in small group discussions, using maps to identify the location and nature of potential improvements in Downtown. Several ideas emerged from this workshop, such as a movie theatre, mixed use residential and retail development, gateway elements, and a desire for enhanced pedestrian links in Downtown.

At Workshop #3, participants were asked to review three land use alternatives and prioritize the ideas contained within them. The direction reinforced at this meeting was to ensure that Fourth Street remains the commercial heart of Downtown, that Downtown should be a safe and walkable environment, that a cinema use would be beneficial if it is feasible, and that streetscape improvements are important. Work



Community Workshop #3.

conducted at this workshop and previous workshops led directly to the development of a Preferred Alternative for Downtown's redevelopment.

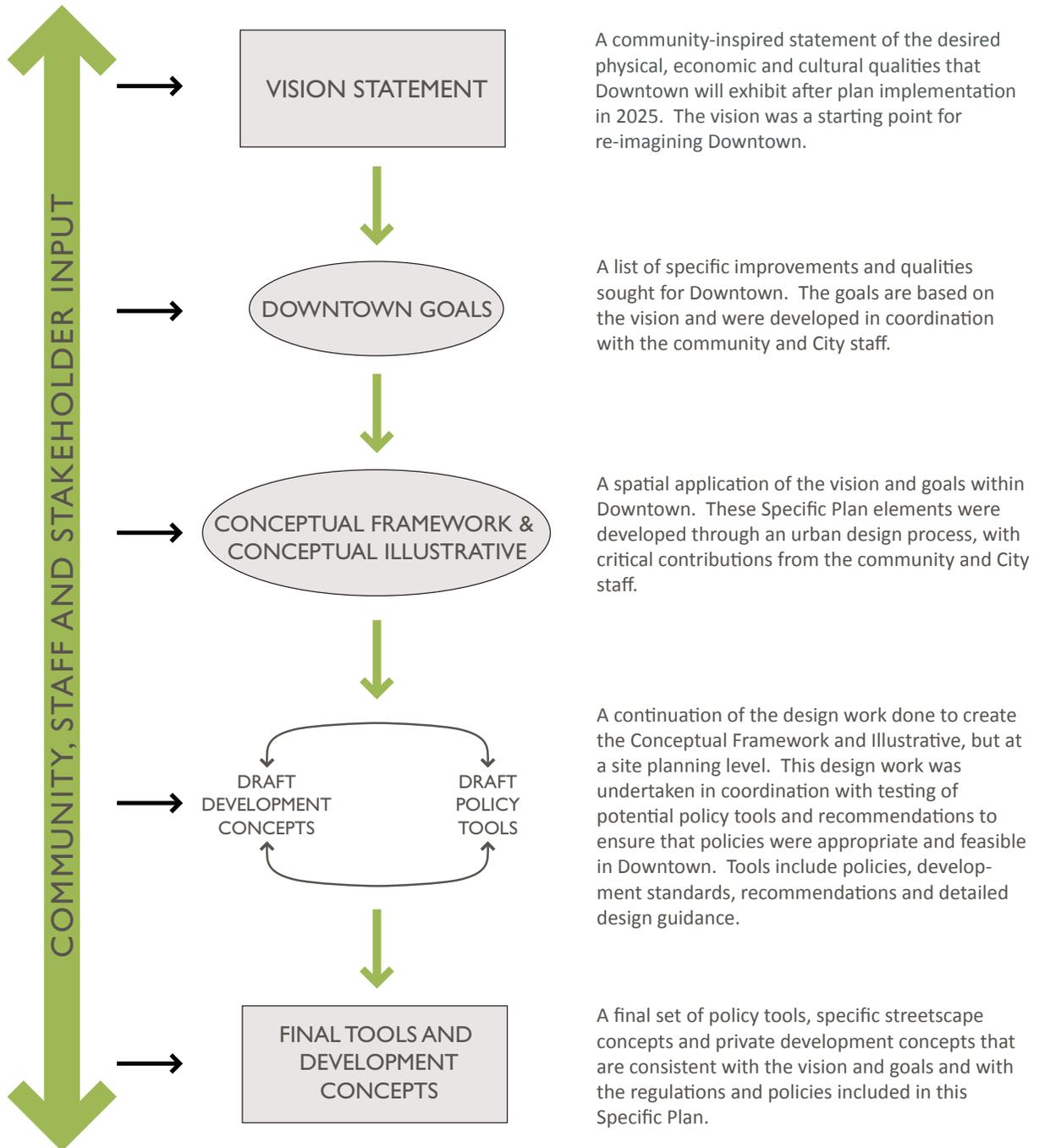
### **Staff Charrette**

In December 2008, staff members from all City departments participated in a charrette to synthesize the information from the previous workshops and work toward a preferred alternative. By working together, staff members were able to discuss the feasibility of ideas and to consider how community recommendations would impact the City from an array of perspectives. This important step served as a "reality check" and augmented the workshop series, which strongly influenced the development of the Preferred Alternative. The Preferred Alternative prescribes the preferred land use mix, design concepts and transportation improvements for Downtown. In December 2008, the Preferred Alternative was presented to City Council and attending members of the public.

### **Specific Plan Preparation**

With a Preferred Alternative in place, the consultant team developed this Downtown Specific Plan, which includes detailed guidance for achieving the Preferred Alternative in Downtown. The Preferred Alternative is discussed in more detail in Chapter Three, Vision, Goals and Concept. Figure 1-4 illustrates the process undertaken to develop this Specific Plan.

**FIGURE 1-4** Specific Plan Preparation Process



## **E. Statutory Requirements of the Specific Plan**

Under California law, Cities and Counties may complete Specific Plans to develop policies, programs, regulations and guidelines to implement the jurisdiction's adopted General Plan. A Specific Plan effectively establishes a link between implementing policies of the General Plan and the individual development proposals in a defined area.

### **Required Contents**

This Specific Plan has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of California Government Code Section 65451. As prescribed by law, the Plan includes text and diagrams that generally describe the following:

- The distribution, location and extent of all land uses, including open space.
- The proposed distribution, location and extent and intensity of major components of public infrastructure, such as transportation and drainage systems.
- The standards and criteria by which development will proceed.
- A program of implementation measures, such as financing measures, policies, regulations and public works projects.
- A statement of the relationship of the Specific Plan to the General Plan.

### **Findings of Consistency with the General Plan**

California law requires a Specific Plan to be consistent with a City's General Plan and that findings regarding consistency be included in the Specific Plan itself. Although the following amendments to the City's General Plan and Zoning Ordinance will be necessary to allow its implementation, the recommendations and objectives of the Downtown Specific Plan are consistent with the overarching goals of the Ceres General Plan, including the direction given for the Downtown area.

#### ***General Plan***

The General Plan must be amended alongside adoption of this Specific Plan. General Plan amendments will ensure that land use designations and their associated provisions are consistent between the Specific Plan and the Ceres General Plan.

#### ***Zoning Ordinance***

The Zoning Ordinance must be amended to implement the Specific Plan by creating a new Downtown Specific Plan Overlay Zone. This Downtown Specific Plan Overlay Zone will become a zoning classification within the City of Ceres Zoning Ordinance and will allow the development standards in the Downtown Specific Plan to augment or supersede the current zoning. If there is a discrepancy, the Downtown Specific Plan takes precedence.

## F. Plan Contents

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The additional chapters follow this introduction.

### ***Chapter Two: Existing Conditions***

This chapter provides an overview of existing conditions in Downtown.

### ***Chapter Three: Vision, Goals and Concept***

This chapter tells the “story” of the Specific Plan by providing a vision statement, plan goals, urban design concept, and a series of recommended improvements.

### ***Chapter Four: Development Concepts***

This chapter discusses potential public and private development concepts for Downtown. Detailed illustrations are included.

### ***Chapter Five: Policies***

This chapter provides the guiding policy statements intended for use by decision-makers and the public when considering new development or public investments in Downtown.

### ***Chapter Six: Land Use***

This chapter provides the land use framework and designations for Downtown, including the typical uses and densities allowed.

### ***Chapter Seven: Land Use Regulations and Development Standards***

This chapter provides land use regulations and development standards for new development in Downtown.

### ***Chapter Eight: Circulation***

This chapter discusses proposed circulation improvements in Downtown, including pedestrian, vehicular, bicycle and transit improvements.

### ***Chapter Nine: Public Facilities, Services and Infrastructure***

This chapter describes proposed improvements of public facilities to meet potential increased demand for public services and utility infrastructure.

### ***Chapter Ten: Implementation***

This chapter provides a strategy for implementing the Specific Plan over the next 15 years.