

The Plan for Central Hercules

Hercules, CA

PROJECT DETAILS

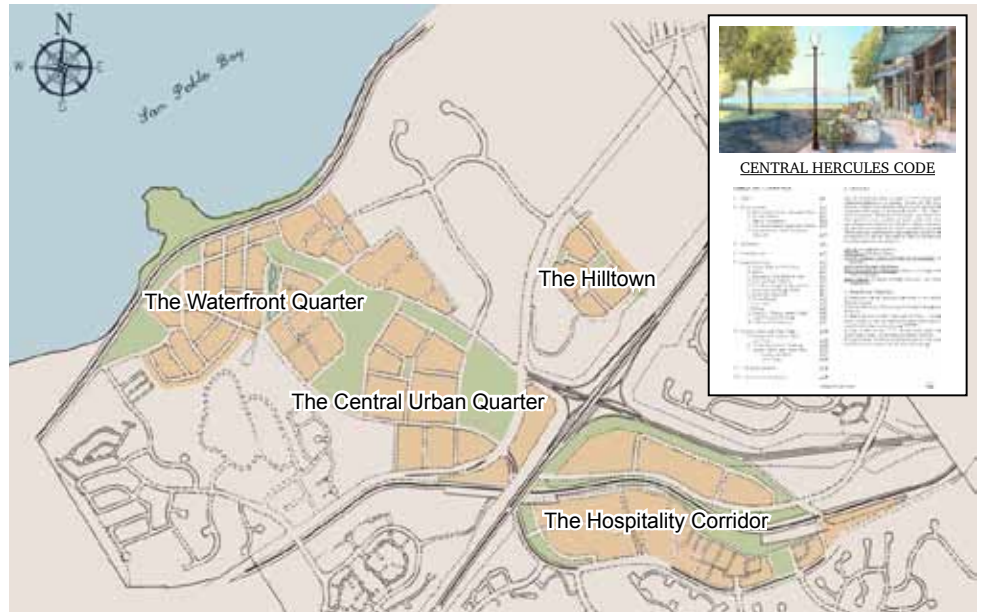
Project Area: 427 acres
Client: Hercules Redevelopment Agency
Hercules Planning Commission
Year Adopted: 2001
Website: ci.hercules.ca.us/index.aspx?page=197

For more information, visit doverkohl.com.



The Waterfront Quarter (above)

The Bixby Company (with Sargent Town Planning) is developing large portions of this new traditional neighborhood where the town meets San Pablo Bay. It will be home to a Bay Trail park, a waterfront square, a wide variety of offices, residences, live/work spaces, restaurants, plus a modest amount of retail. Designs for completing the neighborhood at the water's edge (by Opticos Design, Inc.) include additional mixed-use development focused around a new Amtrak station and potential ferry terminal.



The Project

Hercules, California is located 16 miles east of San Francisco along the eastern edge of San Pablo Bay in Contra Costa County. Once a thriving waterfront town built around the Hercules Powder Company, modern Hercules now struggles with issues that are familiar to all of the growing municipalities in the region, including a loss of natural scenic open space and sense of place, a rising tide of traffic, threatened environmental systems, spiraling housing costs, and the scramble for needed municipal revenue. To reestablish the city core and the economic engine of the waterfront, the Hercules Redevelopment Agency commissioned a study for the Central Hercules District, comprised of 427 acres of prime brownfield land at the center of the City and on the shore of the Bay. In 2000, Dover, Kohl & Partners was selected to design a master redevelopment plan and code to guide the regeneration of the heart of the City. Additional contributors to the Plan included Gibbs Planning Group, Fehr & Peers Associates, UrbanAdvantage, and Zimmerman/Volk Associates.

The Process

While most places grow outward from the center, the physical center of Hercules was left vacant after the departure of the Hercules Powder Company. With the suburbs fashioned around the old industrial sites, Central Hercules resembled a hole in a donut, waiting for the right infill concept. The design team held a public charrette in June 2000 to gather, test and refine various urban design ideas from local residents. Eight days of hands-on public participation events and meetings with landowners, developers, community leaders and other stakeholders helped reconcile public and private interests.

Plan Principles

The outcome of the charrette was the Plan for Central Hercules, a master plan that illustrates the primary concept of growing upon a framework of mixed-use walkable neighborhoods, balanced with a restored and ecologically diverse interconnected stormwater system. The Plan focuses on simultaneously maximizing the sense of place and revenue-generating potential, sensitively developing the waterfront with public access, and interconnecting once-fragmented parts.

Status

The Plan for Central Hercules and corresponding Central Hercules Code (a form-based code) were adopted by the City in 2001. The Central Hercules Code is considered to be the first modern form-based code adopted by ordinance in California. Since 2003, Opticos Design, Inc. has been working as the Town Architect for the City, administering the Code. Over the years the Plan has continued to evolve as planners and developers respond to changes in the market and regulatory requirements. Today, the neighborhoods are in various stages of detailed planning, design and construction.

The Framework of Neighborhoods

The Central Urban Quarter

The Central Urban Quarter will provide a mixture of uses, including residences, offices, retail, and public gathering spaces. This combination will provide a thriving center for Hercules, both day and night. A network of streets forms the foundation for the neighborhood, with streets designed as places for people, not just cars. Pedestrian-friendly sidewalks, street trees, and parking provided on the street or behind the buildings encourage an atmosphere of community. A "network of greens," including restored wetlands and a linear park along Refugio Creek, will spatially define the Quarter. The first phases of development in the Central Urban Quarter have been constructed; additional mixed-use areas are planned in future phases.



Existing Conditions
The Central Urban Quarter contains the intersection of San Pablo and Sycamore Avenues (above); this "main & main" intersection caters to the automobile, with wide travel lanes and auto-oriented uses. This critical main street fails to display the look and feel that Hercules should embody in its most visible spot, as the sense of place is compromised when the proportion of road width to building height is too wide.



Long Term Improvements
A first step for improvements is to bring buildings close to the edge of the street and restore on-street parking. This initial change helps to create a sense of place. As time passes, later buildings will follow the lead of the earlier ones, continuing to improve the pedestrian environment dramatically.

The Hilltown

Prominent from Interstate 80, the Hilltown will offer scenic vistas of San Pablo Bay. The buildings will rise over and conceal most of the parking, allowing a tight pedestrian form. The Hilltown will someday replace a tank farm that presently occupies the site, and because of its focal location, will become the City's key landmark.



The Hospitality Corridor

This area will include hotels, office and retail in addition to new market-rate housing, sites for affordable family housing and civic facilities. The sketch above shows these uses combined on a small neighborhood square. Connections are paramount. The Plan requires that streets within the new residential areas, for example, should connect directly to the existing streets in a normal urban block pattern. The Plan also emphasizes facing streets, including Sycamore Avenue, with the fronts of buildings.