

Seventh Street

concept and urban design plan Executive Summary

HOOD Design

Urban Landscape and Site Architecture

for the City of Oakland

Community Economic Development Agency

with

Dowling Associates

Van Maren & Associates
and EIP Associates

funded by a **California Department of Transportation** (Caltrans) grant for Environmental Justice

October 15, 2004

Seventh Street

concept and urban design plan

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Introduction

Seventh Street has been synonymous with West Oakland, California since the Transcontinental Railroad terminated its route at the Pacific. In the context of the Southern Pacific rail yard, a prosperous commercial district emerged that catered to a diverse public and neighborhood. The rail and streetcar ran along Seventh Street connecting to the Bay's mole, which functioned for turn-around and shipping to Oakland's downtown. The street's history bears testament to a neighborhood and city commercial strip, one of the bay area's famed blues music and supper club corridors, and a major truck route for the Port of Oakland. Seventh street's rich and diverse history remains in the collective consciousness of neighborhood and Bay Area residents.

The street has seen its share of change, as evidenced in today's context. The street suffered nearly fifty years of dismantling by transportation infrastructure and large-scale industrial uses. The street no longer carries the train; only BART passes overhead. The commercial businesses and clubs are absent as non profits, artist studios and local shops have emerged. The cultural context—once ghettoized—is now becoming more diverse. Lastly, due to the Loma Prieta Earthquake of 1989, the Cypress Freeway has been removed from the center to an edge position.

As new housing and transit oriented development is being planned, what will become of Seventh Street? Will it be a place where people come to shop? Will it be an area where cars just pass through? Or will it simply be a street in a neighborhood where diverse uses mingle together and people young and old feel comfortable and safe walking along its sidewalks? Whatever the final development, the street's history and cultural past should remain a vital component to its physical and qualitative character.

The purpose of the Seventh Street Concept and Urban Design Plan as funded by California Department of Transportation Environmental Justice Grant is to provide recommendations to reduce the adverse impacts of transportation on the immediate Seventh Street project site. The design will recommend amenities conducive to future transit oriented development and activity with a strong civic character that creates a "place" identity. The Concept and Urban Design Plan will produce schematic designs for streetscape improvements on Seventh Street in three zones: the historic district commercial zone bifurcated by the BART tracks, the new transit-oriented development area arising around the West Oakland BART station and former industrial parcels, and the mixed-use district at Mandela Parkway.

This Urban Design Plan will also explore alternative street configurations to reduce the impact of autos and trucks along Seventh Street.

The goals of the plan are:

Return a distinct "character" to the area.

Connect local and new residents to the Seventh Street corridor.

Promote the development of vibrant local shopping amenities along Seventh Street.

Promote pedestrian use of local services.

Make the area more comfortable by improving pedestrian safety along the corridor.

Improve access to the BART station and AC Transit bus services for pedestrians, cyclists, and other transit riders.

Mitigate negative impacts of transportation infrastructure on Seventh Street community residents.

The design process of working toward these goals took place over one year. The layering of information, research, analysis, and design concepts resulted in a comprehensive plan for the nine block project site. The phases of the processes are articulated in the chapters of this document. The first chapter is an analysis of the historical and existing urban patterns and infrastructure of Seventh Street. The second chapter focuses specifically on the traffic patterns, pedestrian patterns, and the transportation network on and surrounding Seventh Street. The third chapter focuses on paving, planting, and site furnishings designed to support the goals of the landscape design concept.



Seventh Street's jazz legacy includes the Peacock Melody Strutters, 1922. Jazz on the Barbary Coast, Tom Stoddard

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SEVENTH STREET EXISTING CONDITIONS ASSESSMENT

Seventh Street's dynamic history is characterized by constant shifts and changing development patterns. Seventh Street has historically been a dense residential district, a thriving commercial zone, a freight and passenger transportation center, and a music entertainment district. Few physical remains of this history exist along the street today.

PHYSICAL LANDSCAPE

Oakland was the western terminus of the transcontinental railroad established in 1869. The Southern Pacific railroad tracks once ran the length of Seventh Street and extended to the Port of Oakland ferry terminal and the Oakland Mole freight docks. By 1878, the railroad tracks of three major railways, the Northern Railway, the Central Pacific, and the Southern Pacific, converged at the end of Seventh. (page 1.6) The Oakland Mole, the westernmost portion of the East Bay shoreline, was extended by filling wetlands. The piers serviced both commercial shipping and passenger vessels. The potential density of West Oakland was established in mid-19th century city platting when the street grid was laid over "bay mud" marsh soils. Property lot sizes along Seventh Street were related to expected uses. The lots along Seventh Street were sized for worker housing, 25' to 30' wide by 100' deep. Railroad yards still occupy large areas of land just south of Seventh Street. The railroad tracks in the street center have either been removed or paved over. The railroad is no longer a major source of employment in West Oakland. Container trucks now serve the shipping docks and much of the interstate freight is served by truck transport. This vehicle traffic is a significant factor in the current street condition.

Seventh Street's physical landscape transformation over the last century has been guided by changing commerce and transportation infrastructure. (page 1.5)

1912: The neighborhood business core and street corridor is continuous from almost downtown to the waterfront. A diversity of businesses includes hotels, restaurants, music venues, and all neighborhood requirements. This urban condition spans the completion of the railroads and World War I.

1930: A large-scale commercial block intrudes into the center of the business core. The continued Port land expansion leaves Seventh Street more distant from the waterfront and freight docks.

1952: Industry intrudes further into the Seventh Street business core, disturbing the street continuity and disrupting the street into two distinct sections. The two sections are clearly divided by the Interstate-880"Cypress Freeway", first constructed as a ground level expressway, then as a two level raised freeway.

Today: The current condition is a street reconnected. The new Cypress Freeway, I-880, circumvents Seventh Street, allowing it to become a continuous street corridor again. The neighborhood businesses are gone and Seventh Street is no longer a significant route between destinations. The freeway is the preferred route to the port and other East Bay areas, although Seventh Street is still a city truck route.

Seventh Street's built figure ground has changed significantly over the past century. Maps from 1912, 1951 and 1973 by the Sanborn Fire Insurance Company document buildings, uses and construction methods. They provide snapshots of a constantly changing physical city. (page 1.6)

1912: The street primarily consists of single lot wooden or brick buildings. A continuous row of buildings lines the railroad tracks and house diverse businesses including hotels, restaurants, music venues, and all neighborhood requirements.

1951: Groups of buildings are replaced by larger industrial and multi-family projects. 1973: There are more vacant lots and large scale buildings, both industrial and institutional. Entire blocks of buildings are removed for the Post Office facility and the Cypress freeway.

Today: Approximately thirteen buildings remain out of the street facade of 1912. More historical buildings have been cleared for BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit) tracks, the West Oakland BART station, and the reconfigured freeway at the street's west end. The BART tracks divide the north and south sides of the street. Many lots are vacant or function as surface parking lots for commuters. The wide street corridor has fractured and indistinct edges. In 2002 the West Oakland Redevelopment Plan was adopted, including all portions of the West Oakland community development district which was not covered previously in the Oak Center Acorn, and Army Base Redevelopment Districts.

Seventh Street consists of three zoning areas surrounded by medium density residential neighborhoods. Generally, land use along Seventh Street conforms to land zoning. Private land use along Seventh Street consists of small commercial businesses, multifamily housing, institutional churches and organizations, and residential units above commercial. The land zoning is as follows: (page 1.7)

S-2 Civic Center: Created for the Post Office bulk handling facility, this zone solely encompasses the Post Office property.

C-35 District Shopping Commercial: This zone includes the remaining commercial buildings of historic Seventh Street. There are a few commercial storefronts here, some with residential spaces above. Almost half the lots here are vacant. The C-35 zoning allows for any local neighborhood-serving retail, commercial, and medium to high density residential uses.

S-15 Stand alone district: This zone encompasses the eastern end of Seventh Street, the West Oakland BART station, several large vacant industrial parcels, and parcels left empty by the former Cypress Freeway. It is a "stand alone" special designation zone with the intent of creating transit-oriented development (T.O.D.). T.O.D. development consists of concentrated public transportation facilities, high-density multi-family housing, and commercial uses serving daily commuters and new residents. S-15 prohibits the development of new surface 'stand-alone' fee parking lots.

SOCIAL LANDSCAPE

Nine blocks of the Seventh Street project area are owned by diverse agencies. (page 1.8) There are few private owners of individual lots. Several private owners, including trusts or family groups, have bought multiple lots, usually adjacent lots creating larger parcels. The remaining large parcels are owned by non-profit organizations including Oakland Community Housing, Slim Jenkins Court, and The Crucible. Government institutions such as Caltrans, Oakland Housing Authority, BART, and the U.S. Post Office occupy entire blocks. The small number of property owners means change on Seventh Street can begin with the participation of a few significant property owners. If a new urban design framework can be established with the large parcel owners, new developments by the individual lot owners will add up to more than individual parcels alone.

ADJACENT PROJECTS

The Acorn Prescott Eighth Street Neighborhood Improvements project by the City of Oakland encompasses Eighth Street from Wood Street to Market Street, including the treatment of Center Street between Seventh and Eighth as well as Mandela from Seventh to Eighth. The project includes changing traffic from one-way to two-way, striped Class II bicycle lanes, new paving, street trees, corner plantings, and curb bulb-outs. Eighth Street is part of the citywide bike plan from the waterfront to downtown Oakland. As a narrower, more residentialoriented street, Eighth Street reinforces Seventh Street's role as a commercial core.

The BART Seismic Retrofit Program is an ongoing program to upgrade its infrastructure to current seismic standards. All BART piers along Seventh Street will have additional rebar reinforcing and steel jackets added. Pier foundations will be exposed and enlarged with additional rebar and concrete. The first phase of this project has funding from Caltrans to retrofit piers where BART tracks span a roadway. This phase of work is in the engineering phase and construction is slated to begin in 2006. The retrofit of the remaining piers will be funded by a general election bond measure in 2004. Possible coordination between elements of this design plan and the work scheduled by BART could represent a cost and construction time savings.

Amtrak is building a maintenance facility between Third and First Streets, south of the I-880 Freeway. The site is currently occupied by freight container and truck storage. The facility will contain a trainwasher building, service and inspection, maintenance shop, locomotive load testing area, and employee parking lots. The final two blocks of the Third Street Extension Project pass through this site and will be implemented by Amtrak in conjunction with the maintenance facility construction projected by the end of 2004. This project will have minimal impact on Seventh Street.

The Alameda Aerial Gondola project, part of the City of Alameda, Alameda Point Base Reuse Project, is a possible solution to tunnel and bridge congestion. The selected master developer, Alameda Point Community Partners, has proposed an aerial gondola and is considering routes either from the former base to West Oakland BART, or from Alameda to Jack London Square, then following the waterfront to West Oakland BART. This project is in an initial concept and feasibility studies phase and has no projected completion date. Adding another transportation system to Seventh Street would increase the development potential and customer base for future commercial investment.

The Oakland Walk of Fame is a community-initiated project by the Bay Area Blues Society to honor the blues, jazz, and gospel musicians who performed in clubs on Seventh Street. It is planned as a series of elements, including bronze plaques cast with musicians' names embedded in sidewalks. These elements will contribute a layer of history and complexity to the streetscape. Other site elements including gateways and historical markers will be considered at the award of a construction contract, per the City of Oakland's standard protocol.

The Mandela Parkway Streetscape Project by Caltrans (California Department of Transportation) landscapes the wide center median in Mandela Parkway. This generous median is the result of the removal of the first Cypress Freeway after its collapse in the 1989 Loma Prieta Earthquake. This project includes street paving, curbs, street trees, a meandering pedestrian path, specimen oak trees, decorative lights, lawn, and shrub plantings. The street configuration

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consists of two lanes of one-way traffic and a Class II bike lane (part of the Oakland Bay Trail) on either side of the median. The proposed planted parkway extends over a mile north from the Oakland border of Emeryville to Eighth Street. A narrow paved median with street trees continues to Seventh Street. The intersection of Mandela Parkway and Seventh Street includes corner bulb-outs and shrub plantings. This prominent green space design reduces in scale and visibility before reaching Seventh Street, creating an undistinguished intersection at Mandela/Cypress and Seventh Street.

The *Third Street Extension Project* was completed by the City of Oakland with federal funding aid. This three block project reconfigured Cypress and Third Streets to connect beneath the new Cypress I-880 Freeway. Cypress Street, the continuation of Mandela Parkway, is two blocks long before it curves and becomes Third Street. The project includes new street paving, curbs, gutters, sidewalks, curb cuts, traffic signals at Fifth Street, decorative street lights, and street trees. The street consists of two lanes of two way traffic with striped Class II bicycle lanes. This extension creates a continuous route from Emeryville down Mandela Parkway to Third Street and on to Jack London Square. The significance of this street connection is diminished by the undistinguished intersection at Seventh.

The Mandela Gateway Housing by Oakland Housing Authority in partnership with Bridge Housing Corporation stands on opposite corners of Mandela Parkway and Seventh Street. This high-density multi-family project includes 168 rental units of low income apartments, 14 for-sale townhouse units, and 20,000 square feet of commercial space. Physically, these two large buildings across from the BART station will anchor the end of Mandela Parkway and be the largest, newest buildings on the street. Economically, when the housing units are filled, this project will also provide an influx of residents to the street, potential customers of new retail businesses.

The proposed *Mandela Transit Village* by the Alliance for West Oakland will occupy the corner of Cypress Street (Mandela Parkway) and Fifth Street with residential condominiums (209,000 s.f.), commercial space (38,600 s.f.), and a parking garage (750 spaces) for both residents and the public. This project will provide substantial parking for BART commuters and may increase use of the BART station by nonresidents. It will also increase the quantity of owner-occupied residential units available within walking distance of BART.

The currently vacant property of the former *Red StarYeast Factory* located at Cypress (Mandela) and Fifth Street is a potential development site. Across the street from the BART station, and bordered by BART tracks, the site is ideal for a transit oriented commercial development. The adjacent train noise diminishes its potential for residential use.

The San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit District has issued a request for proposals (August 2004) to redevelop the West Oakland BART station, develop high-density residential units, and commercial spaces. Currently, the Seventh Street edge is a large parking lot and the station itself is set back from the street. Any development of the site will require the replacement of the 350 parking spaces within the immediate vicinity. The most active time periods at the station are the early morning commute hours. A project on this superblock that creates a more constantly active and consistent building edge would significantly improve this part of Seventh Street.

INFRASTRUCTURE

On four blocks at the western end of Seventh Street, the street is bifurcated by overhead BART tracks and dominated by the large scale U.S. Post Office facility and garage. The north side of the street holds the remaining one to two story historical buildings of Seventh Street. The BART piers sit in a central raised median that divides four lanes of traffic. The sidewalks are average size, ten to twelve feet wide and edged with concrete curbs and gutters. Few street trees exist on the north side of the street. The Post Office property is almost continuously planted with trees. Visually, the street appears to be two narrow corridors set between building faces and the BART track structure. The train noise interrupts conversation, and the track structure casts a deep shadow.

A transition zone occurs at Chester Street, as the overhead BART tracks move to the south side of the street nearing the station. There is no raised median here between the four lanes of traffic. The north side of the street is the end of the district of historical buildings. The sidewalk on the south side is oversized to accommodate the BART columns that land in the sidewalk and contains no street trees. A church center occupies the property parcels distorted by the construction of BART. The street corridor's edges are still defined by the storefront buildings and BART tracks, but the street is open and visually enlarged.

The BART transportation system dominates two blocks between Chester and Mandela. The sidewalks are generous, fifteen feet wide, and edged with old granite curbs and wide cobblestone gutters. Lots on the north street side are vacant or used for BART commuter parking. The BART station and surface parking lots fill the south side of the street. The street consists of four lanes of two-way traffic and a striped center median. Visually the street corridor is wide and open, extending from the station structure to the houses on each side street.

The buildings on the eastern end of Seventh Street have an industrial scale. Large Caltransowned parcels on the north side contain the Crucible Industrial Arts School and Mandela Gateway Housing. Large vacant lots behind chain link fences on the south side remain from the demolition of the old I-880 Cypress Freeway. Industrial-scale elements including the new elevated Cypress Freeway, BART line, and the cranes of the Port of Oakland are visible to the south. The street corridor here has no visually defined edges. The sidewalks are average size, ten feet wide, and with some granite curbs and wide cobblestone gutters. Past this point, beyond Union Street, Seventh Street regains a more residential feel with housing, businesses, and street trees lining the street.

The existing utilities and urban infrastructure of the project area are shown on pages 1.10 through 1.12.

Seventh Street's stormwater system drains along three branches. Campbell Street to Wood drains westerly; Peralta to Kirkham collects flowing east and drains south; Kirkham to Union also drains to the south in a separate branch. Between Wood and Mandela Parkway, the stormwater line is situated in the westbound traffic lanes. Between Mandela Parkway and Kirkham, the stormwater line shifts to the south street side, then turns south along the former freeway boundary.

The sanitary sewer from Peralta Street westward flows west to a large main line at Wood Street. The line is situated near the north street curb. A lateral line in Peralta crosses Seventh Street. From Henry Street to Chester the lines change sizes and line both street sides. From Chester to Center, double lines occur on the north street edge. From Center to Mandela the line lies in the south street edge, then turns south down Mandela. A lateral line in Kirkham Street crosses Seventh Street. A lateral line in Union Street drains stub lines on Seventh Street.

Potable water lines extend along both sides of Seventh Street at the curb. The main line runs beneath Peralta Avenue. Smaller sublateral lines connect adjacent side streets. Circling the Post Office is an additional large water line.

Electrical lines along Seventh Street within the project limits have been burried underground. Lines on adjacent streets terminate or underground at Seventh Street. The only electric lines that cross Seventh Street are on Henry Street and Mandela Parkway/Cypress Street.

The general condition of sidewalks on Seventh Street is good. Sidewalk needs to be replaced in small sections between Henry and Center and at Union Street. Most of the north sidewalk between Center and Mandela needs to be replaced. Along two blocks from Henry to Chester and from Mandela Parkway to Kirkham, the old granite curb and cobblestone gutter still exist on both sides of the street. From Chester to Mandela and one half block east of Kirkham, the old curb and gutter exists on the north street edge. Corner wheelchair ramps need to be rebuilt to current handicap access standards from Willow to Chester Streets and at Union Street.

The views from the sidewalks of each side of the street illustrate the visual dominance of the BART structure and the inconsistent building corridor of Seventh Street. (pages 1.13-1.14) Two large institutions, the BART station, and the Post Office facility occupy the south side of Seventh from Wood to Cypress street. From Cypress Street east towards downtown the street edge is primarily large light industrial parcels, many vacant.

At the West Oakland BART station a superblock of parking lots edge the street. They are full of commuters' cars during the day and empty at night. The station building is set back from the street and has one entrance on Center Street. All street and parking lot lighting is tall "cobra head" fixtures. The sidewalk in front of the BART station also serves as a bus stop with benches located near the crosswalk. Moving west along Seventh Street, from Chester to Henry, the fenced infrastructure of BART occupies the streetfront parcel. At Henry Street the BART tracks begin to move into the street and dominate the view. The property between Henry and Lewis Streets, behind BART, is owned by the Pentecostal Way of Truth Church and houses a daycare center, basketball courts and other nonprofit uses. A community garden occupies the triangular parcel between Lewis Street and Peralta Avenue. Down Peralta Avenue is a clear view of the cranes of the Port of Oakland at the Oakland Estuary.

West from the corner of Peralta and Seventh, the Post Office superblock includes a large tree-shaded lawn area, customer parking lot, and drive-through mail drop lane. The main facility building sits behind a paved plaza area and a large concrete sign announcing the "United States Post Office". The entrance doors are recessed beneath a large concrete

overhang. The employee entrance between the main building and the garage is always populated by a few employees. A snack vendor sets up a stand at the corner of the garage. The parking garage and lawn occupy the rest of the block. West from Wood Street, Seventh Street descends to an underpass beneath the Cypress Freeway, and continues to the Port of Oakland.

The north side of Seventh Street contains many small structures and vacant lots. From Wood Street to Willow Street sits a row of buildings including Esther's Orbit Room, a decades-old social club, bar, breakfast room, and music hall. The commercial spaces on either side are vacant. The rightmost building with the old bay window in the upper story and the stuccoed blank facade on the first story was built in 1890 and housed the headquarters of the International Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. Slim Jenkins Court at Willow and Seventh is a recent mixed-use low-income development. A Chinese restaurant, a Head Start child development center, and a Goodwill job training and placement center occupy the streetfront commercial spaces. The next commercial building between Willow and Campbell dates from 1913 and is currently occupied by the Western Service Workers Association.

On the corner of Campbell and Seventh, the large Mission Revival building was the Arcadia Hotel, built in 1906. The large vacant lot was the Lincoln Theater, built in 1919 and recently demolished. The two Italianate commercial buildings at the corner of Peralta were built in 1885-90, originally housed a saloon and plumbing shop. They currently hold small businesses such as a variety shop. Between Peralta Avenue and Henry Street, a group of four buildings ends the Seventh Street historical district. Two buildings are Colonial Revival with storefronts below and apartments above. The mid-century building has been converted to an artist shop and apartment. The corner building is also late 19th century and is still occupied.

The block from Henry to Chester is primarily vacant with one empty gas station building. From Chester to Henry two contemporary buildings anchor the corner with a Mexican cantina and a liquor store/deli/check cashing establishment. In between is vacant land used for daily commuter parking. At Center Street the land use changes to larger scale blocks and are occupied by the Mandela Gateway Housing Project, an armored truck lot, and The Crucible.

URBAN CONTEXT (page 1.15)

An aerial view of northern Oakland shows the urban morphology surrounding Seventh Street. The City of Oakland is composed of a series of shifted street grids. The seams between grids are arterial streets radiating across the city. Within the Seventh Street project area, Peralta Avenue is one such arterial seam, cross streets extend east and west at different angles. The resultant corners are triangular parcels, such as the intersection of Peralta, Henry and Seventh Streets. Mandela Parkway (Cypress Street) is another major street dividing two street grids. Seventh Street is part of the original platting of Oakland extending from downtown to the waterfront.

Respecting Seventh's Street historical significance, all cross streets intersect Seventh at a right angle before joining their own street grid. Cross streets extending south from Seventh terminate at Third Street (2 blocks south of Seventh) and the new Cypress Freeway. This neighborhood, the South Prescott, has its own distinct identity from the neighborhoods north of Seventh Street. The cross streets create the community surrounding Seventh Street. A few steps from each vacant lot or historic building is a thriving community of residents, Victorian homes, churches, and artists. They are the patrons of Seventh Street's businesses and institutions.

Parallel to and north of Seventh, Grand Avenue provides a direct route to the Bay Bridge for auto and truck traffic, supplanting the historical purpose of Seventh Street as access to transbay ferries. A light rail system no longer runs on Seventh Street or any of the historical thoroughfares. The San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit system (BART) now serves the Bay Area communities. BART stops four times in this area of Oakland, at MacArthur station, 19th Street, 12th Street, and West Oakland. All trains from the East Bay to San Francisco pass through West Oakland station before entering the Transbay Tube beneath San Francisco Bay.

A designated bicycle route connects downtown to West Oakland along Eighth Street then continues into the Port of Oakland. Within the Port several shoreline parks provide public access to the water. Towards the north, bicycle lanes along the future Mandela Parkway lead to Emeryville and join the San Francisco Bay Trail.

The Port of Oakland facilities have expanded away from West Oakland, creating an enormous mass of industrial land between West Oakland and the waterfront. Streets circumventing Seventh Street serve the shipping industry and its huge cranes, container yards, and warehouses. An abrupt disconnect occurs at the freeway between the scale of the Port and the residential scale of West Oakland. Along Seventh Street, the industrial scale has infiltrated in the form of the Post Office, BART station, etc., resulting in conflicting street perceptions.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

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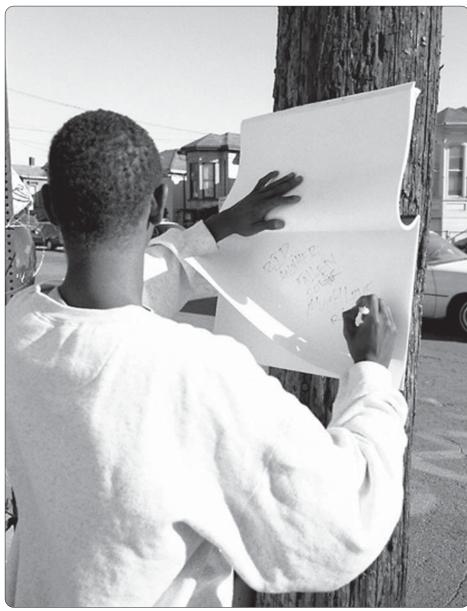
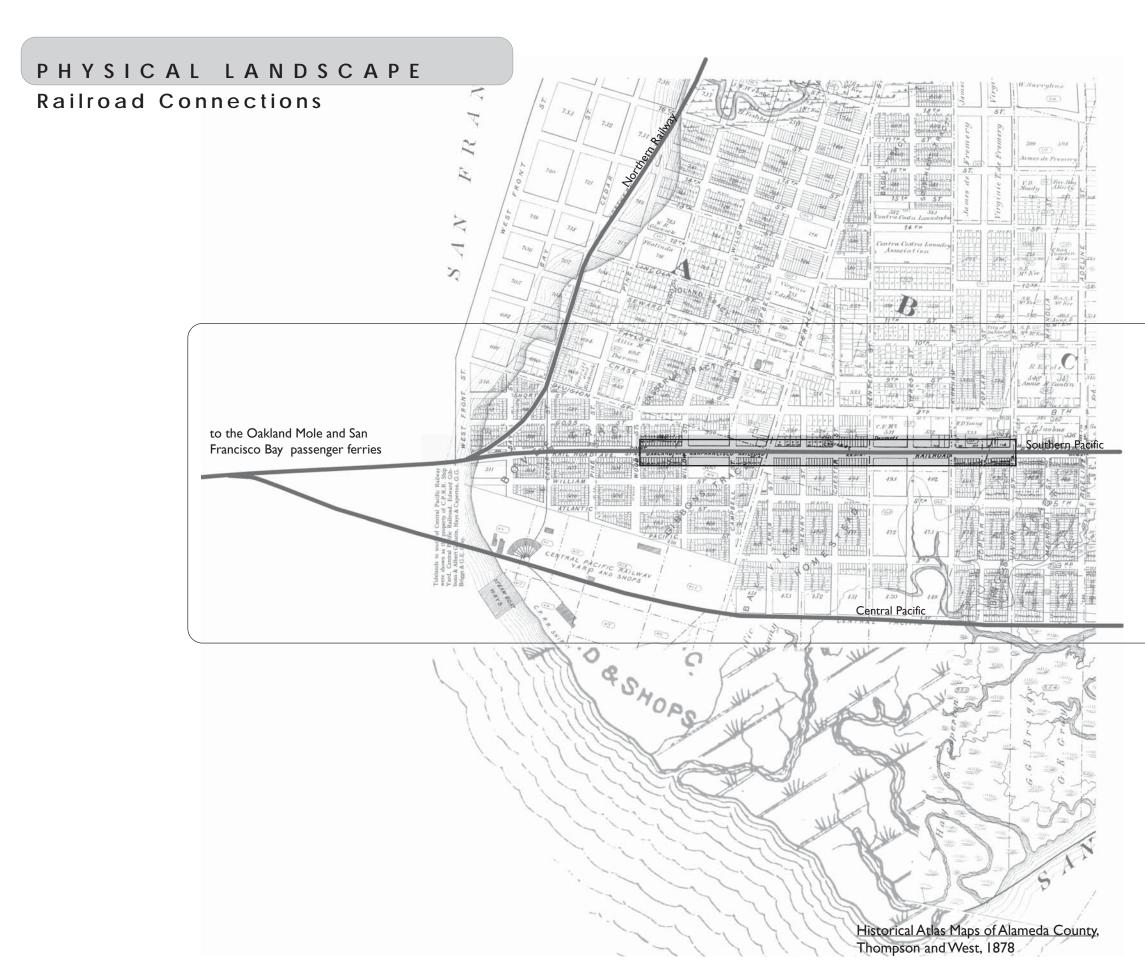
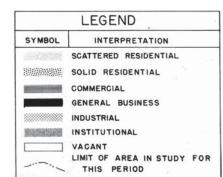


Photo courtesy of Lew Watts

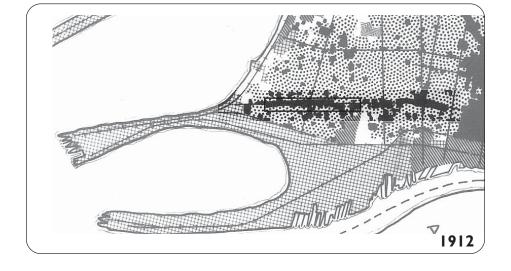




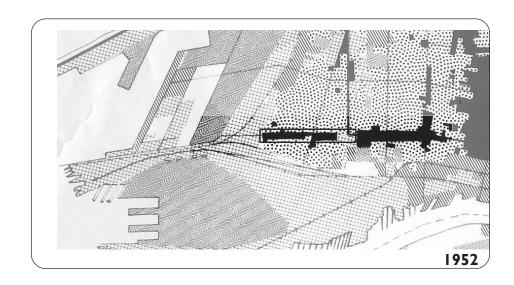
By 1878 the railroad was completed and the City of Oakland almost fully platted. Seventh Street is called Railroad Avenue and is the main route for freight trains to the Oakland Mole.

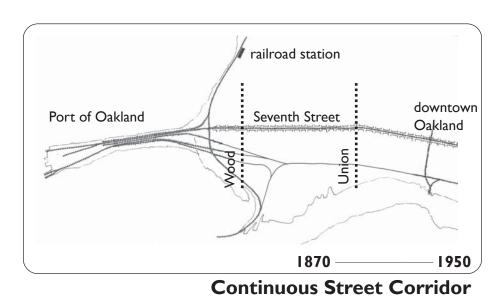


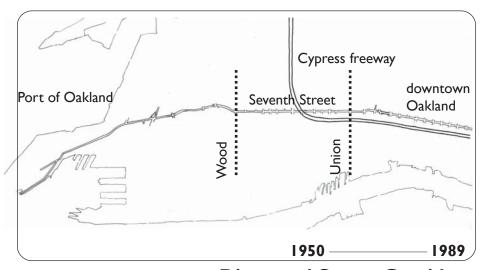


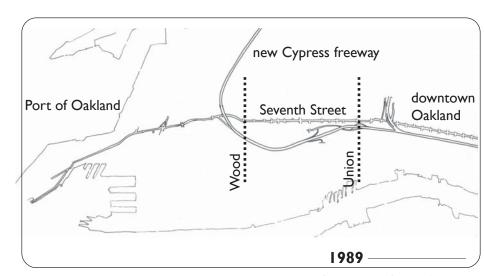












Disrupted Street Corridor

Reconnected Street Corridor