

MID-TOWN MASTER LAND USE VISION AND MOBILITY PLAN

Existing Conditions Review and Identification of Opportunities and Constraints

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This is a project for the Town of Yucca Valley with funding provided by the Southern California Association of Governments' (SCAG) Compass Blueprint Program. Compass Blueprint assists Southern California cities and other organizations in evaluating planning options and stimulating development consistent with the region's goals. Compass Blueprint tools support visioning efforts, infill analyses, economic and policy analyses, and marketing and communication programs.

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A. Introduction

This memorandum provides an analysis of existing conditions, as well as issues and opportunities present within the Mid-Town area in the Town of Yucca Valley. This information will be used during the planning process as a basis for shaping alternatives, developing land use recommendations, and conceptual site planning for the Mid-Town study area. The purpose of this analysis is to understand the physical setting of the Mid-Town area and identify opportunities and constraints that will contribute to the planning process for a more livable Mid-Town area.

This memorandum is submitted in conjunction with:

- Existing Mobility Conditions Memorandum (prepared by Iteris, August 2012)
- Market Potential Analysis (prepared by Stanley R. Hoffman Associates, August 2012)
- Stakeholder and Agency Interview Notes (prepared by The Arroyo Group, August 2012)

B. Purpose and Objectives

The Town of Yucca Valley is embarking on an important period of growth and development, having initiated a General Plan Update in October 2011 and identifying three Focus Areas as part of this process that have great potential for change and implementation. One of these Focus Areas, which will require more detailed recommendations than those provided at a General Plan level, is the Mid-Town Focus Area. A focused plan and implementation strategies for this area, which is the purpose of this project, will provide the tools to develop and redevelop the core commercial area of the Town.

The primary objectives of the project are to identify land use options that could include increased housing densities and mixed uses, as well as explore pedestrian linkages between public transit, the Government Center and major recreation, commercial, and education nodes of activity.

An equally important objective is to implement design practices, such as Complete Streets, to enable safe, attractive, and comfortable access and travel for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and public transport users of all ages and abilities, particularly along Twentynine Palms Highway, which acts as a barrier between the northern and southern portions of the Mid-Town area. As stated in the Yucca Valley Community Profile (November 2011), "Yucca Valley's corridors are a vital component of the town's economic stability, and therefore, great care should be taken to ensure the streetscapes, signage, and other architectural details support the quality image that the community desires to convey. These corridors constitute a significant opportunity for the community to further enhance its image and maintain a strong economic presence in the basin."

A final objective of the process is to identify potential partnerships and implementation strategies among and between public and private entities for jointly developing programs and/or policies directed at improving livability and mobility with the Mid-Town area and to facilitate realization of the recommendations of the Plan.

C. Mid-Town Study Area

The Mid-Town area is approximately 568 acres in size and is illustrated in Figure 1. It is located in the center of the Town of Yucca Valley, and is generally bounded by Sage Avenue on the west, Joshua View Drive on the east, Onaga Trail on the south, and Crestview Drive on the north. The Mid-Town area is anchored by the intersection of two state highways - State Route 62 (Twentynine Palms Highway) and State Route 247 (Old Woman Springs Road). This intersection is the highest traffic volume intersection in the Morongo Basin and a focal point of the community. These highways provide the only regional transportation linkages to and from the Morongo Basin, and Twentynine Palms Highway is the gateway to Joshua Tree National Park. In addition, the majority of the Town's non-residential uses are located along Twentynine Palms Highway, thereby contributing significantly to the Town's overall image and character. Twentynine Palms Highway exhibits the right-of-way and auto-oriented character that is typical of state highways and major arterials.

The boundary for the Mid-Town study area has been minimally changed from the boundary shown in the SCAG Request for Proposals (RFP No. 12-001-B23) in order to match the edge of streets and parcels. This will allow for accurate quantitative analysis of the study area, as well as recommendations for entire parcels, rather than portions of parcels.

D. Regional Context

The Town of Yucca Valley is located approximately 25 miles northeast of Palm Springs in San Bernardino County (Figure 2). Twentynine Palms Highway links the Town to Interstate 10 and the Coachella Valley and west to the Inland Empire. Old Woman Springs Road (SR 247) connects with Twentynine Palms Highway in the center of town, the location of the Mid-Town study area, providing access to Barstow and the Victor Valley and Interstate 15 via SR 18. Nearby communities include the community of Joshua Tree and the City of Twentynine Palms to the east, the community of Morongo Valley to the southwest, and the communities of Pioneertown and Yucca Mesa to the north. The San Bernardino Mountains lie to the west. The Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center (MCAGCC) is located north of the City of Twentynine Palms.

Immediately south and southeast of Yucca Valley lies Joshua Tree National Park. Declared a U.S. National Park in 1994 when the U.S. Congress passed the California Desert Protection Act (Public Law 103-433), it had previously been a U.S. National Monument since 1936. It covers a land area of approximately one million acres. The Park is named for the Joshua tree (*Yucca brevifolia*) forests native to the park and includes two distinct desert systems, the Mojave Desert and the Colorado Desert, which occur at different elevations within the Park and have profoundly contrasting appearances. Yucca Valley is one of the four gateway communities to the National Park. With approximately 1.3 million visitors visiting Joshua Tree National Park each year, there is opportunity to better capture visitors passing through Yucca Valley and create a desirable destination that complements a trip to the National Park.

The Coachella Valley lies further south, below the Little San Bernardino Mountains. Cities in the Coachella Valley include Desert Hot Springs, Palm Springs, Cathedral City, Rancho Mirage, Palm Desert, and Indio. A large number of Yucca Valley residents go "down the hill" to the Coachella Valley for greater dining, retailing and entertainment options than what is available in the Morongo Basin. There is opportunity for the Mid-Town area to provide greater options to local residents, as well the potential to integrate Yucca Valley's visitor-related economic activity with Coachella Valley's visitor activity.



Figure 1 – Mid-Town Study Area

 Mid-Town Project Area



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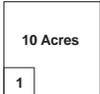
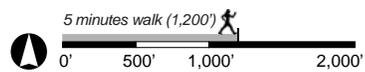




Figure 2 – Regional Context

E. Existing Land Use

Existing land uses in the Mid-Town area are varied and include a high concentration of core government, transportation, recreation, and education services. It is also the prime commercial retail, service and employment base within the Town. Table 1 identifies existing land use in the study area.

As it contains Town Hall and the Community Center Complex (Government Center), Mid-Town is the civic and cultural heart of the community. Other public/quasi-public community facilities and services located in Mid-Town include the Hi-Desert Nature Museum, San Bernardino County Public Library-Yucca Valley Branch, Yucca Valley Senior Center, Morongo Basin Transit Authority Transfer Facility, United States Post Office, and San Bernardino County Sheriff's office substation. In addition, there are several major financial institutions as well as commercial and service oriented businesses, including grocery stores, restaurants (both chain and locally-owned), and motels. In addition, while not yet developed, a 75-unit senior-housing project is proposed to be constructed on the vacant site just south of the Government Center on Twentynine Palms Highway and Dumosa Avenue.

Yucca Valley High School is located just outside the study area boundary to the west on Sage Avenue, but is important for the synergy it creates with the retailing, government and civic uses in Mid-Town. In addition, the Yucca Valley Boys and Girls Club, Tri-Valley Little League Facility, and Brehm Youth Sports Park Facility, which is currently under construction, are located west of study area on Little League Drive and Palm Avenue. They also interface with the Mid-Town area and improved linkages should be made between the facilities and the Government and Community Center complex.

Community amenities, such as schools, grocery stores, and civic and cultural buildings are vital to the Mid-Town area and the Town should capitalize on the concentration of these amenities in the study area, enhance connections to them, and build on the synergy of new mixed use projects. These elements can enhance neighborhoods, create identity and strengthen the sense of community.

Single-family residential uses surround the government and commercial core to north and south. In the area between Sunnyslope Drive and Crestview Drive, the area is a mix of vacant land and single family homes. The area between Yucca Trail and Onaga Trail to the south, however, is a well-established single-family residential neighborhood. There is also some multiple family housing located closer in to the commercial core.

While the Mid-Town area is considered the "downtown" of Yucca Valley, approximately 17% of the area (in net acres) is vacant (Figure 3), and many properties are underutilized. Approximately 80% of the land within the study area is in private ownership.

Table 1: Existing Land Use in the Mid-Town Area

Existing Land Use	Land Area (acres)	Percentage of Specific Plan Area
Airports	22.30	3.93%
Communication Facilities	1.64	0.29%
Educational Institutions	3.94	0.69%
Fire Station	0.61	0.11%
General Office Use	13.57	2.39%
Government Offices	21.67	3.82%
Hotels and Motels	1.20	0.21%
Improved Flood Waterways	16.99	2.99%
Local Parks and Recreation	0.06	0.01%
Manufacturing	1.71	0.30%
Manufacturing, Assesmbly and Industrial Services	0.82	0.14%
Multi Family Residential	23.81	4.19%
Other Commercial	7.59	1.34%
Park and Ride	1.02	0.18%
Public Facilities	8.00	1.41%
Retail Stores and Commercial Services	44.58	7.85%
Single Family Residential	193.20	34.02%
Vacant	79.24	13.95%
Water Storage Facilities	11.98	2.11%
Wholesaling and Warehousing	3.24	0.57%
Total Net Acres	457.18	80.51%
Right of Way	110.70	19.49%
TOTAL GROSS ACRES	567.88	100.00%

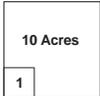
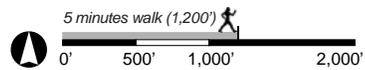


Figure 3 – Vacant Land in the Mid-Town Area

- Mid-Town Project Area
- Vacant Properties



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F. General Plan Land Use Designations

The Town of Yucca Valley is currently undergoing an update to its General Plan. A major focus of the General Plan Update is to incorporate Mixed Use land use designations at appropriate locations in the Town. As such, a large portion of the Mid-Town area, primarily located around Twentynine Palms Highway and Old Woman Springs Road, is being designated Mixed Use (MU). Per the proposed land use designation descriptions, the Mixed Use designation is intended for a mix of uses including commercial, professional office, recreational, and high density residential. Its purpose is “to allow highly integrated commercial, residential and office uses that facilitate pedestrian access and walkability.” The areas designated Mixed Use will allow for the greatest change in the Mid-Town area.

Other proposed General Plan designations in the Mid-Town area include Public/Quasi-Public, Industrial, Airport, Commercial, Medium Density Residential, Medium High Density Residential, Low Density Residential, and Rural Residential. These are identified in the following table and illustrated in Figure 4.

Table 2: Proposed General Plan Land Use Designations in the Mid-Town Area

General Plan Land Use	Land Area (acres)	Percentage of Specific Plan Area
Airport (A)	10.54	2.31%
Commercial (C)	3.05	0.67%
Industrial (I)	16.50	3.61%
Low Density Residential (LDR) 2.0-5.0 du/ac	0.82	0.18%
Medium Density Residential (MDR) 5.1-8.0 du/ac	1.25	0.27%
Medium High Density Res. (MHDR) 8.1-14.0 du/ac	31.96	6.99%
Mixed Use (MU)	96.03	21.00%
Public/Quasi-Public (P/QP)	68.22	14.92%
Rural Residential (RR-0.5) 0.5 ac min	134.50	29.42%
Rural Residential (RR-1) 1 ac min	94.30	20.63%
Total Net Acres	457.18	100.00%
Right of Way	110.70	24.21%
TOTAL GROSS ACRES	567.88	124.21%

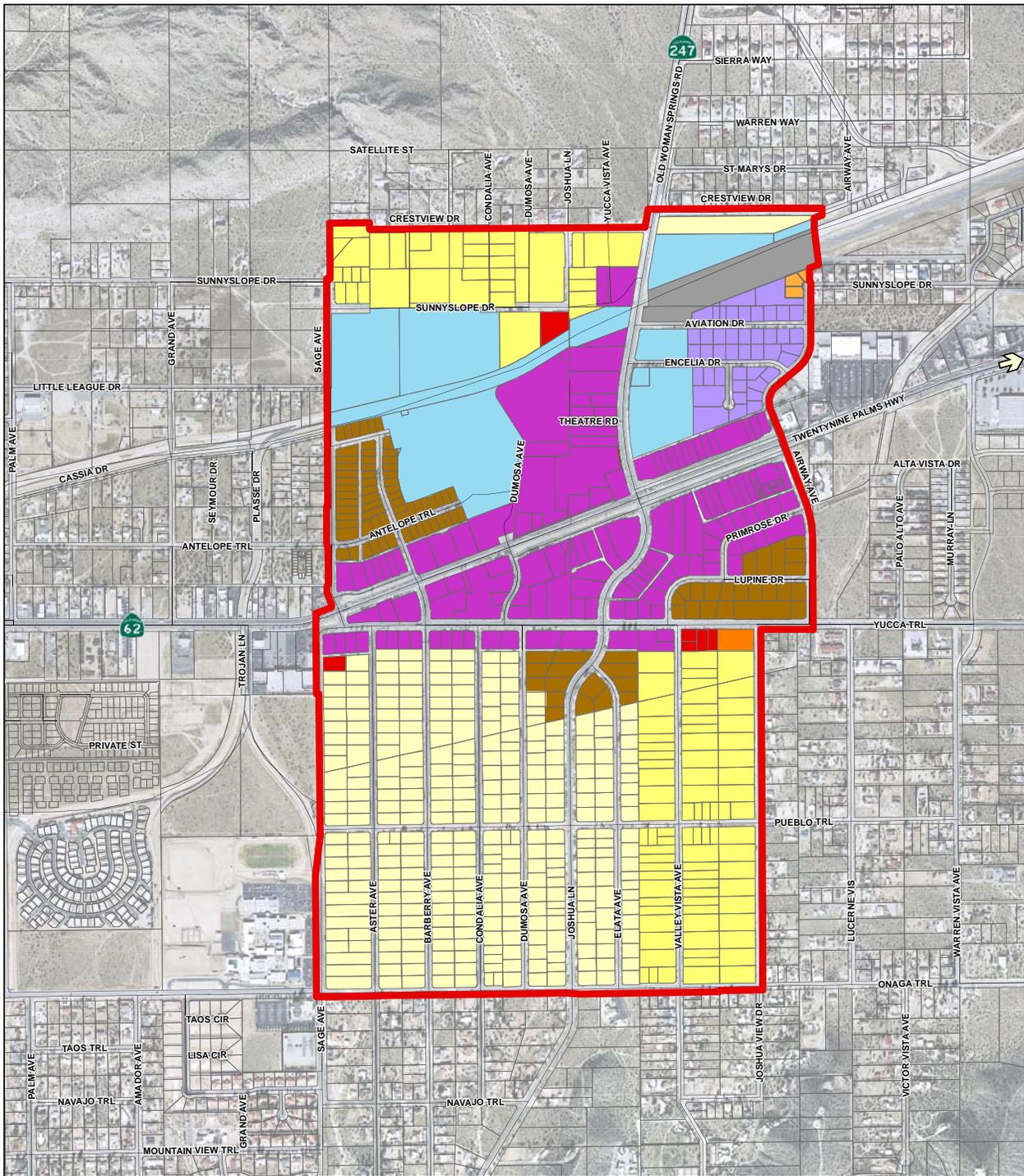


Figure 4 – Proposed General Plan Land Use Designations

Mid-Town Project Area

Proposed General Plan Designations

Rural Residential (RR-0.5) 0.5 ac min

Rural Residential (RR-1) 1 ac min

Low Density Residential (LDR) 2.0-5.0 du/ac

Medium High Density Res. (MHDR) 8.1-14.0 du/ac

Medium Density Residential (MDR) 5.1-8.0 du/ac

Mixed Use (MU)

Public/Quasi-Public (P/QP)

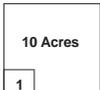
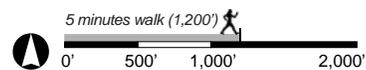
Industrial (I)

Airport (A)

Commercial (C)



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F. Land Use and Urban Design Opportunities and Constraints

Based on our initial research, field analysis, meetings with City and SCAG staff, and stakeholder interviews, the following are key land use and urban design opportunities and constraints identified for Mid-Town. Many of the opportunities were identified during the stakeholder/agency interviews and reflect the stakeholders' interests in the Mid-Town area and Town of Yucca as a whole. Opportunities and constraints related to mobility and market conditions/economics are included in the reports prepared by Iteris and Stanley R. Hoffman, submitted concurrent with this memorandum.

Opportunities

- Mid-Town is already the cultural and civic heart of the Town because of the well-established Government and Community Center complex. The character and design of Mid-Town should focus on enhancing its civic status and importance in the community. There is opportunity to bring in more residents to provide more day/night time activity for current and future retail. There is also opportunity to create additional open space and/or public gathering space throughout Mid-Town, as well as pedestrian linkages to and from nearby retail, business, and residential uses. The momentum created by new development in this area, such as the new senior housing project immediately south of Town Hall, should be continued with new projects and streetscape design. Connections to this important civic node should be established and enhanced to ensure access from adjacent neighborhoods.



The Government and Community Center is the civic and cultural heart of the community. The character and design of Mid-Town should focus on enhancing its civic status and importance in the community.

- There are numerous vacant and underutilized properties in Mid-Town, many of them contiguous, which allow opportunities for unified projects, rather than piecemeal development, the previous norm in the Mid-Town area. There are also a significant number of large parking lots, as well as potentially unused right-of-way. Parking lots and vacant parcels oftentimes represent opportunity sites for new development that can serve as catalyst projects in the revitalization of an area. Developing larger, unified projects can reinforce mixed use synergy, increasing housing choices with higher densities, and offer the possibility for meaningful public open space areas within projects.



Vacant and underutilized parcels provide opportunities for higher intensity development that will enhance the activity within Mid-Town. However, because the parcels are under different ownerships, development incentives may need to be provided to encourage parcel assembly for larger, unified projects.

- Mid-Town’s location along Twentynine Palms Highway can be a positive attribute. There are high volumes of through traffic, particularly from visitors to Joshua Tree National Park and traffic related to the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center (Marine Base). There is a major opportunity to capture this traffic with well-planned and aesthetically pleasing development and open spaces. Ideally, a sensitive, optimal mix of land uses, landscape, and public gathering spaces will draw travelers from the highway to shop, dine and recreate in the future development of the Mid-Town area.
- There are many examples of “gateway” towns into National Parks, including Springdale, Utah (adjacent to Zion National Park, and Three Sisters, California (adjacent to Sequoia National Park), which are destinations in themselves and complement and enhance a visitor’s trip to the adjacent National Park by providing a “local” and pleasing experience. Mid-Town can build upon its unique natural setting and characteristics to attract visitors to stop in the Mid-Town area. In addition, nearby Pioneertown is capturing more and more visitors with its Western-themed amenities and increasing music scene. The Mid-Town area can also capitalize on this nearby attraction.
- There is currently no unique identity for the Mid-Town area that distinguishes it from the rest of the Morongo Basin. With the potential for a significant amount of new development in a mixed use setting, there is an opportunity to create a strong identity for the area through architectural and landscape and open space design features, as well as public art. Yucca Valley’s dramatic physical setting and topography inspire design elements that build upon the characteristics of the high desert environment.



Yucca Valley's natural landscape and beautiful high desert setting should be enhanced and featured in all new development and public improvements. Building upon the natural context offers great potential for creating a strong identity and sense of place.

- In addition, there is little distinctive streetscape along Twentynine Palms Highway throughout Yucca Valley. Distinctive streetscape improvements along both highways, as well as along Dumosa Avenue into the Government Center, will give Mid-Town identity and help create a destination.
- There is the opportunity to embrace a very low water use plant palette that reflects Mid-Town's high desert location and provides a climate-appropriate and beautiful landscape. Sensitively introducing more landscaping that is complementary to the prevalent Joshua Trees and provides shade and visual interest can create an inviting environment that will be in keeping with the high desert context. In addition, new development should be sited and clustered to protect and minimize the impact on the native Joshua Trees.



Several sites in Mid-Town, including the Hi-Desert Nature Museum and Yucca Valley Transit Center, use low water landscaping and public art features to create a visually appealing environment that is in keeping with the high desert setting. Similar improvements should be encouraged throughout Mid-Town in the both the public and private realm.

- There are multiple connection potentials to residential uses, public facilities, and employment areas both within and adjacent to the planning area which can reinforce both the livability of residential areas and the viability and vibrancy of retail functions. Linkages between Mid-Town and Brehm Park, which is being constructed near the Little League facility to the west of Mid-Town, should be explored. In addition, a pedestrian connection across Old Woman Springs Road to the Industrial-designated land should be made to foster walkability between this future employment area and the government/retailing areas of Mid-Town.
- With the many vacant and underutilized parcels in the Mid-Town, there is opportunity to relocate the California Welcome Center and Chamber of Commerce to Mid-Town to create further synergy between visitors passing through Yucca Valley and the cultural, retailing and dining opportunities to be located in Mid-Town.
- The convergence of Twentynine Palms Highway with Old Woman Springs Road in the center of Mid-Town creates a significant street intersection and reinforces Mid-Town as the focal point of the community. This intersection presents an opportunity for an interesting and memorable gateway element or public art feature for Mid-Town.

Constraints

- While there are several areas of contiguous vacant parcels, they are generally owned by multiple owners, and not under single ownership. This can make parcel assembly for larger projects challenging as there can be difficulties in creating consensus for the future of the area. The Town should provide development incentives to encourage lot consolidation. With such incentives, the ownership pattern may provide opportunities for multiple property owners to share ideas and information, thereby potentially reducing individual cost and effort. There are also potential benefits in joint development and/or developing complementary projects.
- Twentynine Palms Highway creates a significant physical, psychological, and visual barrier between the north and south sides of Mid-Town. The frontage roads (Twentynine Palms Outerhighway North and South) further exacerbate the problem. There is a need to reconceptualize the Highway right-of-way to be more attractive and provide for pedestrians, bicycles and transit, as well as better link the north and south sides with design and streetscape elements. Improved landscaping and streetscape amenities in the parkways that separate the main highway from the outerhighways are needed.



Twentynine Palms Highway is the “window” into the community as it runs the length of the Town. Currently, it creates a major barrier between the north and south sides of Mid-Town and presents no sense of place. With uniform streetscape and pedestrian improvements, the highway can contribute greatly to Mid-Town’s identity and become part of a pedestrian circulation system within Mid-Town.



The north and south outerhighways further contribute to the impression that Twentynine Palms Highway is a barrier. Improved landscaping, pedestrian improvements and streetscape amenities in the parkways that separate the main highway from the outerhighways are needed.

- Irregular block size and street grid configuration in the Mid-Town area are also significant inhibitors to safe and efficient pedestrian crossings and circulation.
- There is a poor building edge along most of the streets in Mid-Town due to the prominence of parking lots, vacant land, the changing scale of the buildings, and various street patterns. A weak building edge can negatively affect the quality of the pedestrian experience. Opportunities to enhance the pedestrian edges, either along a street or a plaza, should be maximized to encourage pedestrian activity in the Mid-Town area.



Building frontages disrupted by driveways and parking lots create an inconsistent pedestrian edge and detract from a sense of place.

- The variety in the built environment (varied building setbacks and scales, numerous vacant parcels), results in discontinuity and fragmentation of the area, especially as it is viewed from Twentynine Palms Highway. In addition, there is no uniformity of the streetscape infrastructure (sidewalks, landscaping, etc.). This contributes to a lack of identity and no real sense of place. There are opportunities to design new development creatively to provide a sense of place, while keeping with the diverse nature of the area and highway.



Inconsistent sidewalk amenities throughout Mid-Town make for an inhospitable pedestrian environment.

- There is currently a lack of sewer infrastructure available to attract new development. However, the Hi-Desert Water District is working in conjunction with the California Regional Water Quality Control Board in the development and construction of a wastewater treatment and water reclamation facility and associated pipelines from each property to the main facility. The first phase of the sewer project, which includes the Mid-Town area is expected to start in 2014 and completed by 2016. This is crucial to attracting new development to Mid-Town, particularly industry and businesses.