# Site and Context 2

This chapter describes the key characteristics of the Hillsdale Station Area that have shaped the development of this Plan. More detail about existing conditions is found in the Existing Conditions Report, which serves as a companion document to this Plan.

## A. Regional and Local Setting

The City of San Mateo is located in the middle of the San Francisco Peninsula, approximately 20 miles south of San Francisco and about 30 miles north of San Jose, as shown in Figure 2-1. It is located next to San Francisco Bay and benefits from easy access to the San Mateo Bridge, Highway 101, and Interstate 280. In addition to good roadway connections, the city is well-served by Caltrain with three stations: Downtown San Mateo, Hayward Park, and Hillsdale. San Mateo is a significant Peninsula city serving as a regional center with a well-established downtown. The regional rail connection remains an important organizing principle for the community.

Figure 2-1: Regional Map

The Station Area encompasses approximately 150 acres of land surrounding the proposed relocated Hillsdale Station in the southern half of the city, as shown in Figure 2-2. The approved Bay Meadows Phase II, and recently completed Phase I, lie directly east of the Station Area. Together, they will be a sizeable neighboring community with residential, commercial, and office uses. Many of the proposed open spaces in Bay Meadows Phase II are publicly accessible and will serve Station Area residents and visitors. Plans for the development include two new connections to the Station Area across the rail tracks at 28th and 31st Avenues. Just north of Bay Meadows and east of Delaware Street is the San Mateo County Event Center, a regional destination for meetings and special events. Another point of interest in the surrounding area is the San Mateo Medical Center south of the Station Area.

## B. Related Documents

This section describes recent planning documents that guide development in and around the Station Area.

### 1. General Plan

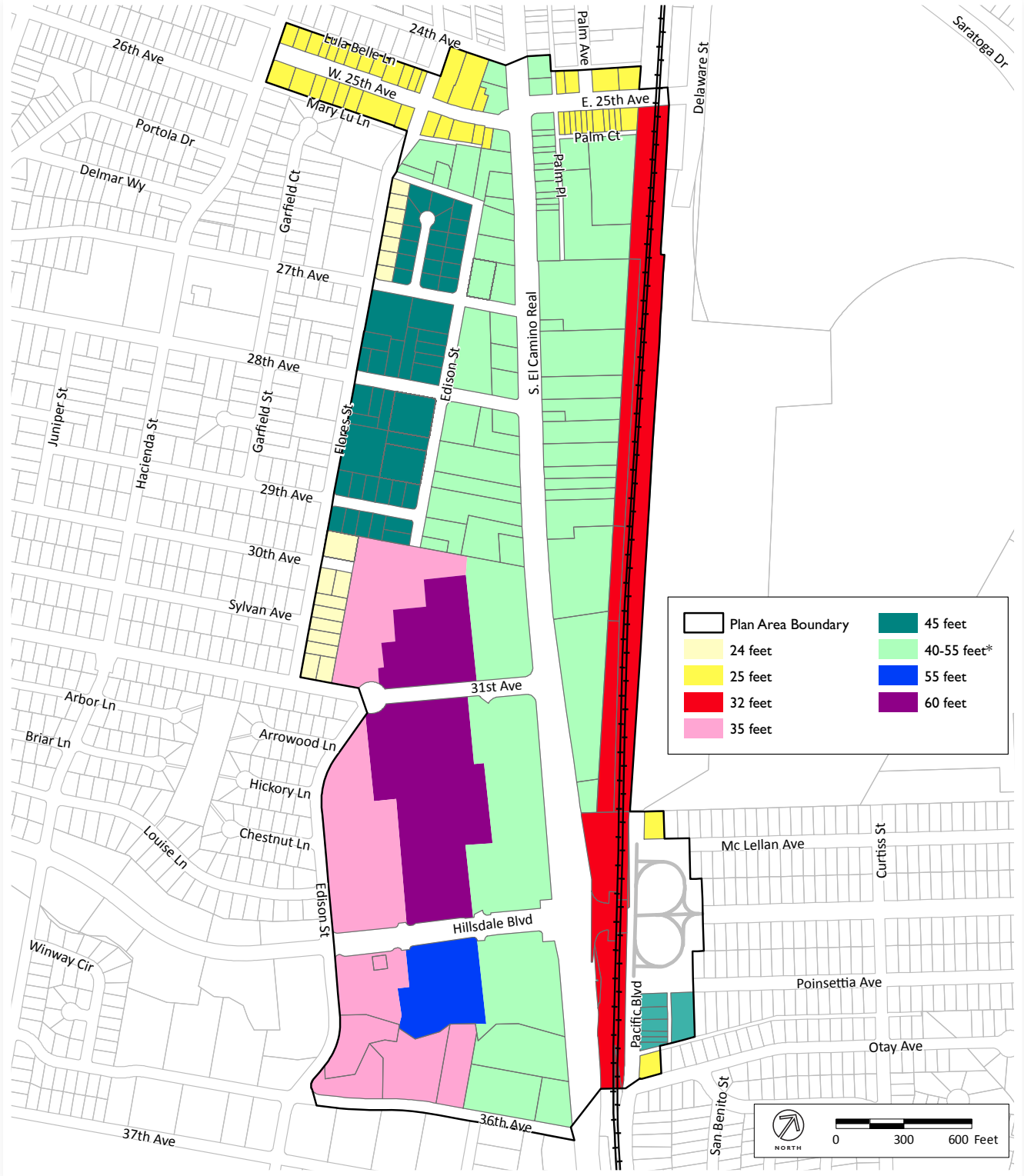
Adopted in 2010, the General Plan *Vision 2030* is the result of an extensive planning process, providing a clear framework for future development in San Mateo. *Vision 2030* is guided by eight major planning principles that strike a balance between new growth and preservation of San Mateo's quality of life. These directives include concentrating major new development near transportation and transit corridors and beautifying and improving El Camino Real. They continue the direction provided by the prior General Plan and are evident in the documents discussed in this section. The land uses designated by the General Plan in the Station Area are indicative of the City's desire to focus growth around transit centers. The most prevalent land use designations are Transit Oriented Development, Regional/Community Commercial/High Density Multi-Family, High Density Multi-Family, Regional/Community Commercial, and Neighborhood Commercial. Figure 2-3 illustrates the General Plan land use designations in the Station Area.

Maximum building heights, as shown in Figure 2-4, are indicative of the City's desire to focus growth on the city's main transportation corridors. In the Station Area, development on parcels along El Camino Real may be up to 55 feet so long as they are parcels over 100 feet deep and conform to specific policies. These height limits are set per Measure P, a height limit ordinance passed by the city's voters in 2004.

Figure 2-2: Citywide Context

Figure 2-3: General Plan Land Use

Figure 2-4: General Plan Heights




**For lots more than 100 feet deep, buildings over 40 feet may be permitted up to a maximum of 55 feet if they conform with specific Planning Area policies.*

This Station Area Plan takes advantage of, and applies standards that are consistent with, these generally higher density designations around transit centers.

## 2. Zoning

The City of San Mateo's *Zoning Code* implements the General Plan through zoning districts and overlay zones, and contains general provisions for orderly development in San Mateo. A map of these zoning designations within the Station Area is shown in Figure 2-5.

The Station Area contains residential designations ranging from single-family to multi-family and commercial designations of different ranges from the neighborhood-scale to regional-scale. The *Zoning Code* also contains specific language that refers users to the San Mateo Rail Corridor Transit-Oriented Development Plan, discussed below, for regulations governing TOD parcels. While the Corridor Plan governs these parcels for TOD, other designations in the Station Area are highly flexible and also conducive to high density, transit-friendly, mixed-use development. In addition to the residentially zoned parcels, parcels with C1, C2, C3, and E2 designations allow for residential uses. Residential development in these designations is allowed by right with a residential zone overlay and encouraged by allowing a higher overall intensity of development for mixed-use projects. Residential units may be developed on parcels without a residential overlay district but are subject to a Special Use Permit. If such a permit is issued, the residential development follows R3 "Minimum Development Standards."

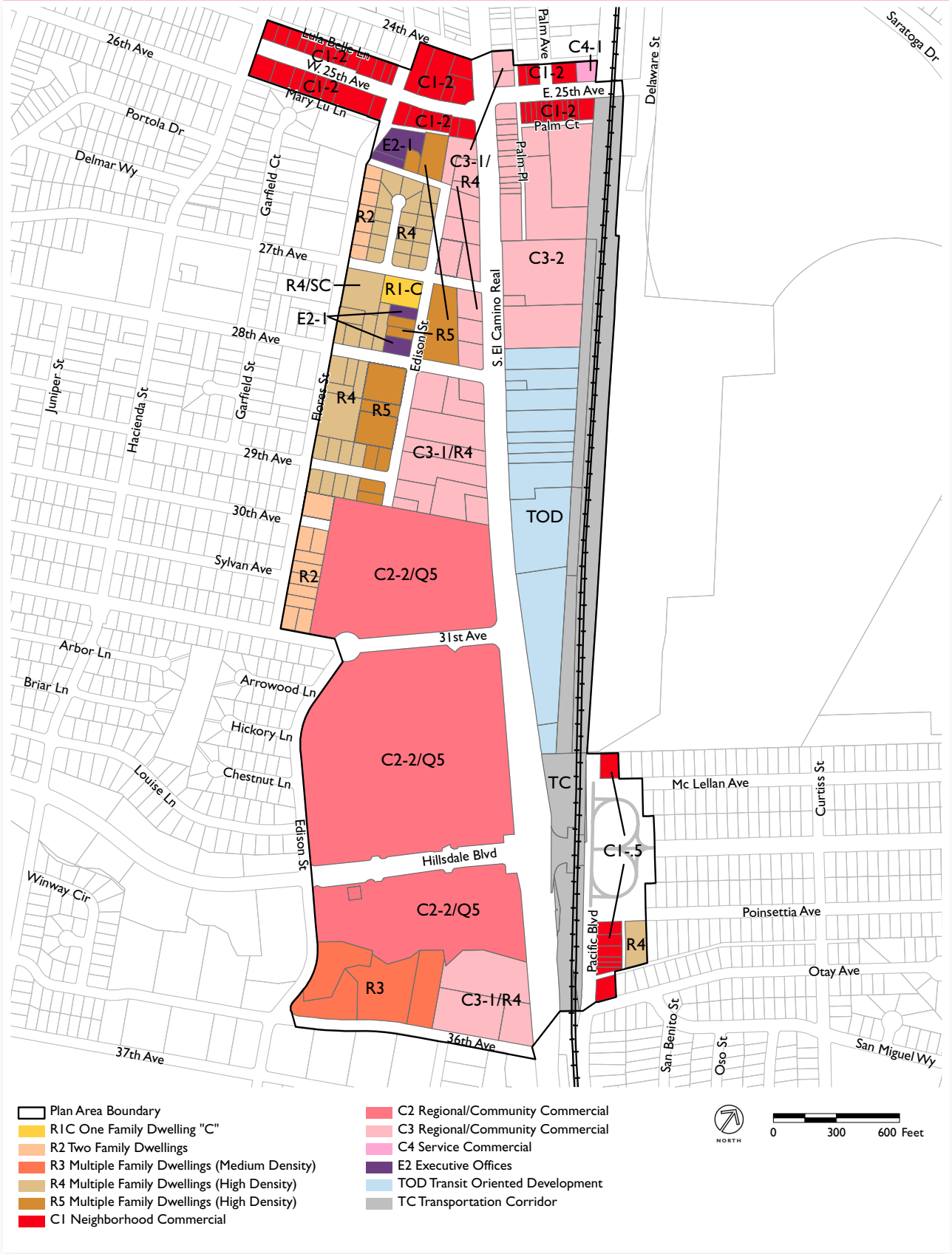
## 3. Measure P

In 2004, the voters of San Mateo passed Measure P. Measure P extended the provisions of the sun setting Measure H. Measure H passed in 1991 and became effective January 1, 1992. Measure P extended the horizon-year of Measure H to 2020 and incorporated some modifications. It places limitations on building heights throughout the city, with the intent of maintaining San Mateo's suburban character while providing for economic development and increasing the development of affordable housing. The measure includes language that was inserted into the General Plan. Building heights permitted in the Station Area are as shown in Figure 2-4.

## 4. Senate Bill (SB) 375

On September 30, 2008, Governor Schwarzenegger signed into law SB 375. SB 375 focuses on housing and transportation planning decisions to reduce fossil fuel consumption and conserve farmlands and habitat. SB 375 provides a path for improved planning by providing incentives to locate housing developments closer to where

Figure 2-5: Zoning



people work and go to school, allowing them to reduce vehicle miles traveled every year. Finally, SB 375 provides certain exemptions under CEQA law for projects that are proposed consistent with local plans developed under SB 375. MTC will prepare a Sustainable Communities Strategy for the Bay Area to implement this bill. Although that strategy is not yet available, it will certainly emphasize development like that shown in the Hillsdale Station Area in this Plan, prioritizing the construction of housing and other compatible uses around transit centers.

### 5. Sustainable Initiatives Plan

The Sustainable Initiatives Plan was prepared in 2007 by San Mateo's Sustainability Advisory Committee. It includes recommendations to reduce San Mateo's carbon footprint through energy efficiency, transportation, and City operations; reduce water use; improve San Mateo's suburban forest; and expand recycling and waste reduction opportunities. Many of the recommendations were incorporated into the General Plan *Vision 2030*, as they are aligned with the General Plan's commitment to sustainable development.

This Plan contains concepts, goals, and policies that are supportive of specific recommendations made in the Sustainability Initiatives Plan. The following key recommendations are aligned with the vision of this Plan:

- T 1: Increase mode share for pedestrian and bicycle travel to 30 percent for trips of one mile or less by 2020. Bicycle and pedestrian travel currently represents about 3 percent of all travel.
- T 5: Concentrate future development near rail transit stations.

### 6. Multi-Family Design Guidelines

There are several multi-family buildings in the Station Area, which are subject to City design guidelines for this type of development. While the zoning code regulates the height, bulk, setback, parking, open space, and other standards, the design guidelines establish preferred architectural character, site design, and building design. As property is redeveloped from lower density single-family housing to larger multi-family projects, it can significantly alter the character of the neighborhood. The Design Guidelines are intended to ensure that new multi-family developments improve the quality of life for existing and new residents. Although this Plan proposes specific standards and guidelines for new residential development, the Multi-Family Design Guidelines provide a useful context and will still apply to new development on parcels not addressed in the later Chapters of this Plan.

## 7. El Camino Real Master Plan

Adopted in 2001, the *El Camino Real Master Plan* identifies issues and opportunities for improving the safety and urban design of one of the most heavily traveled, historic corridors in San Mateo. Some of the specific elements of the plan that have directly informed the Station Area Plan include:

- Themed intersections at 25th and 31st Avenues.
- Setbacks from El Camino property line to create a wider effective sidewalk. In cases where the effective sidewalk exceeds 10 feet, this area should be landscaped, with areas adjacent to building entries and display windows designed predominately as a hardscape area for gathering and outdoor commercial activity with accent planters, raised beds, benches and/or other types of pedestrian amenities.

Included as part of the plan are General Corridor Design Guidelines. These guidelines serve as recommendations for improvement and redevelopment going forward. The guidelines ensure attractive, site-sensitive, and pedestrian-oriented development for parcels on El Camino Real, including many in the Station Area.

## 8. San Mateo Rail Corridor Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Plan

*The San Mateo Rail Corridor TOD Plan* (Rail Corridor Plan) was adopted in 2005 to provide a framework for TOD development and streetscape improvements around the Hillsdale and Hayward Park Caltrain station areas. A key objective is a new, well-designed transit center for multiple modes of transportation, with specific emphasis on pedestrian access, open space, and shared parking around the Hillsdale Station. Some of the specific elements of the Rail Corridor Plan that have directly informed the Station Area Plan include:

- Grade separations at 25th, 28th, and 31st Avenues to improve local access for pedestrians, bicycles, and autos;
- A viaduct structure for the tracks between 28th and 31st Avenues to facilitate connections, light, and air.
- Drop-off locations for shuttles near the Caltrain Station access points.
- A "transit plaza" between 28th and 31st Avenues that is at least 8,000 square feet.
- The Rail Corridor Plan supports the implementation of the theme intersections proposed by the *El Camino Real Master Plan*. In addition, the Plan proposes the theme intersection concept to be extended to 28th Avenue.

In addition to these overall concepts, the Rail Corridor Plan establishes the TOD zoning district that applies to many parcels in the Station Area between the train tracks and El Camino Real north of the existing Caltrain Station.

### 9. Grand Boulevard Initiative

The Grand Boulevard Initiative is a collaborative effort between 19 cities, counties, local, and regional agencies, as well as other stakeholders, such as local businesses and advocates for housing, bicycling, economic development, and smart growth, with the goal of improving the performance, safety, and aesthetics of El Camino Real. In part, the intent of the effort is to clarify regulations for El Camino Real, which is under the jurisdiction of Caltrans, but also subject to regulation by local and regional agencies.

### 10. Grand Boulevard Multimodal Transportation Corridor Plan

The Grand Boulevard Multimodal Transportation Corridor Plan, adopted on September 15, 2010, translates the Grand Boulevard vision into tangible strategies and design concepts that fulfill the Grand Boulevard Initiative guiding principles. As part of the plan, transit and land use scenarios are analyzed to explore possibilities for enhanced transit service along the corridor. Design guidelines and prototypes are developed to illustrate possible multimodal streetscape options.

The plan includes the Multi-Modal Access Strategy and Context Sensitive Design Guidelines, which propose pedestrian, bicycle, and transit scenarios on El Camino Real. The design guidelines also provide a regulatory context on how new streetscape improvements meet, exceed, or require design exceptions of Caltrans' standards.

## C. Existing Land Use

Existing land uses in the Station Area are primarily a mix of commercial and residential uses. Neighborhood-oriented commercial and office space lines 25$^{th}$ Avenue. Along El Camino Real, land uses transition from small-scale retail uses in the north to larger strip and formula retail in the south, culminating in the regional commercial center of the Hillsdale Shopping Center. Generally, the entrances to uses along El Camino Real front the street and the loading areas are at the back of the buildings. The Caltrain station is primarily surrounded by parking, with one national restaurant chain – TGI Friday's – and a station building occupied by a convenience foods store. The western extent of the Station Area, between Edison Street and Flores Street, is a mixture of single-family homes, duplexes, townhomes, and multi-family homes. Hillsdale Garden Apartments, a large garden style multi-family project, encompasses several blocks at the south-west corner of the Station Area.

## D. Urban Design

San Mateo is one of a chain of communities that began as a trading and agricultural post along El Camino Real and grew up during the last century around the commuter rail line serving San Francisco. These two transportation corridors have largely influenced the form of the Station Area.

### 1. Streets

El Camino Real is a six-lane commercial boulevard with a development pattern that is typical of many Peninsula cities. It is characterized by a wide automobile right-of-way, narrow sidewalks, and minimal pedestrian amenities that reinforce the perception of an auto-oriented corridor. As the main north-south connection in the Station Area, El Camino Real is experienced by thousands of residents, travelers, and motorists each day. Because of its size, form, and function, El Camino Real serves as the most prominent physical feature of the Station Area.


*Looking north on El Camino Real.*

The east-west streets are more varied in size, form, and function. 25th Avenue is a two-lane, slow moving street with good pedestrian amenities and angled parking west of El Camino Real, qualities that work well in a small-scale business district. 27th, 28th, and 29th Avenues are typical residential streets that connect the neighborhoods to El Camino Real, defined mostly by minor landscaping and parallel parking. Hillsdale Boulevard and 31st Avenue are defined largely by their relationship to the Shopping Center. Hillsdale Boulevard is a major arterial and a main "front door' to the flanking suburban mall development. As a result, the character of Hillsdale Boulevard is representative of a street engineered for maximum vehicular flow: a wide right-of-way with sparse pedestrian amenities and trees, designed for drivers going through the Station Area and into the shopping center.

*25th Avenue.*

*Hillsdale Boulevard.*

## 2. Buildings

Buildings in the Station Area are varied in form and orientation, and generally exhibit qualities that are reflective of the street and neighborhood they are in. Small-scale commercial buildings, typically one to two stories tall, are consistently built to the street edge in the 25th Avenue business district, west of El Camino Real. Although they are of various architectural styles, the buildings exhibit a coherent design that is comfortable for pedestrians because of the scale and orientation of doors, windows, and awnings.