

I INTRODUCTION

According to the City of Chico General Plan, new residential communities should “emulate the positive qualities of traditional Chico neighborhoods” and include a “clear organizational pattern, an interconnected network of tree-lined streets and an attractive housing stock.” The City of Chico already has a tradition of attractive residential neighborhoods, including the Barber neighborhood and older residential neighborhoods near Chico’s downtown and, more recently, the Doe Mill neighborhood. Today, Northwest Chico has the opportunity to become part of this tradition.

This Specific Plan defines clear parameters for the future development of Northwest Chico. Implementation of the Plan will create new residential neighborhoods in the area that have a distinct sense of place, are well-served by commercial uses and open space, and that celebrate the area’s natural amenities. The Plan is also intended to ensure that new infrastructure required to serve the area, particularly drainage and storm water systems, is attractively integrated with the new development it serves.

This chapter of the Specific Plan provides a description of the Northwest Chico Specific Plan Area (Plan Area) and an overview of the planning process. It also explains the statutory requirements of a Specific Plan.

A. Planning Area

The following sections describe the regional and local settings of the Plan Area.

1. Regional Location

As shown in Figure 1-1, the City of Chico is located approximately 90 miles north of Sacramento in western Butte County, east of Interstate 5 on Highway 99. Butte County is home to 210,500 people, living in the cities of Chico, Oroville, Gridley, Biggs, the Town of Paradise and other unincorporated areas. The City of Chico is the largest population center in Butte County.

As of 2004, the City of Chico had 71,317 residents and occupied approximately 29 square miles. The urbanized, unincorporated areas adjacent to the City have a population of more than 30,000, making the total population of the Chico urban area approximately 102,000. The City expects its population to grow to 90,578 by 2010 and to 136,678 by 2020 through both annexation of unincorporated County lands and population growth within the city limits.

2. Plan Area

The approximately 700-acre Plan Area is bounded along the north and northwest by Mud and Sycamore Creeks, on the east by Hicks Lane and to the south by Eaton Road. The Plan Area boundary ends at the levees of these creeks. While private property ownership boundaries may extend beyond the levees, the Specific Plan does not anticipate any development outside the Plan Area boundaries. The Plan Area is bisected by Highway 99 and the Esplanade. Figure 1-2 depicts the Plan Area.

The Plan Area includes lands both inside and outside of Chico's current city limits, most of the Plan Area is in unincorporated Butte County. Approximately 120 acres of the Plan Area fall within the City of Chico, 420 acres lie beyond the city limits in Chico's Sphere of Influence (SOI) and approximately 160 acres lie outside of the SOI. The entire Plan Area is on the urban side of the Chico Area Greenline.

B. The Planning Process

This section describes the planning process that led to the completion of the Specific Plan.

1. Initial Steps

Work on the Specific Plan began in the fall of 2003 with the completion of a comprehensive existing conditions analysis, which is summarized briefly in

Chapter Three. More detail is contained in the Draft Environmental Impact Report completed for the Plan. This analysis helped the City and stakeholders understand key development opportunities and constraints in the Plan Area.

Following completion of the existing conditions analysis, a community planning process was the most important factor in the development of the Specific Plan. As described below, the process included several community workshops, meetings with property owners in the Plan Area and multiple meetings with the Planning Commission and City Council.

2. Community Meetings and Development of Alternatives

An all-day community charrette was held in November 2003 to explore community goals for the area and to create alternative approaches to development in the area. Working in small groups, community members explored ideas relating to residential character, parks and open space and mixed-use commercial development. Two alternative development concepts for the area resulted from this charrette.



Participants at the all-day charrette

In addition, two meetings were held with landowners in the area, including those wishing to move forward with specific development projects. Property owners discussed their goals and ideas for the Plan Area, resulting in the development of a third alternative development concept.

These three alternatives were presented at a public meeting in January 2004. Community members and stakeholders discussed the pros and cons of each alternative and their comments were synthesized into a report to the City Council and Planning Commission for consideration.

3. City Council Review and Development of a Preferred Alternative

At a joint meeting in February 2004, the Planning Commission and City Council considered all three alternatives. Over the course of two subsequent meetings, the City Council discussed various aspects of the three alternatives and then directed that a preferred alternative be created that included desired features from all three alternatives. The final preferred alternative comprises the basis of this Specific Plan and the Plan Concept presented and described in Chapter Four.

4. Plan Preparation

Based on the direction from the City Council, staff and consultants developed this Specific Plan, which includes detailed guidance for the development of the Plan Area.

5. Environmental Review

The environmental review materials required for adoption of the Specific Plan were completed concurrently with the preparation of the Plan. The environmental impact analysis is contained in a separate document, the Northwest Chico Specific Plan Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR). The DEIR examines the environmental impacts of the land uses and development proposed as part of the preferred alternative and includes recommended mitigation measures as necessary.

6. Adoption Process

A mandatory 45-day review period followed the publication of the Draft Specific Plan and its DEIR, during which time members of the public and interested agencies commented on both documents. The City then published a Final EIR, after which adoption hearings before the Planning Commission

and the City Council commenced. Members of the community also commented on the Plan and EIR at the public adoption hearings.

When the City Council adopted this Specific Plan, it also certified the Final EIR and approved a General Plan amendment to ensure consistency between the Specific Plan and the General Plan. In addition, the City Council approved an update to the City's Zoning Ordinance to ensure its consistency with the land use classifications specified in the Specific Plan and General Plan amendment. This Specific Plan incorporates changes approved by the City Council at the adoption hearing.

7. Next Steps

As a next step in the implementation of the Specific Plan, the City will ask the Butte County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo) to approve a City of Chico SOI amendment and begin annexation proceedings.

Chapter Nine of this Plan, contains more information about implementation steps and a conceptual financing plan.

C. Statutory Requirements of a Specific Plan

Under California Law (Government Code Section 65450 et seq.), cities and counties may complete specific plans to develop policies, programs and regulations to implement the jurisdiction's adopted General Plan. A specific plan frequently serves as a bridge between the General Plan and individual development master plans and planned unit developments, or other large development projects.

1. 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, 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 and regulations, and public works projects.

California law also 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.

2. Finding of Consistency with the General Plan

Although an amendment to the City's General Plan will be necessary to allow its implementation, the recommendations and objectives of the Northwest Chico Specific Plan are consistent with the broad goals of the City of Chico General Plan. In general, the policies of the General Plan call for accommodating new residential growth in well-designed neighborhoods that contain a mix of uses and housing types, and provide convenient access to neighborhood serving retail uses. In addition, new neighborhoods should have a well-defined mixed-use center, organized around publicly-oriented uses and open spaces. The recommendations contained in this Specific Plan further these goals.

D. Plan Contents

The Draft Specific Plan includes the following chapters:

- ◆ **Chapter One** is this introduction, which includes an overview of the planning area, a description of the planning process and next steps, and the statutory requirements of a specific plan.
- ◆ **Chapter Two** contains the Plan's vision and goals for the Plan Area.

- ◆ **Chapter Three** includes an overview of existing conditions in the planning area.
- ◆ **Chapter Four** contains an overview of the major components of the Specific Plan, such as the residential neighborhoods, new commercial areas, the open space system, and an overview of storm drainage infrastructure. An illustrative drawing of the overall plan concept is included in Chapter Four.
- ◆ **Chapter Five** contains a summary of the proposed circulation pattern, including specifications for new designs of major streets in the Plan Area, and pedestrian and bicycle improvements.
- ◆ **Chapter Six** maps new General Plan land use classifications in the area and describes the development intensity allowed by each designation.
- ◆ **Chapter Seven** contains a set of guiding principles for the design of new development, open space, and public improvements and infrastructure within the Plan Area.
- ◆ **Chapter Eight** describes the proposed infrastructure serving the Plan Area.
- ◆ **Chapter Nine** contains specific implementation strategies, including next steps, a conceptual financing plan, phasing of the Specific Plan and best management practices.
- ◆ **Chapter Ten** lists the preparers of this Specific Plan.



FIGURE 1-1

REGIONAL LOCATION

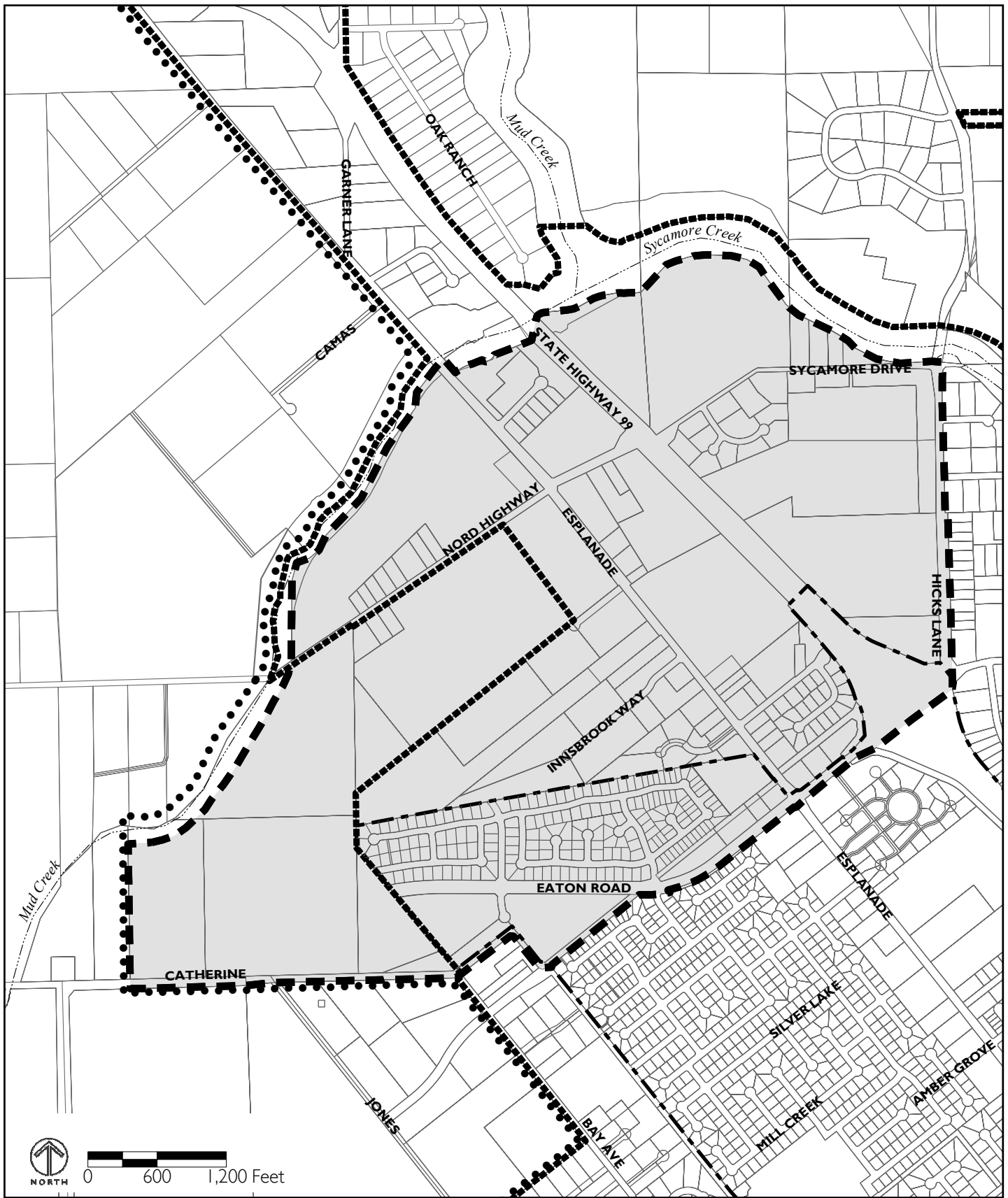


FIGURE 1-2

PLAN AREA

CITY OF CHICO
NORTHWEST CHICO SPECIFIC PLAN
FINAL
INTRODUCTION