

# Subarea Report: Downtown

July 2021



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# Introduction

Ventura is home to a rich mosaic of neighborhoods with their own look, feel, and sense of place. While each has its own distinctive charm, each also faces its own unique set of conditions – such as housing quality, walkability, and park access – that have implications for residents’ quality of life. To better understand these differences, this report provides an overview of the Downtown subarea in Ventura, delineating its predominant uses, overall character, and prevailing issues. It is one in a series of twelve (12) standalone reports on existing subareas in the City of Ventura.



California Street. Source: Downtown Ventura Partners

Land Use	Percent
<b>Residential</b>	<b>22.0%</b>
Single-Family Attached	0.2%
Single-Family Detached	11.6%
Multifamily	10.2%
<b>Commercial</b>	<b>22.3%</b>
Accommodation	1.4%
Office	3.2%
Commercial Centers	9.4%
Commercial Other	0.0%
Commercial Recreation	8.3%
<b>Mixed-Use</b>	<b>0.3%</b>
Mixed-Use Commercial	0.3%
<b>Industrial/Manufacturing</b>	<b>2.2%</b>
Light Industrial	1.8%
Wholesale / Warehousing	0.4%
<b>Public/Institutional</b>	<b>12.1%</b>
Civic Facilities	1.5%
Religious Facilities	0.5%
School	1.0%
Transportation	3.9%
Utilities / Communications	0.1%
Water	5.0%
<b>Open Space</b>	<b>29.1%</b>
Parks / Recreation	28.4%
Natural / Conservation	0.7%
<b>Vacant/Other</b>	<b>12.0%</b>

## Downtown Overview

Downtown Ventura is a vibrant mixed-use community located in and around the city’s historic core, generally bounded by the foothills to the north, Sanjon Road to the east, the Pacific Ocean to the south, and the 101/33 junction to the west. With its historic landmarks, walkable streets, and proximity to the beach, it is Ventura’s main cultural destination, attracting tourists and visitors from across the city and region. However, its residential population is largely low-income, as median household income (\$48,555) ranks as the second lowest of any subarea in Ventura. Figure 1 shows an aerial view of the subarea.

## Existing Land Use

As Figure 2 shows, Downtown hosts a uniquely balanced mix of uses, including agriculture/open space (29.1 percent), residential (23.0 percent), and commercial (22.3 percent) uses. Housing is mostly found in the area’s east end approaching Midtown, while retail, office, and other commercial uses are clustered in the historic core. Public/institutional uses (12.1 percent), including schools and government buildings, are also dispersed in the area.

Main Street is the neighborhood’s major retail corridor, supporting a dynamic mix of uses that extends from Fir Street westward to the San Buenaventura Mission and

Ortega Adobe – two major cultural landmarks. City Hall, housed in a large neoclassical building with an elegant façade, is also located at the northern end of California Street with a viewshed that extends to the Pacific Ocean. Key public and recreational amenities include three theaters, the Ventura County

Fairgrounds, and several parks. Downtown is also home to the headquarters of the Patagonia clothing company.

## Neighborhood Statistics



**4,230 residents**  
(3.9% of City)

**2,646 units**  
(6.1% of City)



**16.2 units per residential acre**  
(Citywide: 7.8)



**4.7 people per acre**  
(Citywide: 7.7)



**median income**  
**\$48,555**  
(Citywide: \$78,882)



**median home value**  
**\$588,850**  
(Citywide: \$570,100)



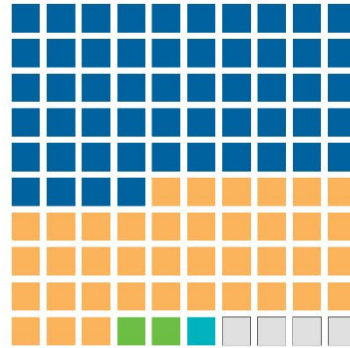
**3,895 jobs**  
(7.6% of City)



**14% residents aged 65+**  
(Citywide: 15.8%)



**12% residents aged 18 or under**  
(Citywide: 21.8%)



- White (54%)
- Hispanic/Latino (39%)
- Asian (2%)
- Black (1%)
- Other/Two or More Races (4%)



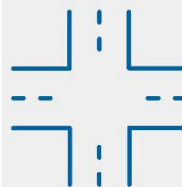
**46.2 park acres per 1,000 residents**  
(Citywide: 7.2)



**74.7% residents five minutes from park**  
(Citywide: 40.2%)



**24.9% residents at very high fire risk**  
(Citywide: 10.7%)








**69.5 intersections per mi<sup>2</sup>**  
(Citywide: 92.7)



Figure 1: Aerial

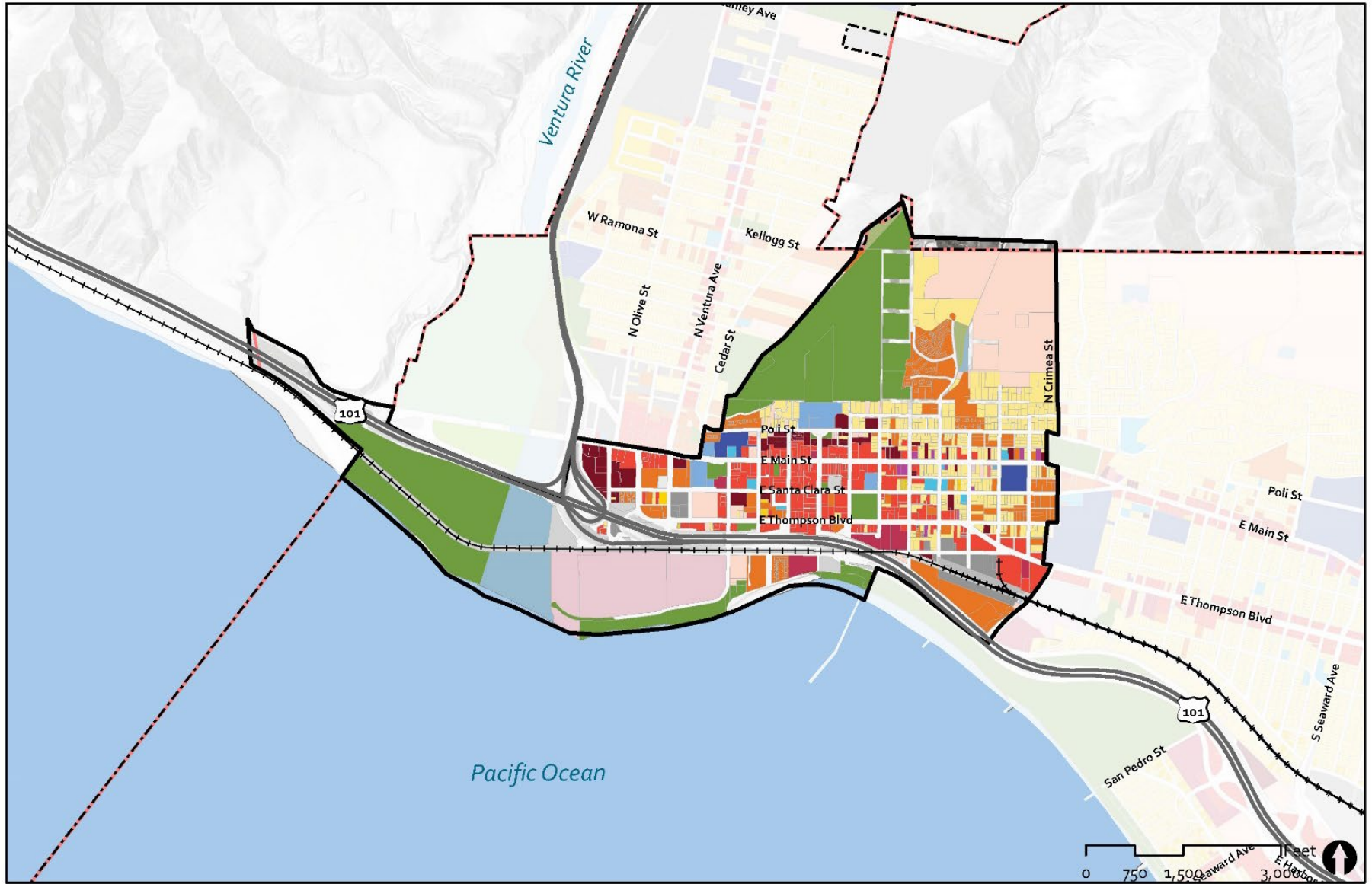


-  Downtown Subarea
-  Ventura City Limits
-  Sphere of Influence
-  Railroad
-  Freeway

Data Sources: City of Ventura (2020); County of Ventura (2020); ESRI (2020)



Figure 2: Existing Land Use



Data Sources: City of Ventura (2020); County of Ventura (2020); ESRI (2020)





## Neighborhood Features and Challenges

- Historic Resources and Architecture.** Downtown is Ventura’s historic and cultural epicenter, home to important landmarks like the San Buenaventura Mission, Ortega Adobe, and Shisholop Village. Downtown also exhibits an eclectic mix of architectural styles that reflect its diverse history, including Victorian, Craftsman, Spanish Mission, and Art Deco buildings. To preserve Downtown’s unique character and heritage, the City applies a form-based code (FBC) and historic overlay zone throughout the area. A historic resources inventory is also being developed to facilitate the restoration and preservation of key sites in the area.
- Walkable Environment.** Downtown is organized along an attractive and highly walkable street grid. Blocks are generally fine-grained, with several small lots supporting a mosaic of community-serving uses. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the City closed part of Main Street to vehicle traffic to accommodate sidewalk dining and shopping. Anecdotal evidence indicates a high level of public support for this program.
- Mixed-Use Core.** Downtown arguably contains the most dynamic mix of uses anywhere in Ventura, which contributes to its reputation as a key regional destination. In addition to its array of historic and cultural landmarks, Downtown is both a regional retail hub – including small businesses like restaurants, cafes, bars, and boutiques, among others – and recreational center, home to several parks, plazas, and paseos. More than 13 percent of all retail establishments in Ventura are in Downtown, highlighting the district’s importance to the City’s fiscal and economic health (see “Market Study” for more detail).
- Form-Based Planning:** Downtown is one of a handful of areas subject to form-based development regulations instead of traditional zoning. This method, which emphasizes urban form and aesthetics, is rooted in the 2007 Downtown Specific Plan and its goal to preserve a “special sense of place.” The Specific Plan also sought to position Downtown as a “preferred place” for new housing and offices uses; at the time of writing, Downtown is slated to experience significant development that will implement the Plan’s vision. For example, the proposed “Ventura Triangle” project plans for 231 multifamily units in the south end of Downtown.
- Moderate Wildfire Risk.** Due to its proximity to the Los Padres foothills, Downtown faces the third highest fire risk of any subarea in the city. Virtually a quarter (24.9 percent) of the population live in areas deemed “very high fire risk.” Figure 6 shows fire risk in Downtown.
- Flooding and Sea Level Rise Risk.** Parts of Downtown, particularly in the southern area, are at risk to sea level rise and flooding. Ventura River outlets to the Pacific Ocean here, extending the risk inland of coastal flooding. Figure 3 shows the projected sea level rise and coastal flooding by 2100 along the coast of Ventura. Affected facilities likely to be exposed to future flooding include the City of Ventura Lift Station, City Promenade, Fairgrounds, Raceway, Surfers Point, Ventura Beach RV Resort as well as development southeast of Ventura Avenue and Main Street.
- Coastal Regulations.** Due to its partial location in the Coastal Zone, most of Downtown is subject to additional land use regulations for purposes of coastal management and resource



*Historic structure. Source: Raimi + Associates*



conservation. Per the California Coastal Act, local governments with land in coastal areas are required to prepare a Local Coastal Program (LCP) that outlines various policies and regulatory mechanisms intended to manage the conservation and development of these areas. In Ventura, the Coastal Protection (CP) overlay zone is one of the LCP's chief implementation mechanisms. Virtually all of Downtown south of Poli Street lies in the CP overlay zone.

## Streetscape



*Main Street. Source: Rice University*

Downtown's streetscape is a defining feature of the neighborhood. Destination corridors such as Main Street have a fairly consistent tree canopy, continuous street wall, and comfortable sidewalks with widths of up to 12 feet. West of Fir Street, most buildings have no setbacks with storefronts flush to the sidewalk, creating an inviting pedestrian environment (see Figure 5 for building footprints). As the neighborhood becomes more residential in character approaching Midtown, setbacks increase, and landscaped front yards begin to dot the roadway with greater frequency. While building heights typically do not

exceed two stories, a handful of sites – particularly historic buildings in the Downtown core – rise as high as seven stories.

Despite its inviting pedestrian environment, Downtown's bicycle infrastructure could be improved. Angled street parking is abundant on Main Street, which effectively reduces travel speeds but also limits opportunities for active transportation. Striped (Class II) bike lanes are present on parts of Main, Poli, and Santa Clara Streets, but are found nowhere else in the district (see "Transportation and Mobility Report" for more). These conditions increase the potential for conflict, as cyclists are forced to travel on sidewalks or share roadways with vehicles. Should conditions allow, some street parking could be reduced and repurposed as Class I (separated) or Class II (striped) bike lanes.

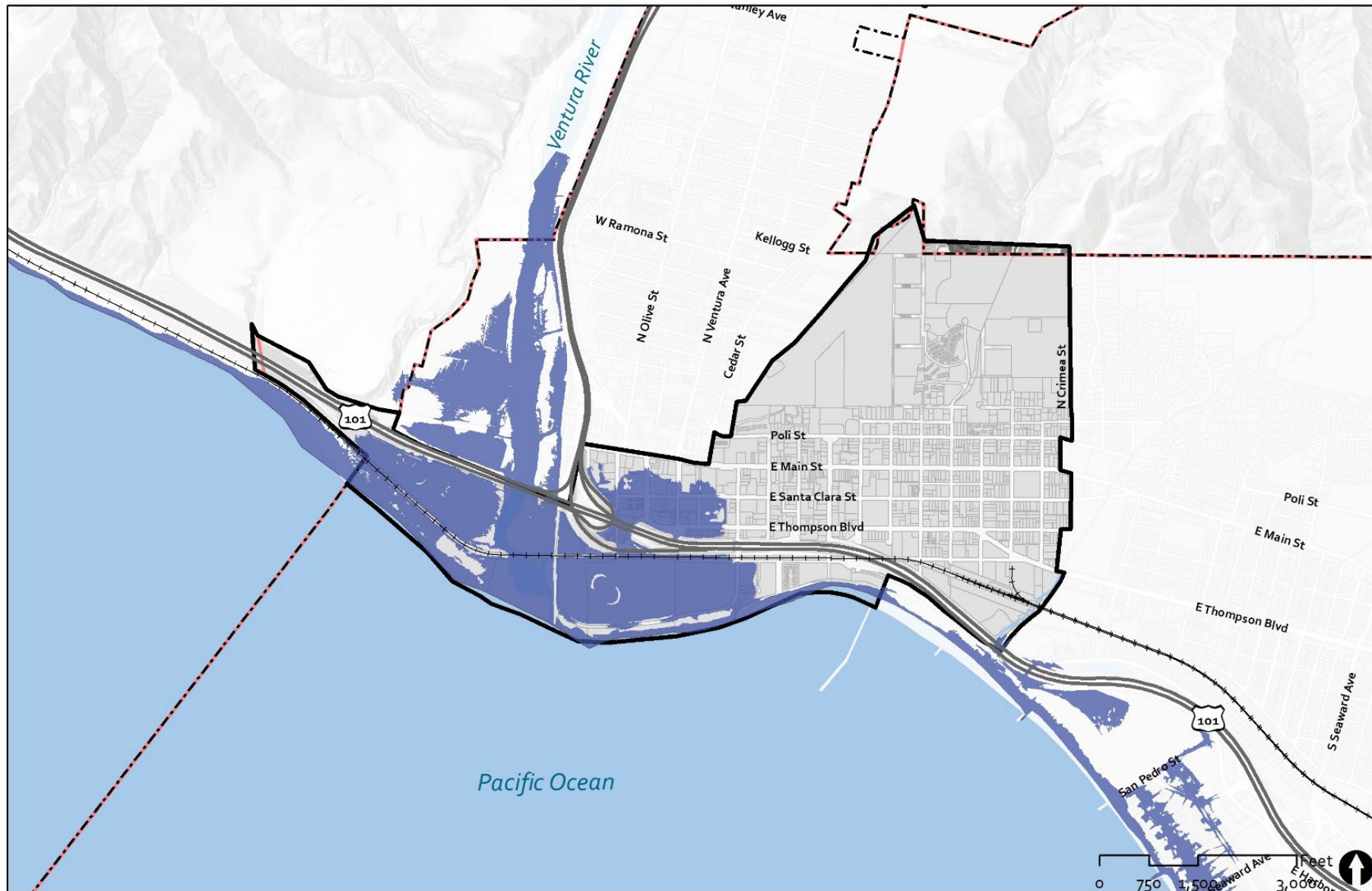
### *Intersection Density*

Intersection Density is one metric used to evaluate an area's walkability. A high concentration (i.e., density) of intersections in a defined place is typically indicative of a gridded street pattern, which expands travel routes and connectivity, creates frequent opportunities for controlled pedestrian crossing, and can even facilitate placemaking at key nodes. Intersection densities of 140 per square mile or more are more conducive for walkability.

As Figure 4 below indicates, Intersection Density in Downtown is variable. The Downtown core, bounded by Ventura Avenue and Hemlock Street, contains an exceptionally high concentration of intersections, reflecting the finely gridded and walkable street network described above. However, Downtown's peripheral areas – namely north of Poli Street and south of Highway 101 – host comparatively few intersections, with larger street blocks and a circuitous roadway network.

Note: The scenario on page 8 shows the possible extent of flooding during a 1% chance annual storm (100-year storm) plus 3.3 feet of sea level rise. This is consistent with the State of California Sea-Level Rise Guidance (2018) for the likely range of sea level rise by 2100 (low risk aversion scenario).

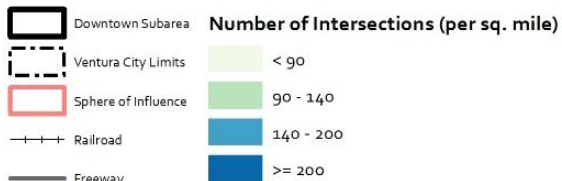
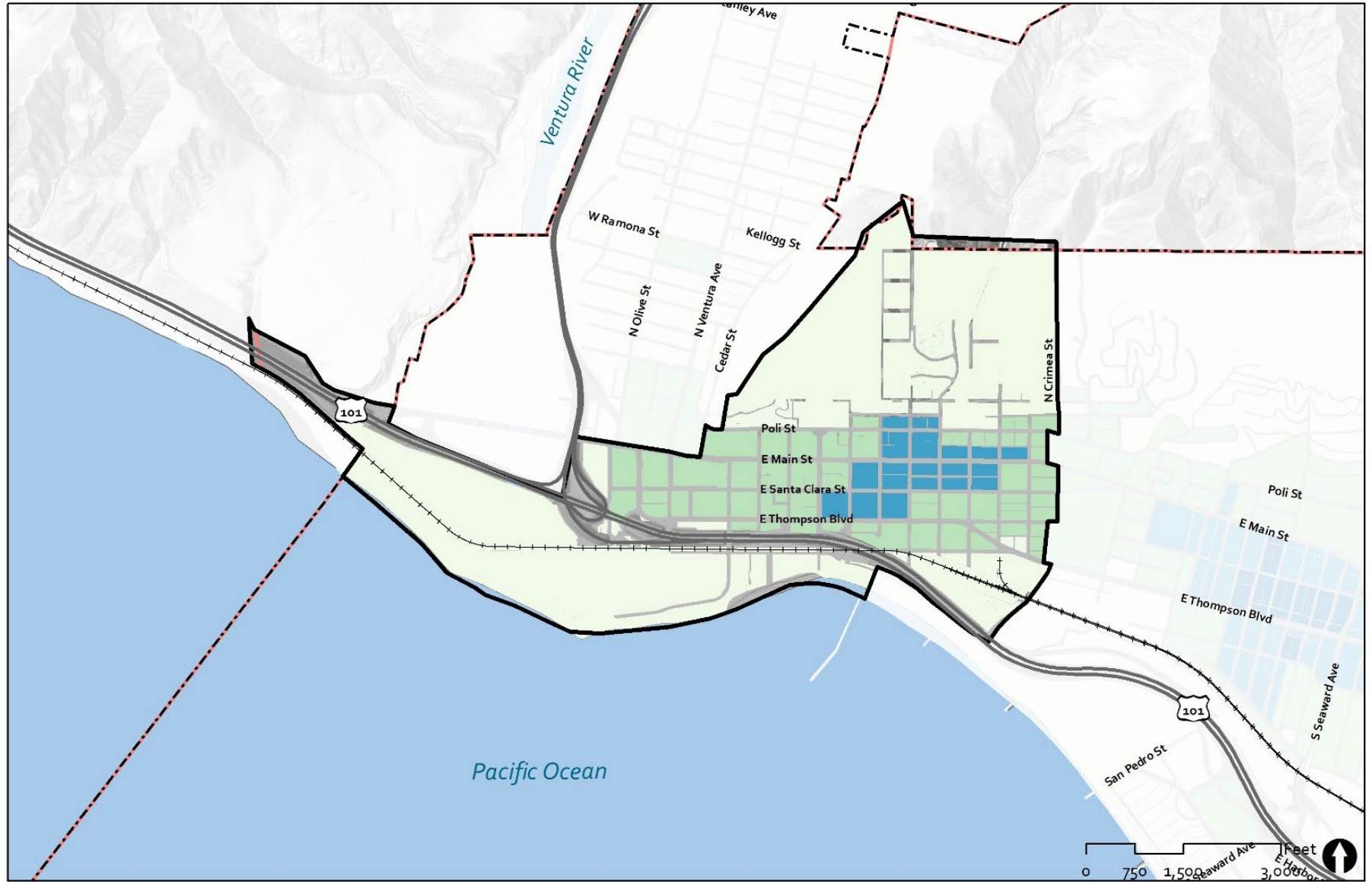
Figure 3: Future Flood Hazard with 3.3 Feet of Sea Level Rise



- Downtown Subarea
- Ventura City Limits
- Sphere of Influence
- Railroad
- Freeway
- Sea Level Rise Risk Area



Figure 4: Intersection Density

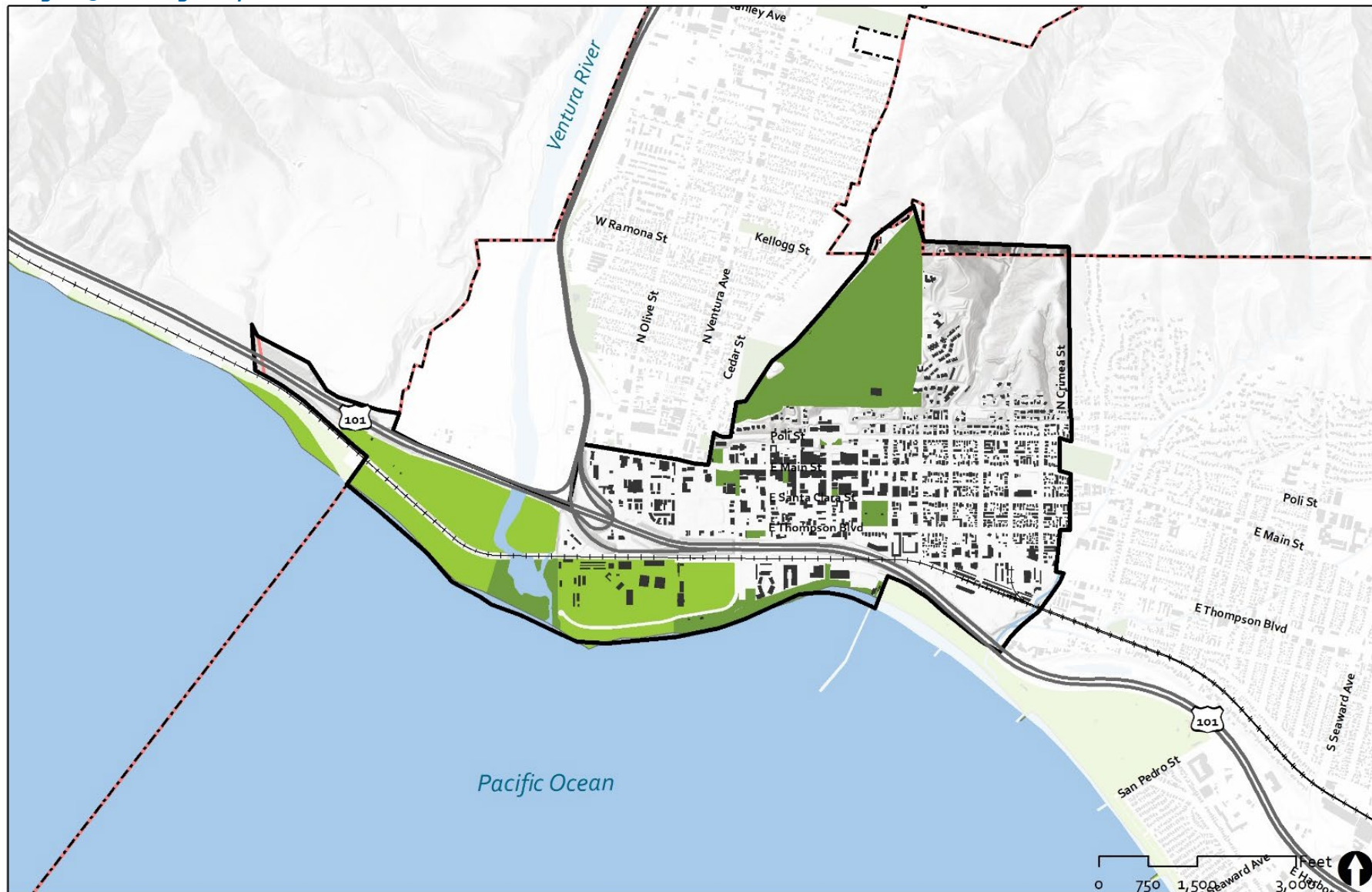


Data Sources: City of Ventura (2020), County of Ventura (2020), ESRI (2020)





Figure 5: Building Footprints



- Downtown Subarea
- Railroad
- City Park/Open Space
- Ventura City Limits
- Freeway
- Regional Park/Open Space
- Sphere of Influence
- Building Footprints





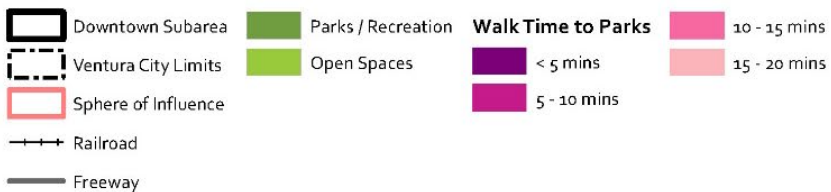
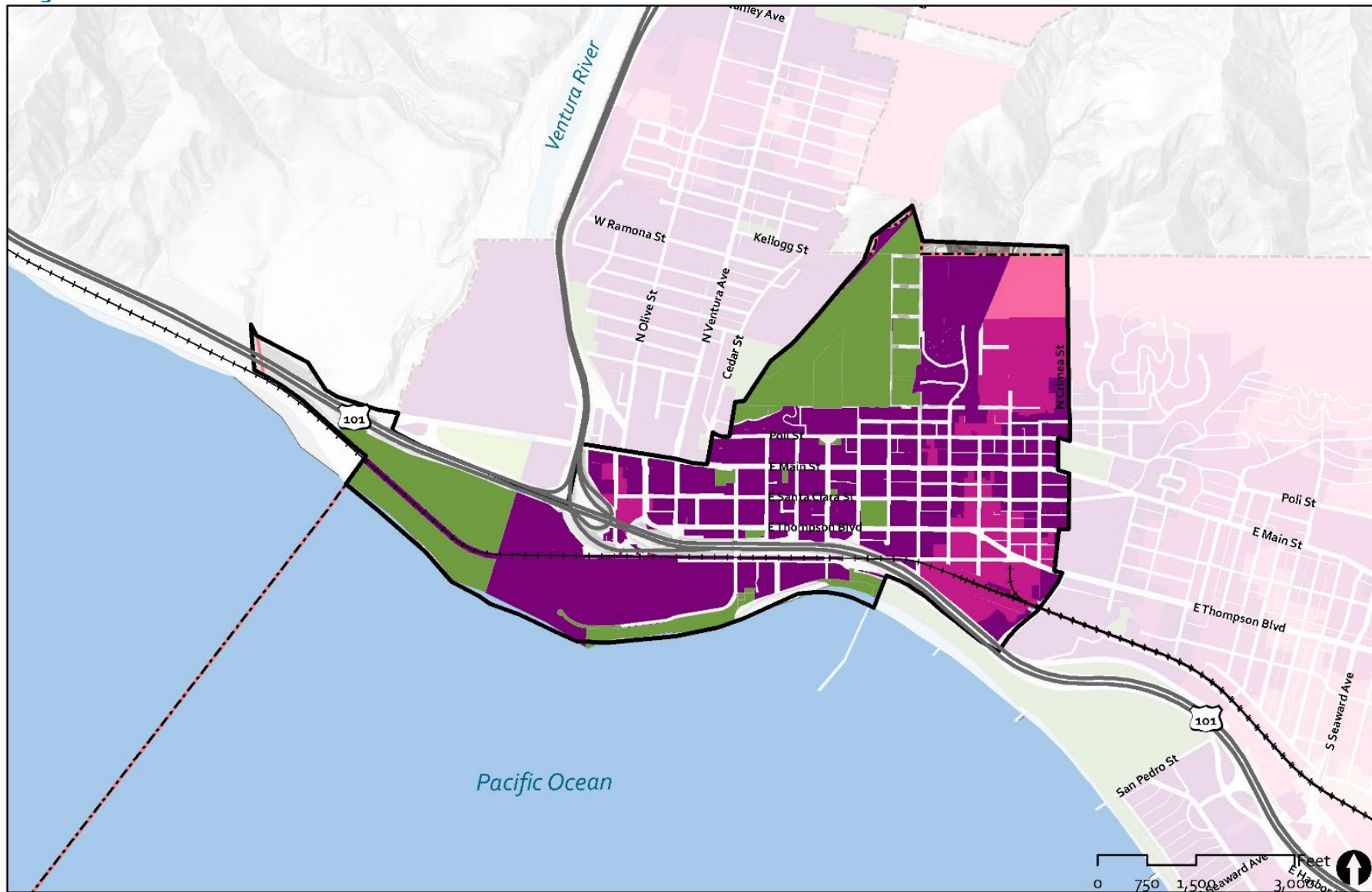
## Open Space

Downtown hosts a wide and unique array of public gathering spaces. Green spaces include five public parks that are woven into the built environment and provide opportunities for both active and passive recreation. On its southern periphery, the Ventura Promenade extends along the Pacific Coast and intersect with the Ventura Pier. As Figure 6 shows, almost three-quarters (74.7 percent) of Downtown residents live within a five-minute walk of a public park, and there are over 46 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents – the most generous ratio of any subarea.



*Trail at Grant Park. Source: Ventura County Trails*

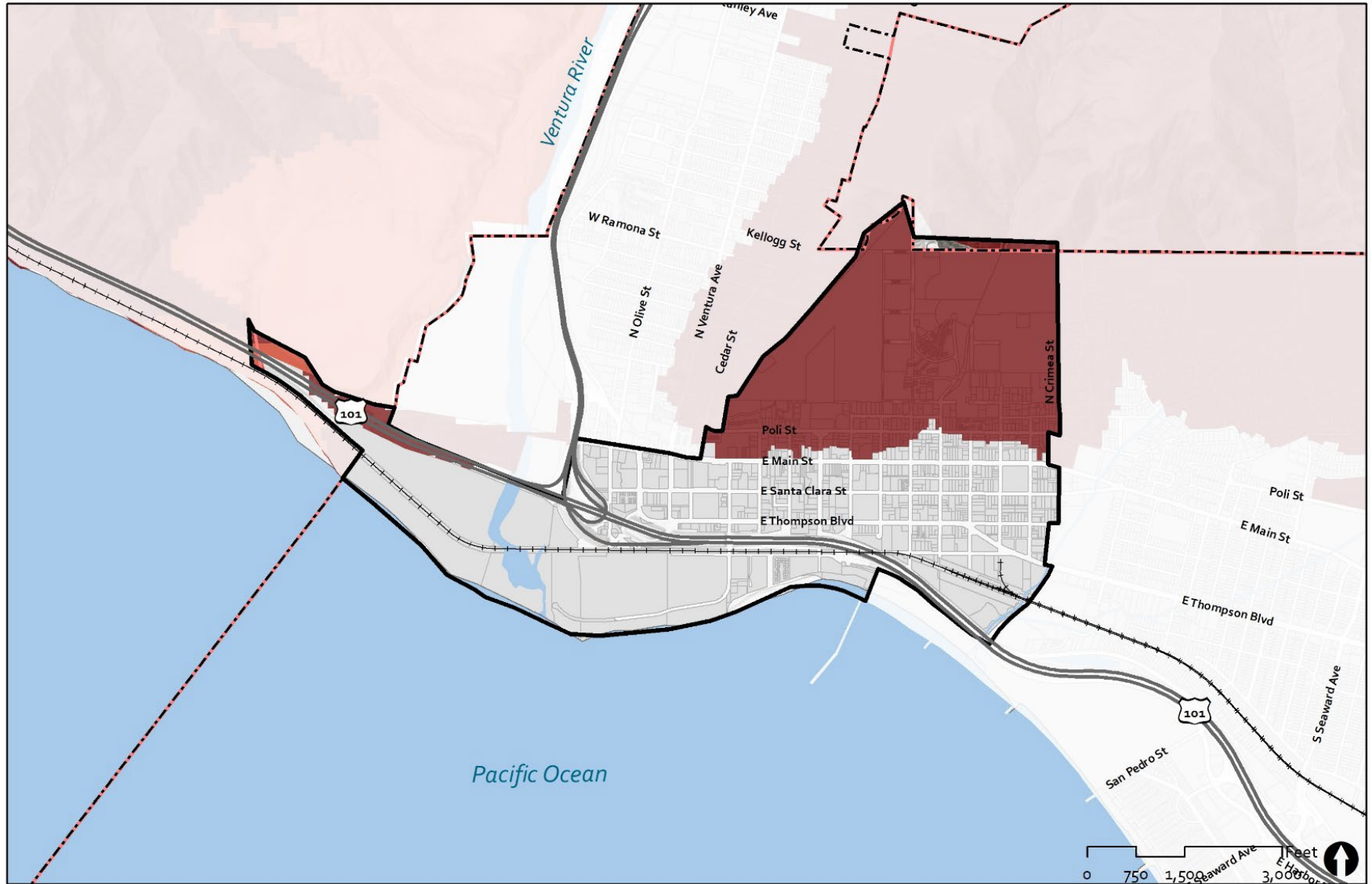
Figure 6: Walk Access to Parks



Data Sources: City of Ventura (2020); County of Ventura (2020); ESRI (2020)



Figure 7: Fire Risk



- Downtown Subarea
  Railroad
  High
- Ventura City Limits
  Freeway
  Very High
- Sphere of Influence



## Summary of Key Findings

- **Strong Access to Parks and Recreation:** Virtually all Downtown residents enjoy strong access to parks, as nearly three-quarters (74.7) percent live within a five-minute walk of one, and there are more than 46 acres of parkland available per 1,000 residents. This proximity provides a strong foundation for creating a healthy and livable community. To improve public access to the beach, pedestrian connectivity and parking supply could be expanded.
- **Vibrant Destination:** Downtown is a major citywide and regional destination given its vibrant architecture, historic significance, walkable streets, and dynamic mix of community amenities. Major attractions include a diverse range of recreational spaces – from hillside trails and beaches to public parks and civic plazas – and an array of small, locally-owned businesses housed in adaptively reused structures. Many of these operations are also vital to the City’s economy, as 13 percent of all retail is located in Downtown.
- **High Wildfire Risk:** Parts of Downtown are vulnerable to wildfires, which are only anticipated to increase in frequency as climate change intensifies. Nearly a quarter (24.9 percent) of all Downtown residents live in “Very High Fire Risk” (VHFR) areas, indicating a need to consider limiting development in foothills, expand evacuation routes, and strengthen adaptation and resilience efforts.
- **Sea Level Rise and Coastal Flooding Risk:** The south end of Downtown is at risk to sea level rise and flooding. Several facilities including the Fairgrounds, Raceway, Surfers Point, Promenade, Sewer Lift Station, Ventura Beach RV Resort as well as development southeast of Ventura Avenue and Main Street are at risk. A range of adaptation strategies should be explored. Adaptation strategies may include requiring new development to account for sea level rise in all future applications, raising the land with fill, increasing the height of the finished floor elevation of buildings, and finding space for water on properties, in streets, and in parks and open spaces. A managed retreat strategy for high-risk facilities such as the lift station on the promenade should be analyzed for long term infrastructure needs in the City.
- **Average Bicycle Infrastructure:** While Downtown is highly walkable, opportunities for biking are limited. The district hosts few Class II lanes and no Class I lanes. As a part of the General Plan Update, strategies to better balance parking needs, both current and projected, with considerations for bicycle safety should be explored. Options could include providing protected bike lanes by removing on-street parking or reducing number or width of travel lanes as needed. These options would need to be carefully studied further. Two streets that may be appropriate for these interventions are Santa Clara Street and Thompson Boulevard.

**Note:** Due to misalignments between subarea and Census-designated boundaries, demographic indicators presented in this report should be treated as approximations.