VISIONING section 2

section 2 . VISIONING

PROJECT SCENARIOS

Building on the project priorities, site understanding, and initial ideas, the consultant team developed visioning scenarios to test ideas, confirm such priorities, and identify potential technical challenges. Purposely different, the visioning scenarios were a tool to collect public input in a number of project aspects by comparing one solution to the other and identifying preferences. Both scenarios had at their core the objective of making parks and open spaces an integral part of the Plan, thus they studied possible methods of connecting with streets, existing and proposed development within the site, as well as with adjacent areas of the City, including historic downtown to the west.

The design scenarios and preliminary concepts were presented for public and technical input, ultimately becoming the basis for the preferred alternative –the Master Plan– described in Section 3 of this document.

This section of the summary report discusses the concepts and characteristics of the two project scenarios developed during the visioning stage of the Plan:

1) **Scenario A**, labeled *Modified Grid* studied the idea of modifying the layout of streets adjacent to the Central Park in order to respond to the waterways' alignment, instead of preserving an orthogonal grid throughout the project area, as proposed in the Strategic Plan;

2) **Scenario B**, named *Grid Interwoven* in turn looked at preserving the orthogonal grid and studied connecting parks and open spaces by extending park elements onto the streets and viceversa, allowing some development and elements of the City cross the parks' boundaries.

SCENARIO A: modified grid

The first scenario developed was called **Scenario A : Modified Grid**. This concept was centered on Jennings Ditch and Mill Creek, their configuration, potential development as a year-round waterway, and their function as public amenity.

Three main ideas defined this scenario and dictated the form and function of the rest of its elements: 1) the creation of a **year-round water feature** including both waterways, 2) the **re-configuration of the new streets** proposed in the area adjacent to Jennings Ditch (the Central Park) to follow the ditch's alignment, and 3) the construction of a **large gathering area** at the terminus of Oak Avenue [(1)].

The first idea required the creation of two large ponds for the re-circulation of water (one upstream and one downstream), and the construction of a series of weirs to pond the water along its causeway to provide continuous flow. Thus in this scenario spaces were organized by weirs or weir-like elements that functioned as pedestrian crossings, edges, walls, etc.

The second idea forced re-alignment of the grid, creating two meandering boulevards flanking the east and west sides of the Central Park, roughly following Jennings Ditch course. The strongest concept of this scenario, re-configuration of these two streets provided a clear character for the park edges, and highlighted the importance of the park as the center of the East Downtown Visalia area.

Finally, the idea of a large gathering area gave the plan a second center, a counter-part to balance the Civic Center area, and allowed the open space to become the real connector between land uses.

Following the priorities established by community members during the initial public workshop, each scenario presented specific response to the criteria for stream restoration, trails and paths, urban character, events and activities.

The applied criteria for scenario A is as listed on page 42.

(1) Per community and City's direction, both scenarios proposed the interruption of Oak Avenue at Burke Street.

SCENARIO A: MODIFIED GRID

SITE PLAN

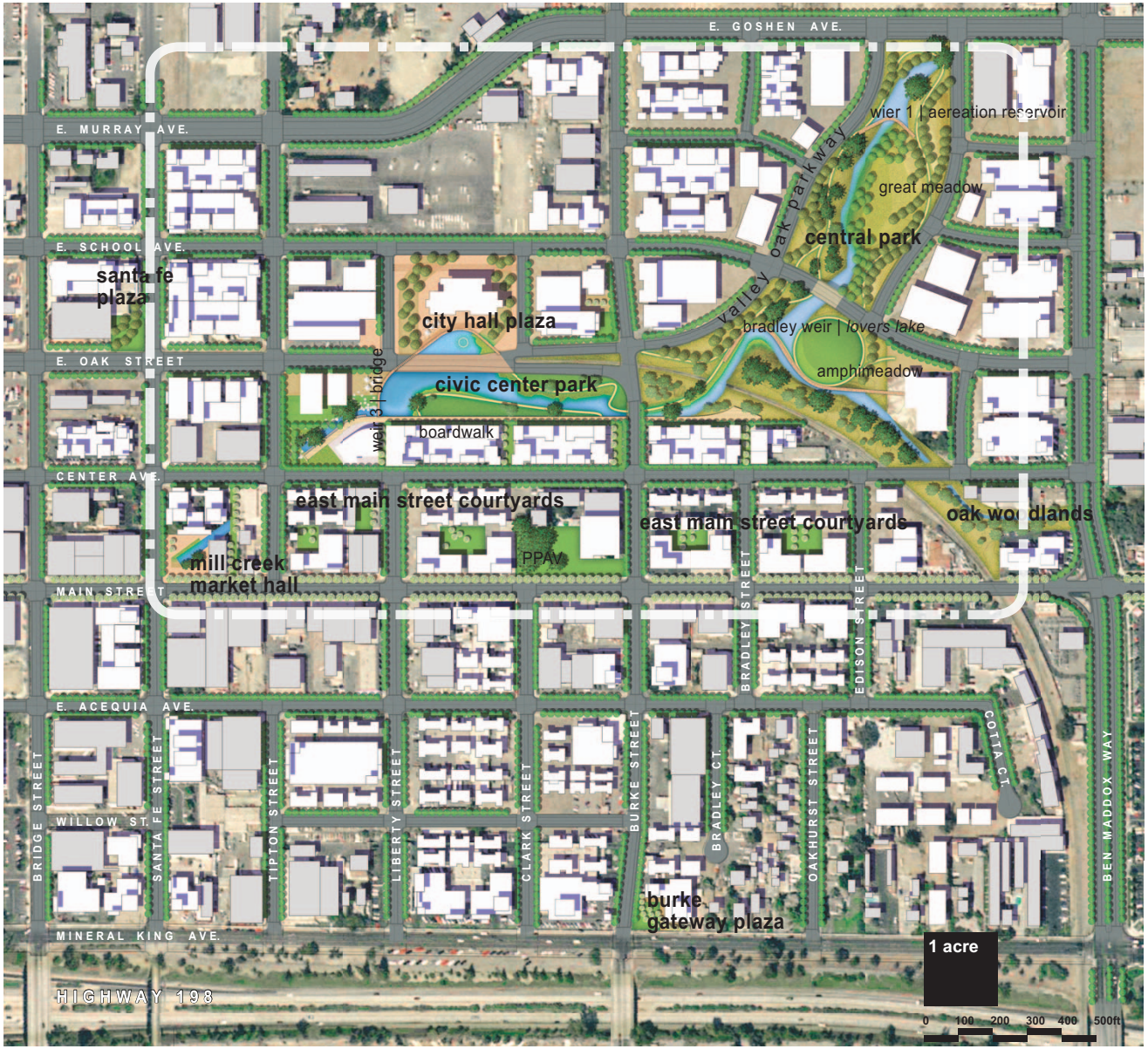


Figure 16 . Scenario A: Modified Grid, Illustrative Plan

The site plan for scenario A shows the reconfigured streets: School Avenue curves south and uses an existing ditch crossing (culvert) for going over Jennings Ditch. Two parkways (named the Valley Oak Parkway) are proposed running north-south along the Ditch.

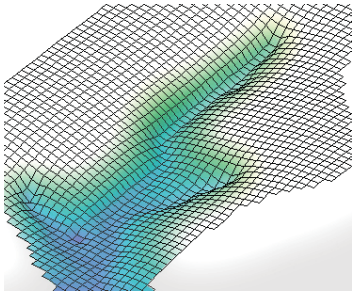
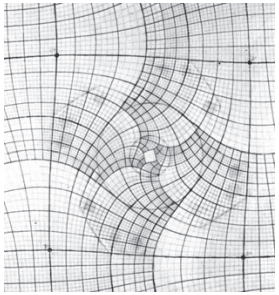
In this scenario Jennings Ditch and Mill Creek will become a managed water feature, providing water year-round. The reservoir for pumping water upstream becomes a central amenity in front of City Hall Plaza.

SCENARIO A key concepts

+ **Parkway**
+ **Amphimeadow**
+ **Lake on Civic Center Park**
+ **Full Re-Circulation System**

CONCEPT AND CRITERIA



lified grid agricultural irrigation weirs layering urban character by natural

Evaluation Criteria Applied : Scenario A

STREAM RESTORATION 1

Full re-circulation system for water year-round.
Preservation of west bank, and creation of new **riparian terraces** on east bank.

TRAILS + PATHS 2

Park engages City via wooded **parkways.**
Meandering park trails respond to new **topography** providing access to all areas of the park.

URBAN CHARACTER 3

Urban form **defined** by **natural systems**, creating a **modified** curvilinear **grid**.
Transitions are provided in **layers** and **overalps**.

EVENTS + ACTIVITIES 4

Large events in **park**.
Program reponds to natural or urban **function**.

Main Ideas for Sustainability

- permeable paving
- managed irrigation
- solar lighting

SCENARIO A: MODIFIED GRID

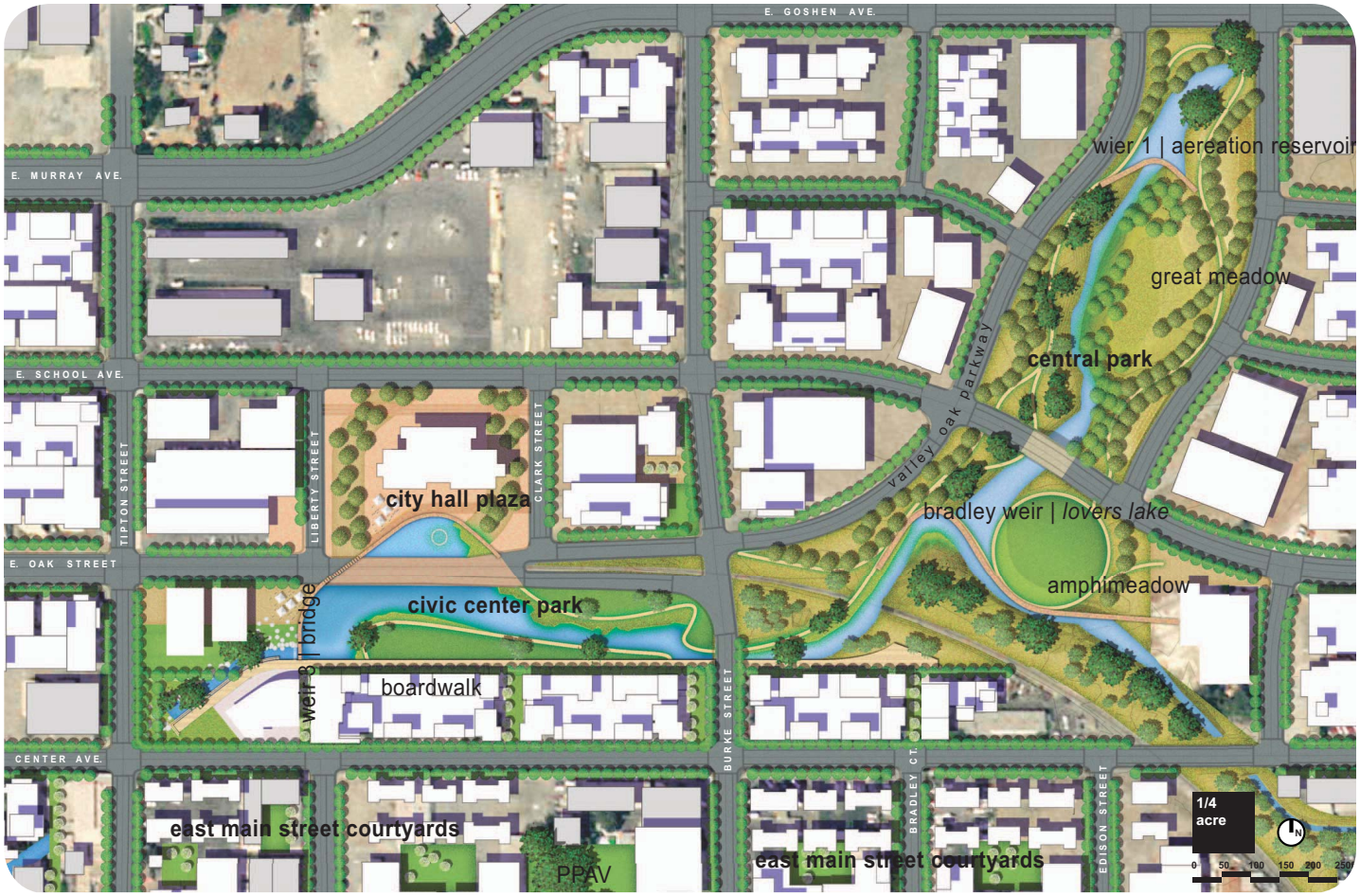
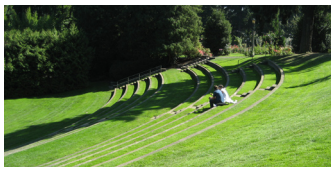


Figure 17 . Scenario A: Modified Grid, Enlargement Plan

Two large open spaces are proposed in the Central Park in scenario A: the amphimeadow at the confluence of the waterways, and a great meadow formed by regrading the east bank of Jennings Ditch into a series of riparian terraces. The re-configuration of the east side of the ditch requires that all existing trees on that side of it to be removed. New native and riparian trees and grasses are proposed on this area to encourage natural habitat.

This scenario proposes a pedestrian bridge over Oak Avenue to provide easy connection between City Hall Plaza and Civic Center Park.






CHARACTER

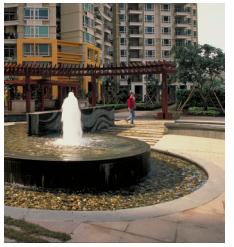
Figure 18 . Scenario A: Modified Grid, View of Amphimeadow and Lake

Figure 19 . Scenario A: Modified Grid, View of City Hall Plaza

As described in the concept, this scenario used the weirs necessary to create a year-round water feature as pedestrian crossings in the park. Figure 18 shows a view of Central Park from the confluence point of Jennings Ditch and Mill Creek. In the middle-ground the large amphimeadow is shown.

Figure 19 shows the character of the outdoor spaces in front of City Hall, including the large water feature and the pedestrian bridge arching over Oak Avenue.

SCENARIO A: MODIFIED GRID



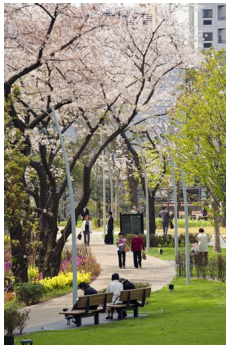


Figure 20 . Scenario A: Modified Grid, Model

COMPARISON WITH STRATEGIC PLAN : street alignment

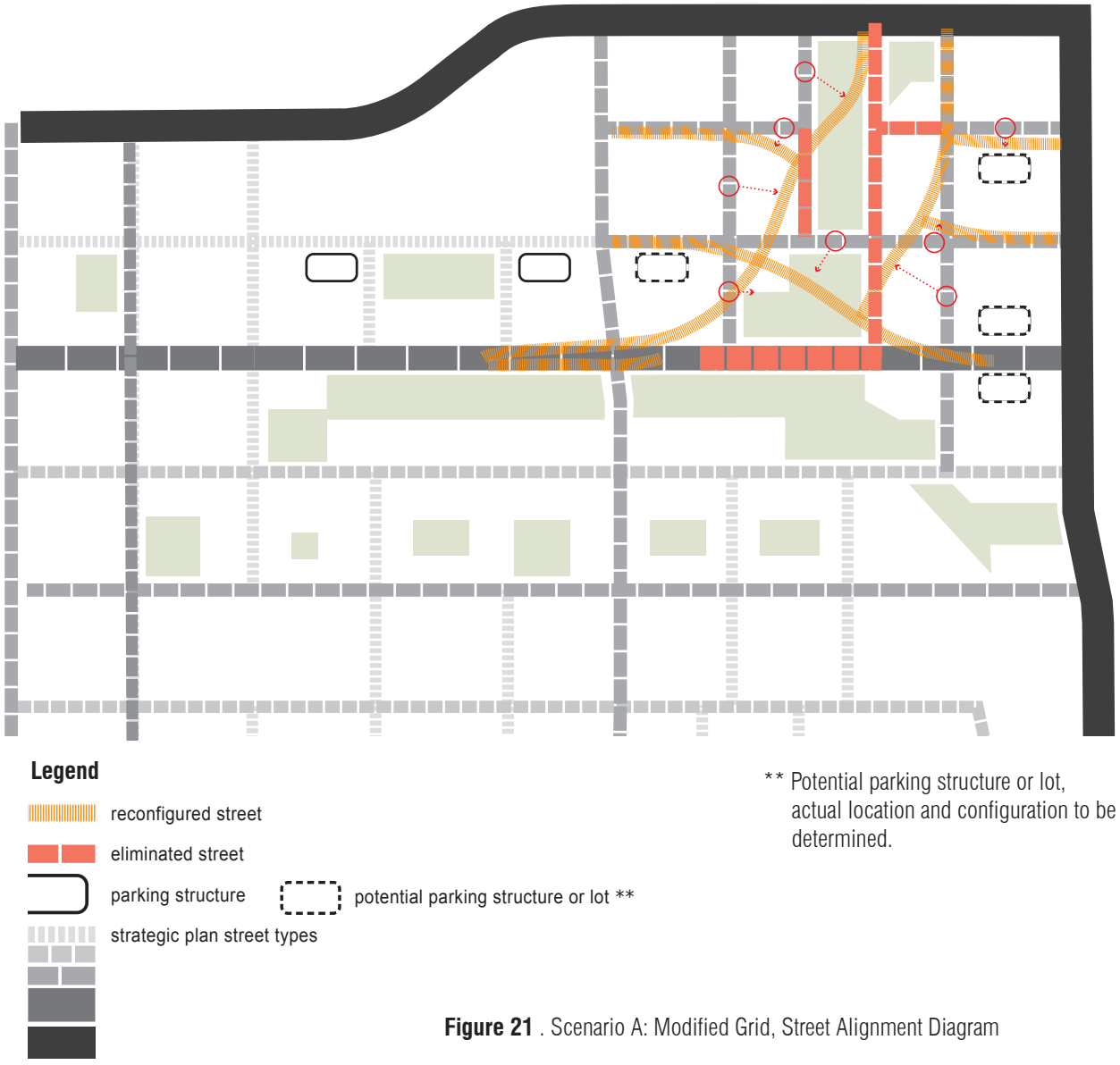


Figure 21 . Scenario A: Modified Grid, Street Alignment Diagram

To allow public to understand how the adopted Strategic Plan was being modified, the consultant team prepared the two graphics in these pages to compare street layout and amount of open space included.

The street alignment diagram shows clearly how the grid was literally modified to form the new parkways. Three segments of streets (including the portion of Oak Avenue that crosses over Mill Creek) are eliminated in this scenario.

COMPARISON WITH STRATEGIC PLAN : developable land

Legend

acres	
14.1	master plan parks
19.6	scenario open space
0.99	lost development
0.83	gained development
	no in-park development

> 5.5 ac **open space**

< 0.2 ac **development**

Figure 22 . Scenario A: Modified Grid, Developable Land Diagram

Figure 22 illustrates how the size of the overall area for open space increased with the re-configuration of the plan by more than 5 and a half acres. Nevertheless, because the majority of this additional open space came from the elimination of proposed streets, the amount of developable land did not get affected as much.

SCENARIO A: MODIFIED GRID

SCENARIO A: MODIFIED GRID

STREETSCAPE AS PARKWAY

Main aspect of this scenario was the proposal of two new parkways along the Central Park.

The idea is that these boulevards should be heavily planted with large canopy trees to contrast with the rest of the Plan area, highlighting the presence of the water feature.

SCENARIO B: grid interwoven

The second scenario was called **Scenario B : Grid Interwoven**. This concept was built around the idea of extending the park into the streets and connecting amenities and land uses using streetscape design.

The main ideas that defined this scenario included the following elements: 1) the construction of a number of **urban swales** to direct storm water into the park for natural cleansing before its release onto the Jennings Ditch-Mill Creek system, 2) the **preservation of all existing Oaks**, and 3) the construction of the **largest gathering plaza** at City Hall.

This scenario proposed that only the Mill Creak segment that runs along the Civic Center Park would be re-circulating and with water year-round. This reduction on the size of the water feature allowed the creation of a smaller pond downstream.

To contrast with scenario A, this scenario also proposed a more formal park design for the Civic Center Park including a linear riverwalk and channel, a number of gridded tree groves, and a large public plaza at the new City Hall building.

The applied criteria for scenario B is as listed on page 52.

SCENARIO B: GRID INTERWOVEN

SITE PLAN

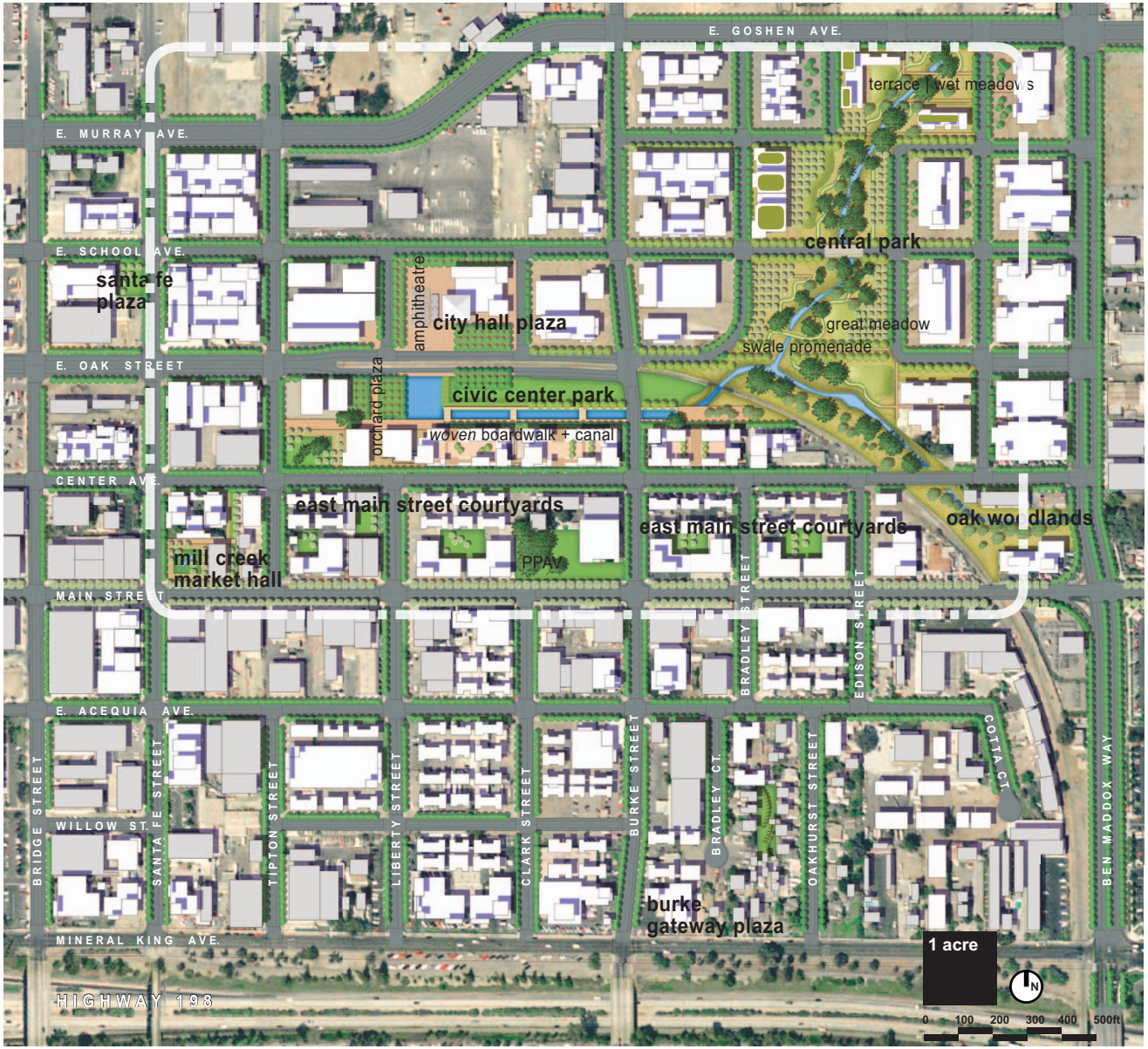


Figure 23 . Scenario B: Grid Interwoven, Illustrative Plan

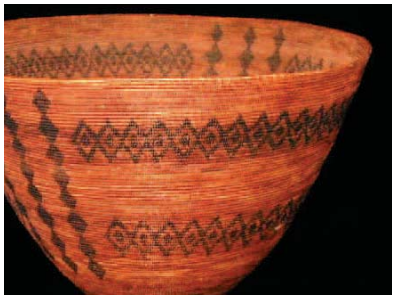
The site plan for scenario B illustrates the preservation of all existing Valley Oaks along Jennings Ditch. It also shows the linear and formal character of the Civic Center Park boardwalk and channel, in contrast with the natural configuration of Jennings Ditch.

Tree groves of flowering trees are planted in grids to celebrate the agricultural heritage of the region. The tree planting in this scenario extends into and from the parks, suggesting a seamless transition between one space and the other.

SCENARIO B key concepts

+ **Preserving All Existing Oaks**
+ **Urban Swales | Wet Meadows**
+ **Large Green on Civic Center Park**
+ **Event Space at City Hall Plaza**

CONCEPT AND CRITERIA




grid weaving gradations natural system responds to urban morphology

ricultural pattern grid weaving gradations natural system responds to urba

grid agricultural pattern grid weaving gradations natural system respo

Evaluation Criteria Applied : Scenario B

Main Ideas for Sustainability

- sidewalk swales
- local stormwater separators and filters
- reduced re-circulation
- solar lighting

STREAM RESTORATION 1

Partial re-circulation system for water feature. Preservation & enhancement of **riparian environment** on Jennings Ditch.

TRAILS + PATHS 2

Park engages City via planting + paving **extensions. Access** to park is through **orthogonal** swale paths. Nature trails **outline** the preserved creek, contrasting with grid form.

URBAN CHARACTER 3

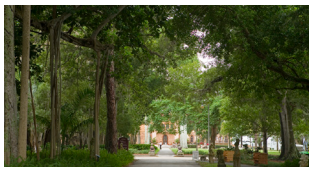
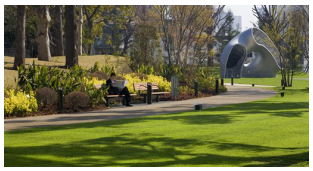
Park form defined by **city grid**, via **extending and weaving** the ortogonal grid into and out of the park. Transitions are provided in **gradations**.

EVENTS + ACTIVITIES 4

Large events in **City Hall plaza**. **Program** organized in **modules**.

Linear vegetated swales within the park align with surrounding street. These swales drain into detention areas located beyond the ditch banks. These detention areas are to hold the water and let it percolate slowly into the soil, preventing contaminants typically found in urban run-off to enter the natural water system.

Figure 24 . Scenario B: Grid Interwoven, Enlargement Plan

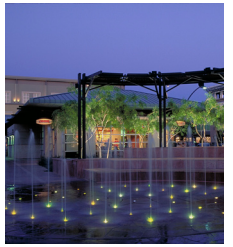

CHARACTER

Figure 25 . Scenario B: Grid Interwoven, View of City Hall Plaza

Figure 26 . Scenario B: Grid Interwoven, View of Riverwalk at Night

As mentioned above, a large public plaza is proposed as the main gathering space in scenario B. Figure 25 shows a market day in front of City Hall.

Figure 26 illustrates the proposed formal boardwalk and riverwalk elements. Mill Creek runs in a built channel, draining into a large reservoir pond.



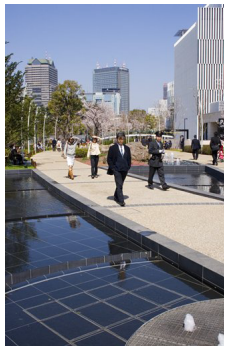


Figure 27 . Scenario B: Grid Interwoven, Model

COMPARISON WITH STRATEGIC PLAN : street alignment

Figure 28 . Scenario B: Grid Interwoven, Street Alignment Diagram

As described in the previous scenario, to allow public to understand how the adopted Strategic Plan was being modified, the consultant team prepared the two graphics in these pages to compare street layout and amount of open space included.

The street alignment diagram here shows the very minimal transformations suggested in this version of the scenarios.

COMPARISON WITH STRATEGIC PLAN : developable land

Legend

acres	
14.1	master plan parks
21.0	scenario open space
1.34	lost development
0.72	gained development
0.97	in-park development

> 6.9 ac **open space**

< 0.3 ac **development**

Figure 29 . Scenario B: Grid Interwoven, Developable Land Diagram

The diagram on this page illustrates how in this scenario the size of the overall area for open space also increased with the re-configuration of the plan, in this case by almost 7 acres.

To compensate for the loss of developable land, scenario B proposed to include some “development within the park”. Envisioned as small commercial (cafes, small restaurants), office, or institutional uses (library, visitor center), these buildings would be designed to feel like an element in the park.


Civic
Center
Office
Civic
Center
Park

SCENARIO A: MODIFIED GRID

STREETSCAPE AS EXTENSION OF PARKS

Park engages City via planting
+ paving **extensions.**

As mentioned before, scenario B tried to link park with the city by extending planting, swales, paving, etc. into sidewalks and streets.

DISCUSSION AND OUTCOME

After the public presentation of the two scenarios illustrated above, the City took the materials produced by the consultants and conducted a number of meetings to obtain additional feedback from specific stakeholders and community members.

At the conclusion of this round of presentations, the City provided the consultant team with comments from several groups. The following is a brief summary of main recommendations:

- In general the stakeholders preferred the street layout of scenario A.
- All existing Oak trees should be preserved.
- Parks acreage needed to be reduced to eliminate any potential developable land loss.
- Reinforce connections to Downtown.
- Strengthen the visual terminus of Oak Avenue at the amphimeadow.

During this review period, the engineers of the consultant team also studied the benefits and issues of both scenarios and provided a number of recommendations to be included in the preferred alternative.

The main recommendations developed by the hydraulic and civil engineers include:

- The connection of the proposed Valley Oak Parkway into Oak Avenue will not be feasible due to railroad code restrictions that limits the number of crossing and left-turns allowed in an urban setting.
- Since Mill Creek is currently considered Waters of the US, the proposal of the formal channelized version of the creek in scenario B is not recommended.
- Likewise for the proposal of creating a water feature including Mill Creek. It is recommended that the creek is left to its natural seasonal pattern, and focus the year-round feature only on the Jennings Ditch (not considered Waters of the US).