

EXISTING CONDITIONS 2

A key step in the Specific Plan process was a thorough assessment of existing conditions in Downtown. This chapter summarizes the results, beginning with a discussion of key strengths to build on as Downtown revitalizes.

A. Key Downtown Strengths

Downtown has several existing strengths that will provide a strong foundation for the Downtown Specific Plan. These elements define and create the character of Downtown, and change in the Downtown should be geared at their preservation and enhancement.

Investment in Downtown

The City has already begun investing in Downtown by recently constructing a Community Center on Third Street, which creates a new focal point for Downtown. The Ceres Community Center celebrated its grand opening on June 16, 2009. The Community Center provides assembly and conference space, a City Council dais, computer facilities, and houses the Parks and Recreation Department. It provides expanded numbers of employees into Downtown on a daily basis and generates pedestrian activity and market support for Downtown businesses. The Community Center is a Downtown draw and should catalyze future public and private investment in Downtown.



Ceres Community Center.

Fire station #1 was also recently constructed on Third Street in Downtown. Completed in 2003, it serves as the primary fire station in the City and as the administrative headquarters of the Ceres Emergency Services Division. Like the Community Center, this resource benefits Downtown by bringing employees Downtown on a daily basis,



Fire Station #1.

adding a unique and formidable presence through its architectural detail, and ensuring quick emergency response times to Downtown residents and businesses.

The Turlock Irrigation District (TID) recently chose Downtown as the location for one of its new offices. The new TID building, which opened its doors on November 20, 2009, is located on Third Street across from Whitmore Park. The TID building brings additional employees to Downtown and attracts visitors who will add to the market demand in Downtown.

Fourth Street Commercial

Fourth Street, which has served as a central component of Ceres' economy and commercial heart since the city's beginnings, is currently home to several buildings that exhibit urban character appropriate for a downtown. Buildings along the southern blocks of Fourth Street are built to the sidewalk's edge and help frame the street. Most of these buildings are single story and a few are two stories. Buildings framing the Fourth Street/Lawrence Street intersection are examples of existing Downtown development that exhibit traditional "Downtown" character, including the Independent Order of Oddfellows (IOOF) building located at the southwest corner. These structures should be preserved as appropriate and considered as assets to build upon in the future.



Fourth Street Commercial.

Mature Trees

Existing mature trees add a strong presence at certain locations in Downtown. Trees that are mature, healthy and non-invasive should be preserved where possible and when appropriate. Street trees benefit Downtown by providing shade to pedestrians and adding to visual character. Trees are most prominent along Fifth and Ninth Streets, and on segments of North, Fourth and Sixth Streets.



Trees on North Street.



Whitmore Home.

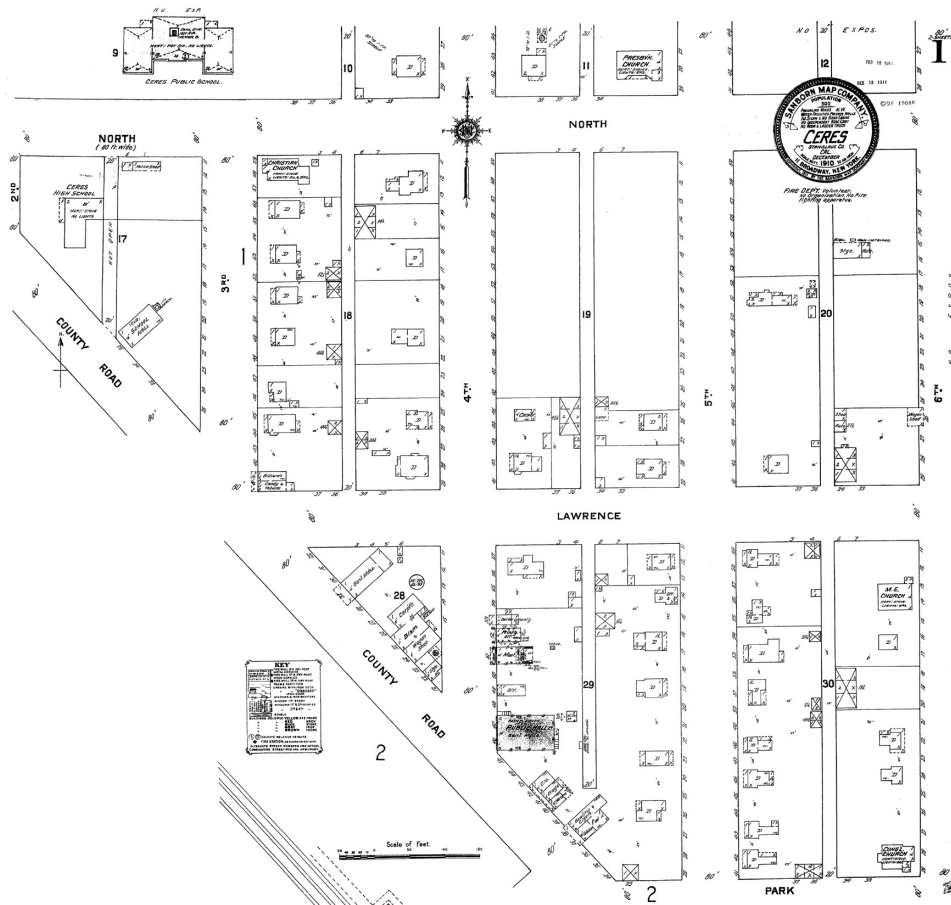
Historic Resources

One of the treasures of Downtown is its historic resources. The first home in Ceres, the Daniel Whitmore Home, is located on Fifth Street in Downtown, along with the Whitmore Mansion and several other homes that were built around the turn of the twentieth century. These landmarks provide links to Ceres' past and add significantly to the character of Downtown. The Ceres Water Tower, located on Sixth Street, is a highly visible addition to the city's historic inventory. The Ceres Museum, located on Fifth Street, is not an historical structure, but provides a key resource for community members and visitors to learn about Ceres' beginnings and how the City has evolved over its history.

Just as Fifth Street in many ways represents the residential beginning of the City, Fourth Street represents the City's and Downtown's commercial beginnings. As shown on the next page on a Sanborn Map of Downtown from 1910, much of the commercial activity took place along the County Road and along the southern segments of Fourth Street, as it does today. In 1910, businesses on Fourth Street included a meat mar-

ket, printer, public hall and barber. The County Road has now expanded to become modern-day State Route 99 and pedestrian-scale development no longer fronts this corridor, but the commercial function of Fourth Street remains in tact. The southern portion of Fourth Street remains the heart of Downtown and home to many of its neighborhood-serving commercial businesses.

Downtown's historic structures serve as both a reminder of its past and inspiration for its future. These structures can provide cues for future development and serve as cultural anchors within Downtown's future urban fabric. Fourth Street's history as the commercial heart of a small community can be preserved and now expanded to support the goals important to Ceres in the twenty-first century.



Ceres development in 1910.

Existing Residents and Businesses

Much of the Downtown consists of single-family homes, particularly on the east side of Downtown. These homes create a strong residential base from which to build on and the residents who live there have an impact on the Downtown economy. Some homes have been converted to offices or retail, but the majority remain as housing. Downtown residents will continue to represent a key element of, and contributor to, Downtown for years to come.

Several businesses are located in Downtown and have a strong impact on the character of the area, as well as on its economy. They provide familiar restaurants, convenient services, add visual interest, and create activity in Downtown. While providing practical benefits, Downtown businesses also provide a venue for culture, community and interaction to flourish. Business owners can have a strong impact on Downtown's future and their dedication to its improvement will provide a vital asset to the implementation process.



Downtown single-family residential.



Whitmore Park.

Alley System

The majority of Downtown's blocks are serviced by a system of alleys, which add to the overall street grid. The alleys contribute to circulation, provide easements for Downtown infrastructure, and will provide excellent opportunities for redevelopment in Downtown by offering additional circulation possibilities and providing potential access to new businesses and housing.

Whitmore Park

Whitmore Park is the most notable and prominent public space in Downtown. It is a large, well-maintained park and should remain a key component of Downtown in the future. The block on which Whitmore Park sits was home to two schools in 1910, providing a location for a key community service.

Many years later, Whitmore Park still provides an invaluable community service as a park and is home to several mature trees and contains a variety of programmed spaces, including a gazebo, several lawn areas suitable for a variety of activities, and a veterans memorial. Whitmore Park has also hosted several special events in recent years, including farmers' markets, concerts and health fairs.

Access To and From State Route 99

Downtown Ceres is unique among other downtowns in the Central Valley because it is clearly visible from State Route 99. This creates important opportunities to transform travelers on State Route 99 to new Downtown visitors. Highway access and visibility will also be attractive to developers, new business owners, business owners looking to relocate, and to people and families considering making Ceres their home. From an economic development perspective, access to and visibility from State Route 99 is a powerful draw for attracting potential investment to Downtown.

Proximity to Modesto City-County Airport

Downtown should take advantage of its close proximity to the Modesto City-County Airport. Located just over four miles from Downtown, this airport provides excellent regional and national access to recreation destinations, as well as multiple business markets. The airport's ability to support the most common types of business aircraft creates an opportunity for Ceres to promote a business-ready Downtown. Studies have found that companies using business aircraft outperform non-users across every key financial and non-financial measure of business success.

B. Public Policy

The Ceres General Plan contains several goals and policies that focus on Downtown or are city-wide goals and policies that apply to Downtown. Goals and policies that relate to Downtown are located in the following elements of the General Plan:

- Land Use and Community Design
- Transportation and Circulation
- Recreational and Cultural Resources
- Housing

The goals and policies in the General Plan speak to the uses, transportation options, services and housing types that are appropriate for Downtown Ceres and will promote a vibrant downtown.

C. Community Character and Design

Community character in the Specific Plan Area is generally defined by the streets, urban context and connections, and buildings.



Residential street in Downtown.

Streets

The streets forming the perimeter of Downtown are generally more auto-oriented and the interior streets that form the downtown grid pattern are more pedestrian-oriented. Streets vary in configuration, but are generally defined by the presence of sidewalks and the orientation of on-street parking. Three traffic circles also contribute to the current character of streets in Downtown Ceres.

Built Form

Buildings and building orientation strongly impact the character of the Specific Plan Area. Buildings include public facilities, commercial buildings, and single- and multi-family housing units. Each building type creates a unique street condition, affects pedestrian experience and contributes to the overall physical character within the Specific Plan Area.



Typical development on southern blocks of Fourth Street.



Undeveloped area of the Whitmore Mansion grounds.

Opportunity Sites and Parking Areas

Downtown is also defined by opportunity sites, such as vacant or underutilized parcels and large parking areas. When located adjacent to the street, these sites often result in a discontinuous pattern of development, which is less pedestrian-friendly.

D. Land Use

Downtown Ceres contains a variety of land uses, most notably the following:

- Retail, both regional and neighborhood serving
- Office
- Public/Institutional
(including City Hall, Police Headquarters, fire and several churches)
- Multi-family Residential
- Single-family Residential
- Parks
- Parking Areas
- Vacant Parcels

These uses are spread throughout Downtown, but pockets of similar uses are grouped in specific areas. Several public and institutional uses are clustered along Third Street. Small-scale commercial and retail uses are clustered on the southern portions of Fourth Street. Residential uses are generally located east of Fifth Street, north of Magnolia Street and west of Second Street.

E. Demographics and Market Demand

The Downtown Ceres Development Market Overview Report was submitted to the City in March 2008 during the initial stages of the planning process. The Report discusses demographic trends and projections, economic conditions and development potential in the Specific Plan Area. The key findings from this document are summarized below in this section.

Demographic and Economic Findings

Since 2000, Ceres has experienced a rate of growth roughly double that of the State. By 2030, projections suggest that the Ceres population could increase by 30,000. This growth is driven largely by Ceres' close proximity to Modesto and Turlock. This future population growth will create potential opportunities for Downtown, particularly for housing and office uses.

Housing Market

Like most places in the country, home values fell in Ceres in 2008, but decreases were less severe than in Stanislaus County as a whole. This suggests that as of 2008, the housing market in Ceres has remained relatively strong. The Terrace, a small subdivision of 28 small-lot single-family homes, has recently been developed near the Richard Way/Richland Avenue intersection. This project has been successful and additional phases are expected. Demand for multi-family homes has been higher than multi-family housing products (supply) in the past according to local real estate industry participants, and will likely stay strong upon economic recovery.

Townhomes are among the most economically feasible multi-family housing types for Downtown Ceres, since they have lower construction costs than more complex condominium projects. The Meridian, a townhome project at the Boothe Road/Whitehaven Avenue intersection, reinforces the market potential for townhomes in Downtown. The recent market success of a rental multi-family development on Tenth Street (between Roeding Road and Pyramid Avenue) near Downtown and comments from local real estate industry participants indicate strong future potential for rental properties in Downtown. Multi-family production, including both for-sale and rental units, is important for attracting the younger households, professionals, and other similar demographic groups most interested in living and working in a downtown environment and that would support expanded retail choices.

Retail Market

Due to small lot sizes, small existing buildings, and the extensive and expanding retail corridor along nearby Mitchell Road, the market for neighborhood-serving retail is limited within Downtown. This suggests that retail uses with the greatest market potential in Downtown include small eateries, brew pubs, specialty food stores and other types of specialty retail that provide a different and unique tenant mix compared to the more typical suburban mix of national and regional retailers along Mitchell Road.

Office Market

Demand for office space in Ceres is relatively low, particularly for larger employers. This is evidenced by low occupancy levels for office space along with low asking lease rates. Future demand for office space will likely increase as Ceres' population and office-based employment continues to grow, creating demand that could be met locally rather than in nearby existing office centers such as Modesto. There may also be opportunities for new types of office products, such as office condominiums targeted at smaller firms wishing to own their own space.

F. Transportation and Circulation

This section discusses the existing vehicular, pedestrian, bicycle and transit conditions within the Specific Plan Area. This section summarizes the key findings from the Existing Transportation Conditions Memorandum submitted to the City in March 2008.

Vehicular Circulation

Traffic in Downtown currently operates at an acceptable level under the level-of-service (LOS) standards described in Ceres General Plan. This indicates that opportunities exist to intensify uses and accommodate associated increases in traffic.



Whitmore Avenue.



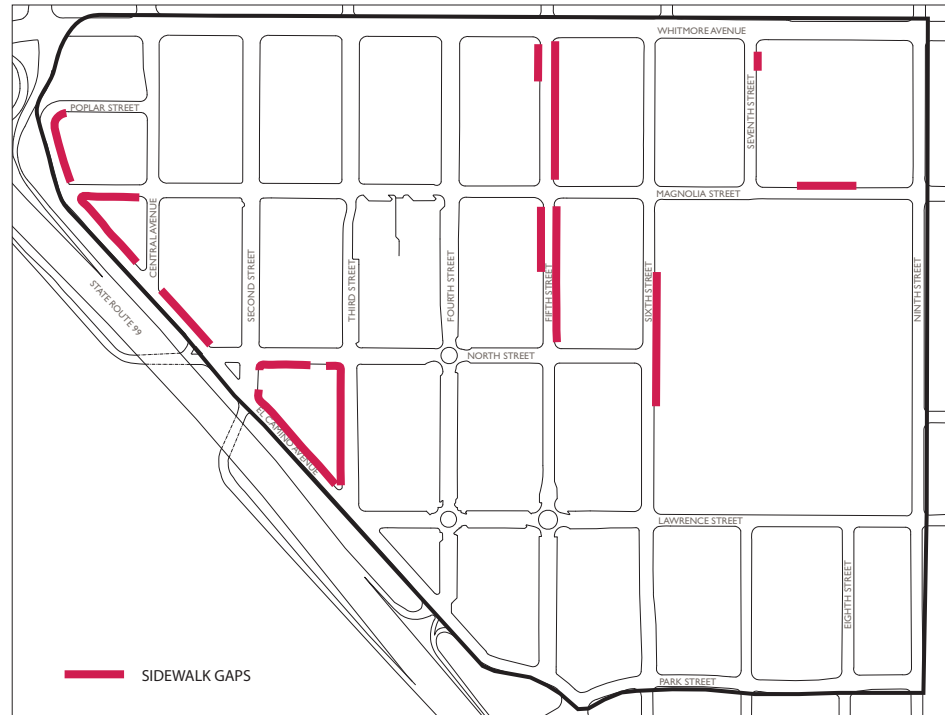
Crosswalk at Whitmore Avenue/Third Street intersection.

Pedestrian Circulation

Sidewalks are generally present throughout Downtown, with very few gaps. Gaps in the sidewalk system are shown in Figure 2-1. Downtown sidewalks are generally between four and five feet wide with the exception of the two southern blocks of Fourth Street, where they are considerably wider.

Crosswalks are provided at traffic signals along East Whitmore Avenue in Downtown, as well as at some of the unsignalized intersections along this corridor. Traffic signals are also equipped with pedestrian crossing signals that let the pedestrian know when it is safe to cross. Crosswalks are also prominent at intersections near Walter White Elementary School. Crosswalks are also provided at the Park Street/El Camino Avenue intersection and across Fourth Street at the El Camino Avenue/Fourth Street/State Route 99 northbound ramps intersection. Field observations indicate that pedestrian activity is highest near schools in Downtown, particularly at arrival and dismissal times.

FIGURE 2-1 Sidewalk Gaps



Bicycle Facilities

Bicycle facilities are typically classified into three groups:

- **Bike paths (Class I)** – Paved trails that are separated from roadways.
- **Bike lanes (Class II)** – Lanes on roadways designated for use by bicycles through striping, pavement legends and signs.
- **Bike routes (Class III)** – Designated roadways for bicycle use by signs only; may or may not include additional pavement width for cyclists.

The Specific Plan Area contains few bicycle facilities. No Class I off-street bike paths or Class II on-street marked bike lanes exist. Magnolia Street is designated as a Class III bike route.

Transit

Both local and regional transit service is provided in Downtown. Ceres Area Transit (CAT) and Stanislaus Regional Transit (StaRT) provide fixed route service within the Downtown.

Local fixed route transit service in Ceres is provided by the City of Ceres. Three CAT routes serve Downtown. Routes A and B operate during weekdays. Route A serves the eastern portion of the City, while Route B serves the western portion of the City. These routes overlap in Downtown. Service is provided on one-hour headways. Weekend service is provided by Route C, which consolidates portions of Routes A and B and operates primarily on Magnolia Street within Downtown.

StaRT Route 15 serves Downtown by connecting Ceres to Modesto, Keyes and Turlock. Bus stops in Downtown are located on Magnolia Street near City Hall and near Ninth Street. The route operates eight round trips per day with buses arriving approximately every two hours. Weekend service consists of six round trips per day with similar headways to weekday service. Hours of service on weekends are more abbreviated.



Transit stop at City Hall.

G. Parking

As part of the Specific Plan process, a Downtown Ceres Parking Analysis was prepared by Fehr & Peers. This section summarizes the findings of the report, which was submitted to the City in February 2009.

Downtown parking spaces were inventoried and include 1,521 on-street parking spaces and an additional 263 off-street parking spaces. These figures do not include all surface parking areas within Downtown. Some were excluded for the following reasons:

- Minimal use occurs on weekdays, such as the First Baptist Church
- Parking areas were restricted, such as City Hall
- Parking areas were only accessible by private driveways

The parking assessment indicates that parking is generally available within Downtown and accommodates demand throughout the day. The highest parking utilization rate for Downtown for any given hour during the day was 29 percent. This utilization rate decreased to below 20 percent after 5 p.m.

However, certain areas in Downtown had less parking available because of their proximity to commercial uses, civic uses or employment centers. For example, less parking is available near City Hall and other civic buildings because these buildings receive visitors throughout the day. It should also be noted that parking availability in these



Underutilized parking on Fourth Street.



Occupied parking on Fourth Street.

areas does increase significantly during evening hours. The following areas experience below-average parking availability during daytime hours:

- Areas around the library, school and School District offices.
- On-street parking along Second Street near City Hall.
- Surface and on-street parking near the southern portion of Fourth Street also experienced above-average parking demand.

Lower parking availability in these areas is attributable to the number of nearby retail stores and restaurants that have only minimal off-street parking supply. It should be noted that while parking availability was lower in these areas than in others (reaching 85 percent utilization or higher for a small number of select blocks), additional parking was available within one block.

H. Infrastructure

As part of the Specific Plan process, an Existing Conditions Infrastructure Summary was prepared by Jacobs Engineering. This report was submitted to the City in March 2008. This section summarizes the report by presenting the key findings related to existing infrastructure conditions in Downtown.

Stormwater

Storm drainage in Downtown flows to two pump stations. Drainage flows north to the pump station on El Camino at Whitmore and south along the Pine Street overcrossing to an additional pump station southwest of State Route 99. The two pump stations have enough capacity to serve existing Downtown uses, although some of the connecting pipes are undersized. There is also a system of dry wells, although some are currently not functioning efficiently. Inefficiencies have resulted from improper well maintenance and allowing gravel fines to enter the rock, reducing capacity. Existing pipes are also rusting.

Sewer System

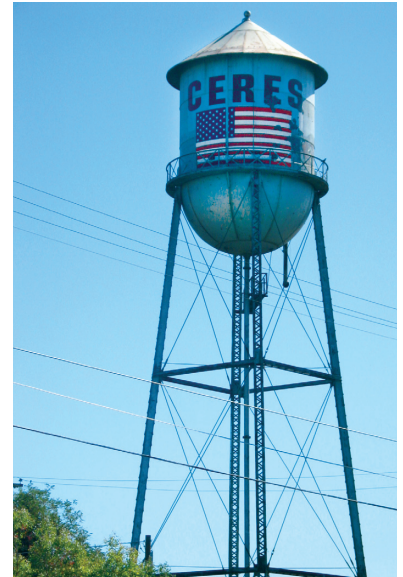
Sewage from Downtown flows toward the Pine Street Lift Station at the northwest corner of Pine Street and Railroad Avenue. Existing sewer infrastructure in Downtown ranges from 6-inch to 8-inch pipes. The Wastewater Treatment Plant, located at East Service Road and Morgan Road, currently treats approximately 3.1 million gallons of wastewater per day. The Plant has a capacity to treat 6.3 million gallons of wastewater per day, which is adequate to serve current development in Ceres.

Water

According to modeling efforts conducted by Jacobs Engineering and flow information provided by the Ceres Fire Department, the water system has sufficient capacity to serve the existing development in an average daily and maximum daily demand scenarios, as well as under fire flow conditions. However, the water system is not currently equipped to provide adequate pressure to accommodate a maximum daily demand scenario and still maintain adequate fire flow capabilities.

Dry Utilities

Electrical service is currently provided by the Turlock Irrigation District. Electrical service in Downtown is provided via overhead electrical facilities. Adequate electrical service is available in the downtown area, both for existing and potential new development. Pacific Gas & Electric (PG&E) provides natural gas to Downtown. PG&E has indicated that there is sufficient capacity to serve existing development, and that there is likely capacity to serve potential new development. AT&T provides telecommunications services to Downtown, including telephone and DSL internet service. Additionally, AT&T operates a switching station on Third Street within Downtown. Cable television and cable internet service is provided by Charter Communications. Charter expects that provision of cable services for future development will be feasible.



Ceres Water Tower.

I. Cultural Resources

Cultural resources include both archaeological and historical resources. There is no evidence of prehistoric or buried historic cultural resources within Downtown. A review of architectural records and a partial architectural survey was conducted for Downtown and indicates that the Daniel Whitmore Home is the only property listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Whitmore Mansion is another notable cultural resource not listed on the National Register. Additionally, several other residential properties built around the turn of the twentieth century and the Ceres Water Tower were identified as cultural resources during the planning process, but do not yet warrant inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places.

J. Community Services

This section characterizes existing services for police, emergency services, schools, the library, parks and solid waste disposal.

Police

The City's Police Division currently consists of 46 sworn officers, 22 non-sworn personnel, and 45 volunteers. The number of officers on patrol at any one time ranges from three to eight officers, plus a shift supervisor. The average staffing is one officer per patrol unit. Response times are categorized according to the severity of the offense or complaint. Depending on the priority of the offense, the department estimates it can have an officer on the scene in approximately six minutes.



Ceres Police Building.

Emergency Services

Fire Station #1 is located Downtown at the corner of Third and North Streets, and houses on-duty fire fighters and administrative staff. The Emergency Services Division is staffed by 34 uniformed personnel, including the Chief, and one non-uniformed personnel member. At any one time, ten fire fighters comprise a duty shift. Average response time varies depending on the circumstances and type of emergency. The Division estimates that first response is usually between three and five minutes with additional backup arriving as needed.

Solid Waste Disposal

Solid waste disposal in Downtown is provided by a franchise agreement with Bertolotti-Ceres Disposal. Solid waste and curbside recycling collection is provided for both commercial and residential uses.

Schools

The following schools serve students living in Downtown. The following information was provided by the Ceres Unified School District.

Walter White Elementary

Located Downtown, Walter White Elementary had an enrollment of approximately 570 students for the 2008-2009 school year. Walter White Elementary is currently at capacity.



Walter White Elementary.

Blaker-Kinser Junior High

Located outside the Specific Plan Area, Blaker-Kinser is fed by Walter White Elementary and several other elementary schools. Blaker-Kinser had approximately 840 students for the 2008-2009 school year and is currently over capacity.

Central Valley High School

Located just outside Downtown, Ceres High School is fed by Blaker-Kinser, Walter White Elementary, and other schools within the District. Central Valley High is currently under capacity and had an enrollment of approximately 1,530 students for the 2008-2009 school year.

Argus Continuation/Endeavor Alternative High School

Located Downtown, Argus Continuation had an enrollment of approximately 300 students for the 2007-2008 school year. Argus and Endeavor is currently at capacity.

Library and Community Center

This section discusses the existing Downtown library and the Ceres Community Center:

Gondring Memorial Library

The Gondring Memorial Library, a branch of the Stanislaus County library, is located Downtown. The Stanislaus County system has a main library and 13 branch libraries. The Gondring Library currently has three full-time employees and four part-time employees. The library is approximately 4,500 square feet and contains approximately 38,000 volumes.



Gondring Memorial Library.

Ceres Community Center

The Community Center provides recreation, cultural and educational opportunities and features a large assembly room with a capacity of 315 people, a small assembly room with capacity of 127 people, a large kitchen, a recreation fitness room, a computer lab, a senior citizen room, a teen room, an arts and crafts room, a City Council dais, recreation staff offices and several meeting rooms.



Whitmore Park.

Parks

Whitmore Park is the only significant open green space within Downtown. The park is located at the corner of Third and North Streets and is approximately 1.5 acres in area. Features include a gazebo, picnic area, dance slab, barbeque pits, a rose garden, and a war memorial. The park is regularly used throughout the year for events, such as farmers' markets, health fairs and other community events.