

A **SETTING** for **SUCCESS**

THE MASTER PLAN'S PURPOSE

The purpose of this document is to update the *West Sacramento Riverfront Master Plan* and the *Sacramento Riverfront Master Plan* completed in 1994 for the West Sacramento Redevelopment Agency and Sacramento Housing and Redevelopment Agency respectively. An important decision was made at the outset of the current planning process, almost ten years later, to create one master plan document that treats both sides of the river comprehensively. That a single plan was produced, based on a shared vision, is testimony to the collaboration of the two communities and their commitment to improving the riverfront in its entirety, as a shared resource. Their willingness to hammer out differences early in the process—*before* the master plan was complete—sets the stage for a successful implementation.

While the current master plan breaks new ground, it also builds on the solid foundation of the earlier master plans and specific plans, which set forth a strong vision for the riverfront. The following goals and principles embodied in the previous plans are carried forward into the current master plan update:

- Establish the riverfront as an active, vibrant urban district
- Emphasize the river as the focus of riverfront area
- Provide alternate circulation modes with emphasis on non-vehicular
- Provide pedestrian and bicycle linkages along river and into adjacent areas
- Emphasize non-vehicular orientation, amenities and scale
- Provide a balance of visitor-serving and community-serving uses and amenities
- Provide for uses and amenities that respond to Sacramento's history and unique character
- Provide uses and amenities which complement those in the area
- Provide for mixed-use / integrated land uses
- Provide for land uses that are flexible and can respond to market conditions and finance opportunities
- Minimize traffic and parking impacts
- Balance resource conservation with development
- Provide for a safe environment day and night, seven days a week ¹

¹ West Sacramento Master Plan and Sacramento Riverfront Master Plan, Sasaki Associates, 1994.

Many conditions have changed, however, over the nearly ten years since the 1994 master plans were completed. On the West Sacramento riverfront, Raley Field was completed providing an important public destination within the Triangle Area and changing the mix of land uses envisioned for that district. The Ziggurat building was developed on the West Sacramento side, offering an important employment center and activity node in this area. The associated River Walk project was implemented north of the Tower Bridge, an exciting first phase of the development of West Sacramento's river edge for public use. Other important initiatives have changed the dynamics of the riverfront zone, including Metro Place, an infill residential development in the Washington Neighborhood near the river, and West Sacramento's new Civic Center complex on West Capitol Avenue, setting a new standard for the redevelopment of the West Capitol Avenue corridor.

On the Sacramento side, the Embassy Suites Hotel was built just south of Tower Bridge and a segment of formal riverfront promenade was constructed in front of the hotel extending south from the bridge. The Crocker Museum has embarked on an expansion project, which is now clearly defined, and an associated study is underway to connect the complex more strongly to the riverfront across I-5. The Railyards planning process has progressed and an inter-modal station has been proposed that will provide a vital connection with the Railyards development. The Railroad Museum has also advanced its expansion plan that will utilize the Central Shops in the Railyards area.

The combination of all of these developments and planned new initiatives promises to create dramatic changes to the riverfront. The updated master plan must anticipate their effect and plan for it accordingly in order to capture the riverfront's full potential.

The master plan is a study plan, not a regulatory plan. It provides an overall vision for the riverfront that can be realistically and sequentially implemented by public and private sector efforts within the financial resources accessible by the two cities and in accordance with market conditions. The plan is intended as a blueprint for possible future actions that may be considered discretely as opportunities and resources arise. It does not have a legally binding effect on future actions, although the cities could move to implement specific administrative actions that would amend existing specific plans or regulations. Such actions would require public and environmental review pursuant to existing laws. Alternatively, the two cities could, together or separately, determine to formally adopt the master plan, requiring comprehensive environmental review of the program contained herein, and action to ensure consistency with existing general or specific plans.



credit: HNTB/Douglas Johnson



Several projects since the 1994 Master Plan have helped define the character of riverfront development and set the stage for future projects (clockwise from top left): Sacramento Promenade adjacent to the Embassy Suite Hotel (not shown), West Sacramento Riverfront Park, Raley Field and the Ziggurat with Tower Bridge, Old Sacramento Parking Structure, and West Sacramento River Walk.

THE COMMUNITY PROCESS

The process for the development of the master plan update was comprehensive, locally based, and involved three tiers of community interaction.

The first was a series of public workshops—including a riverfront bus tour/workshop—that were open to the entire community and publicly advertised. Initially, workshops were held separately for each city, followed by joint workshops combining the two communities. Generally the number of participants ranged from 50 people for individual City workshops to 200 people for joint workshops. This process allowed the master plan team to receive detailed input from each community, and then to take advantage of the synergy between the two sides of the river to develop conceptual ideas. This two-stage process proved to be very effective. First, it allowed a careful understanding of individual community issues, and later when the two groups combined, it generated notable positive energy and momentum for the development of the plan's concepts. Detailed analysis maps and charts were developed during this initial stage to summarize and document existing conditions related to land use, infrastructure, transportation, economic conditions, and ecological factors. These maps are summarized in the Appendix.

The high point of this energetic process was a public workshop conducted as a bus tour with 200 community members on four buses, each with a group leader. As the buses went from point to point along the riverfront, the participants discussed their observations together, and individually marked their impressions and ideas in a color workbook that illustrated preliminary concepts. The result was a comprehensive record



Sacramento's early settlers understood the value and importance of the river to their daily lives.

of the community's input in the collected workbooks (which were recorded, then later returned), as well as a sense from both the community and project team that meaningful dialogue had occurred. The firsthand participation of the mayors and council members from both cities in these workshops, as well as the consistent commitment of community participants, greatly enriched the planning process and ultimately the quality of the plan's ideas.



One of several public workshops was combined with an early morning bus and walking tour of the River and proved to be the highlight of the community process.

The community process was enhanced by a previous public workshop conducted by the Waterfront Center prior to the commencement of the master plan effort. The results of that workshop were tremendously useful in setting the stage for current community issues and concerns and served as a jumping off point for the master plan's community process. A summary of the issues from that workshop are also included in the Appendix.

The second tier of the process involved a series of meetings with individual stakeholder groups, first during the data gathering stage and then again during the concept development stage of planning. Included were private landowners and developers and representatives of community groups including Native American group representatives, key cultural resource representatives such as the Crocker Museum and the Railroad Museum, and the Central Valley Chapter of the AIA. The meetings allowed for a detailed discussion of individual stakeholder ideas and concerns, ensuring that these subtleties would be reflected in the master plan.

The third tier involved a series of regular meetings with agency representatives from both cities, which served as a "reality check" as the plan progressed. Each agency was able to temper the concepts with their detailed knowledge of planning, implementation, and funding issues.

The master plan process had an additional interface with the Sacramento River Corridor Floodway Planning Forum process directed by SAFCA (Sacramento Area Flood Control Agency) to explore and better understand the implications of flood management and its effect on proposed riverfront land uses and activities. This

interaction proved to be very beneficial and, as an outcome, SAFCA decided to use the riverfront master plan study area as a special prototype river segment for their River Forum process.

At key junctures in the process, the plan was brought before the Waterfront Advisory Committee (WAC), composed of the two mayors and one council member from each city, for their input. These meetings served as a precursor to the final review of the plan by the joint city councils, and offered an important opportunity to address issues along the way.

The result of this multi-tiered process is a plan that received comprehensive review from a broad spectrum of community, government, and private interests helping to achieve a balance of perspectives. This balance was crucial in order to ensure an achievable plan for what is arguably the region's most important natural resource.

PROJECT SETTING - THE HEART OF A REGION

In many ways—physically, culturally, and politically—Sacramento sits at the heart of the Central Valley and in this central position, serves as a role model for the region. Because of this pivotal position, the development of its urban riverfront is all the more critical. An urban waterfront of vibrant neighborhoods organized around a strong system of parks and greenways can serve as the literal and symbolic center for the region and as a model of social and ecological planning.



Flood management considerations were crucial in formulating the master plan concepts—a scene from 1862 pre-levee Sacramento.

All Rivers Flow into Sacramento: Regional Hydrology

The Sacramento River, as it passes between downtown Sacramento and West Sacramento, has already traveled many miles, fed by several of the major tributaries that run through the Central Valley, including the Yuba, Feather, and American Rivers. The Sacramento River watershed covers approximately 27,000 square miles or approximately 17 percent of California's land surface area. Hydrologically, this places great importance on this segment of the river as both an opportunity and a liability (mainly associated with flood hazard).



The Sacramento River Watershed drains 17 percent of the total land area of California.

The power and drama of the river is a source of awe, and therefore has the potential to serve as a magnet within the Sacramento metropolitan area. The flows of the river offer recreational opportunity as well as the natural human attraction to dynamic water—the centerpiece for successful urban public space in great cities throughout the world. But the water flows also offer reason for caution. If not carefully planned and regulated, the river can represent danger to people and damage to property from flooding.

For this reason, the plan seeks to achieve the proper balance and configuration of both public space and private development. The two cities’ challenge is to capture the excite-



Partial restoration of the riparian habitat that existed historically will greatly enhance habitat quality and public space.

ment of the river, yet provide safe and secure public space, facilities, and riverfront development. The flood management aspect of the river was an important factor in the development of the master plan, which must constantly balance considerations for ecology, recreation, and flood protection. The master planning process' interface with SAFCA and the Sacramento River Corridor Floodway Planning Forum sought to address the relationship between regional flood control and river use issues in more detail. Results from that interaction are reflected in the master plan. They are reflected in the design of certain improvements such as docks that shed debris, the omission of other improvements, such as fixed habitable structures in the floodway or the levee prism, and in an overall sensitivity to the need for bank protection, levee stability, land inspection, and improved flood fight access.

A Shifting Ecosystem: Regional Ecology

In addition to having an important hydrological function, the river is a complex ecological system on which the region is vitally dependent.

Before 1850, the Sacramento River meandered through the Central Valley floor. As a result of frequent inundation of the floodplain, river-deposited sediments formed natural levees consisting of the natural substrate of the region as well as sediments that were deposited when the river would “overbank” during high-flow events. During each of these events, sediments would settle out of the water column and slowly, over time, increased the height of the natural levee system.

Riparian vegetation formed extensive, continuous forests along the riverbanks, which on average were 4 to 5 miles wide. The areas within the floodplain of the Sacramento River consisted primarily of what is currently classified as Great Valley riparian forest. As the elevation gradient increased with distance from the river, the cover types transitioned to Valley Oak woodland, Valley Oak savanna, and perennial grassland habitats. Expansive wetlands were common in the sloughs and drainages that were within, or fed into, the floodplain of the Sacramento River.



Sacramento River Watershed Ecological Regions. The project site lies within the lower portions of the Central Valley region, through which most water passes before entering the Sacramento River Delta on its way to San Francisco Bay. (Domangalski et al., 2000).

Historically, these ecological systems or habitats supported numerous species of native mammals, resident and migratory birds, as well as fish species; but with the rapid development that has occurred in the Central Valley over the last century, much of these habitats have been lost. Some of this ecological function can be recovered. It is the challenge of this master plan, therefore, to find opportunities for habitat enhancement—including riparian edge, wetland, and riparian forest—with the goal of bringing back some degree of lost ecological function. As evidenced in many examples across the country, balancing ecological restoration and enhancement with intensive human use can be done quite successfully. Accomplishing this will add not only to the environmental quality of the riverfront, but also to the overall quality of the public open space, the experience of the users, and ultimately the value and success of the district as a whole.

An Expanding Metropolis: Regional Transportation and Growth

The explosive growth of the greater Sacramento region over the past few decades is unprecedented in this country. The combination of desirable climate, proximity to regional recreation destinations, job growth, and availability of housing has made this region one of the fastest growing in the nation. The region’s transportation networks, includ-



Agricultural and natural lands are under pressure from the region’s explosive growth.

ing the rivers, have historically been instrumental for the shipment of goods and the transportation of people. Rail, waterway, and vehicular networks have all been central to regional growth and success. However, this growth has not come without a price. Air and water pollution, traffic congestion, uncontrolled sprawl and loss of agricultural lands as well as overtaxing and loss of natural resources including habitat, are some of the unfortunate consequences.

The development of the Sacramento Riverfront is all the more important in view of these regional trends. If high-quality public space can be created, it will provide an important focus for local residents, regional communities, and visitors, actually triggering the development of vibrant, higher-density urban neighborhoods. As the centers of both cities increase in density, having public space close to downtown housing will help reduce traffic congestion, particularly if it is accessible by a variety of transportation modes. Offering high-density redevelopment opportunities will ease the pressure for additional sprawl and put housing close to jobs and recreation close to housing. These goals are essential to the master plan. Its successful implementation can set a new standard for Smart Growth within the region.