



# 1 INTRODUCTION

The City of Oakland, Bay Area Rapid Transit, Metropolitan Transportation Commission, and the Peralta Community College District have come together to prepare a Station Area Plan for the area around the Lake Merritt BART Station. The area encompasses Chinatown, Laney College, civic buildings of Alameda County and the City of Oakland, and the channel connecting Lake Merritt to the estuary.

# 1.1 Project, Goals & Objectives

There are many diverse residents, students, employees, and commercial business owners who make up the community of this area, and Chinatown functions as a citywide center for the Asian community. The Station Area Plan must address the needs of the community, as well as the needs of Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) related to ridership, and the needs of the College District related to education and maximizing the use of their land. BART has stated that it envisions the area transitioning from its current status as an “Urban Neighborhood Station” to a “Regional Center” station type. Creation of a Station Area Plan offers an important opportunity for the community to engage in discussions about the history and future of the Station Area.

The Planning Area is located near several hubs of activity in Oakland, just south of Lake Merritt. Areas nearby the Planning Area of interest include Downtown Oakland, Old Oakland, Jack London Square, and Uptown, illustrated in Figure 1.1.

## Key Objectives

A few of the key objectives of the Lake Merritt Station Area Plan, which will continue to develop and be refined throughout the planning process, include:

- Provide for community development that is equitable, sustainable, and healthy.
- Increase the housing supply, especially housing around the BART station. Include affordable housing for low-income residents.
- Increase jobs and improve access to jobs along the transit corridor.
- Provide services and retail options in the station area.
- Identify additional recreation and open space opportunities.

Finally, the Lake Merritt Station Area Plan must provide an impetus for real development projects, and specific public improvements. The plan should generate interest, enthusiasm, and consensus about new development in the area and the most important public improvement projects for station access.

## Range of Topics Covered in the Plan

The Station Area Plan will address the following topics:

- Land Use, Circulation, and Urban Design
  - Housing Development
  - Station Access
  - Transportation
  - Standards and guidelines for public and private development that assure visual quality in the area
- Open space, conservation and natural resources
- Infrastructure Improvements
- Historic and Cultural Resources
- Regulatory Framework
- Implementation Program



The Lake Merritt BART Station Entrance.



The Lake Merritt Channel with Laney College in the background.



New housing development in Chinatown.



Vibrant businesses exist now in Chinatown.

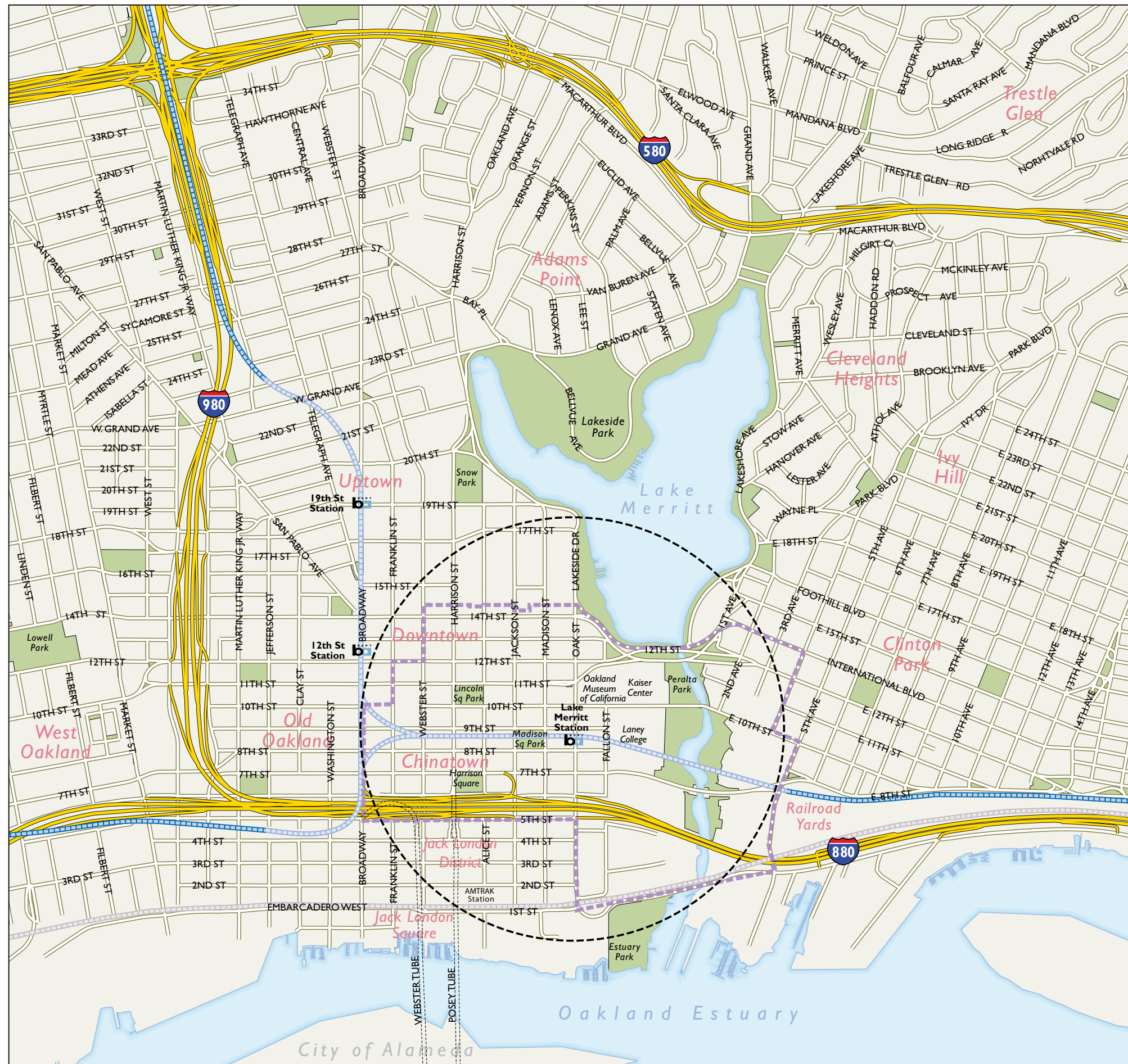








The Main Oakland Public Library.

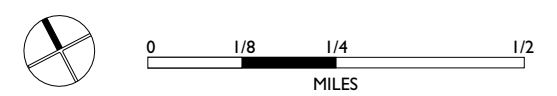


12th Street currently limits access to Lake Merritt from much of the Planning Area. Reconstruction of this road will begin in Spring 2010.

**Figure 1.1:**  
**LAKE MERRITT STATION**  
**PLANNING AREA CONTEXT**



-  BART Station
-  BART
-  Park
-  Focus Area
-  Planning Area - 1/2 Mile Radius
-  Railroad (Amtrak & Freight)



## Building on Existing Assets

The Lake Merritt BART Station is located near several assets, including:

**Chinatown:** A vibrant commercial and residential neighborhood, Chinatown has active streets in the commercial core, a vibrant retail trade, and acts as a cultural center for the east bay Asian population. Chinatown makes up the majority of the residential population within the Focus Area.

**Laney College:** Laney College is the largest of the four Peralta Community Colleges, located adjacent to the Lake Merritt BART Station, the Oakland Museum of California, and the Lake Merritt Channel, on about 60 acres of land. The school serves over 13,000 students, including about 500 international students, and has more than 480 full-time and adjunct positions. Laney serves a diverse student population with a wide range of coursework.

**The Oakland Museum of California (OMCA):** Established in 1969 as a “museum for the people,” OMCA is a leading cultural institution of the Bay Area and a resource for the research and understanding of California’s dynamic cultural and environmental heritage. The museum is undergoing renovations, reopening in May, 2010. OMCA is located one block north of the BART Station.

**The recreational amenities of Lake Merritt, the Estuary, and the Lake Merritt Channel:** Lake Merritt was declared a National Wildlife Refuge in 1869 and plays an important role as a recreational asset for the City. The trails around the lake are very popular for walking and jogging. The Channel, which connects Lake Merritt to the Estuary, runs through the Planning Area. Recent improvements to the Lake edge have been completed through measure DD, with additional improvements including the 12th Street reconstruction and along the Channel planned. Improvements to Estuary Park at the southern edge of the Planning Area are included in development plans for the Oak to 9th project.

**The Kaiser Convention Center:** Originally opened in 1914, as a multi-purpose arena, the Center is currently closed. The convention center is located adjacent to the OMCA, south of Lake Merritt and north of Laney College. The Center has historically been a venue for a variety of cultural events and entertainment, and has potential for future reuse.

**Alameda County Offices:** A major source of employment, the County offices and County Courthouse are located primarily along 12th Street.

These resources provide a strong basis for improving connectivity, ridership and vibrancy of the Station Area. The Planning Area includes areas within ½ mile of the Lake Merritt Station, as shown in Figure 1.2.

The Planning Area includes the southern part of Lake Merritt, the Lake Merritt BART Station, and several distinct neighborhoods around the station, including Chinatown to the west, Lakeside to the north, and the Jack London neighborhood to the south. A Focus Area has been defined in order for work on land use, zoning, and other key issues. The Focus Area was revisited from the original RFP and changed slightly based on circulation and access considerations, to incorporate several County structures and opportunities north and west of the original focus area, and to remove focus from the properties along Lakeshore Avenue. Two areas are left out of the Focus Area: Lakeside neighborhood because it has recently been rezoned, and the Jack London District because it has its own regulatory system under the Estuary Plan.

**The Pacific Renaissance Plaza:** The Pacific Renaissance Plaza houses the Asian Branch Public Library, the Oakland Asian Cultural Center which offers a range of cultural resources, the Chinatown Chamber of Commerce, two levels of shops and restaurants, residential units above the ground floors, and underground parking. A large plaza with a fountain acts as a gathering space for residents and visitors to the area.



Oakland Museum.



County Courthouse.



Chinatown Shopping.



Laney College.



Pacific Renaissance Plaza.



Lake Merritt Channel.

**Figure 1.2:**  
**LAKE MERRITT STATION**  
**BASE MAP**



- BART Station Entrance
- BART Station
- Lake Merritt BART Station
- Park
- City Right of Way
- Public Buildings/  
Major Destinations
- Building Footprints
- Focus Area (Revised)
- Focus Area (RFP)
- Planning Area -  
1/2 Mile Radius



0 100 300 500 750 1,000 Feet

Source: City of Oakland and Dyett and Bhatia, 2009.

# 1.2 Planning Process & Schedule

The planning process is anticipated to take approximately two years, concluding at the end of 2011. The planning process will include extensive community outreach, with opportunities for community involvement at all stages of the process, from the initial visioning and exploration of plan alternatives to the selection of the preferred plan and review of its accompanying Environmental Impact Report. There will be five Community Workshops over the course of the project, as well as seven Community Stakeholder Group meetings. Information about workshop and meeting dates as well as project materials can be found on the project website at <http://www.business2oakland.com/lake-merrittsap>. Figure 1.3 shows the project schedule.

Community outreach has already been initiated through the Lake Merritt Bart Station Area Community Engagement process, conducted by Asian Health Services, the Chinatown Chamber of Commerce, and the Asian Pacific Environmental Network (APEN) in partnership with the City of Oakland. This process included four public meetings, and a 19 question survey which recorded the views of 1,161 residents, workers, visitors, students, businesses and BART users about the advantages and problems of the Lake Merritt Bart Station Area. The process began in November 2008 and was completed with the final report in June 2009. The final report summarizes the input from the community engagement and is incorporated into this report. Table 1.1 lists additional community meetings and workshops for the Planning Process.

**TABLE 1.1: COMMUNITY MEETINGS AND COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDER GROUP MEETINGS**

COMMUNITY MEETINGS/ WORKSHOPS	
TIMING	MEETING TOPIC
April 14, 2010	Community goals and key issues of concern
Neighborhood Teas: Spring, 2010	Assess goals and concerns of local residents who typically do not attend large public meetings
Fall 2010	Land Use/ Urban Design Alternatives
Winter 2011	Draft Land Use, Circulation, and Station Access Plans
Summer 2011	Draft Plan and Draft EIR Open House
COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDER GROUP	
TIMING	MEETING TOPIC
April 29, 2009	Kickoff Meeting
February 18, 2010	Review Existing Conditions Report
March 4, 2010	Review Market Study
Summer 2010	Review Draft Land Use Alternatives and Analysis
Fall 2010	Review Draft Land Use Plan
Fall 2010	Review Draft Access Plan
Spring 2011	Review Draft Plan

PUBLIC HEARINGS	
TIMING	MEETING TOPIC
Fall 2010	Planning Commission or City Council: Present and receive feedback on land use alternatives
Fall 2010	Two City Board Meetings: Present and receive feedback on land use alternatives
Fall 2010	Planning Commission: EIR Scoping Session (following the Notice of Preparation)
Spring 2011	Planning Commission: Present and receive feedback on draft land use and circulation plans
Summer 2011	City Council, Planning Commission, Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board, and Parks and Recreation Advisory Board: Public review of Plan and Draft EIR
End of Year 2011	Planning Commission and two City Council hearings: Present Final EIR and final Plan revisions, and receive final approval.



The Planning Team conducts a site tour of the Planning Area.



Community members talk about their concerns related to the area.

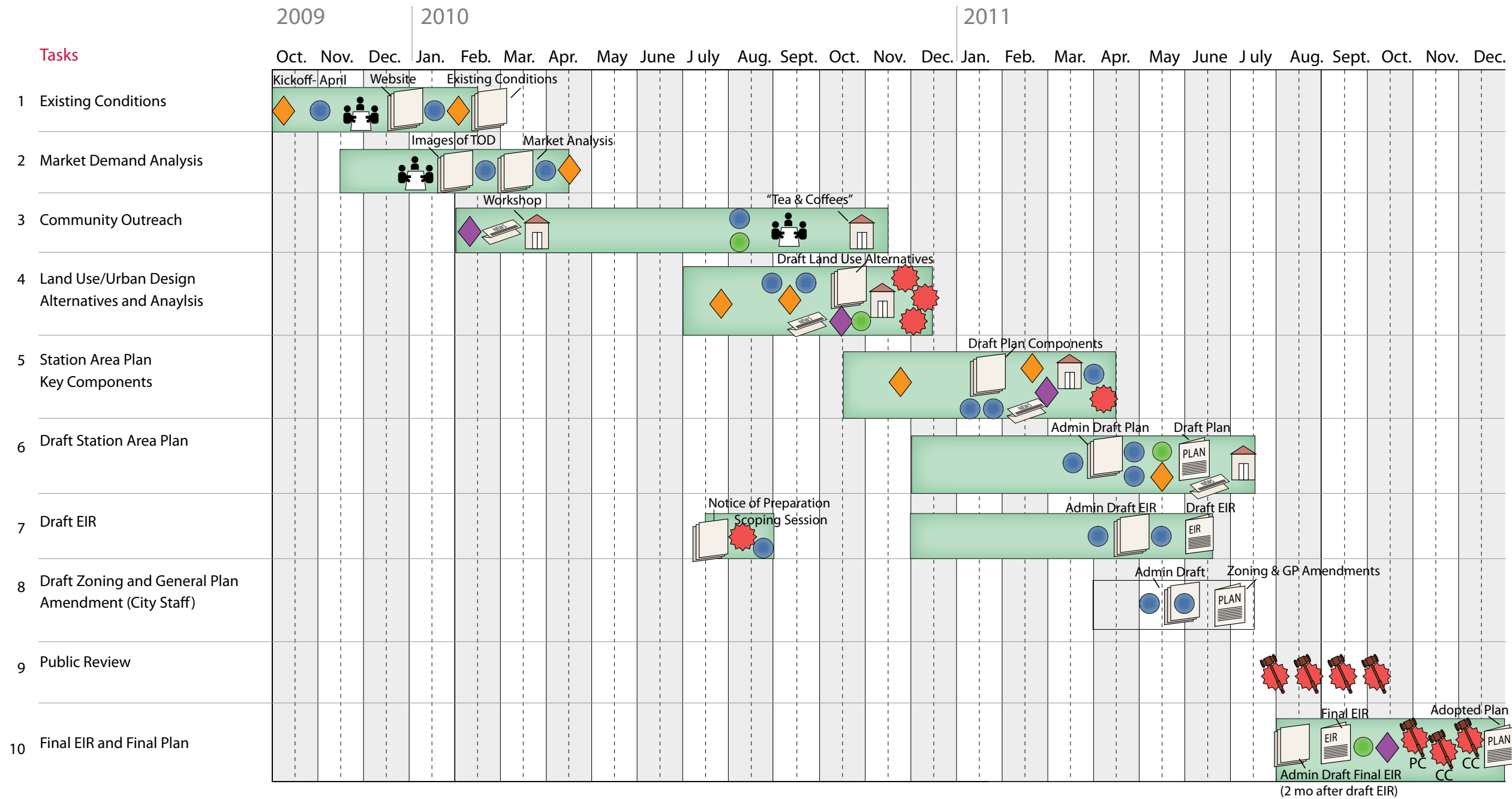


The consultant team shares draft work.

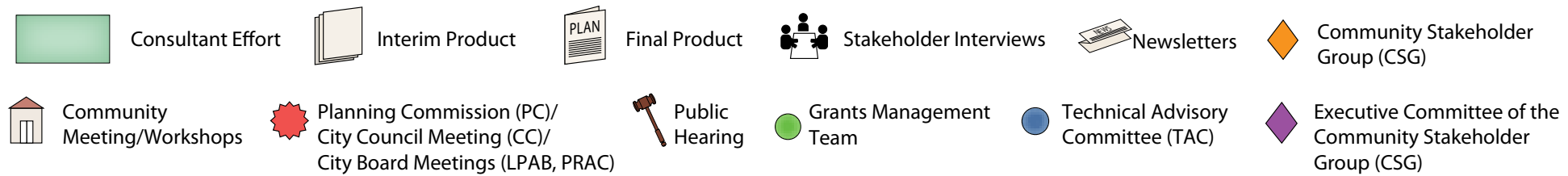


Community outreach for the Plan.

Figure 1.3:  
PROJECT SCHEDULE



**DYETT & BHATIA**  
Urban and Regional Planners



## 1.3 Environmental Review Document

Completing the environmental review process is also a critical component of the project, so that issues are resolved and development can proceed by tiering off the environmental analysis. Under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), a station area plan is considered a project, thus requiring that an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) be completed in conjunction with the plan. An EIR is a detailed analysis of the environmental effects of a plan or development project. The EIR identifies alternatives to the proposed project and presents ways to reduce or avoid environmental damage. Community members can provide input at two different phases in the EIR process: in response to the Notice of Preparation (NOP), about the EIR topics, and to the Draft EIR itself.

## 1.4 Report Organization

This report provides an overview of information and analysis related to the Planning Area in text, maps, and graphics. This report will help generate Concept Plan Alternatives, the next step in the Plan process, and contribute to the environmental setting of the EIR.

**Chapter 1:** The introduction describes the overall project goals and objectives, the planning process and schedule, describes the requirements of environmental review, and gives an overview of the report organization.

**Chapter 2:** Summary of Key Topics and Possibilities describes the focus area and sub-areas, summarizes the key topics and possibilities in the Planning Area.

**Chapter 3:** Existing Plans and Zoning describes the regulatory frameworks and guidelines that apply to the Planning Area. The chapter also summarizes guidelines to transit oriented development and other existing plans and recent studies that are relevant to the Planning Area.

**Chapter 4:** Land Uses describes existing land uses, housing issues related to the Planning Area, existing retail services, and major projects that have been recently completed or are proposed.

**Chapter 5:** Urban Design describes of the existing urban form and height, bulk, and intensity regulations; provides an overview of Crime Prevention through Environmental Design; and gives an overview of streetscape character and conditions on key streets throughout the Planning Area.

**Chapter 6:** Socioeconomic Issues and Property Characteristics provides an overview of local demographics, jobs in the area, ownership patterns, underutilized sites and property conditions, growth projections, and potential opportunity sites.

**Chapter 7:** Circulation provides an overview of background studies and information related to transit ridership and Chintown transportation studies; summarizes circulation patterns in the Planning Area; summarizes the current pedestrian, bicycle, transit, and roadway networks; summarizes the current traf-

fic and parking conditions; and gives an overview of planned developments and improvements.

**Chapter 8:** Community Services, Cultural Resources, and Public Facilities provides an inventory of libraries, community facilities, and cultural gathering spaces; details cultural resources; provides an inventory of service providers; gives an overview of the existing schools and parks in the Planning Area; and summarizes information on crime, safety and fire services in the Planning Areas.

**Chapter 9:** Historic Resources discusses the historic context of the Planning Area, including background history, the context for rating historic resources in Oakland, a detailed listing of the historic properties and districts in the Planning Area; and a review of current conditions.

**Chapter 10:** Environmental Issues addresses several environmental topics, and will contribute to the environmental settings in the EIR. Topics include: hazardous materials, biological resources, geology, air quality, noise, hydrology and water quality, utilities and service systems, and climate change and greenhouse gases.

**Chapter 11:** Community Health provides an overall baseline health condition of the Planning Area, including a social profile, health factors and indicators, and details the health goals as identified by the community.