

CHAPTER TWO:

Community Design and Image

Chapter 2 of the Auburn Boulevard Existing Conditions Report provides an overview of existing community design and image conditions. The analysis summary includes observations about the community context, development patterns, landscaping, and streetscape.

SURROUNDING NEIGHBORHOOD AND INTERFACE

Auburn Boulevard is an historic road. Connecting Sacramento and Auburn, the road has been an important thoroughfare that has evolved with the region. Sylvan Corners (Sylvan Road, Old Auburn Boulevard, and Auburn Boulevard) is an historical settlement center. Nearly 150 years ago the area's first school and commerce were established here. Today, the historic school building now used as the Sylvan Community Center, the elementary and middle schools, and Sylvan Cemetery reflect the area's historic social and cultural importance.

Auburn Boulevard was an early regional highway. Beginning in 1927, it was part of the cross-continental Lincoln Highway and, later, US Highway 40. Several generations of pre- and post-war auto-oriented commercial development can be seen along the Boulevard. Until 1997, Sacramento County regulated land use for the unincorporated Citrus Heights area. The absence of urban development standards resulted in minimal landscaping and streetscaping, little connectivity between parcels, and numerous curb cuts.

The history of the area can be seen in the pattern of roads, blocks, and remaining undeveloped parcels. The community on the east side of Auburn Boulevard grew out of citrus groves. Originally, the rural home sites were intermingled with citrus groves organized by rural lanes. Near Sylvan Corner, these older residential areas back up against commercial businesses fronting on Auburn Boulevard. Over time, these residential areas have filled in. Residential development on the west side of Auburn Boulevard has been developed as many post war suburbs with wider roads, cul-de-sacs, and less architectural variety.



Historic Sylvan School



Auburn Boulevard today



Above: This aerial shows the development patterns of Auburn Boulevard's neighborhoods. The west (top of picture) has developed as many suburban post-war neighborhoods. The east part of the area (bottom of picture) has remnants of orchards and rural residential lanes.

As in many parts of Sacramento County, there is a rough interface between commercial and residential uses. Parking lots, service areas, trash collection, utilitarian buildings back up to residential areas. Besides the poor physical transition, there are also land use conflicts. The hours of operation, outdoor storage, shipping and receiving, and privacy concerns are use-related. In some cases, buildings and parcels originally designed for retail uses have been adapted for other uses with outdoor material or vehicular storage and more delivery service.

Many residential areas depend on Auburn Boulevard for connections. Side streets do not align east and west of Auburn Boulevard, making neighborhood pedestrian crossing difficult and automobile access problematic. Lack of sidewalks, extensive curb cuts, and high traffic speeds make Auburn Boulevard a difficult walking experience for residents.

Over the years, little attention has been paid to the interface between Cripple Creek and Rusch Park and adjacent development. Parking lots sheet-drain to the creek, dumpsters are pushed against the open space, and commercial buildings have been designed on the site without regard to these important community resources.

PATTERN OF BUILDINGS AND USES

The development patterns along Auburn Boulevard reflect generations of individual public and private development decisions. Investments in utilities, roadways, commercial, and residential development have been incremental and uncoordinated. Yet, Auburn Boulevard does have identifiable patterns that suggest five character districts or sub-areas.

Sub Area 1: Sylvan Corners/Cemetery

This area includes the commercial and institutional uses around historic Sylvan Corners. There are glimpses of more deliberate approach to site planning from an earlier time. The schools and cemetery on the west of Auburn Boulevard provide a soft backdrop to the small-lot commercial uses on the east side. Residential uses have been more directly connected to commercial stores. There are remnants of a storefront district and commercial uses along the rural lanes, and the Sylvan Cemetery gate aligns with Willow Street.

The Sylvan Corners Redevelopment Concept Plan adopted by the City in 2001 has established the development approach for the intersection of Sylvan Road, Old Auburn Road, and Auburn



Sylvan Cemetery gate

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Boulevard. However, there is an opportunity to enhance the historic pattern and scale along Auburn Boulevard and how the uses along this stretch of the corridor relate to adjacent residential areas.

Sub Area 2: Small-lot Commercial

The second sub-area is defined by its small commercial lots, automotive uses, and interspersed residential uses. Located between Sylvan Cemetery and Antelope Road, this area has the appearance and land uses that reflect Citrus Heights' own "American Graffiti" era of US Highway 40s heyday. There are automotive repair, auto supplies, and customizing businesses, a 50s vintage drive-in, and Indian Motorcycles store. The lots tend to be small and shallow with individual access and no landscaping.

Sub Area 3: Antelope/Rusch Park

The third sub area is located between Antelope Road and Rusch Park. The intersection of Antelope Road and Auburn Boulevard provides a visible, high-traffic location characterized by convenience uses such as gas stations and mini-marts. Rusch Park and Cripple Creek provide visual relief in the middle of a busy auto-oriented commercial district. There is a vacant site adjacent to Cripple Creek that opens up the view of the creek to the east of Auburn Boulevard.

Sub Area 4: Community Shopping Centers

The area between Rusch Park and Sandalwood Drive was developed as the community-shopping district for the post-war suburban neighborhoods on the west of Auburn Boulevard. The lots are deeper and laid out as anchored shopping centers. The east side of Auburn Boulevard has smaller strip centers and freestanding commercial businesses. This area also has several gas stations and auto parts stores.

Sub Area 5: North Gateway

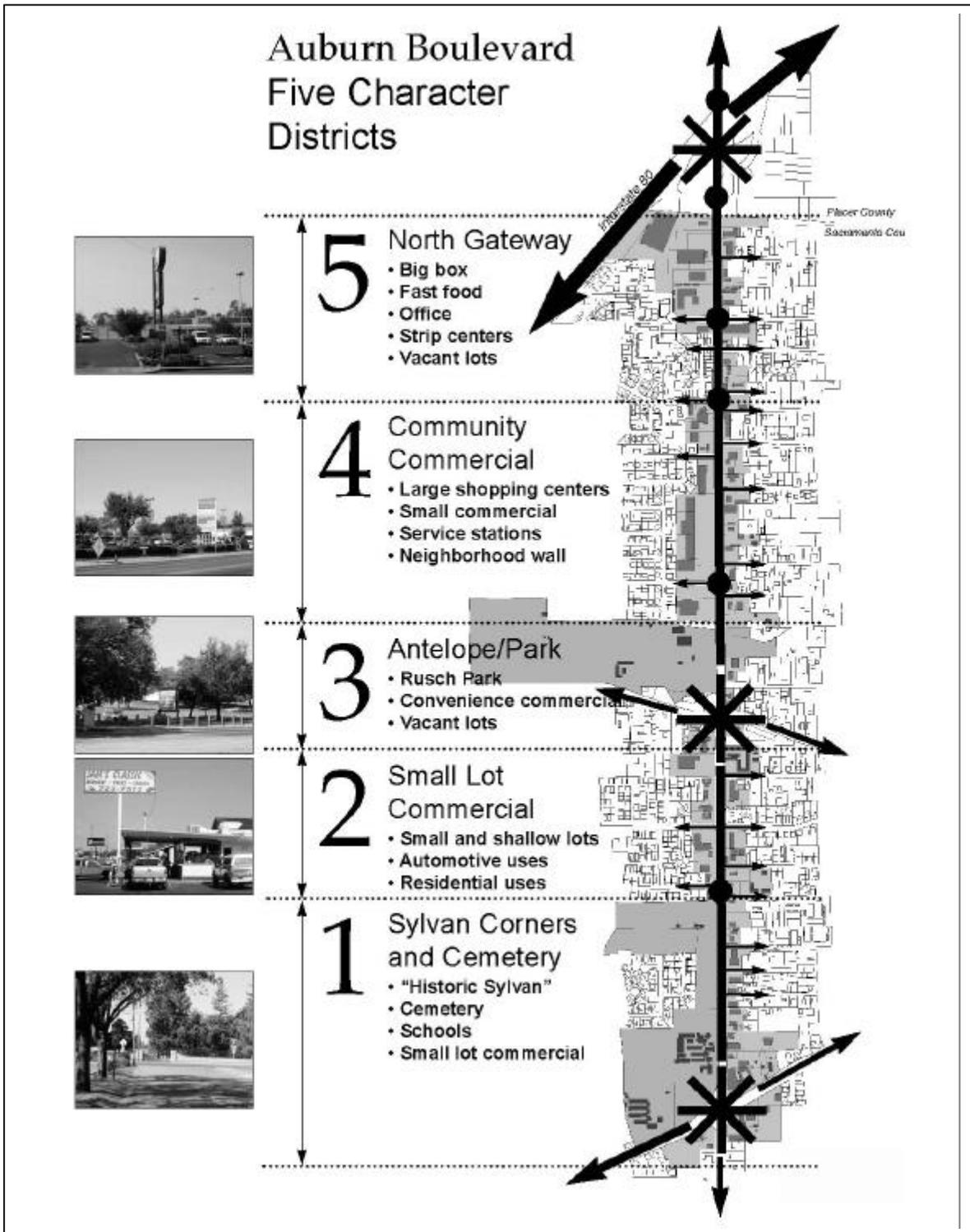
The fifth subarea includes Auburn Boulevard frontage between the DeVille Oaks subdivision on the south and the Roseville-Citrus Heights City Limits on the north. This area is characterized by businesses that take advantage of their proximity to I-80. This includes "big box" retail (Big K and Smart & Final), fast food (Jack-in-the-Box), and other auto-oriented businesses. The professional office buildings at Twin Oaks and Auburn Boulevard represent some of the better quality development with parking located behind the buildings and attractive landscape and streetscape.



Historic house adjacent to Sylvan Corners



Storefronts on side street adjacent to Sylvan Corners



SETBACKS AND PARKING

One of the biggest challenges for improving the pedestrian experience along Auburn Boulevard is the shallow setbacks and parking areas. Older commercial lots have been chipped away by past road widenings. A site needs about 65 feet between the sidewalk and building walkway for a double-loaded 90 degree parking aisle or about 45 feet for a single loaded aisle. Adding a five-foot planting strip in many cases is not possible without sacrificing parking.

On Auburn Boulevard, uneven setbacks will make it difficult to provide inter-parcel access on many block faces. The space between buildings, the staggered parking lots and aisles, and in some cases, changes in grade, limit opportunities to share site access.

The exceptions to the older small lots are the post-war shopping centers. These offer greater opportunity to add landscaping and manage site access.

AUBURN BOULEVARD LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

The landscaping along this transportation corridor is fragmented, displaying a variety of both manmade and natural conditions. Large expanses of landscaped areas associated with the Citrus Heights Elementary School, Sylvan Middle School, and Sylvan Cemetery along the west side of the boulevard and Rusch Park create a strong, positive visual impression. However, most of the streetscape is void of trees and greenery that provide shade and a sense of rhythm and continuity that is needed to help offset the scale of Auburn Boulevard and the discontinuity of the development patterns along this corridor. This problem is compounded by the narrow street right of way and limited or non-existent parking and building setbacks which together leave little room for ornamental or screen planting. Overhead transmission lines, light poles and other utilities along Auburn Boulevard, especially on the east side of the street, limit the possibility of adding trees and landscaping. Signage along the boulevard further fragments the visual and spatial experience. Very little has been paid to the streetscape in general; there are no unifying street elements.

Sub Area 1: Sylvan Corners/Cemetery

The most distinguishing landscape along this section of the corridor includes the grove of native Oak, (*Quercus wislizenii*, Interior Live Oak) in the northwest turn island of Old Auburn



Businesses from Citrus Heights' Highway 40 era



Post-war community shopping center

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Boulevard, a row of Mexican Fan Palms (*Washingtonia Robusta*) fronting the school site, and the mature Italian Cypress hedgerow (*Cupressocyparis sempervirens*) along the street frontage of Sylvan Cemetery. In contrast to the open spaces of the school and cemetery, and in tandem with the mature background planting of a variety of trees (*Deodar Cedar - Cedrus deodora*, *Coast Redwood - Sequioa sempervirens*, other native oaks and *Sycamore - Platanus acerifolia*), the tree coverage is a significant contributor to the character of the street along the west side of the boulevard. The palm trees are visible from long distances, and the dense formal hedgerow of the Italian Cypress behind a stone perimeter wall are appropriate landscape elements to complement the scale of the surrounding buildings and the width of Auburn Boulevard. The lack of other landscape element makes these few features very prominent.



Discount commercial near I-80

Just behind the strip development on the east of the boulevard are fairly mature and established street trees, mostly *Fraxinus velutina*, *Modesto Ash* along *Maple*, *Willow* and *Ramona Streets*. The *Modesto Ash* street trees create a canopy on *Willow Street* at its intersection with Auburn Boulevard and seem to be oriented to what may have been a major entry to the Sylvan Cemetery. The *Salishan Luxury Apartments* create their individual ambience with a fairly lush landscape median planting of *Lagerstroemia indica*, *Crepe Myrtles*, and other well-defined perimeter landscape. Other distinguishable landscaping tends to be set back from the street as is the case with the grove of walnuts in the outdoor area of *Sam and Cin's*. These landscapes help identify individual parcels but do not contribute to a coherent frontage along Auburn Boulevard.



Auburn Boulevard has a variety of streetscape edge conditions.

Sub Area 2: Small-lot Commercial

From *Kanai Avenue* looking north toward *Antelope Road* are a series of small-lot businesses with narrow frontages and undistinguishable landscape patterns. Most of the lots have no landscape and are paved up to the street, with parking blending into sidewalk and driveway pavement. Some of the more recent developments with greater parking setbacks have shrub plantings. Very few however, have any street trees.

The street frontage between *Pratt* and *Sycamore Streets* on the east side of Auburn Boulevard adjacent to a trailer home park has several well-established *Modesto Ash* trees planted in a sloping lawn median between the sidewalk and parking lot of the mobile

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home park. The scale of these trees along with the understory planting begin to create an identity for the street frontage but, unfortunately, this landscape does not extend beyond the parcel. The parcels along this section of the road are higher in elevation than Auburn Boulevard, and the parcels on the west side are set below Auburn Boulevard, following the natural slope of the land. The Pratt Station commercial center has mature parking lot trees and evergreen hedges just behind the public sidewalk.

North of the mobile home park, the landscape disappears with no significant tree or ground cover. Strips of lawn, raised bark mulched planters and stepped concrete retaining walls are the only landscape elements in this portion of street frontage. Large expanses of paving between the smaller storefronts and concrete sidewalk dominate the east side of Auburn Boulevard. The west side of Auburn Boulevard north of Pratt Station is made up of larger retail lots with structures set back significantly from the street frontage and very little landscape. Visible from Auburn Boulevard, just behind the commercial frontage, are large mature stands of trees.

Sub Area 3: Antelope/Rusch Park

North of Antelope Road, the landscape begins to transition with Rusch Park, the topographical low spot along the corridor. Native live oaks and valley oaks mixed with imported exotic plant materials, lawn, and conifers dominate the northwestern corner of Antelope Road and Auburn Boulevard, wrapping around the corner commercial property, which has very little landscape.

On the east, north of Watson Street, there are remnant live oaks in front of a masonry block sound wall just behind the Big O Tire store. The subdivision in this area has been built around a large native oak woodland and creek bed, leaving fingers of the native oak grove between developments and back yards adjacent to this open space.

Sub Area 4: Community Shopping Centers

Large commercial lots with vast asphalt parking lots dominate the western side of Auburn Boulevard in this sub area. There are only a few street trees of varying species, most of which have been installed recently and have not reached mature size. These do little to define the streetscape. Low shrub planting between Grand Oaks Boulevard and Rollingwood Boulevard help screen some of the parking, but this landscaping is spotty and does not provide a continuous row of screening for the parking lots. A lone subdivision interrupts the pattern of the surrounding large



Landscaped street edge near Sylvan Cemetery



Sylvan Corners is going to be streetscaped as part of a roadway and redevelopment project.



Innovative display is part of the streetscape environment in parts of the Boulevard.

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commercial lot development between Sandalwood Drive and Bellbrook Court. A six-foot high masonry wall creates a physical and visual barrier between the subdivision and Auburn Boulevard.

The landscape on the east of the boulevard is mixed. A number of mature trees surrounding the smaller commercial center off Baird Street, gives this area a more balanced and inviting character. The adjacent areas are mostly smaller commercial and strip development that display less planting, with a few randomly planted trees of various species. The automotive service centers and service stations tend to have very little landscape along this frontage. Intermingled in this commercial strip area are residential and converted residential.

Generally, the side streets that intersect with Auburn Boulevard on both the west and east sides have more landscaping in the form of lawns, trees, and flower beds than Auburn Boulevard. Only deep views into the side streets provide relief from the overwhelmingly paved environment of Auburn Boulevard.

The character of the boulevard changes at the office building complex on the corner of Auburn Boulevard and Twin Oaks. This development with its planting of mature London Plane Trees (*Platanus acerifolia*) along the streets and a cluster of palm trees (*Washingtonia robusta*) in the courtyard gives this section of the boulevard solid definition. The size and spacing of the trees is appropriate for the scale of the adjacent developments and the boulevard. Consistency of planting and the use of sidewalk median planting strips are very effective in establishing the landscape character. This area offers a good example of how Auburn Boulevard landscape could be improved. Unfortunately, these trees have been topped back from overhead utilities, which has compromised the streetscape's aesthetics.



Rusch Park is a natural and scenic interlude along Auburn Boulevard.

Sub Area 5: North Gateway

This northern-most portion of the study area is bounded by on-ramps to I-80. It is occupied by chain business developments such as Jack-in-the-Box and Big K, which on the west side display some landscaping along the street frontage. These landscapes are typically low, ornamental planting that is well maintained but does not contribute to the character of the boulevard and does not provide significant screening of the parking lots. There are no street trees or sizeable shrubs and no consistency in planting approach.



Landscape near Cripple Creek

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The east side of the boulevard is rather stark, with a ditch interrupting the continuity of pedestrian sidewalk. There are few, fully mature street trees. Several undeveloped parcels create gaps in the streetscape.

The terminus of this stretch is well defined by the raised highway overpass, and by clusters of large, mature trees on both sides of the road. These trees may be remnants of another riparian corridor. They are visible from distance, and provide a well-defined visual screen and backdrop.

SIDEWALKS

The Auburn Boulevard Specific Plan area includes about three miles of street frontage on the main corridor and another three miles of side street frontage. The sidewalk system is incomplete, has many vertical obstacles, is interrupted by nearly 200 curb cuts, and offers little separation from speeding traffic. The sidewalks on the east of Auburn Boulevard have streetlight and utility poles. Not all crosswalks have been ramped for disabled access.

TOPOGRAPHY

One of the defining characteristics of Auburn Boulevard is its changing elevation along the 1.5-mile roadway segment. There is a 31.1-foot variation in elevation in the overture length of the Planning Area. The Boulevard's high and low spots help define the five sub areas. Starting from the south, the Sylvan Corners/Cemetery area has high points at Old Auburn Road (elv. 152.0) and Kanai Avenue (elv. 148.5). The second sub area drops from Kanai Avenue down to Antelope Road (elv. 138.7). Cripple Creek is the lowest point along the Boulevard (elv. 133.5). The fourth sub-area rises in elevation from Cripple Creek to a high point near Grand Oaks (elv. 147.4) and down again to Sandalwood Drive (elv. 153.8). From there, the fifth sub-area climbs up to the Roseville border (elv. 157.4).



Portions of Auburn Boulevard have edges that are constrained by walls.



Portions of the Boulevard with newer development have desirable sidewalk and canopy trees.

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