REPORT TO COUNCIL
City of Sacramento

915 I Street, Sacramento, CA 95814-2671
www. CityofSacramento.org

STAFF REPORT
May 30, 2006

Honorable Mayor and
Members of the City Council

Subject: Workshop on "Small Public Places" for Sacramento

Location/Council District: Citywide

Recommendation:

Staff is presenting an informational report to the City Council on "Small Public Places for Sacramento." Staff recommends that the City Council review the presented information and direct staff to report back within six months with: 1) a common vision and purpose for "Small Public Spaces" within the City's park and recreation system and 2) recommendations on policy changes that would be required to implement the vision and purpose as proposed.

Contact: Janet Baker, Park Development Manager, 808-8234

Presenters: J.P. Tindell, Advance Planning Manager, 808-1955

Department: Parks and Recreation

Division: Park Planning, Design and Development

Organization No: 4727

Summary:

The City Council has adopted "smart growth" principles in planning for the future growth of the City, increasing the urban character of the City through more dense development in the in-fill and new growth areas. In some cases, higher density and/or the lack of available land will necessitate smaller park and recreational facilities to meet current and future park acreage deficiency needs. Staff is presenting background information to the City Council on "Small Public Places" in order to provide a "full spectrum" of recreational facilities and experiences for these areas. With City Council direction, staff will develop a common vision and purpose and recommend policy changes necessary to implement the vision and purpose of future "Small Public Places."

Committee/Commission Action:

The Parks and Recreation Commission supported staff's recommendation at a special meeting on May 16, 2006.

Background Information:

The City Council has adopted "smart growth" principles in planning for the future growth of the City of Sacramento, increasing the urban character of the City through more dense development in the in-fill and new growth areas. This more dense development is focused mainly in the infill areas, such as the Central City planning area, within Transit Oriented Development (TOD) areas, and within some new growth areas, such as North Natomas and Delta Shores.

In some cases, higher density and/or the lack of available land will necessitate smaller park and recreational facilities to meet current and future park acreage deficiency needs. These smaller sites acknowledge the fact that larger expanses of land for parks are less available in certain areas, including in some older, built-out neighborhoods where significant new residential development will not be added and neighborhood and community park acreage deficiencies exist.

Staff is presenting an informational workshop to the City Council in order to develop:

- A common vision on the purpose and nature of "Small Public Places" as part of the City's parks and recreation system and
- Potential recommendations on policy or plan changes to implement the appropriate vision and purpose balance within the public park and recreation system of "Small Public Places."

Some definitions of various types of small public places are provided in Attachment 1, page 6. On May 8, 2006, staff held a public workshop on "Small Public Places," a summary of the comments and questions posed is included in the report as Attachment 2 (pages 7-10).

Staff's presentation (Attachment 3, pages 11-48) provides images illustrating what already exists in Sacramento. Currently, over 43% of the 164 total sites in the City's park system are less than 5 acres. The presentation also identifies what is contemplated and desirable in the implementation of the vision for and policy approach to these types of public facilities as the City works to provide a "Full Spectrum" of parks and recreation facilities including:

- Plazas/Small Public Places,
- Neighborhood Parks,
- Community Parks,

- Regional Parks and
- Parkways.

Financial Considerations:

Discussion to shape the proposed policy direction does not carry direct or immediate financial impacts to the City. In the longer term, however, it is likely that proportionally, where fewer acres of land are dedicated, more Quimby in-lieu fees would be collected from private development projects.

To provide new small parks in existing park deficient neighborhoods, it may be necessary for new funding sources to be identified, as the City's principal sources of funding for park acquisition and development are applied only to new development (the Quimby Act and Park Development Impact Fee programs).

Environmental Considerations:

This report is "not a project" as defined by Section 15378 of the California Environmental Quality Act Guidelines. The recommended action involves no physical construction and has no potential to cause a significant impact to the environment.

Policy Considerations:

Policy 13.5 of the City's *2005-2010 Parks and Recreation Master Plan* specifically acknowledges the legitimate role of smaller public parks in the City's parks and recreation system by stating:

> "At the sole discretion of the City, accept parkland dedications or acquire neighborhood park sites less than 5 acres in size that meet specialized neighborhood needs, considering the following circumstances:
>
> a. Scale and features are consistent with the character of urbanized areas of infill and mixed use development, and provide needed relief from the hardscape and intensity of denser land use patterns;
>
> b. Sites are visible and serve as positive gathering places for persons living, working or visiting nearby;
>
> c. Larger land areas are not available or desirable;
>
> d. In general, a City adopted Community/Specific Plan identifies such sites to address future growth and are integral to the nature of planned development. Exceptions may be made at the sole discretion of the City;

e. Where feasible, the City may require development and maintenance of these smaller sites to be provided by private interests in accordance with City standards, ensuring they are continuously open to the public."

One of the critical issues facing the City is decreasing land supply and increasing population. As the City continues to develop, there are fewer acres of land available to be dedicated for parks, limiting the City's ability to meet its Service Level Goal of 5.0 acres per 1,000 residents of neighborhood and community serving park land. Staff would instead elect to have higher density or more urban projects provide 2.5 acres per 1000 residents on the project side which could be provided from multiple sites within the project.

The City will continue to make every effort to meet the current service level goal of 5 acres per 1,000 residents and seek land dedication to the maximum extent possible in accordance with its Quimby Ordinance (which is first a land dedication tool). With more dense projects, however, this may not be viable option on sites of smaller infill or higher density projects, or in older neighborhoods where park acreage deficiencies exist and new residential development will not be added.

To the extent that a greater proportion of fees are collected in lieu of land dedications associated with new private development, there will be a shift to a greater emphasis on providing new and improved amenities off site and within existing parks and on school sites, or on other alternative approaches such as acquiring and improving land along and improving public access to the Rivers in the Central City.

These important policy issues should be addressed as goals and policies in the City's General Plan Update, and by continuing to provide for parks and recreation facilities as Sacramento's development density intensifies by collecting fees from private development.

Providing Parks and Recreation facilities is consistent with the City's strategic plan to enhance liveability in Sacramento's neighborhoods by expanding park facilities throughout the City.

Emerging Small Business Development (ESBD):

Not applicable.

Respectfully Submitted by:

ROBERT G. OVERSTREET II
Director of Parks and Recreation

Recommendation Approved:

for RAY KERRIDGE
City Manager

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Attachment 1 – Definitions of Terms

"Small Public Places" can be either privately or publicly owned and can include:

1. Streetscape or landscape areas: For purposes of beautification or visual relief; these areas would not, however, receive credit for meeting parkland dedication (Quimby) requirements.

2. Town/Civic Squares/Commons: Center of community; European inspired.

3. Greens: Shared green spaces tucked away on inside of residential blocks; collectively owned and managed by neighbors whose properties enclose the green.

4. Parks: Where public use is possible and desirable (places people go to or go through); publicly owned gathering places for recreational pursuits.

Attachment 2 – Summary of Public Comments, 5/8/06 Public Workshop

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENTS
"Small Public Places for Sacramento: Public Workshop"
May 8, 2006

Your favorite "small public places" and why

1. Cambridge, MA: stage for music, small shops around, street musicians

2. Philadelphia, PA: pocket park with playground, statue, able to walk to from town homes without going on street, rubberized surface

3. Sacramento
   Capitol Park: mini-spots within the larger site
   Portions of K Street Mall, Sacramento
   - 13th to 10th is a heavily used section where outdoor and eating facilities allow for small gatherings for business/individuals
   - St. Rose of Lima Park

   North Laguna Creek Park's re-created nature area; Bannon Creek Parkway with the old barn (non-urban in nature)
   Inner cloister/garden area, Westminster Church, 12th & N
   Rose Garden, McKinley Park
   Park and playground on Folsom Blvd @ East Lawn Cemetery
   Southside Park
   Tower Café: public seating and fountain outside of outdoor dining area

4. Patriots Square, Phoenix, AZ

5. The Plaza, Sonoma, CA

6. Nice, France: integrate public travel/lightrail routes with greenscape not hardscape (green between the rail lines)

7. Community gardens

8. Melbourne, Australia

9. San Francisco:
   - Washington Square, San Francisco ("ringed" by transit)
   - Duboce Park

10. Chicago: Navy Pier

11. Pocket Park in San Diego's Gaslight District

12. Nature areas with native plants; community gardens open as public park too

13. Residents "adopt" care of pocket park, including naming them

14. Oakland, CA: Rose Garden

Design, size, or location ideas

1. Using alleyways as public spaces, like in San Francisco and Seattle (Post Alley)

2. Look at what the City has created successfully and build on that, such as McKinley and Fremont Parks

3. We need to figure out which parks have good citizen "ownership", how it works and how to replicate it throughout the City, including the establishment of a "Friends of Parks" organization to advocate and provide support to City efforts; make use of Parks and Recreation Dept. Volunteer Coordinator to support this; Oki Park is an example of "adopt a park" community involvement

4. Areas to sit, rest, get a drink along pedestrian/bike routes

5. Food service, retail that's open after 5 pm

6. Provide good walkways/bikeways/public transit to get from high rise projects (with no yards) to nearest public greenspace

7. Make sure there's good public transit access to all such places

8. Farmers' Markets

9. Small game space like volleyball, concrete checkers tables, public art, water features, native plants, good lighting, playgrounds

10. Central City, Sacramento: Alhambra Triangle and Newton Booth neighborhoods are ideal for this concept (squares and fountains)

11. Guanajuato, Mexico: central "jardin" or garden/park, tiled walkways surrounding canopy of trees, fountains, gazebo, benches, bands strolling; restaurants, cafes, bookstores and other shops around the perimeter; vibrant City for walkers

12. Take a city block, put a few commercial enterprises (cafes, etc.) up against the street, and place the park inside or wrapping around the businesses; visible to auto traffic but also partly protected

13. From landscaping strip or planter up to city block size

14. Off street

15. Quality more important than quantity

16. Interesting and varied textures and colors

17. Make seating interesting and comfortable

18. Engage the community to keep these places safe, clean and active

19. More water features

20. Especially by the River

21. Palm trees

22. Covered picnic tables and grills not required

What won't work?

1. We are no longer a "modest" City; we are becoming a true downtown, urban area and we need a different mindset. We need informal, interactive areas/facilities where people can congregate and be *part of* the "urban scene".

2. Few places to sit or rest to support walkability

3. Don't have too much cement (hard structure)

4. Don't need to "program" all these spaces; they can be provided for unorganized use

5. Large, open places without tree coverage/shade

6. Vacant buildings adjacent to public places

7. Lack of imagination or flexibility

Other comments/questions

1. Where are we with meeting the park acreage service level goals in the Central City (acres/residents)?
   Answer: *As of 12/04 (when City 2005-2010 Parks and Recreation Master Plan was adopted), Central City Planning was at 4.3 acres/1,000, taking into consideration portions of public school sites and State park lands. There will clearly be a greater deficiency if significant new residential populations are added to Downtown (e.g. in high rises), unless the City proactively acquires additional lands for parks/recreation facilities.*

2. How much acreage is needed for a baseball or soccer field?
   Answer: *Baseball: 3-4 acres (like Roosevelt Park); Regulation Soccer: 2-3 acres. Organized youth sports programs need complexes of fields, however; these can include 4-6 fields together.*

3. With the aging population, will there be more of a demand for smaller parks? Answer: *It's not an either/or situation. The City wants to provide a "full spectrum" of opportunities, facilities and types of experiences.*

4. Has the Parks and Recreation Department pre-selected the types of activities that will be developed in its parks?
   Answer: *We have defined the types of amenities usually included in our various types of parks. In planning for individual site development, however, public input plays a strong role in determining what amenities will be included.*

5. Funding: where does it come from for neighborhood parks?
   Answer: *The City's Quimby Ordinance is a land dedication/in lieu program for new development to provide parks; the Park Development Impact Fee requires payment of fees to help pay for parks as new development comes in. The Department also gets funding from the Redevelopment Agency, and seeks and is successful to obtain grants (such as CDBG) and donations from community fundraising efforts.*

6. Do you have pre-selected areas that will get these smaller parks, excluding some parts of town?
   Answer: *The City is not predisposed to certain sites or neighborhoods; rather, there are anticipated opportunities particularly in higher density and infill target areas (such as in Downtown) where these smaller sized parks will be likely. An implementation plan for smaller spaces can cover all parts of the City.*

7. Have you considered getting tax delinquent properties? Use these to create small gathering places within neighborhoods. Consider acquiring vacant or underutilized properties.

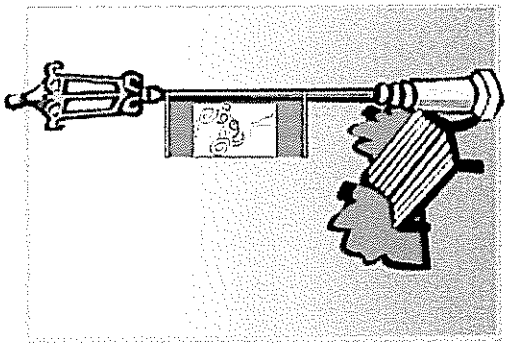
8. Has the infill acreage decrease being proposed (2.5 acres/1,000 residents of neighborhood park land) already been implemented?
   Answer: *The City is not suggesting that the goal of 5.0 acres/1,000 be reduced to 2.5 acres/1,000; rather that the goal for infill projects be to provide 2.5 acres/1,000 on site, and additional parkland or improvements be provided off site with the in lieu and Park Development Fees collected.*

9. Sutter's Landing Skatepark is built on a landfill ~ "I think we can do better for Sacramento's youth." *(Note: Sutter's Landing is a large Regional Park)*

10. Suggestion made that citizens can work with Planning Commission on supporting approval of parcels in development projects dedicated as landscape/green areas and maintained privately (HOAs).
    (Note: The City does have a formal means to encourage the provision of private recreation facilities under the Quimby Ordinance, whereby private development receives credits towards their land dedication/in lieu fee requirements to provide these types of facilities)

Announcement: May 18th meeting of Urban Design Alliance (UDA) to talk more about "Small Public Places" for Sacramento. For more information: www.uda-sacramento.org

Attachment 3 – PowerPoint Presentation to Council

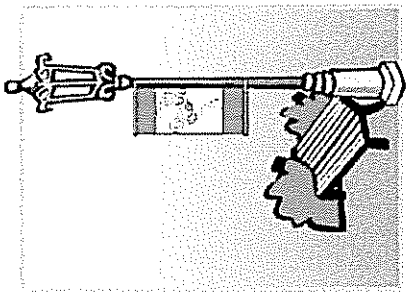


Small Public Places for Sacramento

City Council Workshop

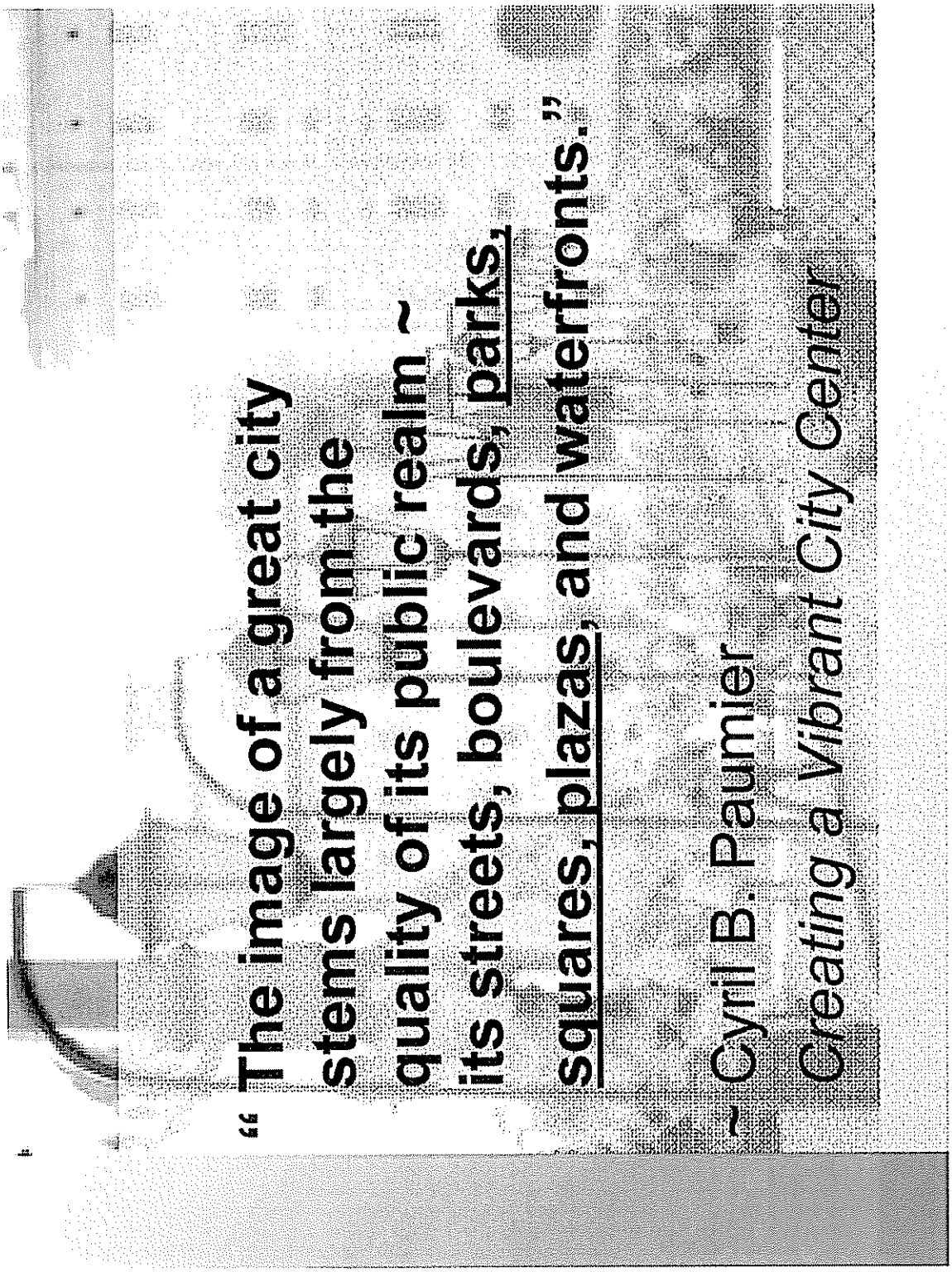
Parks & Recreation Department

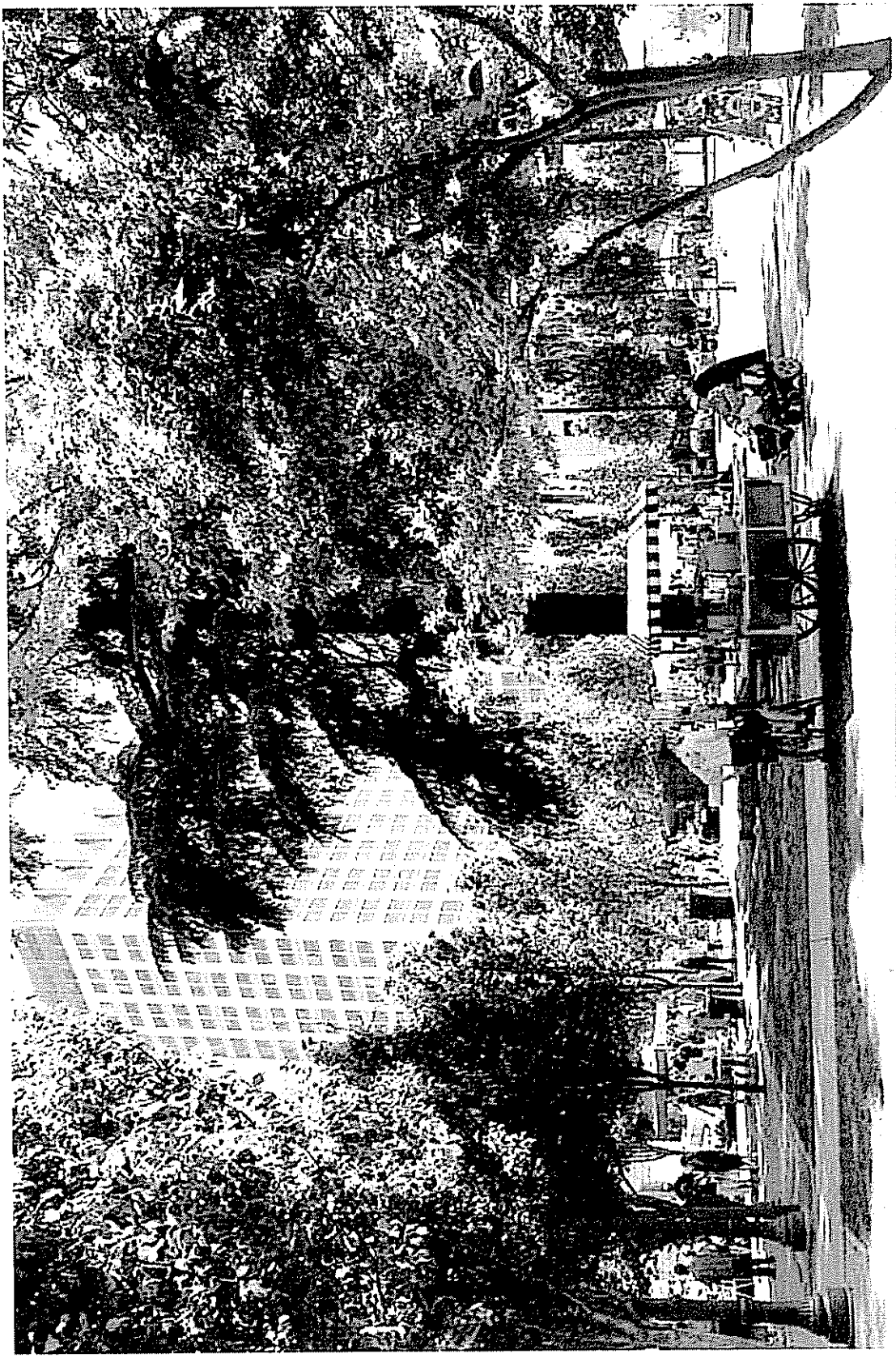
May 30, 2006



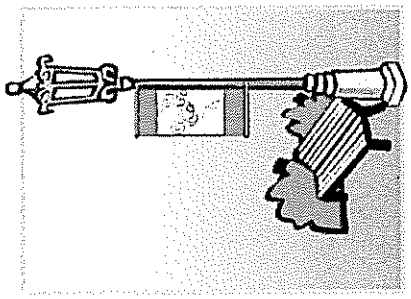
What is Sacramento Becoming?

- "Growing up" into "Big City"
- Continuing growth
- Intensified urban environments (like Downtown), including high rises


" The image of a great city
stems largely from the
quality of its public realm ~
its streets, boulevards, parks,
squares, plazas, and waterfronts. "
~ Cyril B. Paumier
Creating a Vibrant City Center



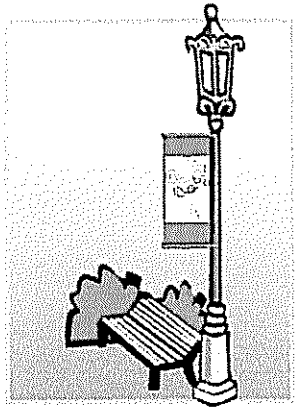
Cesar Chavez Plaza ~ Downtown Sacramento



Workshop Purpose

- Common vision on purpose and nature of small public places
- High density areas
- Park deficient neighborhoods
- High traffic areas
- Guidance for potential policy, plan changes; implementation plans

"Small Public Places"

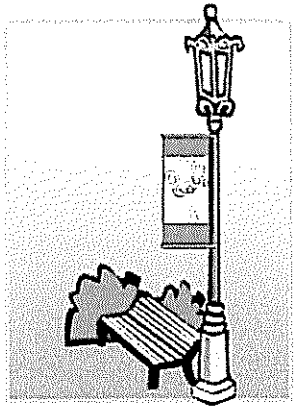


- Streetscape or landscape areas
- Town civic squares/commons
- Greens
- **Parks**: "urban plazas"/"mini-parks"

Small urban parks provide a way to serve growing residential populations in existing urban areas.

Pioneer Courthouse Square ~ Portland, Oregon

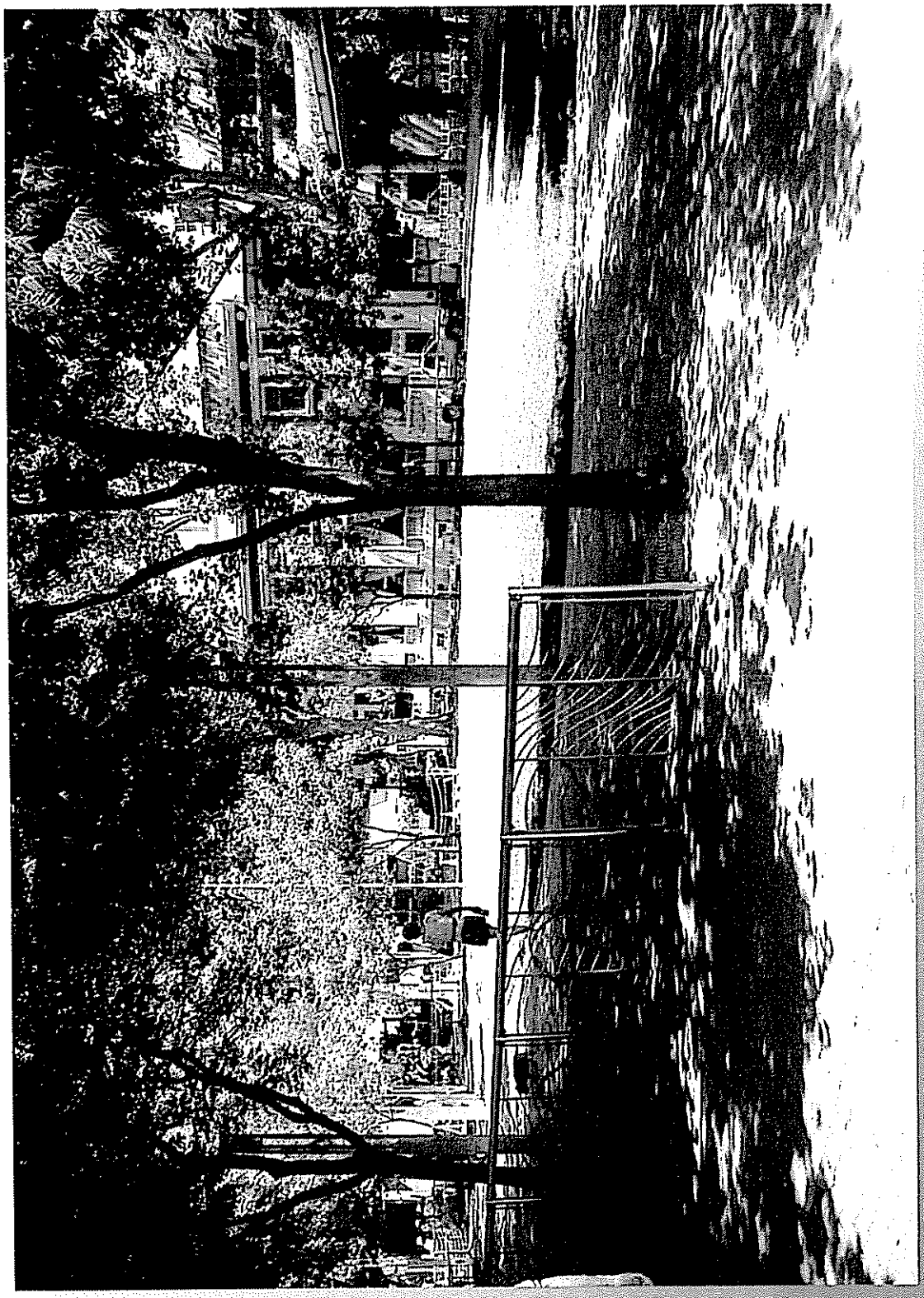
Sacramento Examples



T Street Landscape Median

Public Squares/Plazas/Mini-Parks

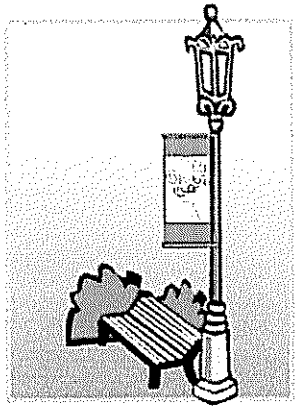
- Chavez Plaza (downtown)
- St. Rose of Lima Park (downtown)
- Park Plaza (South Natomas)
- Dixieanne Park + Tot Lot (North Sacramento)



St. Rose of Lima Park ~ Downtown Sacramento

Current City Policy

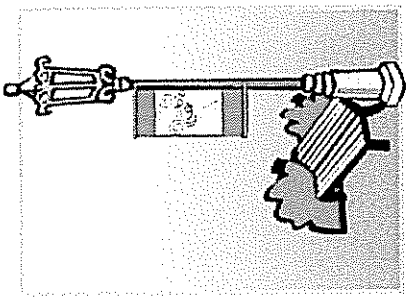
Provides for balance in the parks & recreation system



Parks & Recreation Master Plan
(Part of General Plan)

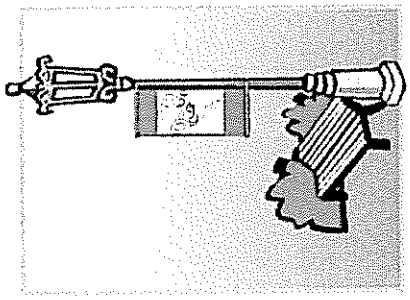
Policy 13.1: 5.0 acres/1,000 residents service level goal for neighborhood/community parks

- 2.5 acres: Neighborhood
- 2.5 acres: Community



Policy 13.5: Implement neighborhood serving sites smaller than 5 acres at discretion of City, and when larger areas not available or desirable

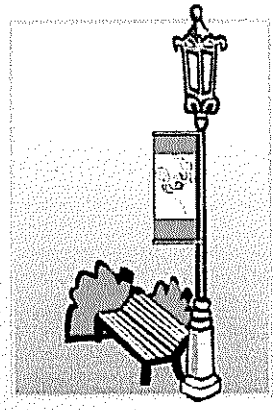
Portsmouth Square ~ San Francisco, California

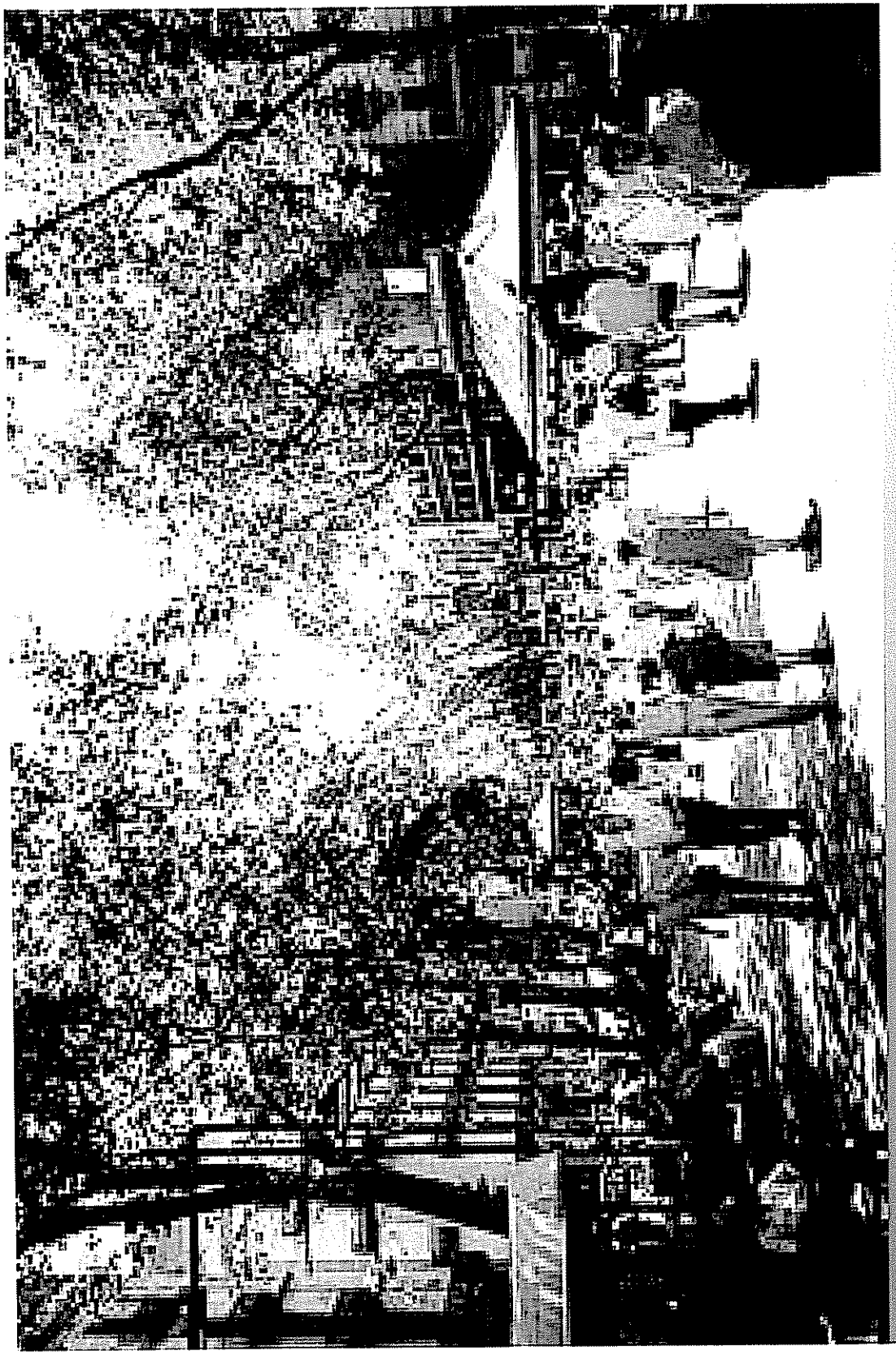


City Goals

- Livability
- Walkability
- Compact development ("Smart Growth")
- High density
- Unique urban character/definition
- Efficient facilities operations/maintenance
- Public safety

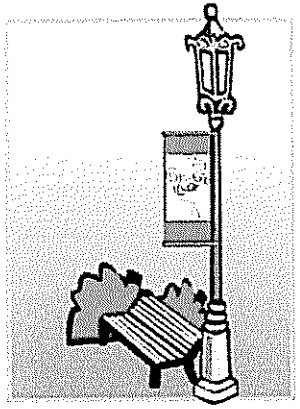
- Destinations
- Spectrum of recreation & outdoor experiences
- Balance within parks and recreation system
- Support active lifestyles, fitness
- Shorter block street grids
- Good public access
- "World class" city



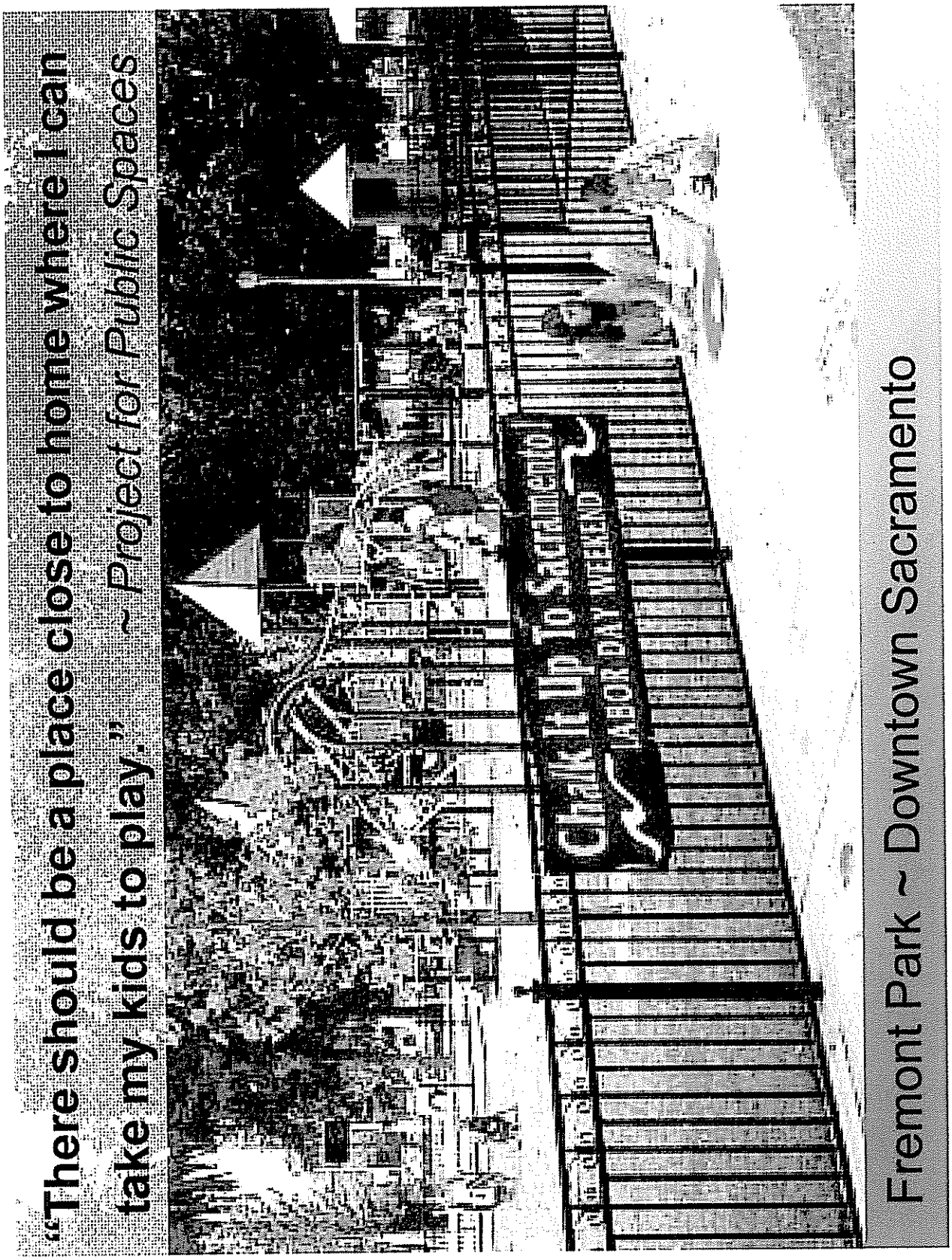


La Rambla ~ Barcelona, Spain

What We've Done So Far

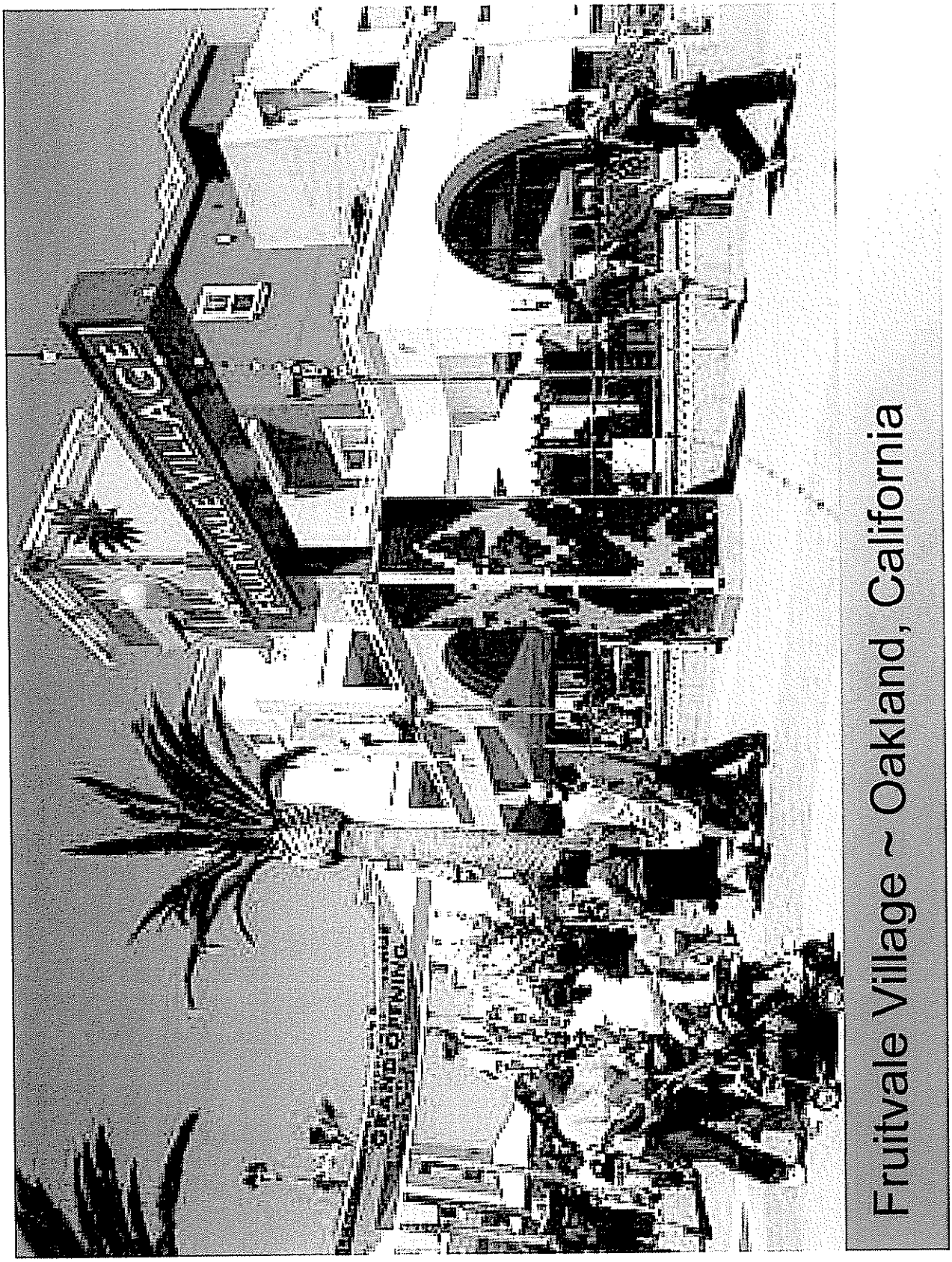


- Central City: Sutter Land Grant Parks
- 43% of total (164) sites in City parks and recreation system are less than 5 acres in size


"There should be a place close to home where I can take my kids to play."
~ Project for Public Spaces
Fremont Park ~ Downtown Sacramento

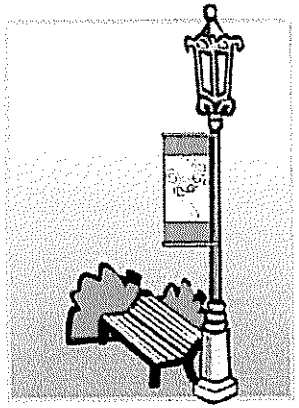
Opportunity Areas

- Areas with High Density Cores (Village/Town/Centers): North Natomas, Greenbriar
- Central City (Railyards, Docks), other infill target areas
- Transit Oriented Development (TOD) around light rail stations
- Park deficient neighborhoods with no large undeveloped parcels

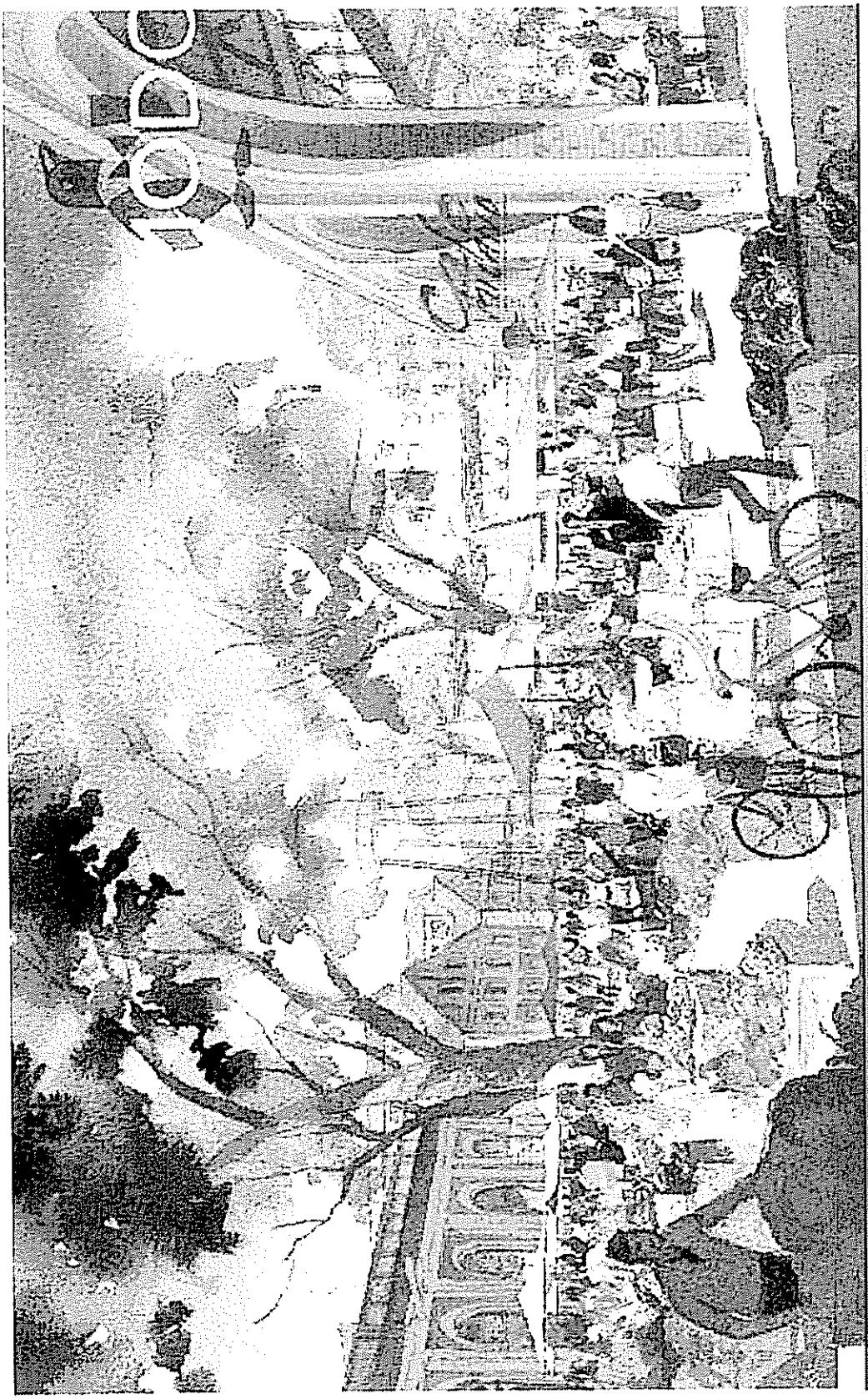


Fruitvale Village ~ Oakland, California

Criteria for Situational Application

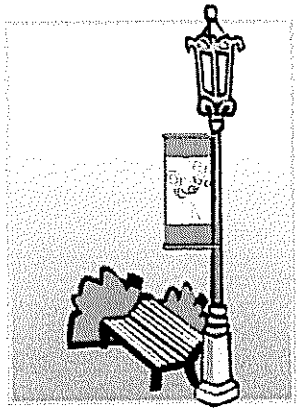


- Smaller development project size
- Nature of development (density; urban)
- Existing deficiencies in the area
- Offsite land acquisition or improvements (other parks, school sites)
- Create unique spaces in high density / high trafficked areas
- Funding can be provided

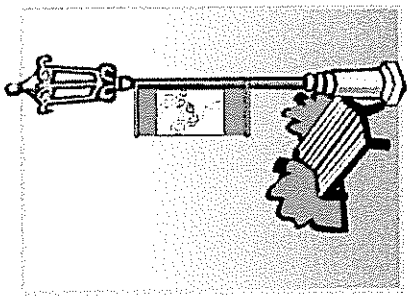


Central District Plaza Concept
Railyards, Downtown Sacramento

Issues



- Can't provide certain opportunities
- Sports field demand is high and growing
- Higher cost per acre to develop
- Public safety, vagrancy problems, inappropriate uses (need "eyes on")
- More small sites less efficient for maintenance/operations



Positive Activity

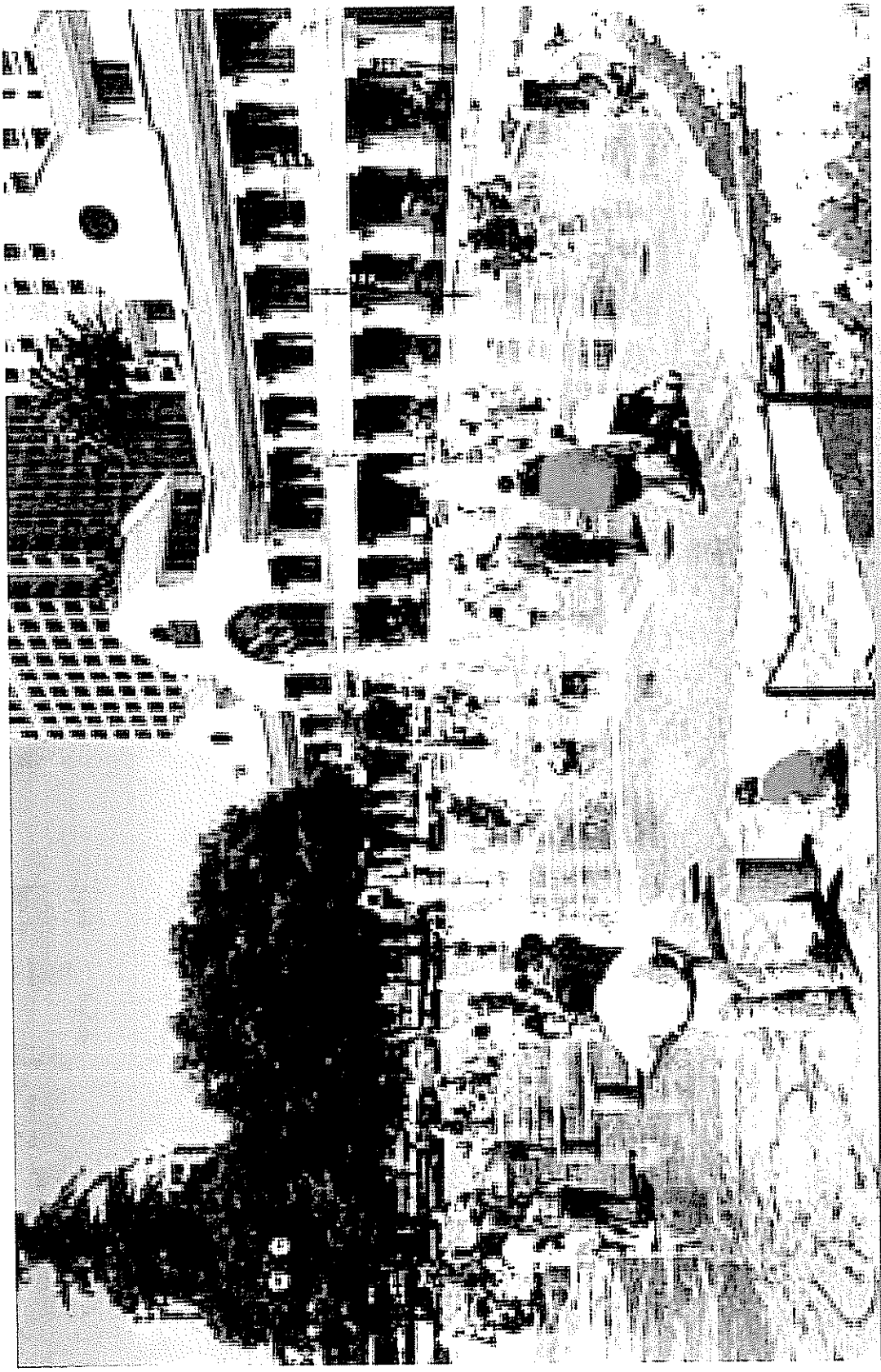
"It is also possible to have too many plazas and not enough activity to fill them."

~ C. Paumier

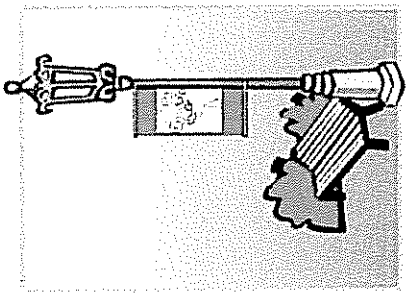
Siting

½ mile reasonable walking distance

"Strings" of small spaces are better consolidated in some situations

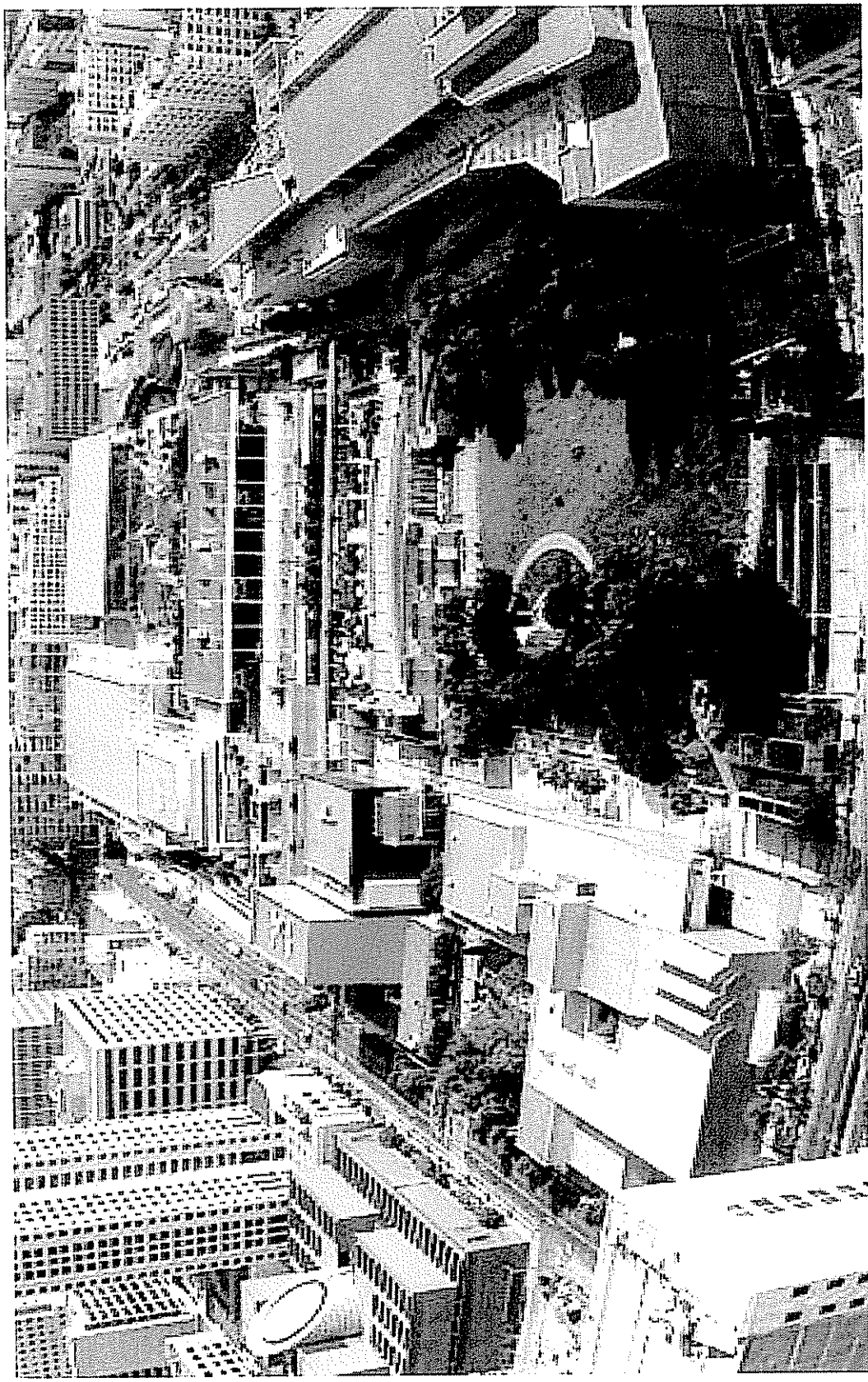


Plaza de Cesar Chavez ~ San Jose, California

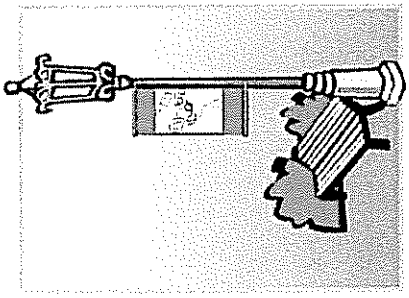


Design on a Human Scale

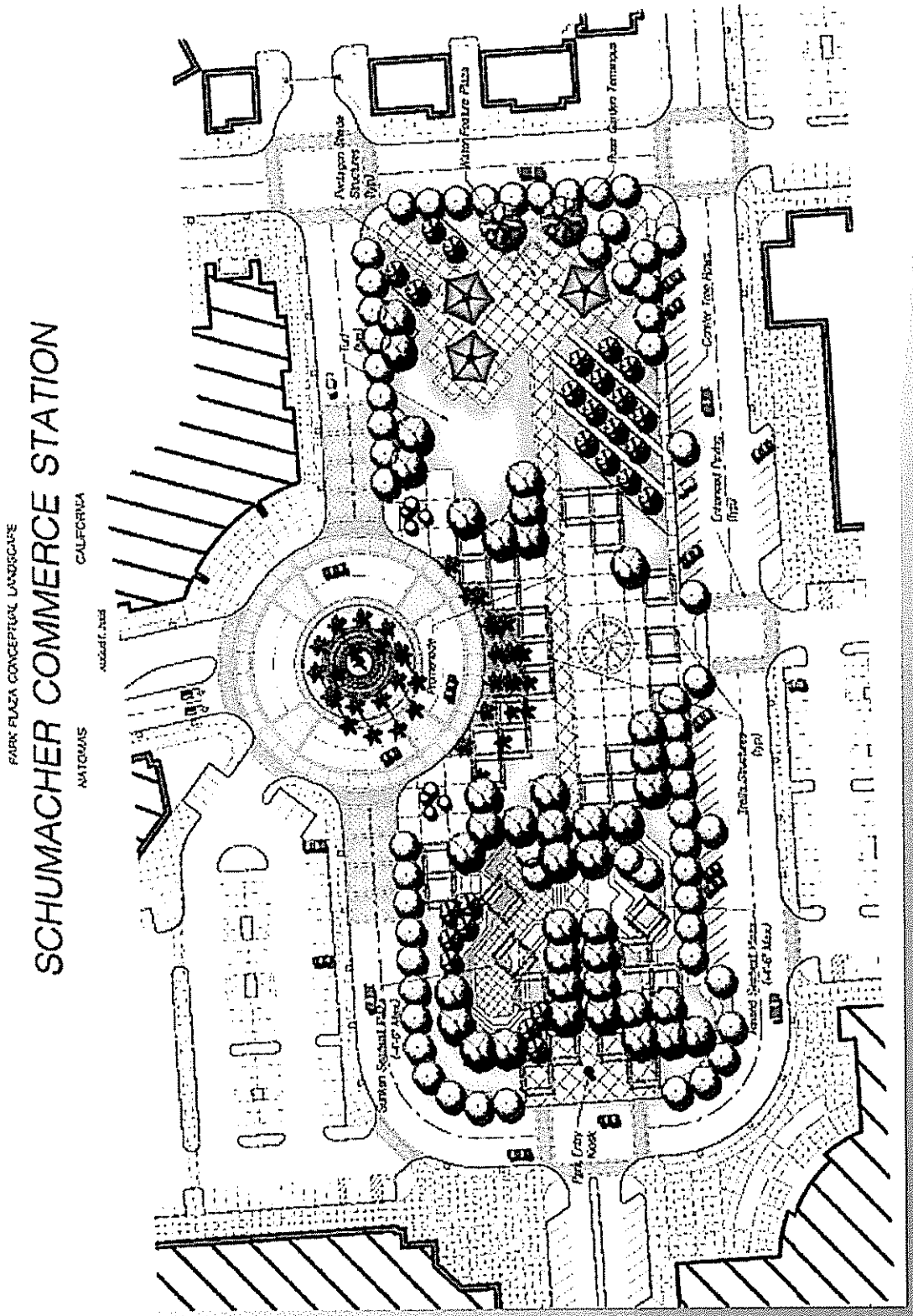
- Innovative, interactive elements
- Balance of: hardscape and greenscape; shade and sun; temperature variations
- Smaller scale performance/event/program venues
- Seating (both fixed and flexible)
- Rooftops



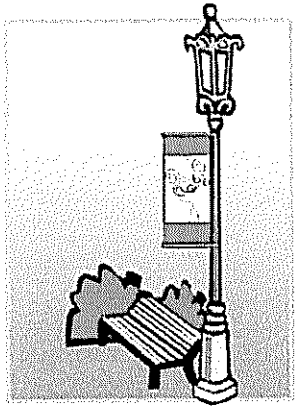
Yerba Buena Gardens ~ San Francisco, California
(Rooftop)



- High quality paving
- Design of adjacent buildings/uses
- Variety of smaller "places" and activities within the space
- Easy to get to
- Scale of sizing
- Commercial activities, especially food
- Public art



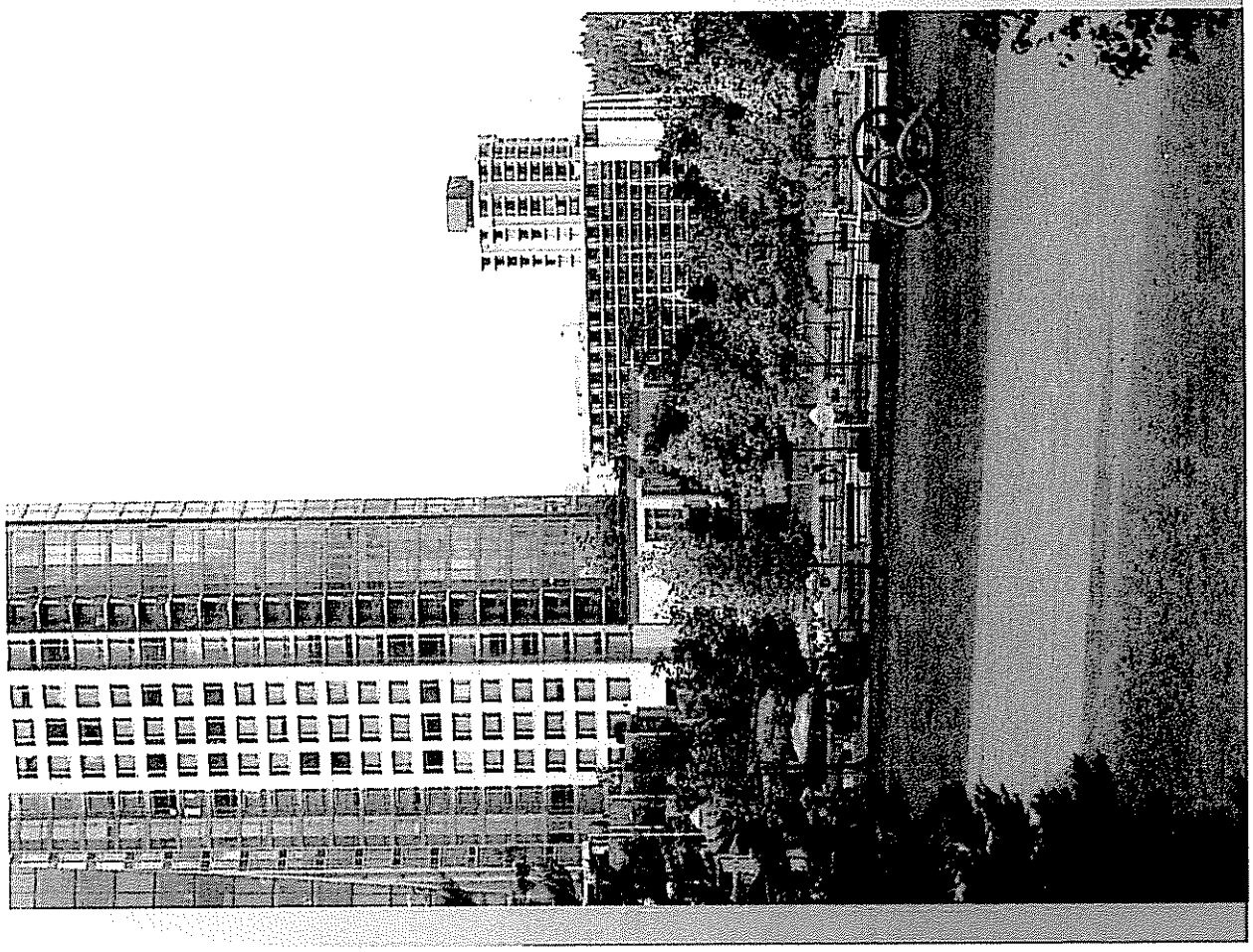
Commerce Station Park Plaza concept
North Natomas



- Visibility from street
- Wayfinding
- Design themes
- Community "ownership"
- Keep nature in our urban areas, including tree canopy

One Implication

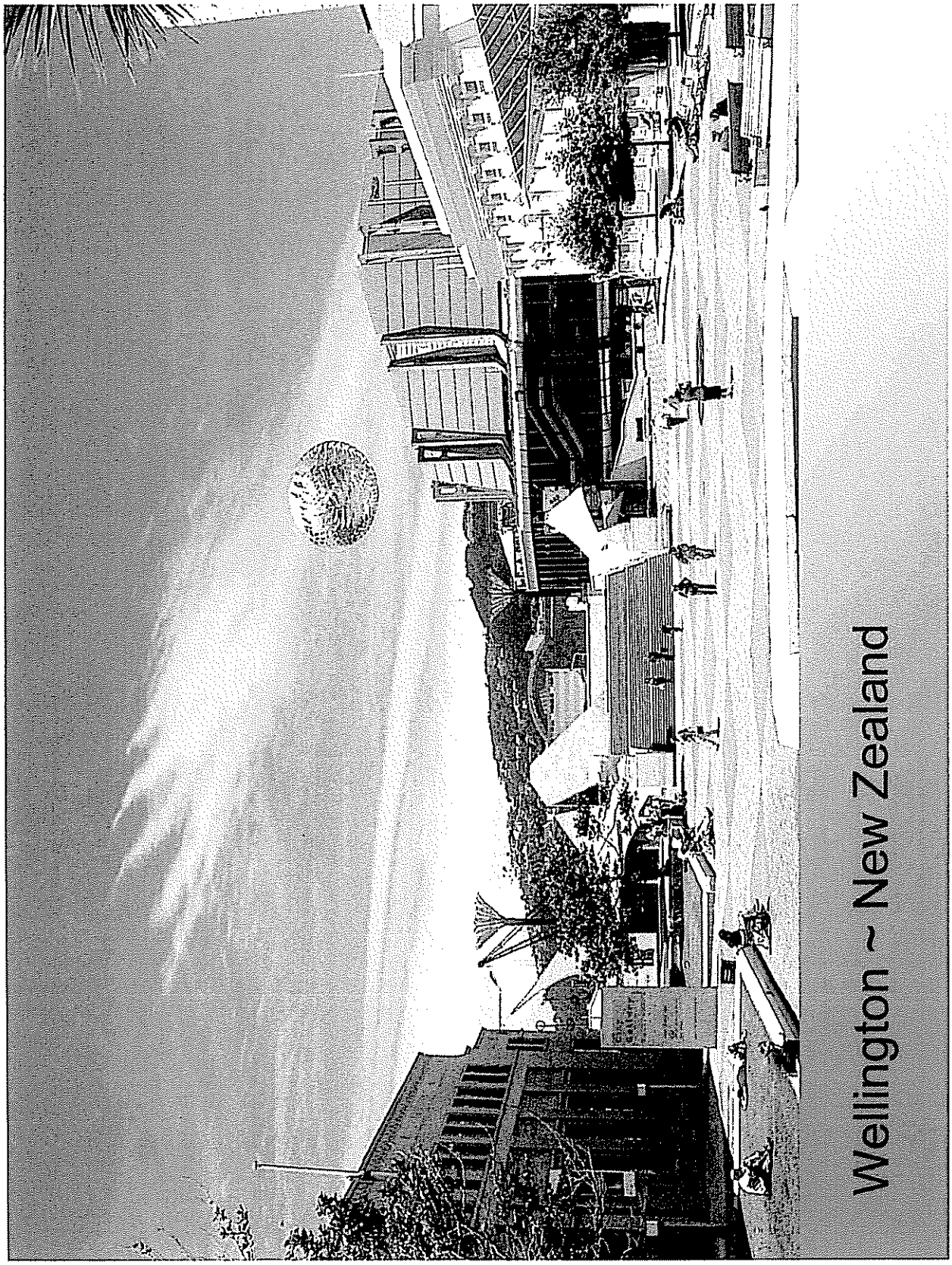
- Pushing larger expanses of parkland to City "edges" and along Rivers



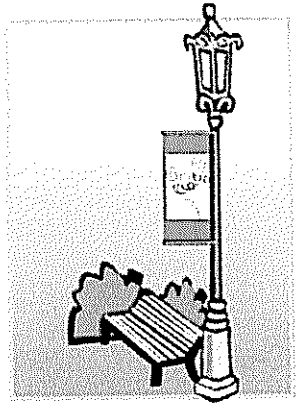
Coal Harbour Park
(Rooftop)
Vancouver, Canada

Implementation

- 2.5 acres/1,000 residents on project site; can be multiple sites
- Give credit for hardscape areas
- Balance owed in fees or improvements to:
  - Purchase land off site
  - Provide special facilities or indoor community center space
  - Improve nearby park, or school site for recreational use
  - Improve access to off site amenities (e.g. bike/pedestrian routes to get to Riverfronts)


Wellington ~ New Zealand

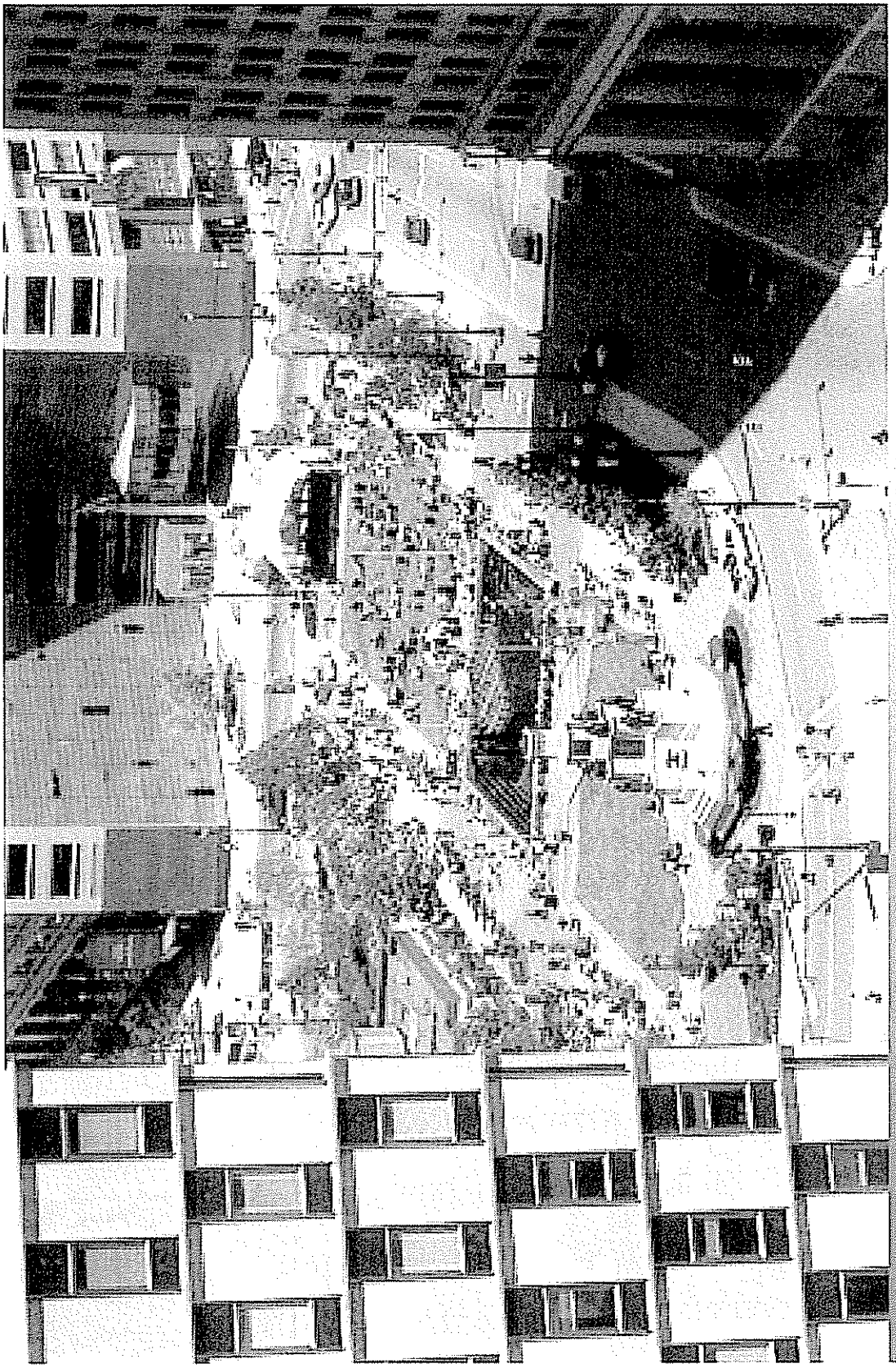
Common Vision



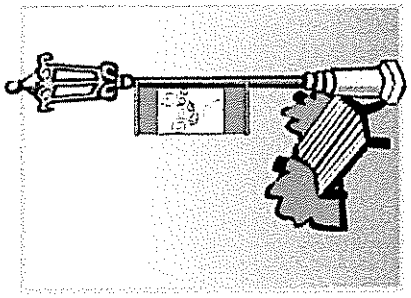
- **"Full Spectrum"**

  Plazas/Small Public Places
  Neighborhood Parks
  Community Parks
  Regional Parks
  Parkways

- Focus smaller sites in higher density areas and park deficient neighborhoods
- Situational application per defined criteria, including that funding can be secured
- Helping to define "Great Public Places"



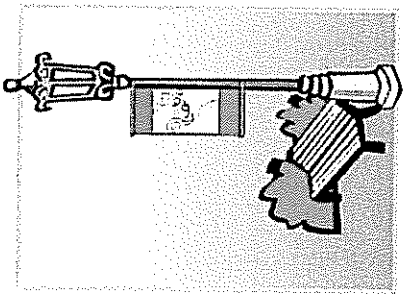
Campus Martius ~ Detroit, Michigan



5/8/06 Public Workshop Input

- Great public gathering places all over our City
- Provide smaller sites in park deficient areas (not just higher density areas)
  - Challenge: higher development and maintenance costs

- May 16th Parks and Recreation Commission: support of policy direction
- May 25th: Review and comment by Planning Commission



Savannah Square
Savannah, Georgia

Next Steps

Staff develops needed policy, plan changes to implement appropriate "small public places" for adoption, in both high density and other areas of the City