CHAPTER 2
Context

A. Historic Context

Magnolia Avenue was designed in the late 19th century by W.T. Sayward, principal architect and partner in the firm Sayward & Evans. It was created to be a showplace roadway to promote the sale of 8,500 acres of land southwest of Arlington Avenue purchased by the Riverside Land and Irrigating Company. Sayward's original concept was for Magnolia Avenue to extend beyond the City of Riverside, from the Santa Ana mountains on the southwest to the San Bernardino Mountains on the northeast.

In its early days, Magnolia Avenue extended from Arlington Avenue to Temescal Street in Home Gardens. Beautiful citrus farms and estates lined much of Magnolia Avenue with wide parkways on both sides and a landscaped median running the length of the corridor. The original landscaping consisted of Magnolia, Cypress, Eucalyptus, Pepper and Palm trees. The landscape design provided unity and identity to Magnolia Avenue as a grand boulevard that was a destination in itself…a place where residents and tourists alike could enjoy a scenic drive. In fact, over the years the Magnolia Avenue/Market Street corridor has sometimes been referred to as Riverside's scenic "17-mile drive."

In 1888, rails were laid along the median for horse drawn cars. In 1899, these cars were replaced by electric cars that ran all the way to Corona. However, by the 1950's these electric car lines were eliminated because of nightly freight trains that became a nuisance to the neighborhoods along the boulevard[1].

Magnolia Avenue, 1890's.

[1] *Magnolia/Market Corridor Study, Moule & Polyzoides, 1999.*

B. Current Setting

Today, Magnolia Avenue is one of the primary east/west streets in the City, extending from Ontario Avenue in Corona to Fourteenth Street in Downtown Riverside where it meets Market Street. Market Street continues through Downtown to the Santa Ana River. The once exceptionally scenic corridor has experienced a great deal of change over the years. Most of the citrus groves and estates are gone, replaced by strip commercial centers, residential, institutional and business uses. In some locations the corridor now consists of incompatible land uses and inconsistent landscaped areas, which have contributed to a lack of continuity for the corridor.

Although Magnolia Avenue has been significantly altered from its original design and character, it still retains much of its historic charm in several portions and maintains its importance as not only a traffic carrier, but also a definable place in Riverside that links distinct neighborhoods, districts and shopping areas. As noted by the community in the Magnolia/Market Corridor Study, the corridor is like the concept of "Pearls on a String," and should be treated as "a linked chain of notable and interesting neighborhoods and districts which are all strengthened by their sequential relationship with each other." The goal of this Specific Plan is to develop the corridor as a system of spaces, structures and environments, rather than a linear strip of unrelated buildings and undefined streetscapes.

Commercial development near Arlington Village.

Land Use

Existing land uses along Magnolia Avenue are diverse, ranging from light industrial uses at the southwestern end near the City limits, to historic residential homes at the northeastern end in the Wood Streets District. Piecemeal development has occurred along Magnolia Avenue, weakening the role and function that each district and neighborhood plays in the City and region. While the framework still exists for identifiable districts along the corridor, the current land use pattern has blurred the distinction. In some locations, the corridor has been over-zoned for general commercial uses, resulting in under-utilized retail uses.

Circulation

Magnolia Avenue was designated in the 1994 General Plan as a 120-foot arterial over most of its length with smaller sections designated as a 100- or 110-foot arterial. It is generally built with four travel lanes, with the exception of the area around Tyler Street in the Galleria District, where it has six lanes. A policy of General Plan 2025 is to limit Magnolia Avenue to four traffic lanes (except where the six lanes currently exist) without reducing the right-of-way. The greater right-of-way width will

allow for increased parkways, bike lanes and sidewalks where they are currently lacking. In addition, it will allow the City the opportunity to explore the feasibility of other future transit options.

A median still runs from the western City limits to Arlington Avenue, however, its width and landscaping have been reduced considerably over time for left turn lanes and additional travel lanes at various locations.

Streetscape

The unity, identity and appearance of the streetscape has been significantly altered from its historic setting. The original design called for a wide thoroughfare with 20-foot wide strolling sidewalks and parkways on either side, a landscaped median and two traffic lanes. The landscaping consisted of Magnolia, Cypress, Eucalyptus, Pepper and Palm trees. Today the landscaping varies greatly along the corridor. There are a few areas where the landscape still reflects the original landscape of the street. In general, there is no discernable pattern to the street trees and landscaping is completely absent in some locations. In addition, most of the wide parkway is gone, with sidewalks abutting the street in many locations. Similarly, the reduction and removal of the median in many locations has greatly impacted the historic landscape.

Landscaped median in Old Magnolia Avenue within the Magnolia Heritage District.

Historic Resources

In addition to the heritage landscape, there are many important historic buildings and historic districts along the corridor. Magnolia Avenue began as a connection between downtown and the grand estates, citrus farms and countryside. It passes through historically significant districts, such as the Wood Streets neighborhood, which has a large concentration of Spanish Colonial Revival and Craftsman style houses that were primarily from the 1920's – 30's. In addition, the six Specific Plan Districts along the corridor contain a variety of historic buildings and elements dispersed among the newer development, including the Arlington Branch Library, the City's first branch library and oldest library building built in 1909; Heritage House, a Queen Anne style house built in 1891 for the widow of an early citrus pioneer; Magnolia United Presbyterian Church, a Gothic Revival church built in 1881 that is the oldest existing church building in the City; and the Parent Navel Orange Tree, from which all American West Coast navel orange trees are descended.

Sporadic parkway landscaping and no median landscaping occur along portions of Magnolia Avenue.

A particularly unique and interesting historic landmark is the Magnolia Avenue Parkway and Center Median between Arlington Avenue and San Rafael Way. This section of Magnolia Avenue maintains the spirit of the original plantings. Laid out

Historic Arlington Branch Library.

in 1876, Magnolia Avenue set a historic national precedent in scenic urban landscaping.

Figure 2.1 identifies the historic buildings, elements and districts along Magnolia Avenue. A description of each landmark can be found in the City's publication "Landmarks of the City of Riverside."

Community Facilities

Several community facilities are also located along Magnolia Avenue, including the Arlington Brach Library mentioned above, Sherman Indian School, Ramona High School, California Baptist University and the Riverside Unified School District's Community Education Program (housed in the historic Palm Elementary School building). In addition, Magnolia Avenue and University Avenue serve as links between the City's four higher education institutions (La Sierra University, California Baptist University, Riverside Community College and University of California at Riverside), as well as two major streets that link the community with Downtown.

Figure 2.2 identifies the community facilities in the City, with those located along Magnolia Avenue highlighted.

California Baptist University in the Magnolia Heritage District.

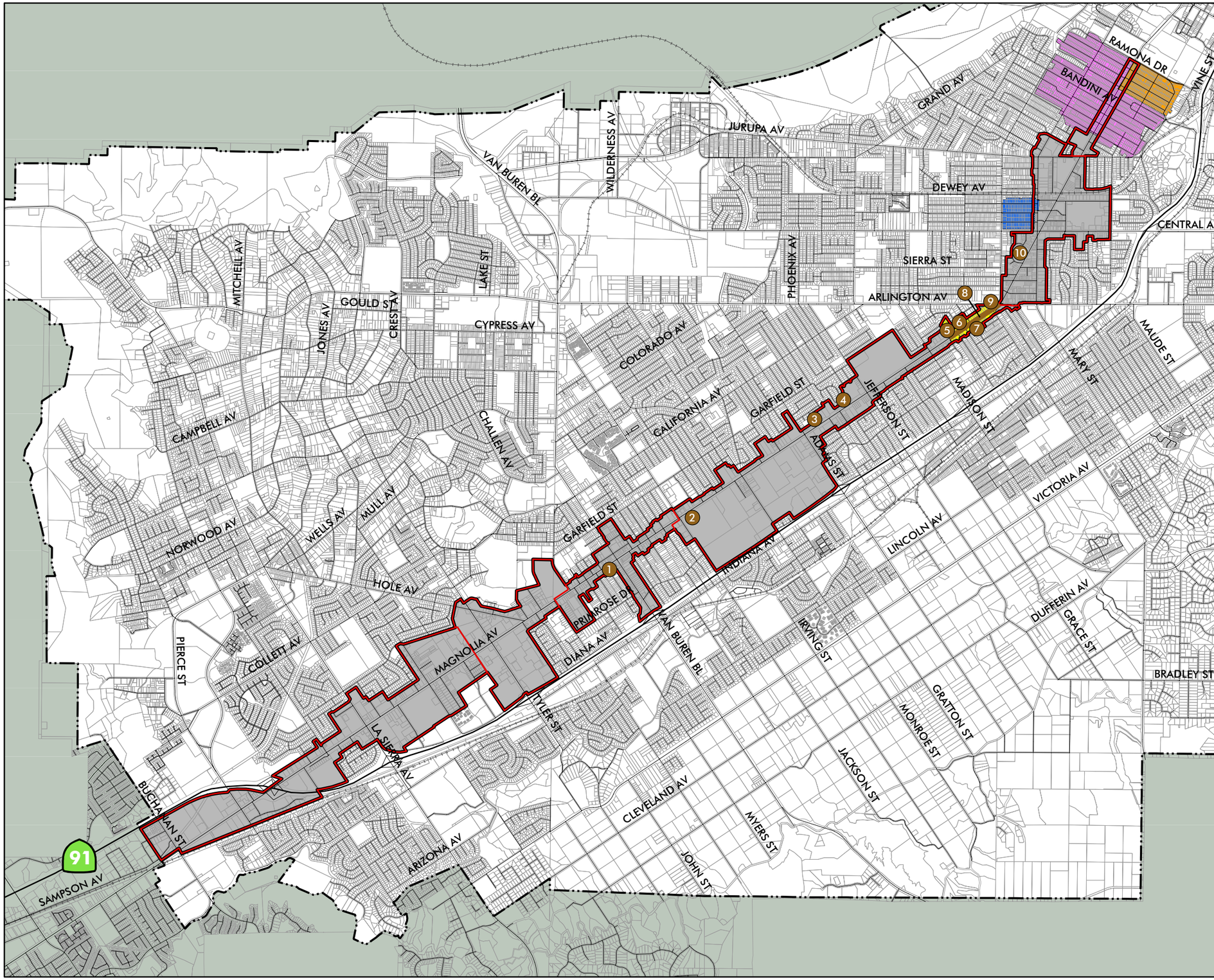

Figure 2.1
HISTORIC LANDMARKS & DISTRICTS

LEGEND

Historic Landmarks

1. Arlington Branch Library
2. Sherman Indian Museum
3. Heritage House
4. Robert Bettner House
5. Holden House
6. Moulton House
7. Magnolia United Presbyterian Church
8. Magnolia Avenue Parkways and Center Median
9. Parent Navel Orange Tree
10. Palm Elementary School

Historic Districts

- Old Magnolia Avenue (Neighborhood Conservation Area)
- Palm Heights (Proposed Historic District)
- Wood Streets (Neighborhood Conservation Area)
- Wood Streets (Historic District)

- CITY BOUNDARY
- SPECIFIC PLAN AREA BOUNDARY

0′ 5,000′ 10,000′

North

Magnolia Avenue Specific Plan

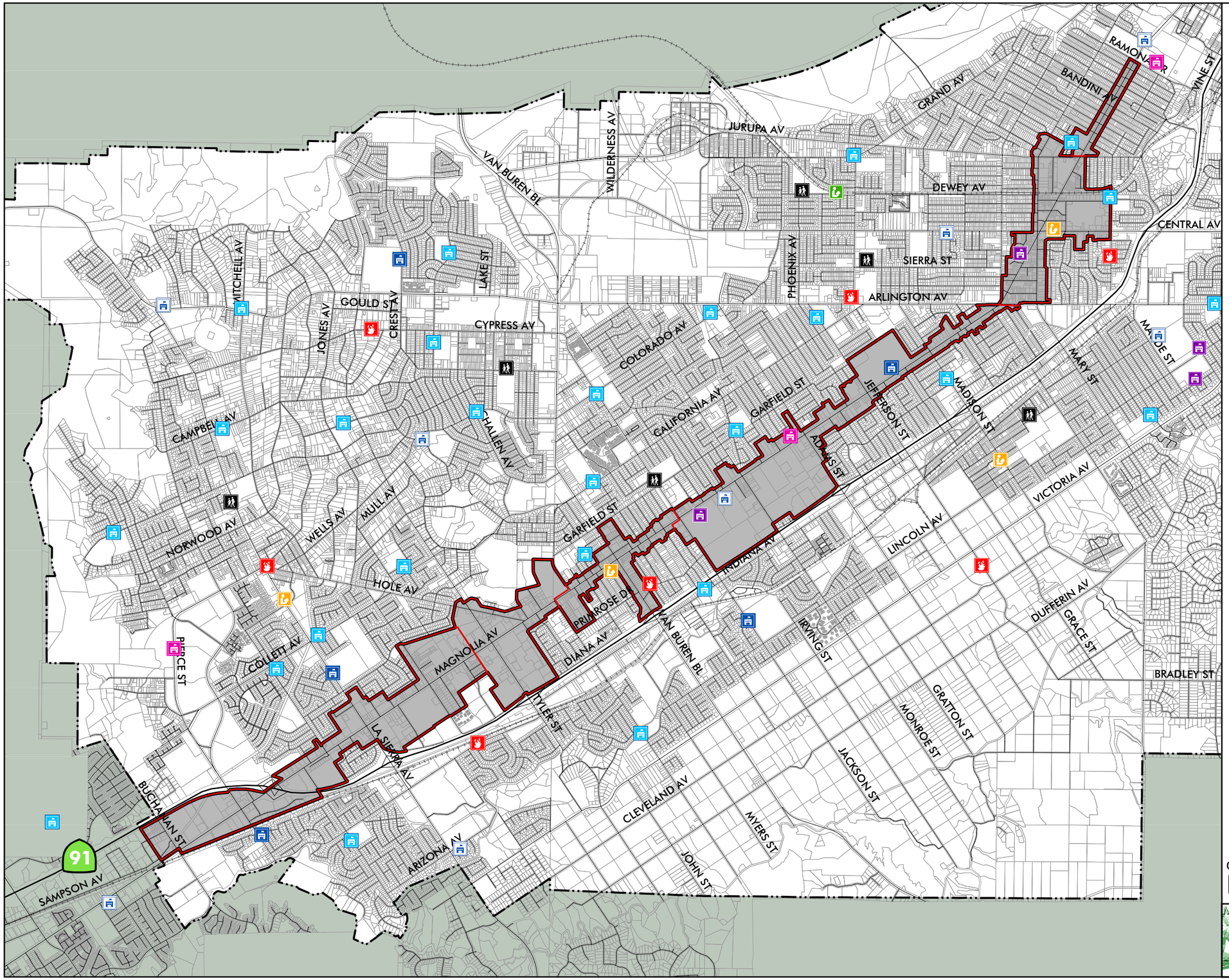

Figure 2.2
COMMUNITY FACILITIES

LEGEND

- Elementary School
- Middle School
- High School
- Other School
- College/University
- Libraries
- Cybraries
- Fire Stations
- Community Centers

- CITY BOUNDARY
- SPECIFIC PLAN AREA BOUNDARY

0′ 5,000′ 10,000′ North

Magnolia Avenue Specific Plan

C. General Plan Designations

General Plan 2025 will have a significant positive impact on the future of Magnolia Avenue as it identifies the corridor as more than just a functional traffic carrier. In the General Plan, Magnolia Avenue is designated as follows:

- Parkway
- Scenic Boulevard
- Mixed-Use Corridor
- Bus Rapid Transit Corridor
- Arts Bus Corridor
- Four-lane Arterial

All of these designations recognize Magnolia Avenue's multi-faceted role as a definable place in Riverside that reflects its historical role as a scenic boulevard while updating its function as a key transit and mixed-use corridor to support future growth.

The General Plan land use designations along the corridor and their land area are as follows:

Table 2.1: General Plan Land Use Designation by Acreage

General Plan Land Use	Acreage
Business/Office Park (B/OP)	151
Commercial (C)	212
Commercial Regional Center (CRC)	102
High Density Residential (HDR)	59
Medium Density Residential (MDR)	31
Mixed-Use Neighborhood (MU-N)	47
Mixed-Use Village (MU-V)	307
Mixed-Use Urban (MU-U)	125
Office (O)	47
Public Park (P)	11
Public Facilities/Institutional (PF)	275
Very High Density Residential (VHDR)	108
TOTAL	**1,473**