



3. URBAN DESIGN & CHARACTER

Pacifica’s visual identity is shaped by dramatic coastlines, beaches, and ridges. With views of the Pacific Ocean to the west, Milagra Ridge to the east, and Mori Point and Pedro Point to the south, the Planning Area exemplifies this seaside topography. Its mix of uses, architectural styles, and streetscapes make its character unique from other neighborhoods. This chapter documents existing urban design patterns within the Planning Area, including existing scale, character of development, topographical features, significant views, and the public realm.

3.1 Building Form, Scale, and Architectural Character

Figure 3-1 shows three distinct “urban form areas” in the Planning Area. Area 1 consists of 14 rectangular blocks between Montecito Avenue and Paloma Avenue that range between 500 to 600 feet in length and 180 feet in width. In this area, each block is generally parceled out into smaller lots fit for single-family or attached homes, with the exception of the SeaPointe Apartment buildings and a few of the commercial and civic buildings throughout the Planning Area. Buildings on north-south streets are generally two to three stories and are generally commercial or mixed uses. East-west streets contain bungalow-style and a few multifamily residential buildings, mostly one story and some two stories.

Area 2, south of Montecito Avenue between Clarendon Road, contains more irregular blocks. The lot sizes and building form are similar to the first area, although the hilly topography along Hilton Way lends a unique character to some of the building lots. The southernmost part of the Planning Area extends past Clarendon Road and down Lakeside Avenue, ending at the Pacific Pines Apartments. This area has a mix of high-density apartment complexes, retail, and smaller single-family homes. The four-story Cypress Pointe apartment building is one of the tallest buildings in the Planning Area.

Area 3 lies across Highway 1 and contains the Eureka Square Shopping Center, high-density residential apartments, and a few smaller lots along Oceana Boulevard. Parcels in Area 3 are the largest in the Planning Area. The character of Eureka Square is typical of outdoor suburban shopping centers developed in the 60s and 70s, with ample surface parking and a variety of smaller single-story stores with offices at the second and third story of parts of the center. High-density apartment buildings ranging from three to four stories sit upon a bluff above Eureka Square.

A variety of different architectural styles and types add to the uniqueness and eclectic character of the Planning Area. Most buildings within the Planning Area were built between the 1950s and 1980s, with some new residential infill units built since 2015. Common material types include wooden-lap siding and shingles, stucco, and stone accents. The color palette of buildings found within the Planning Area are typically light and colorful, but some buildings use more neutral, earthy, and darker colors. The architectural style is a mixture of coastal cottages and single-family bungalows, with a mixture of mid-century modern and courtyard-facing multifamily. The numbered examples in Figure 3-2 show the varying architectural styles found in each urban form area that correspond to Figure 3-1.

Figure 3-1: Urban Form



Source: City of Pacifica, 2019; San Mateo County, 2019; Dyett & Bhatia, 2019.

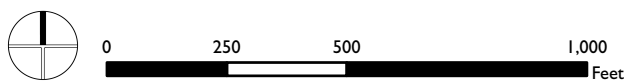


Figure 3-2 Architectural Character



1. This contemporary building at 1680 Francisco Blvd. mimics the style of the Little Brown Church. Retail and residential parking is behind the building.



2. The Little Brown Church is home to the Pacifica Coastside Museum. Its historical significance and design contribute to the West Sharp Park neighborhood.



3. Homes along Beach Blvd. have varied architectural styles and colors which enhance the character of the street.



4. A wooden-shingle single-family bungalow home along San Jose Ave.



5. At the corner of Palmetto and San Jose Aves., these three coastal cottages, which are now commercial storefronts, use bright colors and wooden shingle siding.



6. Built in 2017, these contemporary three-story townhomes on Montecito Ave. use earthy, neutral tones and have a modern style.



7. The mixed-use building at 2270 Palmetto Ave. is brightly colored, three stories tall, and provides parking behind the building. Patios and ground floor retail activate the street.







8. This apartment building at 2316 Palmetto Ave. faces an open courtyard used for parking. Although not directly located on the street, colorful art adds interest.



9. Eureka Square Shopping Center's large parking lots and small, connected stores are typical of auto-oriented strip malls. The brightly colored Horizons West

Figure 3-3: Views



-  Coastal View Corridors
-  Scenic Routes
-  Study Area Parcels
-  Sharp Park Specific Plan

Source: City of Pacifica, 2019; San Mateo County, 2019; Dyett & Bhatia, 2019.



3.2 Views

Coastal views are considered resources of public importance under the California Coastal Act. There are three designated coastal view corridors in the Planning Area, looking down Paloma Avenue, Salada Avenue, and Clarendon Road to the ocean, shown in Figure 3-3. The vantage point at the top of the bluff where the Horizons West Apartments are located offers stunning views of the ocean and the surrounding city, though it is not a protected view. Between existing buildings and trees, glimpses of the surrounding hillsides to the east can be found along Palmetto Avenue. East-west oriented streets provide views of both the ocean and hillsides. Views of other important community landmarks, like the Pacifica Beach Park, the Pacifica Municipal Pier, and the Sharp Park golf course exist along Beach Boulevard.

3.3 Street Design and Public Realm

The Specific Plan will focus on the quality of streets as public spaces and their role in creating an attractive, interconnected public realm that encourages walking and social activity. As the Planning Area is developed into the city's civic and cultural core, walkability will become an important community attribute. Overall, the Planning Area has well-connected streets and sidewalks, although Highway 1 is a significant barrier between West Sharp Park and East Sharp Park/Eureka Square. The recent streetscape improvements along Palmetto Avenue reflect the city's commitment to creating a public realm that promotes community life and supports community investment. However, additional streets in the Planning Area could be improved to support an enhanced public realm.

STREETSCAPE CONTEXT

This section identifies key streets and design features of the following six streets: Palmetto Avenue, Beach Boulevard, Francisco Boulevard, residential streets in East Sharp Park, Oceana Boulevard, and Talbot Avenue.

Palmetto Avenue

Palmetto Avenue is a north-south street that runs through the center of West Sharp Park up to the Fairmont West subarea and provides regular view corridors to the ocean. The stretch of Palmetto within the Planning Area is envisioned to be a vibrant, mixed use main street; however, inconsistencies in storefronts and active ground floor retail currently limit this vision. There are only four restaurants along Palmetto Avenue and they are primarily clustered on the eastern side of the street, between Salada and Carmel Avenues. As mentioned above, this portion of Palmetto Avenue went through significant improvements in 2018, including the addition of dedicated bike lanes, bulbouts, streetlamps, plantings, sidewalks, undergrounding utilities and new striping. Figure 3-4 shows Palmetto before and after these street improvements. While much has been done to improve the streetscape, the constrained public right-of-way has required balancing of tradeoffs. As such, street trees and public seating are limited. While most buildings on Palmetto Avenue front the street, a few empty lots could be an opportunity for infill mixed-use buildings that could bring additional commerce and enhance the street character.

Figure 3-4 Palmetto Avenue Before and After Improvements



2016 Before Improvements: Palmetto Ave and Salada Ave (Google Imagery)



2019 After Improvements: Palmetto Ave and Salada Ave (Google Imagery)

Beach Boulevard

Beach Boulevard is a north-south street that borders the western side of West Sharp Park and runs along the Pacific Ocean as a one-lane street with a southbound travel lane with primarily residential homes on the eastern side and the seawall/beach promenade on the west. Beach Boulevard connects important public amenities, such as the Pacifica Beach Park, the Coastal Trail, and the Pacifica Municipal Pier, and provides access to the coastline. A large amount of surface parking is provided on the southern-most section of Beach Boulevard, which provides access to the Pacifica State Beach and the Pacifica Municipal Pier. Even though Beach Boulevard is located along the water and could be a prime area for retail and tourism activities, it is primarily oriented towards housing and recreation at this time. As such, there are very few visitor-serving amenities along the street, the single example being the Chit Chat Café concessionaire at the Pacifica Municipal Pier.



View of Beach Boulevard looking south. Residential properties are located on the left side and the beach promenade is visible on the right. The Pacifica Municipal Pier can be seen in the distance.

Francisco Boulevard

Francisco Boulevard is a north-south street that borders the eastern side of West Sharp Park and runs along Highway 1. It is a two-lane road with one lane in each direction and parallel parking along the southbound lane. Buildings on Francisco Boulevard include churches, restaurants, apartment buildings, single-family homes, offices, public buildings, and a hotel. A few key public buildings are located along Francisco Boulevard, including the adjacent Pacifica City Hall, Planning Department, the North Coast County Water District facility, and the historically significant Pacifica Coastside Museum in the Little Brown Church. Francisco Boulevard was envisioned to be an active mixed-use corridor in the 2014 draft General Plan Update, but the current “feel” is skewed by residential and community-serving uses. The Planning Area’s only hotel is located at the corner of Montecito Avenue and Francisco Boulevard and does not feel as optimally oriented toward the Planning Area’s recreational and cultural amenities.



View looking northbound along Francisco Boulevard. This picture shows street crossings for the new pedestrian overpass as well as the Little Brown Church in the distance.

Residential Streets

Several east-west streets in the Planning Area act as connectors between Beach Boulevard, Palmetto Avenue, and Francisco Boulevard. With a few exceptions, many of these residential streets are one-way only and typically have on-street parking on both sides. A variety of housing types are found throughout, including townhomes, smaller apartment buildings, and a variety of single-family homes. These streets contain most of the Planning Area's single-family, one-story bungalow-style homes. These streets offer views to the Pacific Ocean and are occasionally framed by large trees, both of which are key features that enhance the street character. While the sidewalk connectivity is generally consistent, the quality and upkeep of the sidewalk could be improved in certain areas. One key feature that could help improve the street character is removing the utility poles and undergrounding the wires. The street "feel" fits its current residential uses, with openings oriented toward the street, and windows, doors, and porches that encourage an active street front. However, a few residential buildings are designed in the dingbat style architecture, which includes a blank garage wall or covered parking spaces that limit an active street feel.



View looking west down Santa Rosa Avenue. Common street elements include mature tall trees, double-sided street parking and sidewalks, utility poles and wires, and a variety of styles of single-family homes. Santa Rosa Avenue ends with a view of the Pacifica Municipal Pier.

Oceana Boulevard

Oceana Boulevard is a north-south street that has two lanes, one in each direction, and runs parallel to Francisco Boulevard across Highway 1. Oceana Boulevard acts as a connector to the East Sharp Park neighborhood and is home to a few key sites, including the historic Anderson's Store at Paloma Avenue and Oceana, the Oceana High School (outside of the Planning Area), and Eureka Square Shopping Center. There are a few townhomes and smaller commercial buildings located along the street as well. The pedestrian overpass that connects over to Francisco Boulevard and San Jose Avenue is located along Oceana Boulevard across from the Eureka Square Shopping Center. The auto-centric design of the shopping center and few stop signs with wide lanes make it easier for motorists to speed down the street, limiting pedestrian comfort. Although Eureka Square does have continuous sidewalks and some vegetation, large parking lots remove the store frontage along the street.



View looking south down Oceana Boulevard along Eureka Square Shopping Center. Street improvements such as the new overpass, crosswalk, signs, plantings, and bus shelter help improve the pedestrian experience.

Talbot Avenue

Talbot Avenue is a narrow, steep, two-way street located on the eastern-most edge of the Planning Area which sits above Eureka Square Shopping Center. On-street parking and sidewalks line both sides of the street. Talbot Avenue primarily provides access to the apartment buildings located upon a bluff and further up single-family homes that are outside of the Planning Area. The steep slope of the street makes it difficult to park and walk but provides panoramic views of the ocean and the rest of Pacifica. The street character largely reflects an auto-oriented design, with the street frontage primarily consisting of garages for the apartment buildings and on-street parking.



View looking west down Talbot Avenue. The steep slope of the street makes it difficult to park and walk, but it provides a panoramic view of the ocean. The Horizons West Apartment complex, shown in the middle of the picture, can be seen from throughout the Planning Area.

PUBLIC REALM

The public realm is space to which the general public has access. It includes physical features within the space itself and those that border and define it. Typically, this includes spaces that are public, such as streets, sidewalks, and plazas, as well as spaces that are private but publicly accessible, such as adjacent buildings and courtyards. In addition to roadways, the public realm includes:

- Sidewalks and pedestrian ways (discussed in Chapter 4, Access and Connectivity)
- Frontage buildings and parking areas
- Street trees and landscape
- Street furnishings and lighting

These elements of the existing public realm are discussed in detail below.

Frontage Buildings and Parking Areas

Frontage buildings can have a strong effect on streetscape character. They shape the street space by physically defining its boundaries and creating a sense of enclosure. Buildings with entrances oriented toward the sidewalk and uses with high levels of daily activity generally create a livelier and more attractive public realm that encourages walking and social activity.

In general, both residential and commercial buildings open towards the street which helps provide a comfortable pedestrian experience and promotes activity within the neighborhood.

Buildings in the Planning Area generally have good frontage along the street, with many shops and building entrances located directly along the sidewalk. Good frontage for single-family homes typically include having a porch or windows that face the street, compared to buildings with blank garages or walls that do not add visual interest and pedestrian scale. Businesses along Palmetto Avenue typically have storefronts that face the street; although some storefronts, such as those commercial buildings at Carmel Avenue and Palmetto Avenue, are set back from the sidewalk behind parking lots.

Street Trees and Landscape

Curbside street trees and landscaping like gardens or planters can provide shade, act as a buffer between pedestrians and roadways, and improve the aesthetics of the street. Incorporating green infrastructure techniques, such as bioswales or street tree rain gardens, can also help reduce stormwater runoff while providing other benefits to the character of the street.

In general, each parcel exhibits its own on-site landscaping, and most of the streetscape landscaping has been planted on private property without any discernable pattern. While this method can produce charming gardens with a variety styles and tree types, it is up to the property owner to grow and maintain it. While most residential properties have room for a front yard to grow plants, commercial properties along Palmetto Avenue do not have room for such landscaping. As such, there are very few trees planted along the street, but there are pockets of plants in pedestrian bulb-outs in corner locations.

Street Furnishings, Lighting, and Wayfinding

Street furnishings and lighting are instrumental to providing a safe and walkable street environment. Generally, there are a lack of street furnishings and lighting throughout the Planning Area. While Palmetto Avenue has new sidewalks and streetlights, other pedestrian amenities such as benches, garbage cans, and street trees are absent. In place of trees, additional elements such as awnings, overhangs, banners, and signs can provide a vertical element to the streetscape. Places that create opportunities to gather, such as plazas with benches, could be incorporated along Palmetto Avenue. The ocean promenade along Beach Boulevard and the Pacifica Municipal Pier include trash cans and benches which help improve the visitor experience. Most of the other streets in the Planning Area do not have furnishings or lighting along the street. Clear orientation and wayfinding are important components of the public realm to guide visitors and guests to important destinations. Currently, there is little wayfinding signage within the Planning Area.

PLANNING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

- The existing public realm and streetscape provides a solid foundation for future development in the Planning Area. Recent Palmetto Avenue improvements set the stage for what is envisioned to be a vibrant, mixed use main street. However, the constrained public right-of-way has resulted in limited space for street trees and significant landscaping. Additional street “furniture” such as benches, planters, and parklets that take the place of some parking spaces could improve the pedestrian experience. For other parts of the Planning Area, improvements to sidewalks and undergrounding utilities would also make the area more aesthetically pleasing.
- The Specific Plan will need to consider how to best balance the character and energy of north-south commercial corridors and additional mixed-use and multifamily development with the preservation of existing residential uses on east-west streets.
- To improve street frontage and increase walkability, the City should aim to minimize blank surfaces on building facades, surface parking lots, and vacant parcels along the street. For commercial properties, design guidelines could include placing parking behind buildings and orienting storefronts and entrances toward the street.
- The Sharp Park area has the potential to be more than the sum of its unique parts. A cohesive visual identity and branding scheme can help to establish the Planning Area as a destination and unite the disparate-feeling street functions in the Planning Area. Incorporating gateway features at major entry points can also enhance a sense of arrival and placemaking. Establishing architectural design standards, active ground floor guidelines that draw upon Pacifica’s artist and artisan community, and material palettes can also strengthen the visual identity of the neighborhood. Wayfinding and signage to major destination points, like the Pacifica Coastside Museum at the Little Brown Church, or the Municipal Pier, could increase pedestrian traffic and encourage people to stay and explore the area.