

## 2.0 PLAN AREA CONTEXT AND DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

This chapter provides an understanding of the geographic, physical, and economic context and concludes with a summary of the development opportunities. The chapter is organized into the following sections:

- 2.1 Regional Context
- 2.2 Local Context
- 2.3 Economic Conditions
- 2.4 Physical Conditions
- 2.5 Opportunities & Constraints

### 2.1 Regional Context

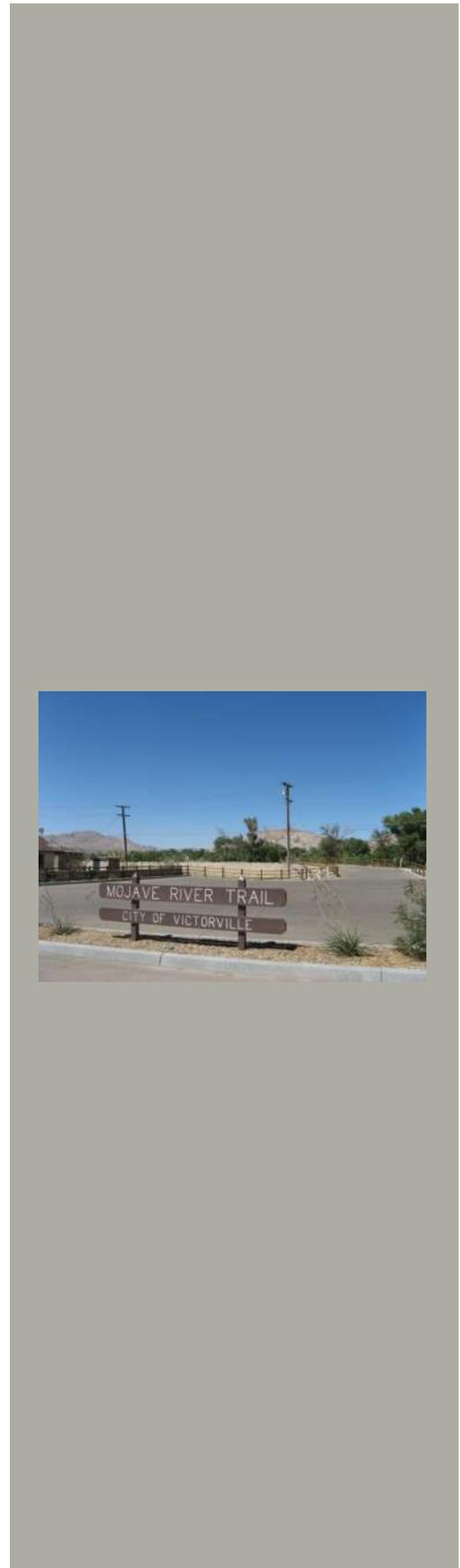
The City of Victorville is located in the Mojave Desert region of San Bernardino County. Victorville is located along the Interstate 15 freeway, approximately 90 miles northeast of Los Angeles and 30 miles north of San Bernardino. Adjacent communities include the Town of Apple Valley to the east, the City of Adelanto to the west, and the City of Hesperia to the south. See **Figure 2.1** for a regional map.

Victorville is a city rich in Route 66 heritage. Historic Route 66 passes through the center of the City and through the spine of the Old Town Specific Plan project area. Victorville is situated along the Mojave River which forms, in general, a natural eastern boundary for the Specific Plan project area. Victorville is within the High Desert climate zone, which experiences all four seasons with temperatures ranging from below freezing in the winter months to over 100 degrees in the summer.

The population of the City in 2016 was 123,510 persons, including group quarters.<sup>1</sup> This number represents a 6.6% percent increase in population since the 2010 census, when the City had a population of 115,903. Currently, the City is experiencing an annual growth rate of 0.5%. However, this growth rate is considerably slower than the previous decade. From 2000 to 2010, the City experienced a significant population boom, growing 81%, from 64,029 to 115,903.

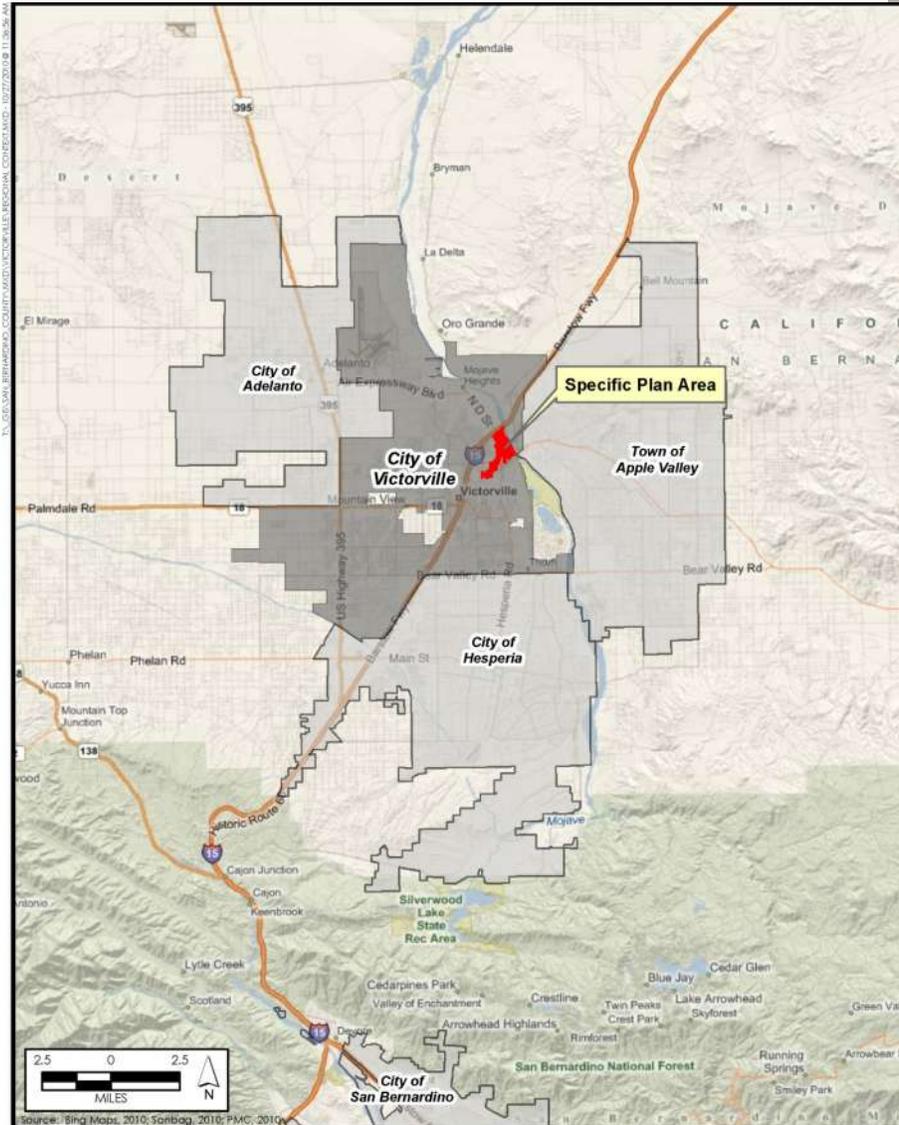
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<sup>1</sup> Source: CA Dept. of Finance, May 2016. [www.dof.ca.gov](http://www.dof.ca.gov).



This Specific Plan can play a critical role in how the future growth occurs in the historic core of the City.

**Figure 2.1**  
**Regional Context**



## 2.2 Local Context

The project area comprises approximately 428 acres and is located between Interstate 15 and the eastern boundary of the city. The historic Old Town is the core of the project area and also includes the area north of the railroad tracks and the 7th Street corridor gateway leading into Old Town. Please see **Figure 2.2** for a map showing the project area.

Historic Route 66 traverses the project area, leading northeast into town from Interstate 15 and then heading northwest along D Street. The Specific Plan area is organized in a grid network of blocks that orient themselves to 7<sup>th</sup> and D streets. Most blocks in the project area have mid-block alleyways.

Old Town is characterized by its small lots, compact form, and pedestrian scale. A number of historic buildings, including the Old Victor School, and cultural sites, such as the Route 66 Museum, contribute to the character of Old Town. At the intersection of D and 6<sup>th</sup> streets is the Victor Valley Transit Center, with a train stop along the Southwest Chief route connecting Los Angeles and Chicago.

The 7<sup>th</sup> Street corridor leading into the historic Old Town core is characterized by larger blocks, larger parcels, and buildings set back from the street with large surface parking lots adjacent to the sidewalk. It is an environment that prioritizes the car and is not as pleasant for walking as within the old Town core.

The area to the north of the railroad tracks is characterized by a lack of structure. Single-family homes and community uses are scattered amidst a large number of vacant lots. The lack of sidewalks and the numerous empty lots create an inconsistent pedestrian environment. Additionally, this area is difficult to access, a priority this Specific Plan will address.



## 2.3 Economic Conditions

A complete market analysis was conducted to guide future investment and redevelopment efforts in the Old Town area over the life of the Specific Plan. The full economic and market analysis report is documented in **Appendix B** of this Plan.

The market analysis identifies the depth of potential market support for possible land uses, such as housing, office, retail, and entertainment, and suggests where the greatest initial investment should be made and resources devoted. A summary of the economic conditions identified in the report is provided below.

### 2.3.1 Housing Market Conditions

The residential real estate market has changed dramatically in the Victor Valley as a result of the economic recession and the ongoing mortgage crisis, which has led to unprecedented numbers of foreclosures across California and the nation. Currently, there are signs that the housing market may have reached bottom and is beginning to make a slow recovery.

The residential real estate market is affected by a high degree of uncertainty, making residential development risky except in specific markets and for specific projects that guarantee a return on investment. Ultimately, new residential development in Old Town would likely need to be differentiated from the typical single-family developments constructed in the region in order to attract a more urban-oriented demographic. As such, a higher-density product in a townhome configuration may be best suited for Old Town, as it would offer a development type more suited for a historic downtown environment. Multi-family rental units or condominiums are other types of housing that could find a niche market in Old Town. Condos currently comprise less than 1 percent of the housing market in Victorville and could be successfully marketed as a unique offering in the region if they were incorporated into a mixed-use or transit-oriented development within the broader vision for Old Town.

### 2.3.2 Retail & Office Market Conditions

Victorville currently captures a significant share of the sales in the region, mostly due to the heavy concentration of big-box retail uses and numerous shopping centers located along Interstate 15. Victorville is generating sales on a per capita basis that significantly exceed both the county and state averages. Retail sales revenues indicate that Victorville is operating as a regional retail center.

In contrast to the city as a whole, which is characterized by more retail establishments than is typical throughout the state and county, Old Town currently experiences little retail sales potential. Old Town consists primarily of marginal commercial uses, exhibits high vacancy rates, and has experienced little new construction.

An analysis of the retail market extending to a distance equivalent to a 20-minute drive from Old Town illustrates that the entire region is capturing more than its fair share of expenditures in almost all categories. Those industries showing some sales leakage and potential sales opportunities at a regional level include electronic shopping and mail order, lawn and garden supply, specialty food stores, florists, vending machine operators, and sales of beer, wine, and liquor.

Revenue from retail sales has seen a steady decline in Victorville since 2007. There are some recent indications that sales declines may have bottomed out and are on the rebound in Victorville. While the overall retail market conditions are not favorable for Old Town Victorville, previous research cited some small-business owners expressing an interest in opening small offices or retail shops in the area. Given this interest and projected population growth through the near to mid term, it is possible that some small-scale (5,000 to 20,000 square feet), locally serving retail (e.g., personal services, niche retailers, and small restaurants) may be feasible in Old Town, particularly if incorporated into a mixed-use-type development. Creating a theme or thematic district to unify the various retail uses (e.g., Route 66 theme, Hispanic food stores, antique district) would further bolster business prospects in Old Town.

Little or no market currently exists for new commercial office development in Old Town Victorville. Nationally, the office market has been experiencing negative absorption, which has led to higher vacancy rates. In San Bernardino County, the office market is significantly weaker than the national averages. According to the Grubb & Ellis 2009 Second Quarter Office Trend Report, the metro office vacancy in San Bernardino County is 23.5 percent. Job losses and shrinking numbers of employees for many firms continue to result in weak demand for office space. However, there are some signs of recovery. Given these conditions, in the short term, any new office developments should be focused on the defined needs of specific businesses and have guaranteed leasing agreements to eliminate market risks.

### 2.3.3 Tourism Market Conditions

Tourism presents an important long-term opportunity for Old Town Victorville. Before tourism can play a significant part in revitalizing Old Town, the required infrastructure to support tourism in the area must be in place. Entertainment, retail, and cultural destinations in Old Town must first be established and effectively

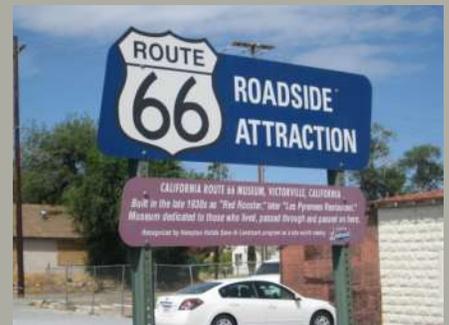
marketed to visitors. Local hotels would form an important part of the supporting tourism infrastructure.

The recent recession has had a negative impact on the national lodging industry. Locally, this trend is affecting the economic viability of many hotels. Based on current trends, the addition of lodging establishments to the Old Town area would likely not be feasible until after 2012 and would depend on key indicators in the travel and tourism industry and local market developments. City investment in expansion of lodging sites should occur as indicators of economic growth begin to rise. Combined with a vision to create a strong sense of place in Old Town and a strategy to develop heritage tourism, lodging facilities could play an important role in future development.

Given Old Town Victorville's convenient location along Interstate 15 and the traffic counts in the immediate vicinity, development of lodging and the resulting transient occupancy tax (TOT) revenues would support redevelopment for the area. Currently, the city's relatively low TOT rate could also give Old Town a competitive advantage over neighboring communities in terms of room rate pricing, though the market to draw visitors to Old Town must be created as part of an overall vision for the area.

Given the area's rich cultural history, historical buildings, destinations such as the Route 66 Museum and High Desert Center for the Arts, and planned recreational improvements along the Mojave River, development can also take advantage of a heritage tourism market. A strong historical theme would bring stronger character and identity to housing, retail, and recreational projects.

The market potential for Old Town Victorville is currently dependent on the economic recovery for the region. However, private enterprises and government agencies must continue to make strategic investments in the future. The future of Old Town will depend more on a clear vision and strategic planning for the area than on the identification of specific market opportunities that are currently not supported by the facts on the ground.



Economic development of existing establishments and the addition of interesting retail, entertainment, or cultural destinations in Old Town over the next three to five years will help attract the critical residential, housing, and visitor-serving development that is expected to recover after 2012. At that time, phasing of residential and office development would occur as market conditions allow.

## 2.4 Physical Conditions

### 2.4.1 Vehicular Circulation System

The project area is focused along the 7<sup>th</sup> Street and D Street corridors. Old Town is characterized by a strong grid network of blocks that orient themselves along these two central corridors. The Old Town area has a near complete network of gridded streets and mid-block alleyways, which offer great access throughout the project area. **Figure 2.3** shows the Old Town street network, and a full series of maps in **Appendix C** of this Plan illustrate a number of the existing circulation and parking conditions in the project area, including inventories of sidewalks, bicycle facilities, speed limits, public parking facilities, number of lanes, truck routes, and transit routes.

Old Town currently experiences high volumes of pass-through traffic, particularly along 7<sup>th</sup> and D streets, creating an unpleasant environment for pedestrians and motorists alike. In order to create a comfortable Old Town experience, traffic will need to be calmed and managed. One alternative this Plan proposes is a long term circulation solution that would divert much of the faster pass-through traffic from 7<sup>th</sup> Street to Hesperia Road. This diversion would allow 7<sup>th</sup> Street to function as a traditional downtown main street where pedestrian facilities are enhanced and traffic speeds reduced. Please see Section 7.1 Vehicular Network in Chapter 7 of this Specific Plan for details.

### 2.4.2 Parking

There is currently a lack of on-street parking along the major arterials in Old Town. See **Figure 2.4** for a map of on-street parking and public parking lots. On-street parking offers a number of benefits, including slowing traffic, providing a buffer between pedestrians and traffic, and maximizing development potential of Old Town lots by reducing requirements for off-street parking. This Plan will increase on-street parking, particularly along 7<sup>th</sup> Street where currently no parking is permitted at anytime.

Current parking facilities within the Old Town area consist of:

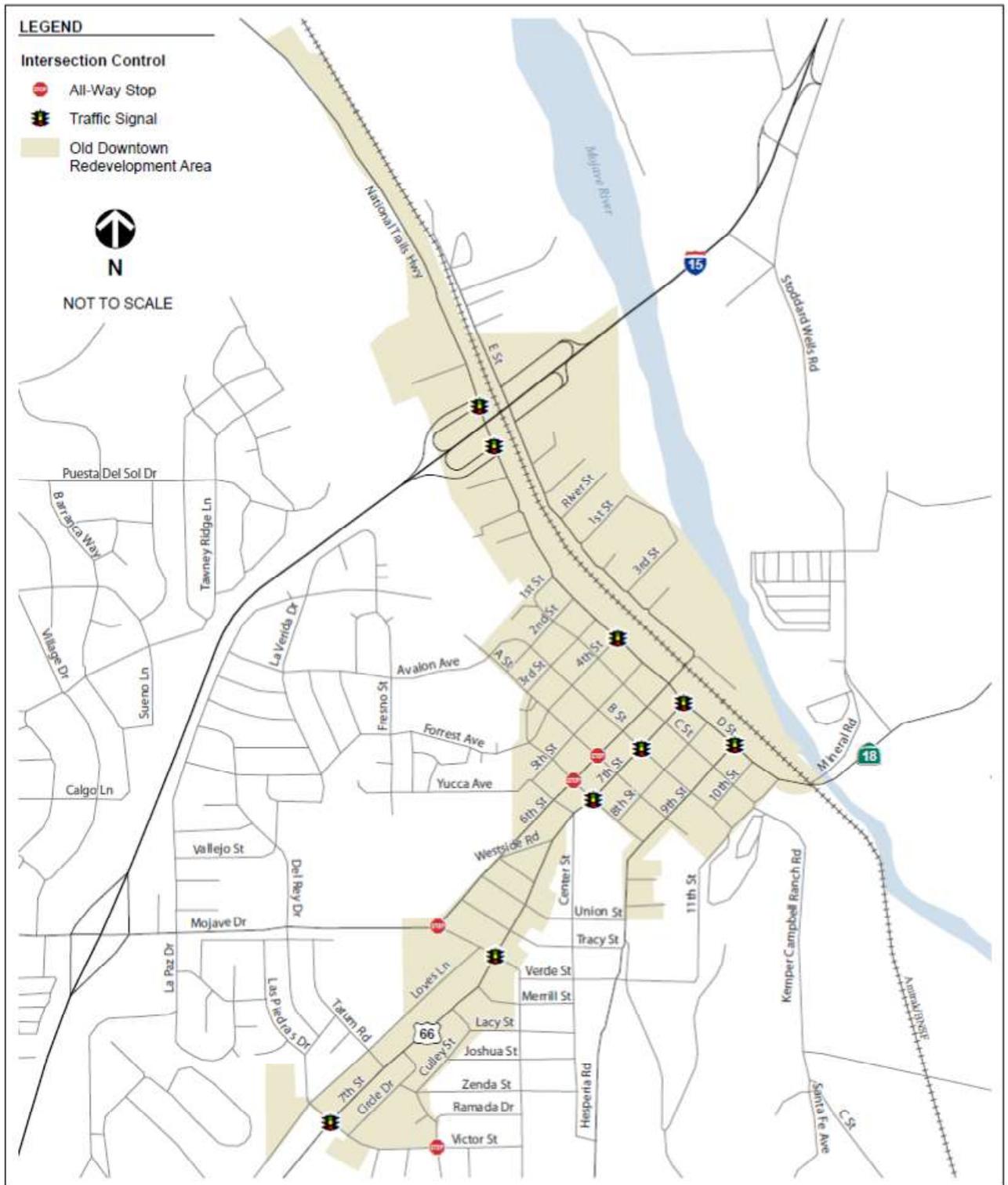
- Off-street parking in public lots: 35 total spaces
- On-street angled parking on A Street and C Street, between 6<sup>th</sup> Street and 8<sup>th</sup> Street: 60 total spaces

- On-street parallel parking on all other roadways except D Street, 7<sup>th</sup> Street, Hesperia Road/9<sup>th</sup> Street, and A Street between 2<sup>nd</sup> Street and 3<sup>rd</sup> Street: estimated to be approximately 2,000 spaces<sup>2</sup>
- Private parking lots

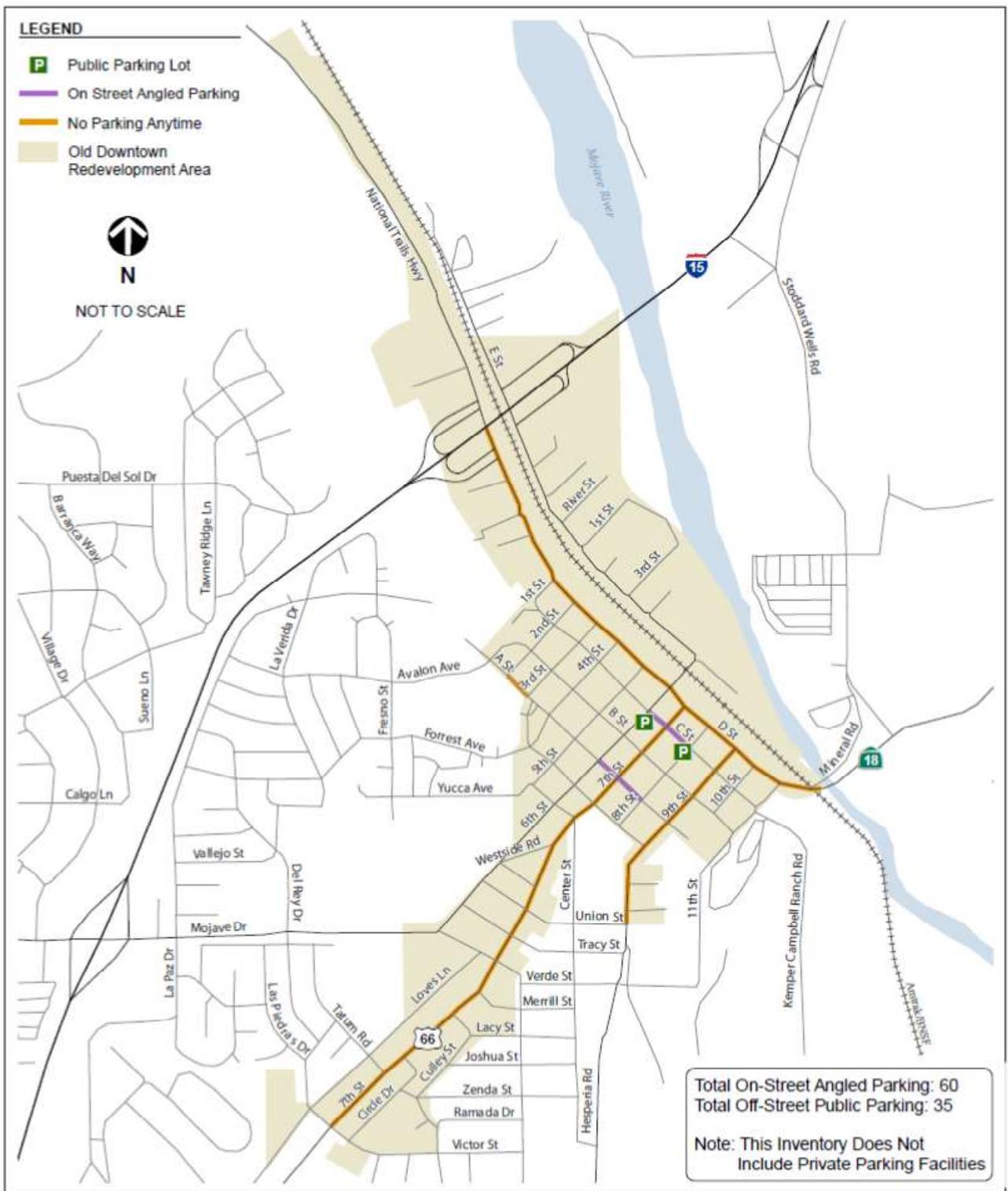
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<sup>2</sup> Estimated based on approximately 26,000 linear feet of roadway network times 2 (parking on both sides) divided by 25 feet per parked car.

**Figure 2.3  
 Street Network**



**Figure 2.4**  
**Parking Facilities**



### 2.4.3 Park-and-Ride Lot

The only park-and-ride lot in the study area is the Victor Valley Transportation Center, located on the corner of 6<sup>th</sup> Street and D Street. The transportation center is serviced by motorcoach, passenger rail, and public bus. This facility also contains ten bicycle storage units.

### 2.4.4 Pedestrian Facilities

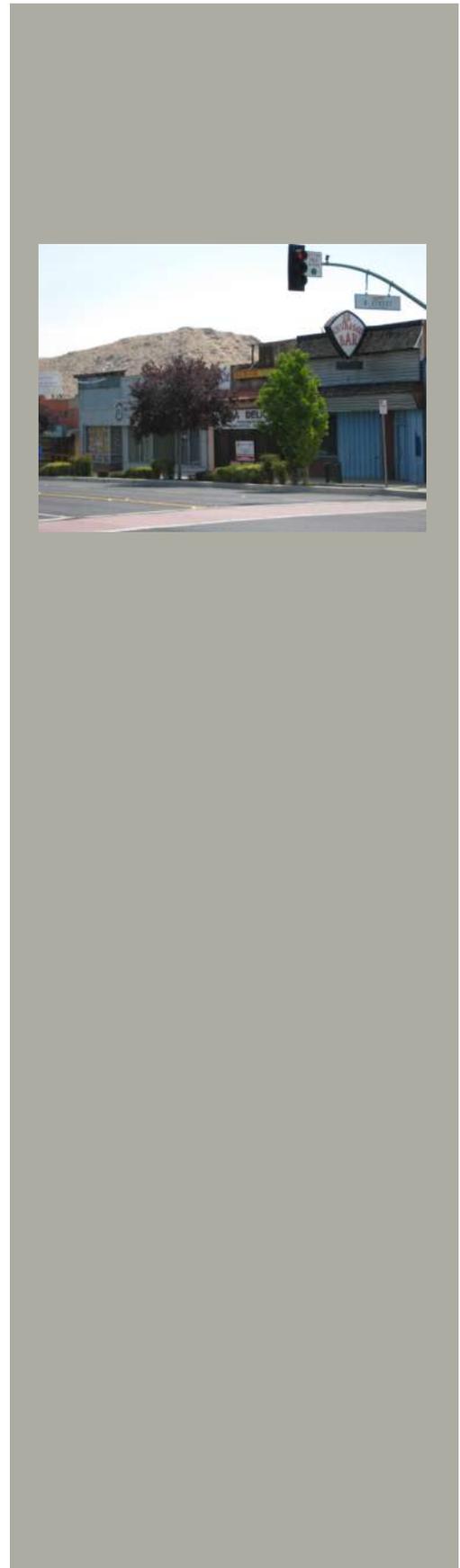
Pedestrian facilities are not consistently provided or maintained in Old Town and present a number of constraints.

Though continuous sidewalks are present along most arterial segments, there are a number of blocks either missing sidewalks or with sidewalks in poor condition that are in need of repairs. See **Figure 2.5** for an inventory of Old Town sidewalks. Improvements in these areas should be made to ensure smooth, continuous, and shaded sidewalks in order to fully realize Old Town as an inviting, safe, and comfortable place for pedestrians.

### 2.4.5 Bicycle Facilities

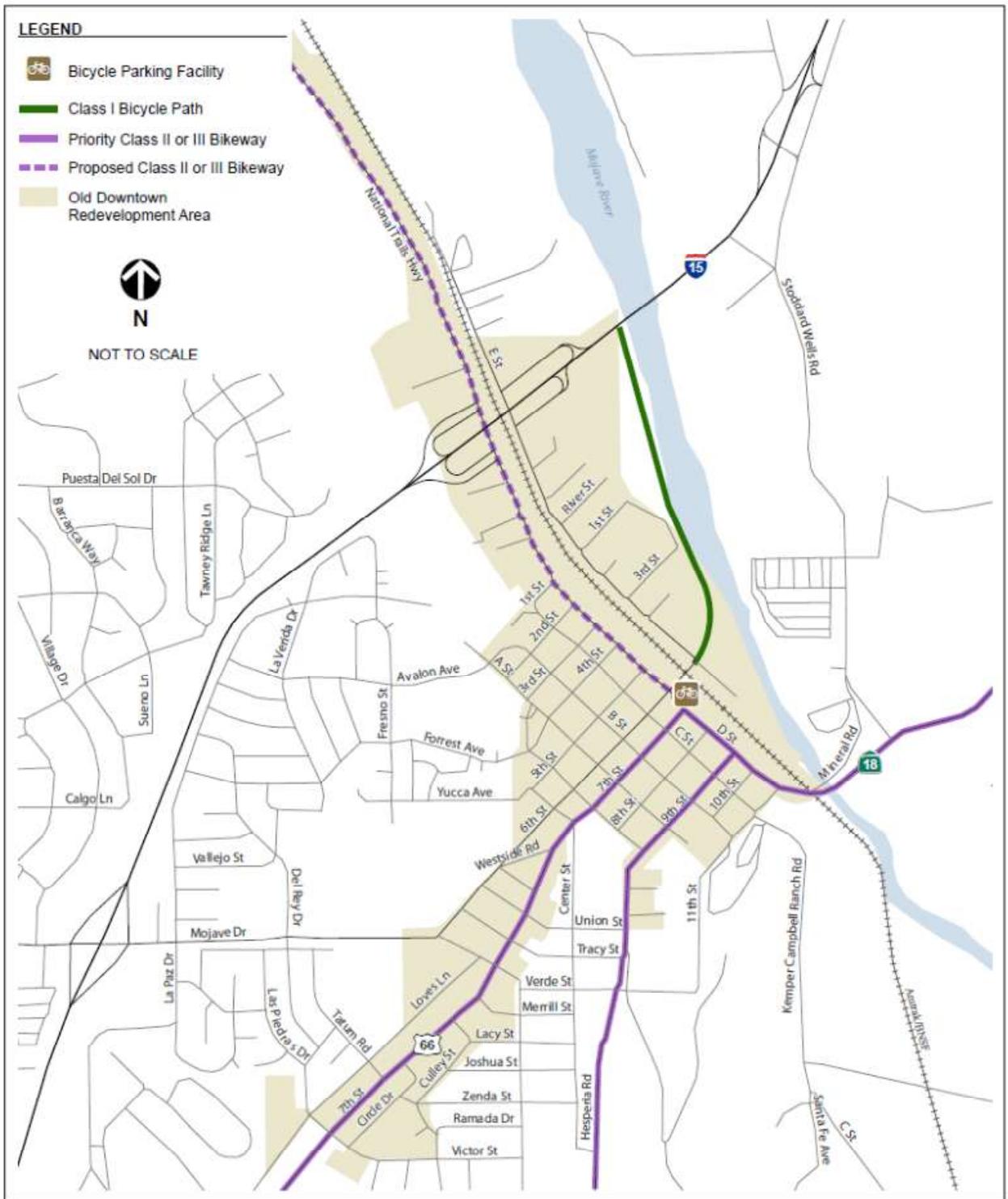
Bicycle facilities throughout the Old Town area support alternative modes of travel to the automobile. There is an existing Class I bicycle trail along the Mojave River at the north end of the study area. This area includes a bicycle parking facility at the train depot. Existing Class III bicycle routes (where vehicles and bicycles share the roadway) exist on 7<sup>th</sup> Street, Hesperia Road/9<sup>th</sup> Street, and D Street south of 7<sup>th</sup> Street. However, these routes do not provide bicycle signs, markings, and/or adequate shoulder width to accommodate bicycles, creating a difficult environment for cyclists. See **Figure 2.6** for a map of bicycle facilities. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the City has a Non-Motorized transportation Plan set in place, which will help develop alternative modes of transportation in Old Town.

A number of bus and train routes connect Old Town to other parts of the city and to important regional destinations. Victor Valley Transit Authority (VVTA) operates two fixed routes with a number of stops throughout Old Town. Amtrak operates the Southwest Chief passenger train, which connects Los Angeles to Chicago. The rail line runs between D and E streets, and the train stops at the Victor Valley Transit Center, located at the intersection of D and 6<sup>th</sup> streets. Amtrak also operates the California Thruway Motorcoach, which connects Victorville to a number of locations throughout California and Nevada, including Bakersfield, Palm Springs, and Las Vegas. See **Figure 2.7** for a map of Old Town transit facilities.





**Figure 2.6  
 Bicycle Facilities**



Source: SANBAG



## 2.4.6 Urban Form and Character

The urban form in Old Town is characterized by a network of gridded streets and alleyways, which establish a strong framework to support a pedestrian-friendly environment. The historic Old Town core comprises a number of small, walkable blocks and compact, dense development. The 7<sup>th</sup> Street corridor leading into the traditional Old Town core has larger blocks and less intense development that is oriented to cars rather than to pedestrians.

Historic Route 66 traverses the project area. A number of historic buildings along the route reflect the historical significance of Victorville and its unique architectural style. The desert terrain and close proximity to the Mojave River offer exciting urban design opportunities for creating a distinct sense of place for Old Town Victorville.

While Old Town possesses a number of amenities, a mix of uses, and a human-scale environment, it lacks a strong identity and sense of place that will draw people in. Safety and security concerns, together with a significant number of vacant and underutilized sites, unclean environment, and poor building conditions, contribute to an unattractive and uninviting district. However, the vacant and underutilized sites provide great opportunities for new catalytic development to revitalize Old Town and improve its image and character. The combination of historic Route 66, compact urban form, and unique desert terrain sets the stage for the possibility of a vital and vibrant Old Town.

## 2.4.7 Land Use

The project area contains a mix of land uses, including residential, retail, restaurant, office, industrial, institutional, and civic. This broad range of uses within close proximity to one another is essential for establishing a vital Old Town.

However, there are a prevalence of undesirable land uses in Old Town, such as car-oriented drive-throughs, auto sales and services, liquor stores, and surface parking lots, all of which will need to be controlled in order to maintain a safe and inviting pedestrian-oriented district.

## 2.4.8 Cultural and Recreational Facilities

Old Town Victorville hosts a number of cultural and recreational venues, including the Route 66 Museum, High Desert Center for the Arts, and Eva Dell Park. Old Town has the ability to build on these cultural resources to attract heritage tourism, lodging, and specialty retail and make Old Town a regional attraction.



### 2.4.9 Socioeconomics

A large and important barrier and a key to overcome for Old Town to become a successful and thriving downtown is the condition of the Old Town community as a whole. Due to several historic reasons, Old Town has been deteriorating for some time. This has evolved into several issues involving a depressed socioeconomic state. The homelessness, mental health issues, widespread drug and alcohol use, loitering and even prostitution have caused clear safety concerns in today's Old Town. These symptoms of the socioeconomic state of Old Town creates a perception which Old Town must prevail over. The Specific Plan addresses this issue and it is an immediate concern of the residents of Old Town as evident from the first Old Town Specific Plan workshop.

## 2.5 Opportunities & Constraints

### 2.5.1 Project Area Strengths & Opportunities



Town project area.

**Mix of Uses** – The mix of retail, industrial, institutional, office, civic, and residential land uses in the Old Town area will provide the framework for a vibrant Old Town environment.

**Transit Center** – The railroad station provides opportunities for more intense, mixed-use, transit-oriented development around the station.

**Historic Buildings** – These culturally significant resources contribute to the character and identity of Old Town Victorville.

**Storefront Windows along 7<sup>th</sup> Street** – Shops provide the opportunity to build upon the identity of 7<sup>th</sup> Street as “Main Street.”

**Route 66 Museum** – This cultural gem is a regional attractor to Old Town Victorville.

**Mojave River and the Mineral Bridge** – The Mojave River Walk will serve pedestrians and equestrians with a system of recreational trails. There is an opportunity to link the river trail to Old Town through improved signage and pedestrian links. Additionally, with the City owning the Mineral Bridge, an opportunity exists for a pedestrian connection across the Mojave River as well.

**Family-Oriented Amenities** – A number of schools and parks are located in and adjacent to the project area. These provide a number of opportunities to bring family-oriented businesses and activities into the Old Town.

**Existing Infrastructure** – The project area is currently served by a well-maintained system of streets, sidewalks, drainage, sewers, and utilities. The infrastructure will serve as the backbone for new Old Town projects.



**Pedestrian-Friendly Form** – The small-scale block pattern and compact

network of gridded streets and alleyways provide the framework for a pleasant and comfortable walking environment.

**Parcel Consolidation** – There are a number of opportunities in the project area where multiple adjacent parcels are under a single ownership. These sites have the potential to create larger development sites that can catalyze Old Town improvements. The following map, **Figure 2.8**, shows an analysis of parcels that have a high probability of being able to be consolidated. These parcels include City-owned parcels, vacant parcels, and groupings of adjacent parcels that are under single ownership.

**Disadvantaged Community** – Within the economic condition of Old Town lays a silver lining. There are several funding opportunities for areas like Old Town and in fact, several grants are only given to projects which include a disadvantaged community. Within Implementation Chapter 9, the Specific Plan describes these opportunities.

**Vacant Junior High School** – This large, vacant and very centralized property provides an excellent opportunity to create a synergistic development. The Specific Plan has identified this as a future community and regional recreation/cultural site.

**I-15 Mojave River Project** – Currently Caltrans is working on a large project to improve the circulation of the freeway between 'D' Street and Stoddard Wells Road. This includes an outer highway and bridge from 'E' Street to Stoddard Wells Road and improved on and off ramps at 'D' Street, 'E' Street and Stoddard Wells Road. Although this project is causing traffic congestion in the short term, the long term effects will benefit Old Town greatly.

### 2.5.2 Project Area Weaknesses & Constraints

**Existing Auto-Related Businesses** – Auto-oriented land uses dominate the 7<sup>th</sup> Street corridor streetscape leading into the historic Old Town. These land uses are in conflict with pedestrian activity and pedestrian safety, which are needed to support a traditional downtown environment.

**100-Year Floodplain** – The floodplain constrains new development opportunities along the northeastern edge of the project area.

**Traffic** – Regional cut-through traffic and vehicle speeds create barriers for pedestrian travel.



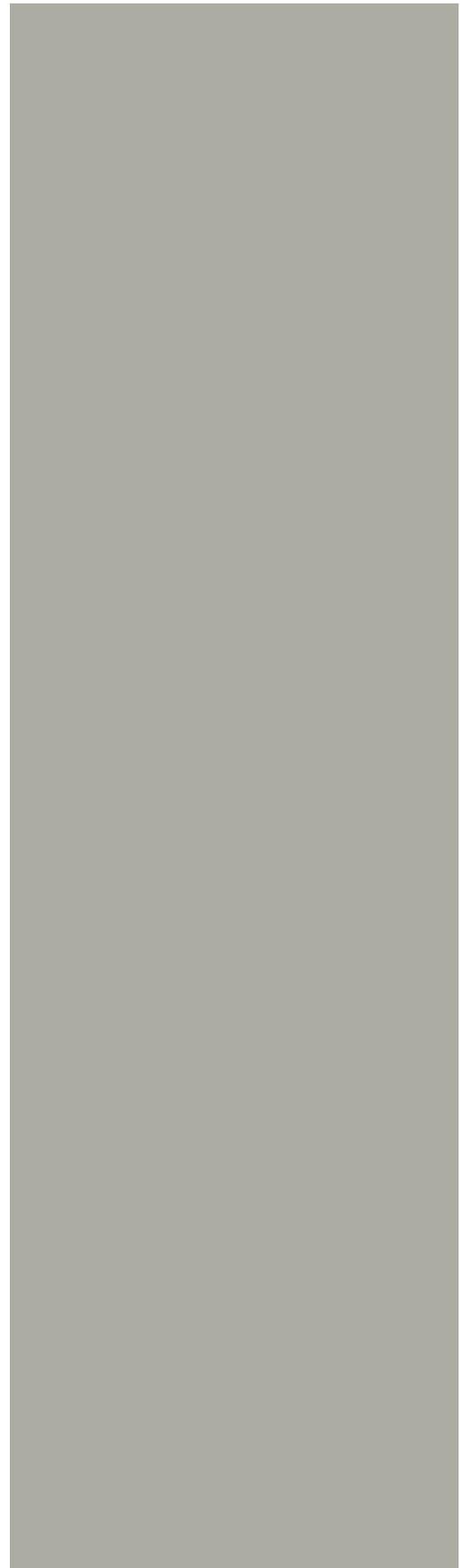
**Noise** – Railroad noise and Highway 18 traffic is a nuisance for local residents and workplaces.

**Negative Perception** – The perception of Old Town Victorville as unclean, unkempt, and unsafe will need to be transformed in order to attract new development. The Specific Plan addresses the current perception of Old Town and is one of the key issues for Old Town to overcome in order to succeed.

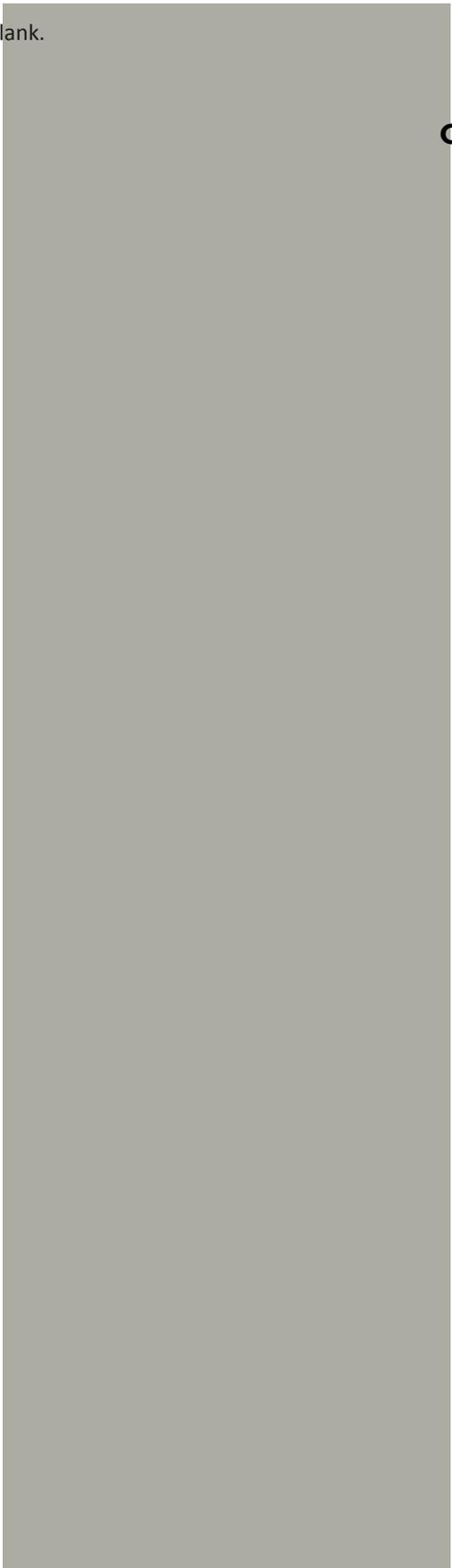
**Safety** – Crime, including property vandalism, personal safety, violence, drug and alcohol use, prostitution, gang activity, homelessness all must be addressed in the short term and long term. This Specific Plan will address the long term issue. Safety is a key to Old Town’s perception and success.

**Homelessness** – Homelessness has been a major issue for Old Town and the Mojave River area for some time. Although homelessness itself is not a crime and the community of Old Town is very engaged in helping the homeless, there must be a balance found in order for development to return to Old Town and it’s perception to change.

**Figure 2.9** Opportunities and Constraints Diagram summarizes the opportunities and constraints described above on a single map. The opportunity sites, identified by yellow stars, were selected based on their high potential for parcel consolidation and their optimal location. Sites along the primary corridors or other strategic locations, such as gateways into the project area, were selected for their potential to act as catalytic projects to encourage additional redevelopment in the project area.

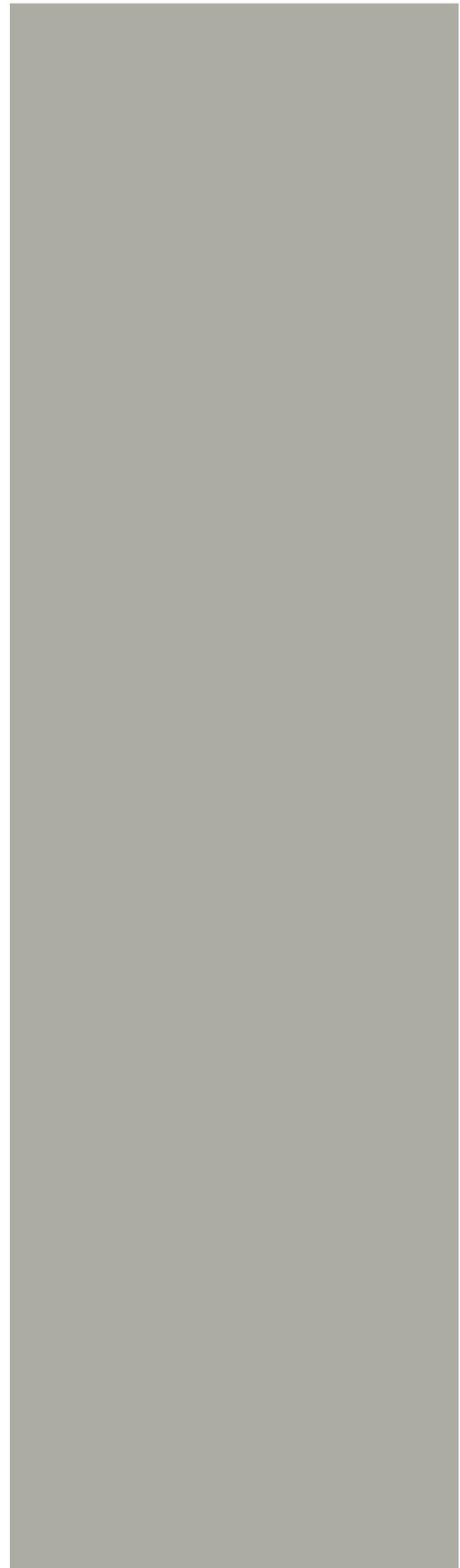


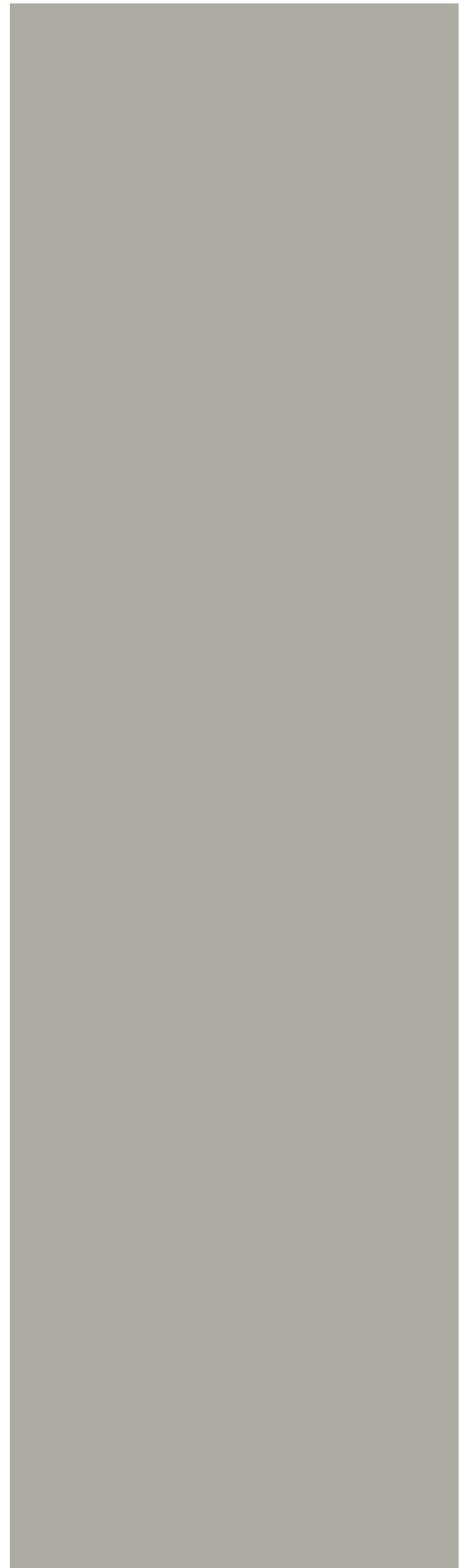
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