

A. Introduction

This report summarizes the results of a charrette held in Laytonville, California. A charrette is a series of interactive public events that spans several days or more and culminates in a vision or design. The Laytonville charrette was conducted May 17 – 24, 2007 to produce a conceptual plan for calming traffic along Highway 101, beautifying downtown Laytonville, improving the business climate, and improving walking, bicycling and equestrian conditions. These changes are intended to help revitalize the community by making it a more appealing place to walk, shop, gather, and do business.

Part I of this report – Chapters 1 and 2 – provides background on the community of Laytonville, including its geographic area and the Plan Area studied throughout this planning process. It provides an overview of past planning efforts, community vision and goals and upcoming transportation projects in the downtown area.

Design, policy and phasing recommendations for Laytonville to establish a strategic framework for the realization of Laytonville’s vision and goals are provided in Part II of this report.

B. Outline

The following section provides a brief overview of the chapters included in Part I of this report and issues addressed in each.

- **Chapter 1** outlines the Plan Area for this study and discusses previous planning efforts in Laytonville as well as current transportation planning projects. It provides an overview of the community-based planning effort that is the backbone of this report.
- **Chapter 2** articulates the community vision, including the top seven community priorities.

The following chapter outlines the Plan Area for this study, discusses previous planning efforts in Laytonville and current transportation planning projects, and provides an overview of community-based planning efforts.

A. Project Context

Laytonville is an unincorporated, rural community located in the coastal mountains of Northern Mendocino County. Laytonville is located at the historic crossroads of Highway 101 and Dos Rios/Branscomb Roads, the east/west axis from Round Valley to the coast. The town center is impacted by high speeds and safety concerns along Highway 101, small businesses struggle to keep their doors open, and many describe the downtown area as shabby and unappealing. Laytonville serves a population nearly triple that of the town's official population, including the communities of Branscomb, Bell Springs, and Spy Rock. Much like the old days, Laytonville is an "outpost" for rural-dwellers in Northern Mendocino County.

With the planned Highway 101 bypass of Willits -- just 22 miles south of Laytonville



Even in 1930, Laytonville served as a central gathering place for people in the area.

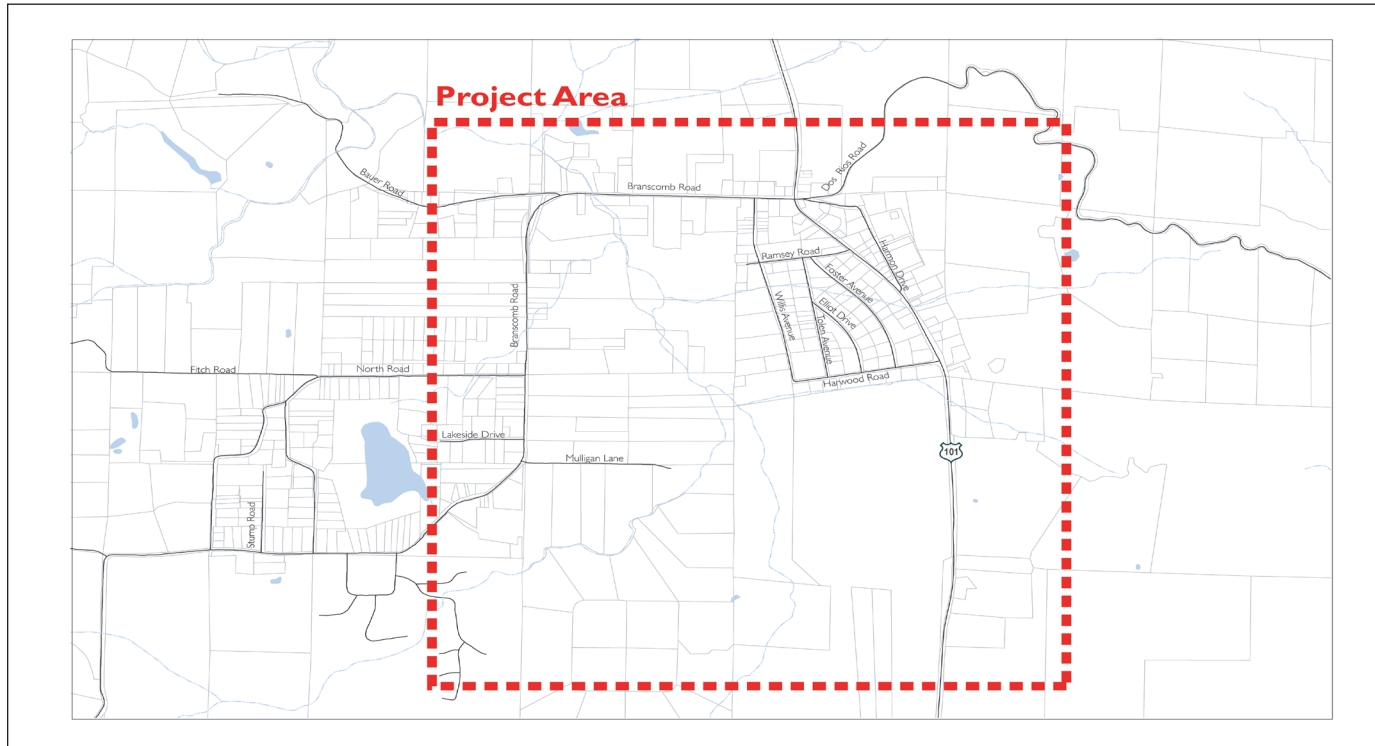


Laytonville's historic crossroads.

-- Laytonville and Hopland (approximately 60 miles south) will have the only two central business districts located directly on Highway 101 for an approximate 300-mile stretch of highway, between the San Francisco Bay Area and Eureka.

1. The Project and Plan Area

This project focuses on community input collected during a week-long charrette held May 17 – 24, 2007 in Laytonville. A charrette is a series of interactive public events that spans several days or more and culminates in a vision or design.



Project Area.

The Plan Area that is the focus of this report includes downtown Laytonville, bounded by Boomer's Bar & Grill to the north, Long Valley Lumber to the south, Harmon Drive to the east and Willis Avenue to the west. It also includes Branscomb Road from Highway 101 to the Laytonville Rancheria because of its opportunity to create better linkages between the Rancheria, neighborhoods along Branscomb Road, Laytonville High School, and the downtown area.

The project was made possible through a Caltrans Community-

Based Transportation Planning Grant received by the Mendocino Council of Governments (MCOG) in partnership with the non-profit Local Government Commission (LGC) and the Laytonville Area Municipal Advisory Council (LAMAC). Matching funds were provided by MCOG and residents, businesses, and community organizations in Laytonville. The LGC is a Sacramento-based non-profit organization that works with communities, agencies and elected leaders to create healthy, walkable, and resource-efficient communities. The LAMAC is the Board of Supervisors-appointed body that represents Laytonville community issues and makes recommendations to Mendocino County government and State agencies.

In collaboration with the MCOG and the LAMAC, the LGC assembled a skilled consultant team through a competitive process to conduct charrette activities and prepare the recommendations and designs presented in this report. Team members included the planning firm Design, Community & Environment, traffic calming and engineering firm Fehr & Peers, and a planner and urban designer from the Local Government Commission. The design team provided technical input to the community and government agencies during the May 2007 design charrette.

2. Collaboration & Previous Planning Efforts

This planning project builds on the Laytonville Community Action Plan (1999), the Laytonville Downtown Development Plan (2001), and the Laytonville Area Municipal Advisory Council's (LAMAC) Community Planning Principles (2004). The recommendations and plans in this report are consistent with previous planning efforts – in fact the reader will see many of the same community needs represented here: community gathering space, street trees, beautification, public restroom, and waste water treatment facilities. While there is continuity with previous planning efforts, this community planning project involved a first-time collaboration with Caltrans, MCOG, Mendocino County Department of Transportation, the Mendocino County Planning Team, the LAMAC and the LGC.

An Advisory Committee consisting of community members and local government staff was assembled to guide the development of this project. The volunteer Advisory Committee provided technical information to the project team, acted as the “eyes and ears” of the community, and was instrumental in organizing the charrette.

3. Current Transportation Projects

Multiple state and county transportation projects are near-

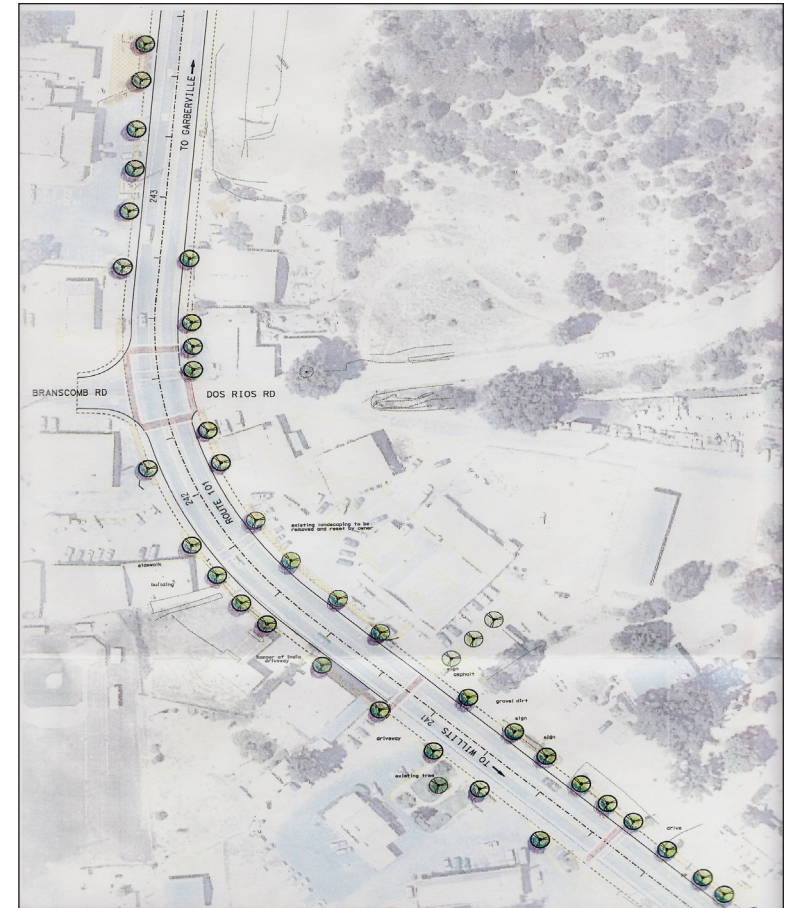
ing construction in Laytonville’s downtown. These projects will improve safety conditions for pedestrians, cyclists and motor-vehicle operators alike. This report includes mention of these planned improvements and identifies linkage gaps that will remain after construction. Recommendations of how to close these gaps can be found in Chapter 3.

a. Caltrans Safety Project and Transportation Enhancement

Scheduled to begin construction in 2008, this safety project includes a vertical curve realignment at Branscomb/Dos Rios Rd. and Highway 101. The grade on the east side of the highway at the Laytonville Garage will be lowered several feet to improve visibility. Intersection improvements will include curb, gutter, five-foot shoulders, eight-foot sidewalks, street trees and decorative pedestrian-scaled lighting. At the community’s request, bicycle racks and hitching posts for horses will be provided.

b. Willis Avenue Improvements

Mendocino County Department of Transportation (DOT) is sponsoring a sidewalk project along Willis Avenue from the bus stop at the Middle School to Branscomb Road. The project will pro-



The Caltrans Safety Project includes sidewalks, street trees, crosswalk improvements, and lighting.

vide safer crossings and routes between the Middle School and High School facilities.

c. Safe Routes to School

County DOT, in coordination with the Laytonville Unified School District, has received state Safe Routes to School funds to improve the informal foot trail along Branscomb Road from the High School to the Rancheria. Specific design recommendations for this Safe Routes to School project were prepared through this planning project, and recommended to Mendocino County DOT by the LAMAC; they are included in Chapter 3 and the Appendix of this report.



Youth discussed their desires for a skate park, pool, arcade, and better trail systems.

B. Community Engagement

1. The Laytonville Design Fair

With the guidance of the Advisory Committee, the Local Government Commission organized a public process to provide guidance during the charrette. This included a multi-day series of focus group meetings, presentations and workshops that engaged residents, businesses, youth, seniors, Cahto Tribal members, community organizations and local government in a variety of activities designed to elicit their concerns and suggestions, provide information about possible solutions, and foster collaborative development of a community vision. Bruce Brubaker of Design, Community and Environment facilitated the meetings and charrette. Other members of the design team provided direction and prepared plan drawings based on community and local agency input.



Seniors spoke of the need for more recreation facilities and trails.



Community service providers shared their ideas and concerns.



Tribal members showed how the historic Coyote Trail connects the Rancheria to the Town.



The High School Rock and Roll bands played their tunes.



Community members voted on priorities.



Opening presentation at Harwood Hall.

Five focus group meetings were conducted on May 17th and 18th, 2007 in advance of the charrette. Members of the design team and Caltrans staff met with five groups: community service providers, seniors, downtown business owners, youth and Cahto Tribal mem-



Visions for Laytonville.



Community members shared their ideas.

bers to hear input from a variety of specific interests. Notes from these focus groups are included in the Appendix.

The public events kicked off with a Saturday night opening town meeting, featuring a “burrito bar” prepared by Marcela Lopez and family, and sponsored by Geiger’s Long Valley Market and Gravier’s Chevron. Over 160 people attended the opening presentation to share their vision and values. During the opening presentation, participants viewed a presentation that showed existing conditions



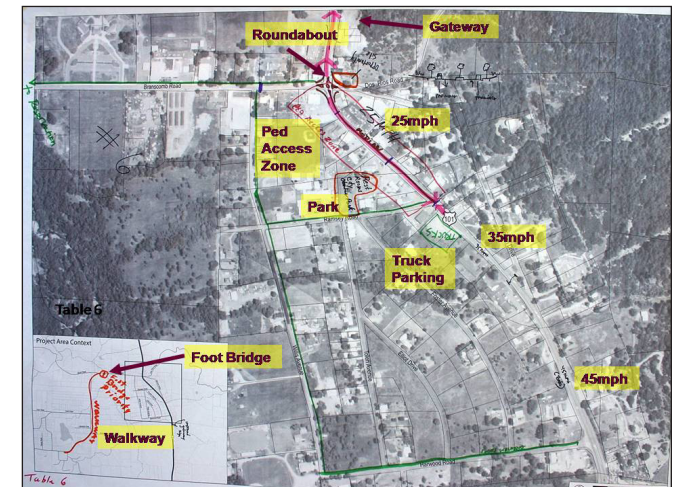
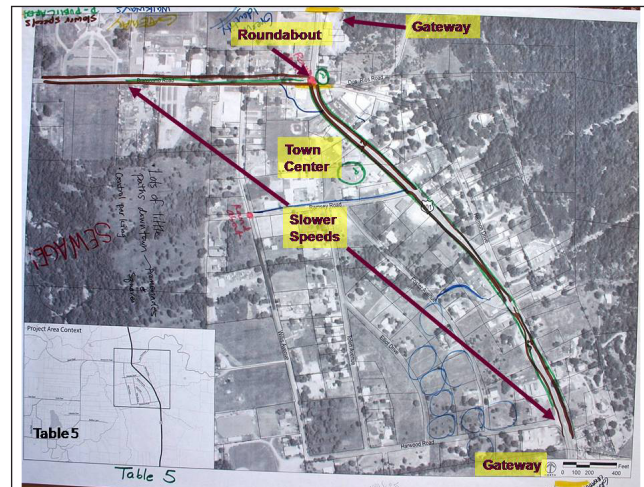
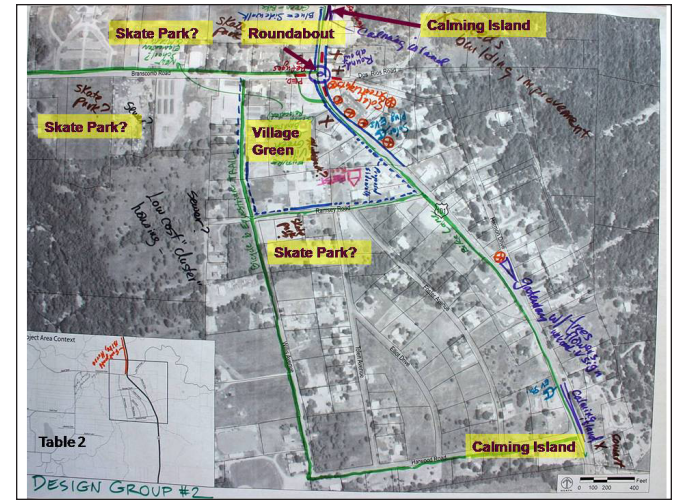
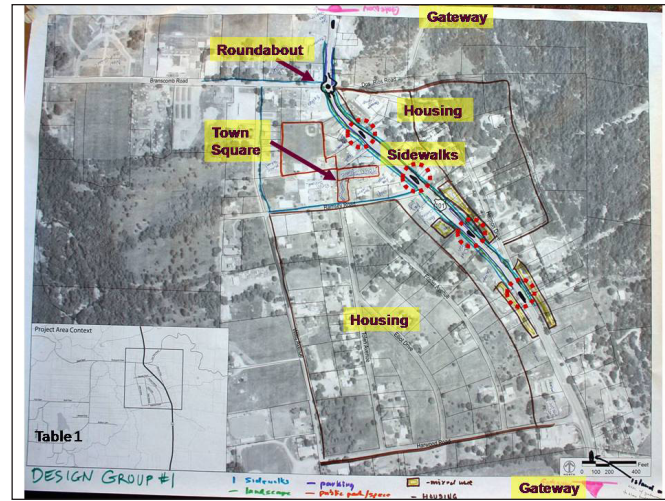
Walking audit focused on Safe Routes to School.



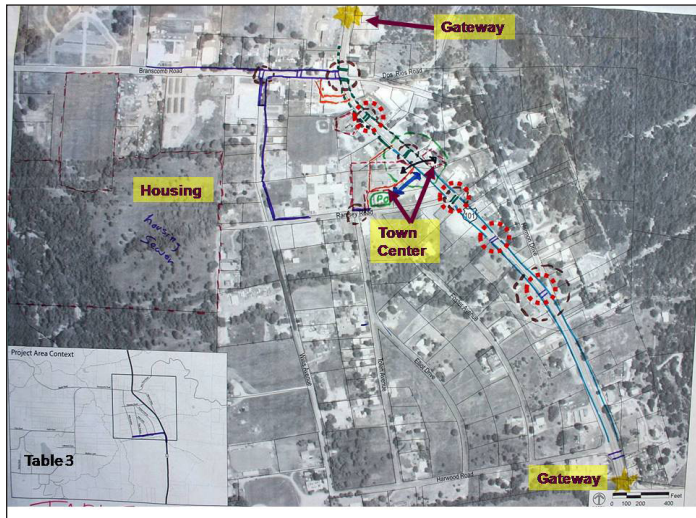
Walking Audit along Highway 101



Walking Audit looking at the northern gateway to town.



Recommendations from the Community Design Tables.



and some potential solutions used in other communities.

A “walking audit” of the plan area was conducted on Sunday morning. Over 50 people met at the Post Office and divided into one of four audits that looked at issues in the downtown area from a pedestrian perspective. Common issues that were identified were the excessive speed of traffic, lack of sidewalks and safe crosswalks, and the awkward intersection of Branscomb/Dios Rios Road and Highway 101. One audit group walked the entire length of the trail along Branscomb Road and developed community recommendations for the Safe Routes to School walkway



Open House at Albert's.



Albert's Studio.

that will be constructed by the County.

On Sunday afternoon, participants gathered at Harwood Hall for “community design tables”. Working in groups, each table discussed possible changes and drew and wrote recommended options for improving Laytonville.

Utilizing Albert's storefront as a design studio, the design team developed recommendations and plans throughout the period based on public input, field checks, and meetings with land-owners, Caltrans, MCOG and County Planning and DOT staff.

Preliminary recommendations were presented to a meeting of over 60 people at the closing presentation on Thursday, May 24.

By a show of hands, participants indicated unanimous support for the LAMAC using the design guidelines in Chapter 7 of this report as a framework for recommending new projects. Three waste-water treatment alternative concepts were presented (individual septic, decentralized systems, centralized sewer) and by a show of hands, a supermajority of participants indicated their preference for the decentralized option.

Participants added closing comments, which included:

- Clarify and reduce the building setback on Highway 101 (currently 80')
- Include solar panels in the design guidelines, and
- Identify County right-of-way on Branscomb Road.

The following chapter discusses the top seven community priorities and community goals that were identified during the planning process.

On the opening evening of the design charrette, residents participated in activities to determine their priorities for developing a vision for Laytonville. The top seven priorities are addressed in order of the number of votes received.

- Central Park/Plaza/Village Concept — 48
- Affordable Housing — 37
- Waste Water Treatment — 34
- Walking/Bicycling/Running/Horse Trails — 33
- Sustainable Development — 29
- Preserve Open Space — 26
- Slow Vehicle Speeds — 22



Participants voted with dots to determine the top priorities for Laytonville.

1. Boundaries and Identity of Laytonville's Town Center

Leading up to and throughout the early part of the charrette, there was a lack of clarity about where the Town Center begins and ends and how to best signify it. High traffic speeds, lack of pedestrian-orientation, and a lack of visual continuity contribute to this confusion. There were also concerns noted about attracting vagrants in public places. Participants agreed that creating a "central park," "plaza," or "village concept" for Laytonville is critical to creating a safe place where people can be together, conduct commerce, shop at the Farmer's Market, and gather in community. Through this process, community members defined the Town Center as the large block that is bounded by Branscomb Road, Willis Avenue, Ramsey Avenue, and including Highway 101. The community vision for Laytonville's Town Center includes the following elements:

- Skate Park
- Public Gathering Space
- Bakery
- Public Restroom



Murals contribute to the existing character of the Town Center.

- Swimming Pool
- Incorporating local art-work and murals to promote beauty, and
- Improving Laytonville’s identify and amenities for travelers along 101.

Chapters 4 and 6 discuss the Town Center.

2. Affordable Housing

Laytonville lacks affordable housing for working class members of the community such as health care professionals and teachers. The lack of housing options in the community signif-



Small-lot affordable housing in town centers contribute to vibrancy and affordability.

icantly contributes to declining enrollment in the school system as families struggle to find places to live and are forced out of the area. Local business employees must often seek housing in surrounding communities. Participants in focus groups and workshops spoke of the need for housing in the downtown area of Laytonville, within walking distance to schools and employers, and affordable to local residents. Possible locations and scenarios for downtown work-force housing are explored in Chapter 6.

3. Waste-Water Treatment

The shape, size, and walkability of Laytonville will be governed by which waste-water treatment option the community chooses. Currently, low-density land-use prevails in the downtown area because large portions of parcels must be set aside for septic systems and alternate leach lines, thus maintaining large distances between destinations. Infill development and increasing the density and mix of uses in the Town Center will be important for developing more sustainable land-use patterns and for the community to realize its vision. The chosen waste-water treatment system will need to be consistent with level of growth that the community wants to see. De-centralized systems may provide opportunities for infill development in the Town Center that can provide affordable housing, recreation, and economic development opportunities desired by residents. A centralized sewer system may pave the way for unchecked

growth. Unofficial community input received during the charrette indicated community preference for de-centralized systems. This issue is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 9.

4. Pedestrian, Bicycle and Equestrian Circulation

Many participants in this planning process – especially youth and seniors – articulated a desire and need for improved trail systems and sidewalks in and around Laytonville. Some trails exist, and are regularly used, but there is concern regarding traffic safety, year-round accessibility and desirability. Branscomb Road, Willis



Unmarked pedestrian crossing on Branscomb Road.

Avenue, and Highway 101 are common pedestrian corridors, but lack adequate pedestrian infrastructure. The equestrian community also desires better connections and safer conditions, especially along Branscomb Road and Highway 101. “Connecting the dots” for pedestrians, bicyclists and equestrians is explored in Chapter 3.

5. Sustainable & Economic Development

Sustainable development balances the fulfillment of human needs with the protection of the natural environment so that these needs can be met, not only in the present, but in the indefinite future. It includes local economic development as well as social equity and opportunity. Throughout this process, the community voiced a strong vision for Laytonville developing sustainably. Buying local and supporting the downtown business climate allows goods, services, and income to, in turn, sustain local families. Reducing consumption of fossil fuels by creating a more walkable community, buying locally, and investing in renewable energy will reduce the energy footprint of Laytonville’s businesses and residents, and contribute to a more sustainable future – and a better bottom line. This issue is discussed in more detail in Chapter 8.

6. Preserve Open Space

People live in Laytonville because they love the rural environ-



Agricultural lands surround Laytonville.

ment and what it offers – open space, quiet, privacy, clean air, and clean water. Ranching, farming, and forestry also rely on undeveloped natural landscapes. The LAMAC-endorsed Town Planning Principles state that Laytonville should develop compactly, in order to preserve these precious resources. Compact development, infill development, and smart land-use go hand-in-hand with open space and agricultural land preservation. Recommendations made throughout this report support the preservation of open space and rural landscapes.

7. Speed and Safety of Truck and Vehicular Traffic along Highway 101

There is a strong desire to slow traffic and increase safety along the stretch of Highway 101 that passes through Laytonville’s Town Center. “Traffic calming” slows vehicle speeds, creating safer pedestrian conditions, and has an additional benefit of lessening the impact of heavy truck traffic and automobiles on the Town Center. With Highway 101 as Laytonville’s “Main Street”, drivers should be encouraged – with posted speed limits and through design – to “behave” while they travel through.



“Mother’s Day Flower Truck Incident”, one of multiple incidents involving trucks colliding with Main Street buildings. Photo courtesy Lorne Strider.

Recommendations on how to “slow the flow” are presented in Chapter 5. Design Guidelines presented in Chapter 7 provide community design concepts that are proven to help slow traffic.