

# San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan: Community Survey Results

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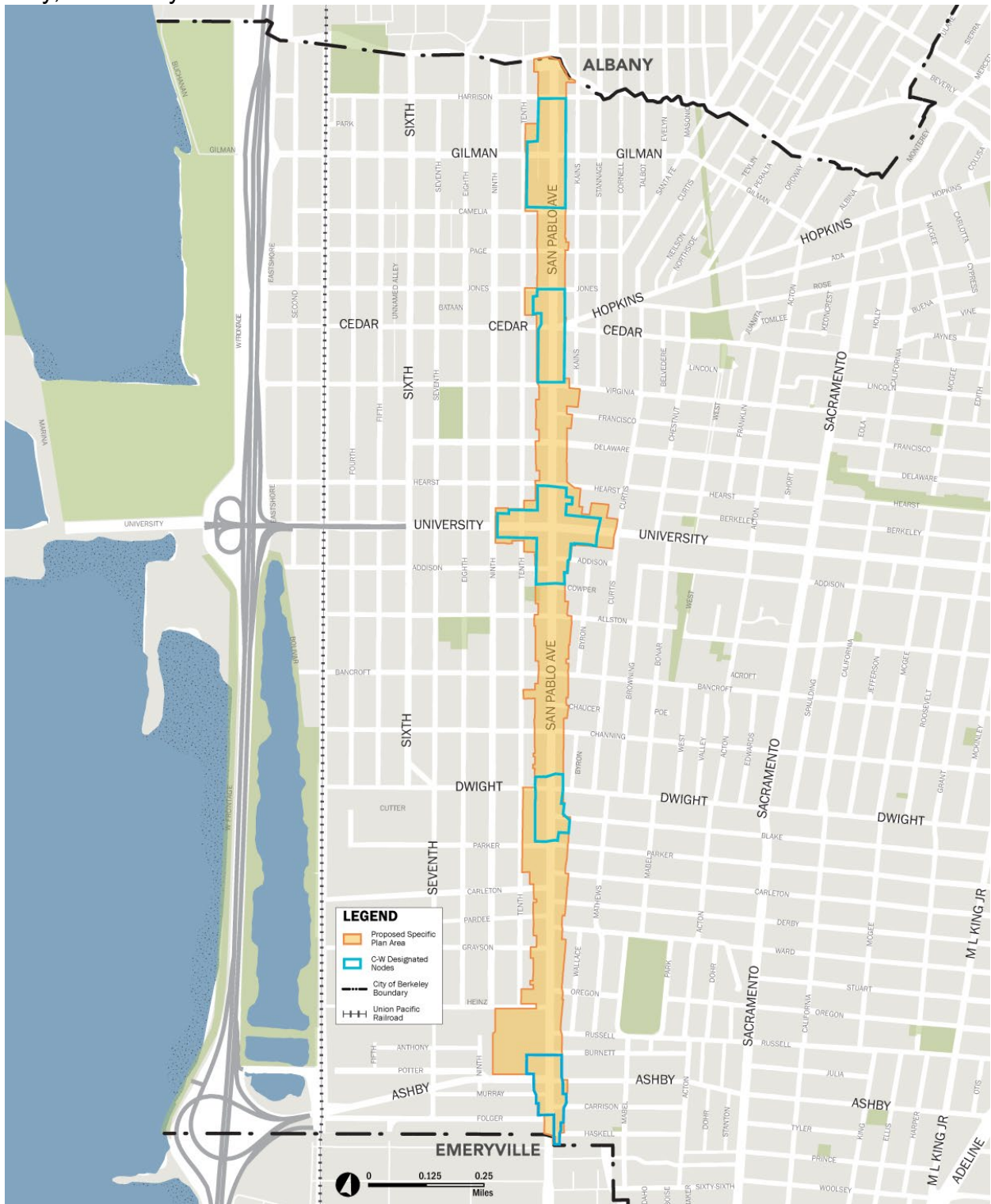
## Introduction

The San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan (Specific Plan) aims to shape the future of the 2.35-mile corridor from the Berkeley/Oakland border in the south to the Berkeley/Albany border in the north. Through community-driven regulations, policies, and programs, the Plan seeks to foster opportunities for living, working, and being part of community life along San Pablo Avenue, while enhancing public spaces, improving transportation, and supporting economic growth.

As part of a broader community engagement initiative for the Specific Plan the project team hosted an online survey. The survey outreach involved distributing flyers at transit stops, cafes, markets, several other businesses, and Berkeley public library. The survey was also promoted at the project's second community workshop, via email to interested project stakeholders, and through a councilmembers' newsletters.

The survey was designed to collect public input on transportation, safety, business development, housing, and public space enhancements. It builds on the themes identified in Chapter 3 of the [Community Assessment Report](#), which were developed through earlier phases of community input. Over an eight-week period, a total of 220 survey responses were collected. This summary documents the results for each question and includes an analysis of any written responses to open-ended questions. The executive summary highlights key findings, while subsequent sections provide an analysis of the survey's main questions. Appendix A outlines the survey's methodology, and Appendix B presents the demographic results.

This map shows the Specific Plan area in orange along San Pablo Avenue and highlights five “nodes” along the corridor at Gilman Street, Cedar Street, University Avenue, Dwight Way, and Ashby Avenue.



## Executive Summary

The survey findings offer insights into public priorities for San Pablo Avenue, particularly in housing and business development, public space enhancements and connectivity with other parts of Berkeley. Respondents expressed a significant desire for a streamlined permit review processes for new businesses and temporary uses, and identified the University node, followed by the Ashby and Dwight nodes, as top priorities for business support and development. At the same time, participants expressed a range of opinions regarding the need for additional funding and support for small businesses. Conversely, conducting a historical evaluation of properties along the avenue was ranked as the least urgent priority.

Respondents identified increased resources for workforce, artist, senior, and family housing as the top priority for improvements. In addition, many participants emphasized the need for affordable housing options along the corridor. Respondents highlighted the importance of improvements to the public realm, such as wider sidewalks and enhanced streetscapes, including landscaping, seating, and lighting. The majority of participants favor the closure of minor side streets to create small public plazas.

Regarding height and intensity of development, about three quarters of respondents supported allowing buildings up to eight stories tall, provided that the development contributes to public improvements. Throughout the survey, respondents consistently identified University Avenue as the most suitable location for higher-intensity development and public realm enhancements. Conversely, a notable trend emerged, with many expressing a preference for increased development intensity along the entire corridor, regardless of specific nodes. A majority felt that taller buildings, over eight stories, would be appropriate in specific nodes or all along the corridor.

Key safety concerns emerged around bike and pedestrian infrastructure, with respondents advocating for better protection for cyclists and improved crossing conditions at major intersections like University Avenue. Many also called for a balanced approach to transportation improvements, one that supports both business vitality and multi-modal transportation options.

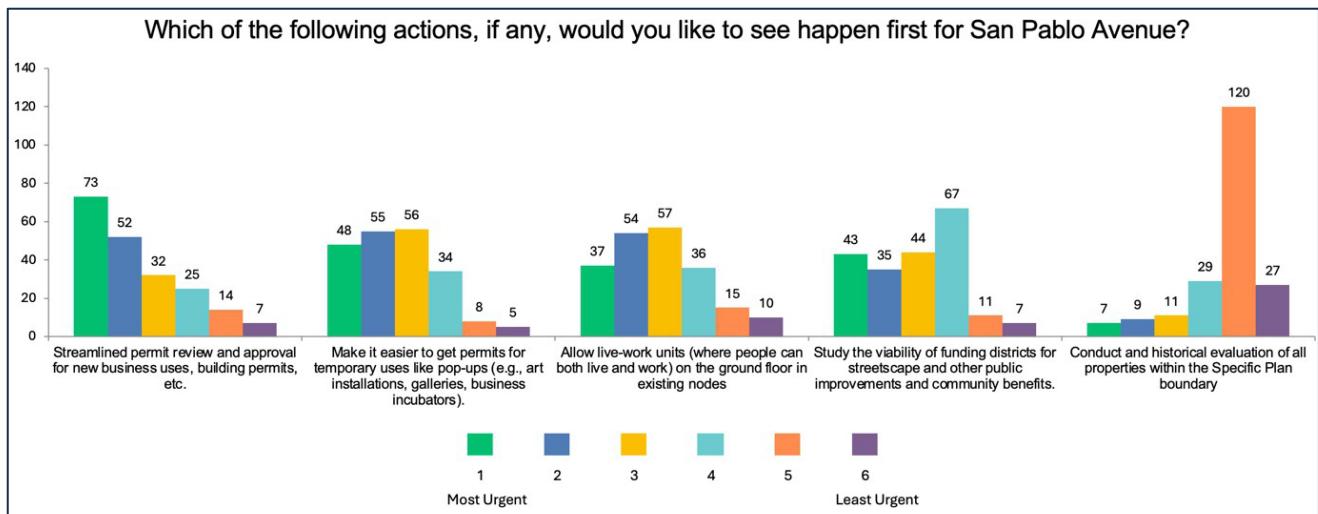
The survey results indicate community support for improving business operations, public spaces, and housing availability along San Pablo Avenue while maintaining the avenue's unique character. The findings from this survey may be useful for the San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan Project in considering how the Plan's policies, development standards, and implementation strategies will align with community priorities and values.

# Findings

## Increasing Business Activity Along the Corridor

To gauge public priorities for improvements along San Pablo Avenue, respondents were asked to rank the following actions in order of urgency, starting with the action they would like to see implemented first:

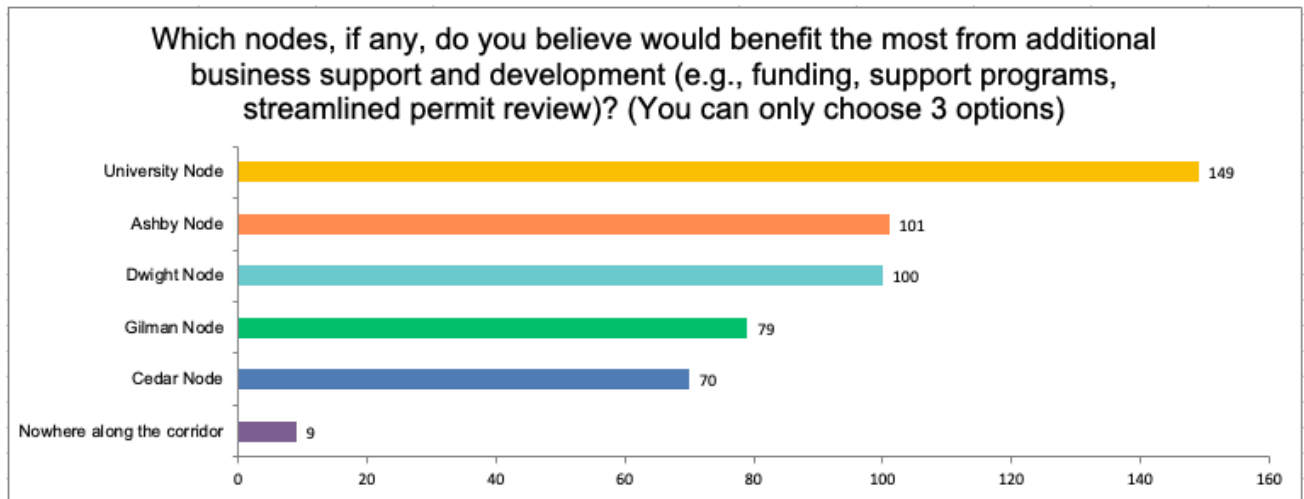
- Make it easier to get permits for temporary uses like pop-ups (e.g., art installations, galleries, business incubators).
- Streamlined permit review and approval for new business uses, building permits, etc.
- Allow live-work units (where people can both live and work) on the ground floor in existing nodes
- Study the viability of funding districts for streetscape and other public improvements and community benefits.
- Conduct and historical evaluation of all properties within the Specific Plan boundary
- None of the above



Multiple-Select Ranked Choice Question 1; Respondents: 212, Skipped: 8

The survey results show the most urgent action is *streamlined permit review and approval for new business uses, building permits, etc.*, and the second most urgent option chosen was *making it easier to get permits for temporary uses like pop-ups (e.g., art installations, galleries, business incubators)*. The least urgent action, is to *conduct a historical evaluation of all properties within the Specific Plan boundary*.

Respondents were also asked to identify which nodes they believe would benefit the most from additional business support and development, such as funding, support programs, streamlined permit review, etc. Participants were limited to selecting up to three options. University node landed within the respondent's three choices the most often, followed by Ashby and Dwight. "Nowhere along the corridor" was the least selected choice, receiving less than 2% of total responses, indicating that respondents generally agree on additional business support and development for nodes.

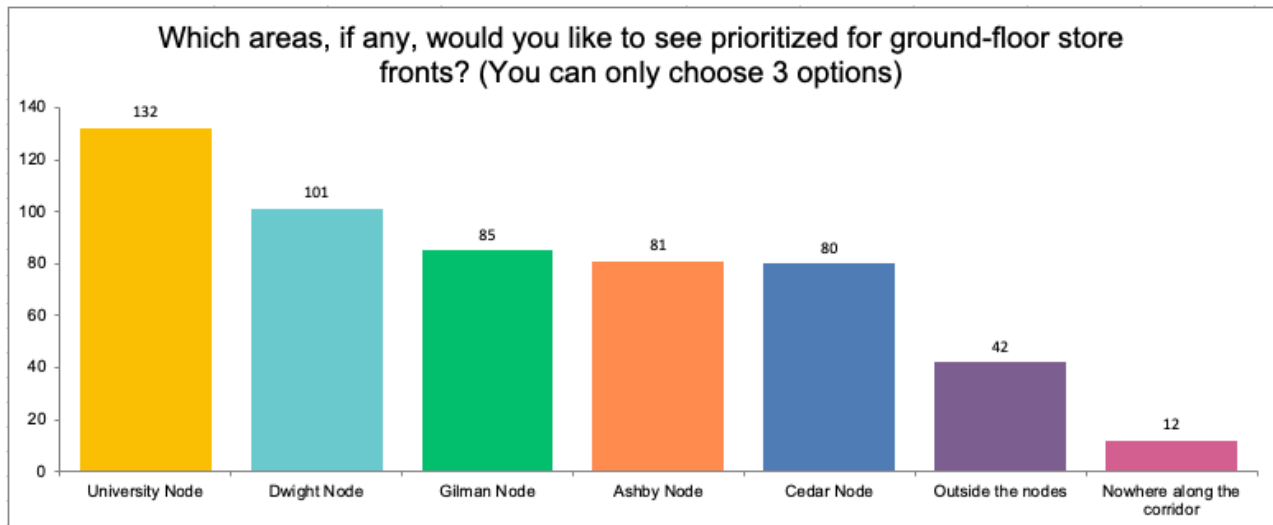


Multiple-Select Question 2; Answered: 220, Skipped: 0

## Improve and Increase Interaction between Private and Public Spaces

Respondents were asked to select up to three areas they would like to see prioritized for development or improvement to determine priorities for ground-floor storefronts.

Respondents chose the University node most, with the Dwight node following. Ashby, Gilman, and Cedar nodes all ranked similarly in the middle, and there were only a few responses for “nowhere along the corridor”.

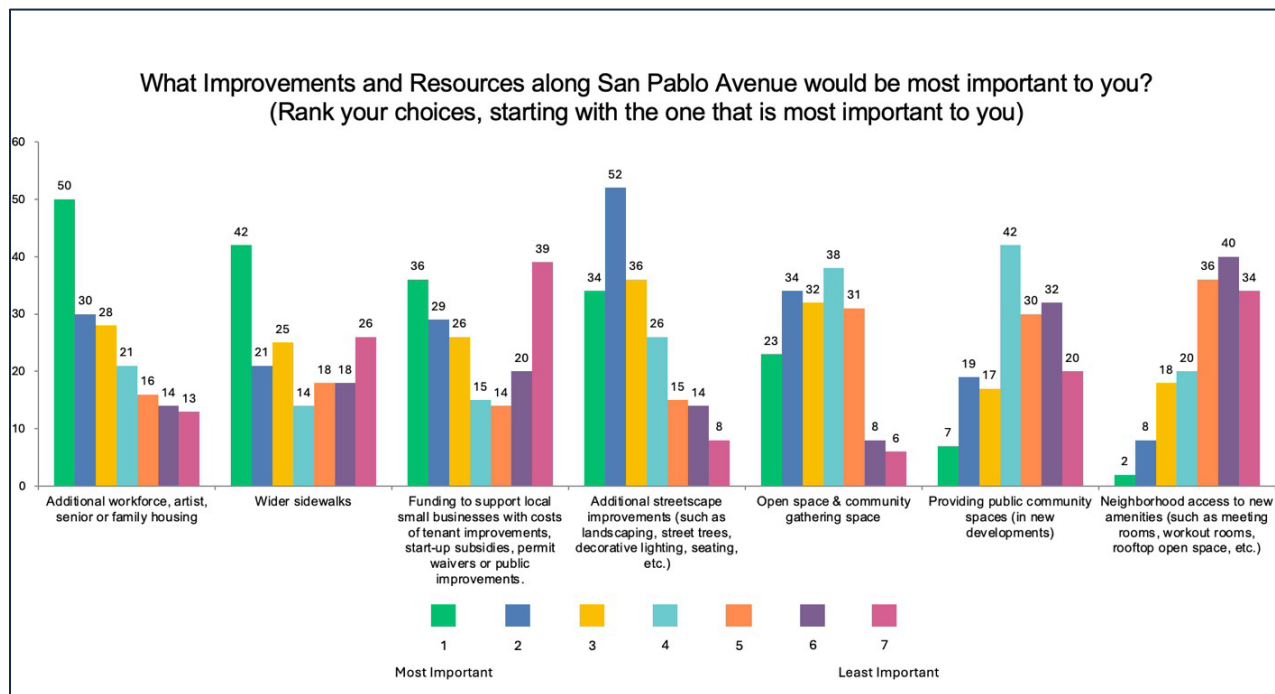


Multiple-Select Question 3; Answered: 212, Skipped: 8

## Potential Plan Area Improvements and Resources

To better understand the community's priorities for improvements along San Pablo Avenue, respondents were asked to rank a list of potential improvements and resources, starting with the option they considered most important. The options included:

- Additional workforce, artist, senior, or family housing
- Providing public community spaces (in new developments)
- Open space and community gathering space
- Neighborhood access to new amenities (such as meeting rooms, workout rooms, rooftop open space, etc.)
- Wider sidewalks
- Additional streetscape improvements (such as landscaping, street trees, decorative lighting, seating, etc.)
- Funding to support local small businesses with costs of tenant improvements, start-up subsidies, permit waivers, or public improvements.



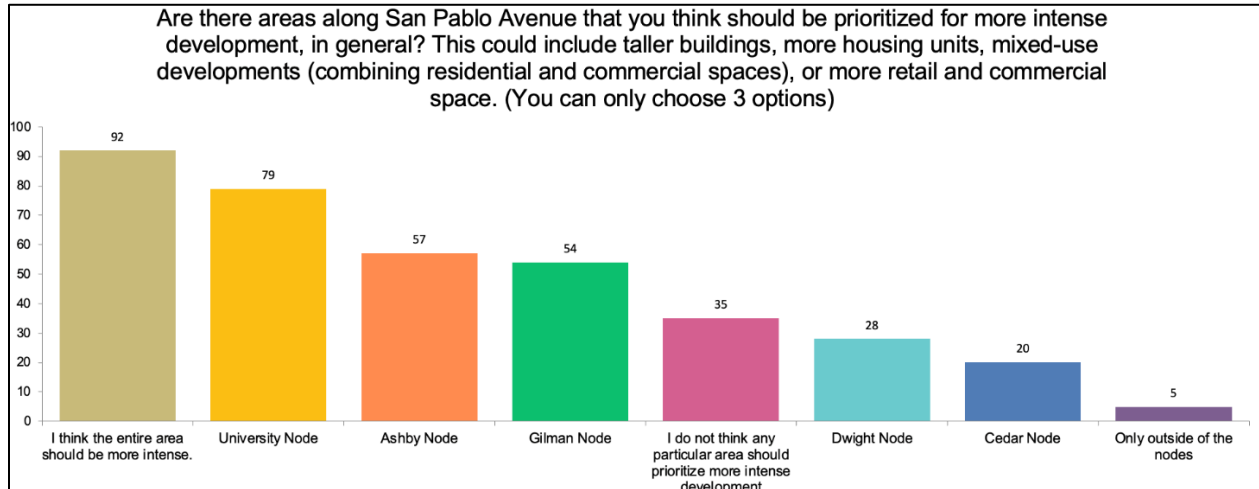
Multiple-Select Question 4; Answered: 199, Skipped: 21

Most respondents selected *additional workforce, artist, senior or family housing* as the their most important improvement, while more respondents selected *additional streetscape* as a more important improvement (selected as a 1, 2, or 3 rank out of 7). *Funding to support local small businesses—through tenant improvements, start-up subsidies, permit waivers, or public improvements*—showed a dual-peak response, with 36 respondents marking it as their top priority and 39 marking it as the least important.

*Neighborhood access to new amenities (such as meeting rooms, workout rooms, rooftop open space, etc.)* skewed the least important priority for the respondents.

## Height and Intensity

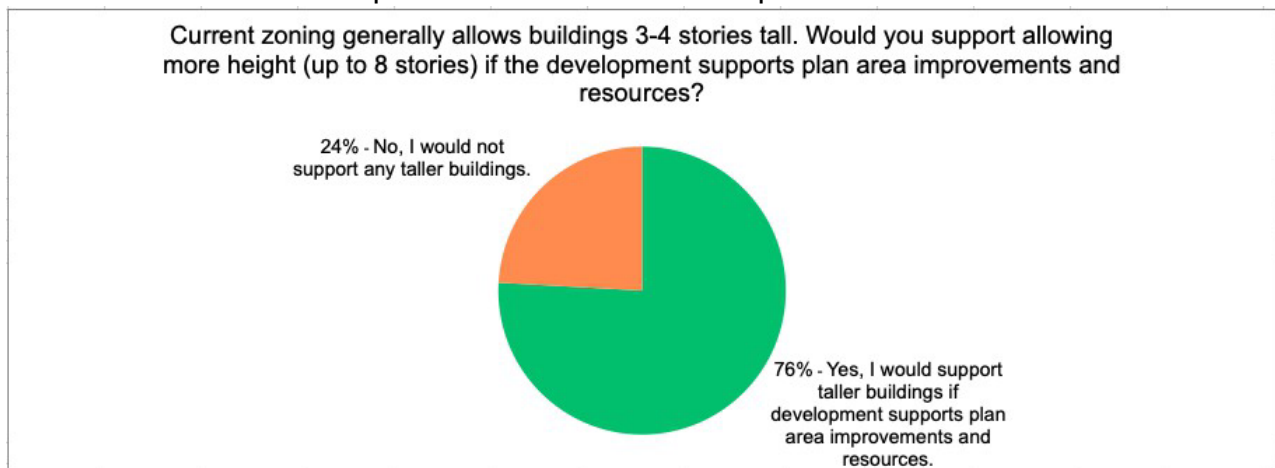
Respondents were asked whether there are specific areas along San Pablo Avenue that should be prioritized for more intense development, including taller buildings, additional housing units, mixed-use developments (combining residential and commercial spaces), or expanded retail and commercial space. Participants were limited to selecting up to three areas.



Multiple-Select Question 5; Respondents: 203, Skipped: 17

Many respondents said *the entire area should have more intense development*. The University node was the second most chosen response. More respondents would *not think any particular area should prioritize more intense development* than prioritizing the Dwight and Cedar nodes.

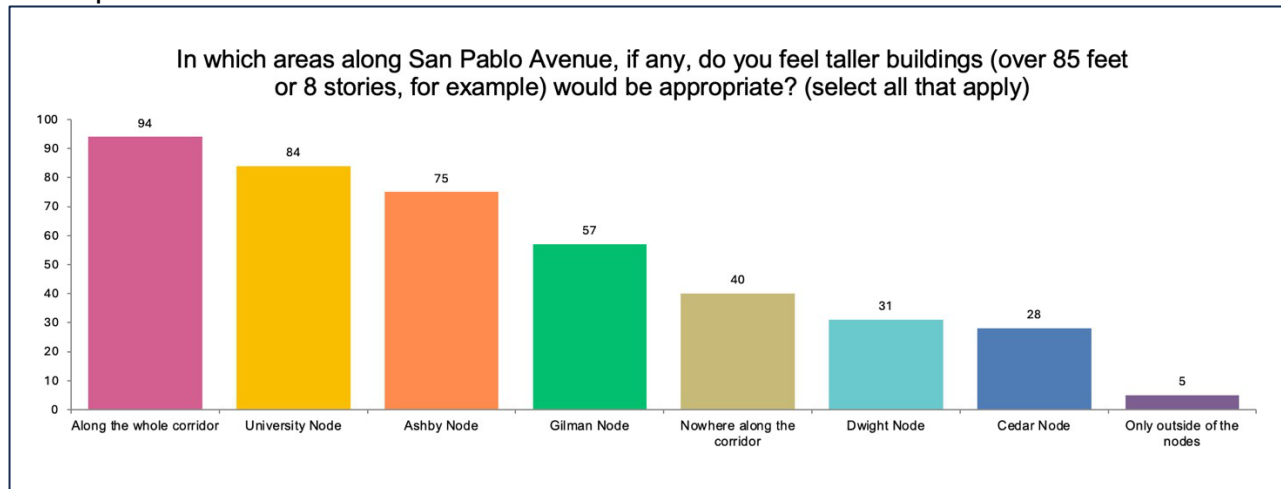
To gauge public support for increased building heights, we asked respondents whether they would support allowing buildings up to 8 stories tall—compared to the current zoning of 3-4 stories—if the development contributed to area improvements and resources.



Single-Select Question 6; Answered: 199, Skipped: 21

A 76% of total respondents said; *Yes, I would support taller buildings if development supports plan area improvements and resources*.

To identify where taller buildings (over 85 feet or 8 stories) might be appropriate along San Pablo Avenue, we asked respondents to select all areas they felt would be suitable for such developments.



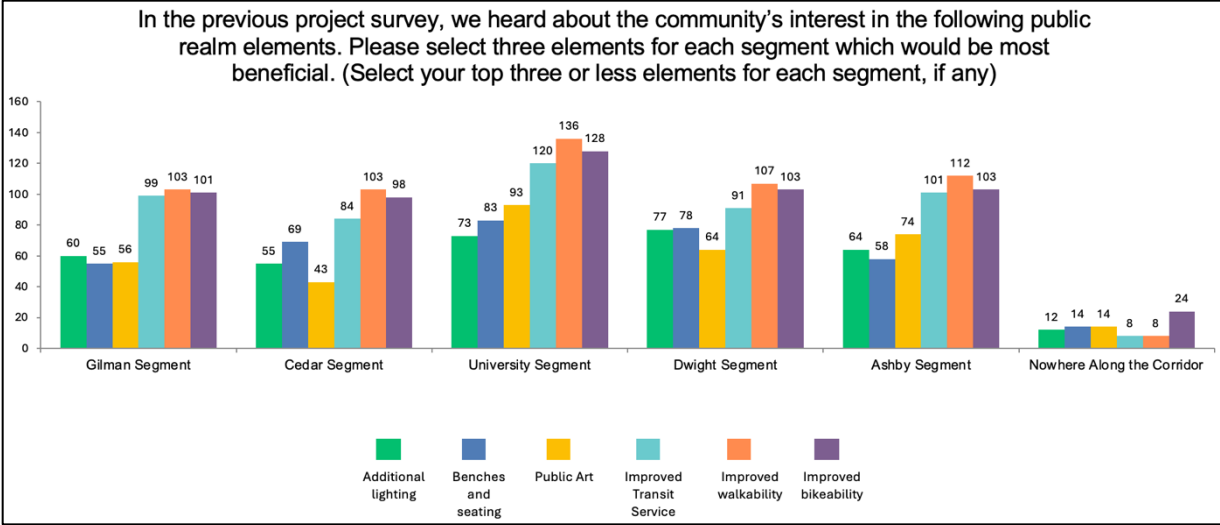
Multiple-Select Question 7; Answered: 202, Skipped: 18

The top response was *along the whole corridor*. Out of the nodes, University was the most chosen response and Ashby followed just slightly behind. Cedar and Dwight nodes are the least desired node locations for taller buildings.

### Improve the Public Realm

In the previous project survey conducted between November 2 and 12, 2023, we gathered insights on the community's preference for various public realm elements. Respondents were asked to select up to three elements per segment that they believe would be most beneficial. The segments included areas adjacent to each node and the options provided were:

- Additional lighting
- Benches and seating
- Public art
- Improved transit service
- Improved walkability
- Improved bikeability

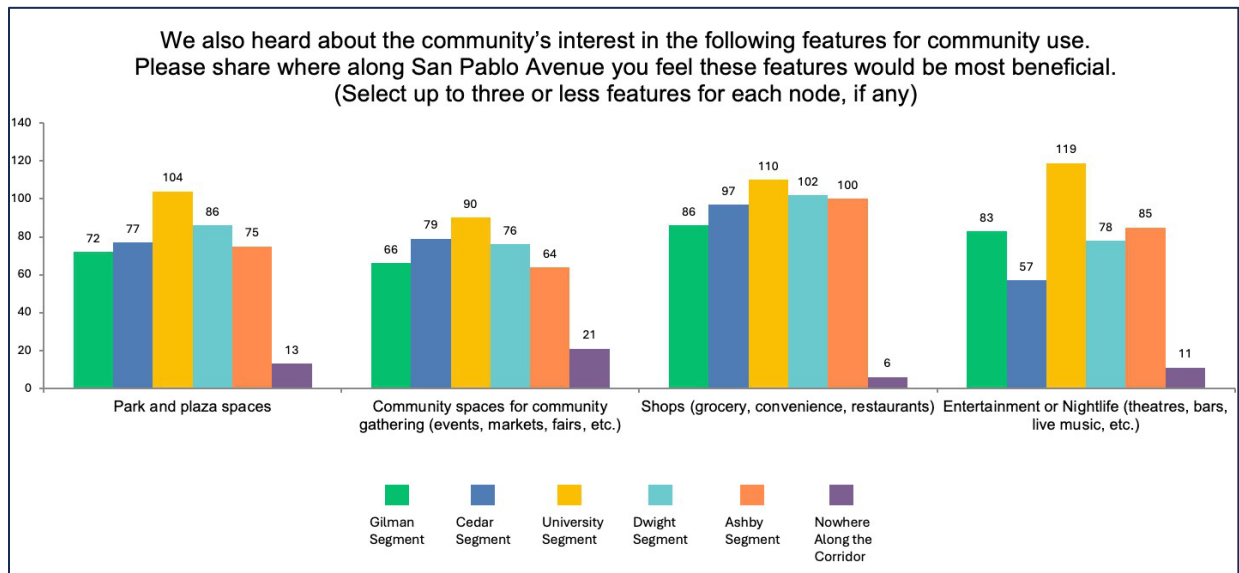


Multiple-Select Question 8; Answered: 187, Skipped: 33

Three features garnered the most support and most responses across all segments: *walkability, bikeability, and improved transit service*. *Improved walkability* was the most selected choice across all segments. The University segment was selected the most frequently for all types of improvements, while the Gilman and Cedar segments were chosen the least often. A small portion of respondents selected *nowhere along the corridor*. *Additional lighting and benches and seating* were selected most frequently for the University and Dwight segments. *Public art* was selected most for the University and Dwight segments.

We also gathered input on community interest in various features for public use. Respondents were asked to identify locations along San Pablo Avenue where they felt the following features would be most beneficial, selecting up to three for each node. The features included:

- Park and plaza spaces
- Community spaces for gatherings (events, markets, fairs, etc.)
- Shops (grocery, convenience, restaurants)
- Entertainment or nightlife (theatres, bars, live music, etc.)

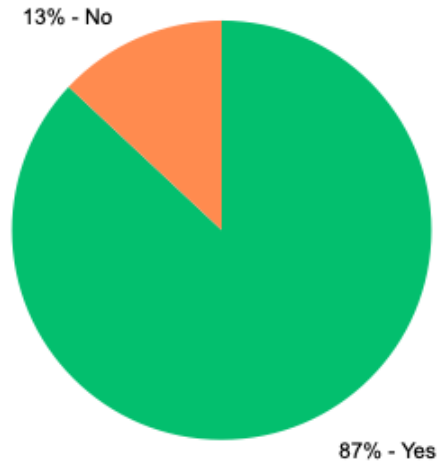


Multiple-Select Question 9; Answered: 182, Skipped: 38

Similar to the previous question, the University segment was selected the most frequently for all features. *Entertainment and nightlife* are the feature where the difference between the University segment and other segments is the largest. Overall, out of all features, *community spaces for community gatherings* were the least selected, while *shops* were the most selected.

Given the limited space available for public parks and plaza areas along San Pablo Avenue, respondents were asked whether they would support the closure of minor streets to create small public plazas.

Given the limited space for public parks and plaza spaces along San Pablo Avenue, would you support closing minor streets access to San Pablo Avenue to create small public plazas?

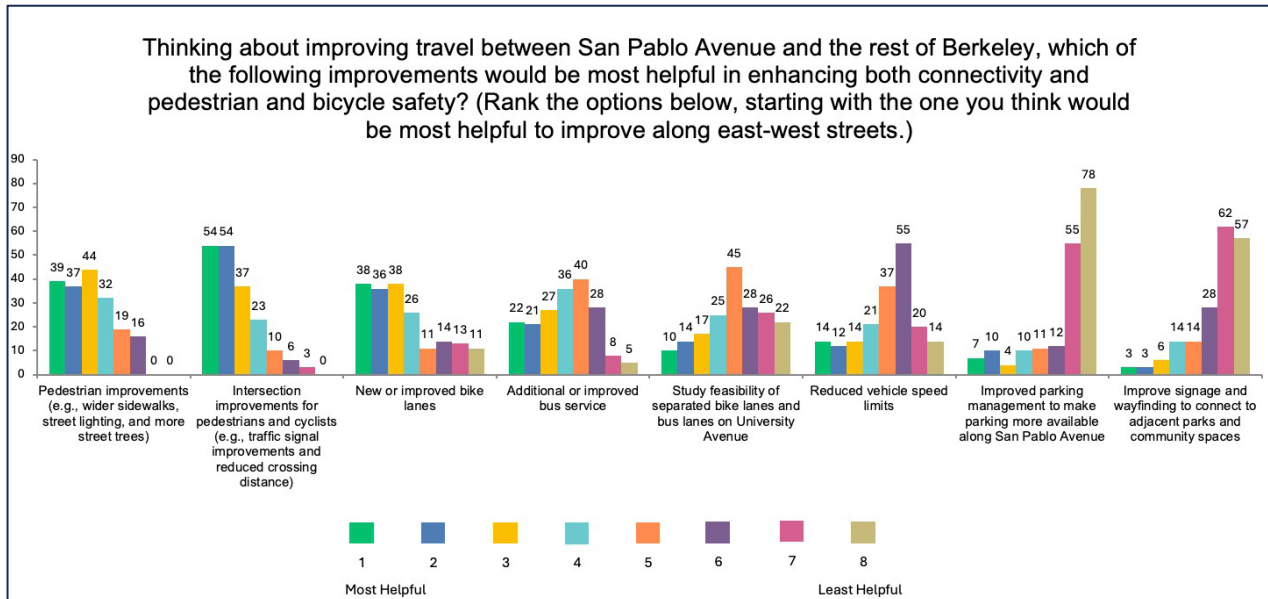


Single-Select Question 10; Answered: 192, Skipped: 28

The vast majority of those who respondents (87%) indicated *they would support the closure of minor streets to create small public plazas.*

### Enhance Local Access

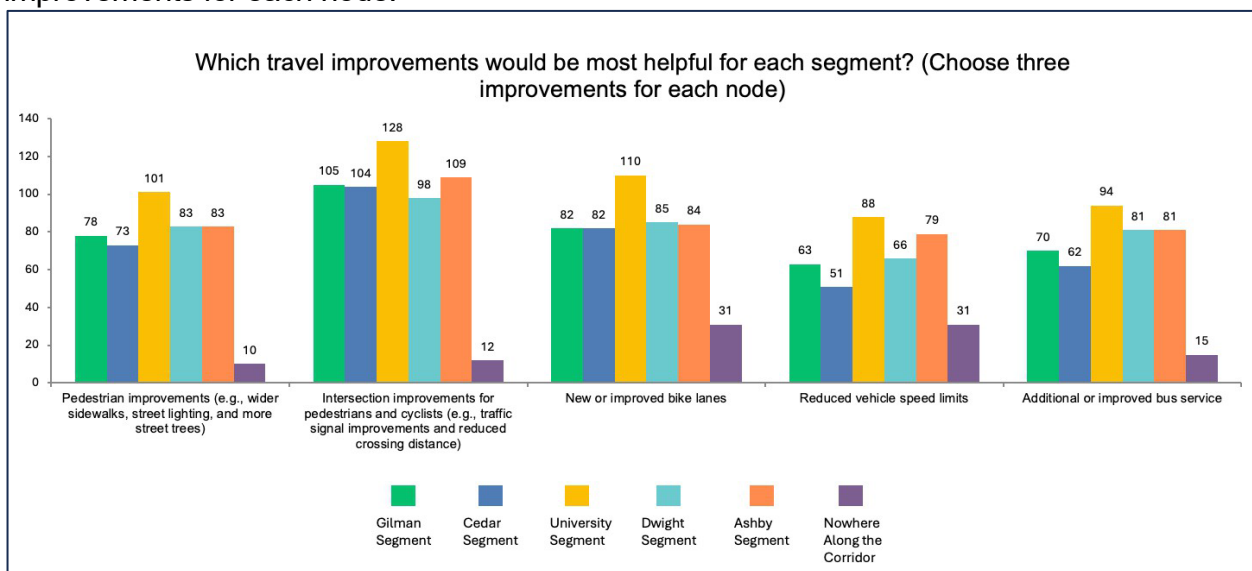
To explore ways of improving connectivity between San Pablo Avenue and the rest of Berkeley, respondents were asked to rank a series of potential improvements designed to enhance both connectivity and pedestrian and bicycle safety along east-west streets, starting with the option they considered most beneficial.



Multiple-Select Question 11; Answered: 187, Skipped: 33

The top choices were *intersection improvements for pedestrians and cyclists (e.g., traffic signal improvements and reduced crossing distance)*, followed by *pedestrian improvements (e.g., wider sidewalks, street lighting, and more street trees)*, and closely followed by *new or improved bike lanes*. *Additional or improved bus service* was also seen as being somewhat helpful with an average score of 4. The option least helpful to respondents is *improved parking management to make parking more available along San Pablo Avenue* and *improve signage and wayfinding to connect to adjacent parks and community spaces*.

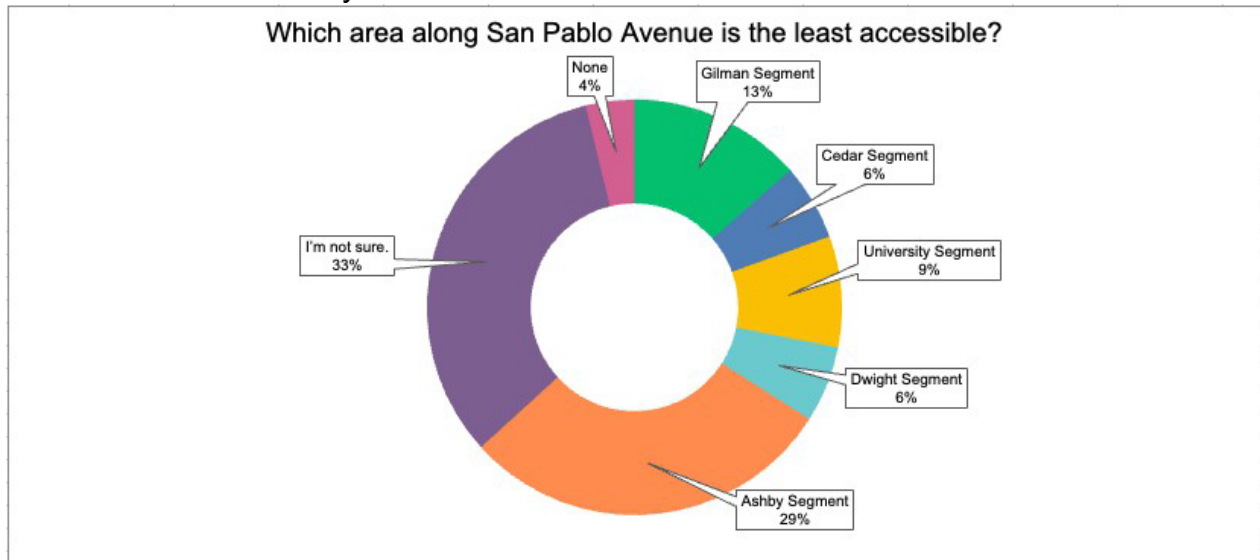
Respondents were asked to identify which travel improvements would be most helpful for each segment along San Pablo Avenue. Participants were asked to choose up to three improvements for each node.



Multiple-Select Question 12; Answered: 183, Skipped: 37

The top response across the board for all segments was *intersection improvements for pedestrians and cyclists (e.g., traffic signal improvements and reduced crossing distance)*. The least helpful travel improvement, according to respondents, was *reduced vehicle speed limits*; although it should be noted that this improvement was selected more frequently for the University and Ashby segments. *New or improved bike lanes* and *Reduced vehicle speed limits* received the most “nowhere along the corridor” responses. The University segment was selected most frequently for improvements which parallels the other questions about improvements by location.

To identify areas with accessibility challenges, we asked respondents which node/segment of San Pablo Avenue they felt was the least accessible.



Single-Select Question 13; Answered: 185, Skipped: 35

The top response was “I’m not sure.” Excluding this option, Ashby is clearly identified as the least accessible segment compared to the others.

We asked respondents in an open-ended question if there are any adjacent parks or community spaces that should be better connected to San Pablo Avenue. This allowed participants to share specific suggestions based on their experiences.

The most answered response was for San Pablo Park to have better connectivity to San Pablo Avenue. 22 Respondents or 39% of those who responded said this. Honorable mentions include Strawberry Creek Park (10 or 18%), George Florence Park (5 or 9%), and Aquatic Park (5 or 9%).

To gather additional thoughts or feedback, respondents were invited to share any comments or suggestions with the San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan Team, providing an opportunity for open-ended responses and further insights.

- Many cyclists feel that biking on San Pablo is dangerous due to high vehicle speeds, lack of protected bike lanes, and unsafe intersections. Crossing streets like University and Gilman is especially hazardous.
- Several respondents suggest improving bike infrastructure on parallel streets, while others advocate for protected bike lanes directly on San Pablo.
- Protected bike lanes are seen to improve safety not just for cyclists but also for pedestrians and drivers.
- There's a call for better bike connectivity between Berkeley, Albany, and Emeryville.
- Pedestrian crossings are seen as dangerous, especially for children traveling to school or families crossing busy intersections.
- There is a demand for better pedestrian infrastructure, including raised crosswalks, clearer signals (replacing confusing ones like at Virginia St. and Hearst Ave.), and reducing vehicle speeds, including some support for ticketing.
- There are mixed views on parking, with some advocating for maintaining or expanding it to support businesses, while others support reducing car lanes in favor of buses, bikes, and wider sidewalks.
- Affordable housing is seen as critical, with skepticism about the accessibility of current market-rate developments.
- There were a few comments about concerns related to new development addressing desire for stepback and setbacks where adjacent to neighborhood residential parcels, potential for a "wall" of taller buildings on San Pablo creating a "wind tunnel" effect.
- One comment suggested increasing allowable heights in adjacent areas to increase potential for housing and transition density into neighborhoods.
- One comment points out the potential for nightlife uses, particularly in areas where residences are not adjacent to San Pablo Avenue parcels.
- Respondents view better lighting, more green space, and trees as ways to improve both safety and the walkability of the corridor. The emphasis is on making the area more inviting and human-scaled, rather than designed around cars.
- Respondents generally believe that San Pablo should be safer and more welcoming for pedestrians and cyclists, with improved infrastructure for non-car modes of travel. At the same time, they recognize of the need for a balanced approach that supports both business vitality and multi-modal accessibility. Suggestions include clearer, simpler traffic signals and strong emphasis on reducing vehicle speeds.

## Node Prioritization Breakdown

### **Across the entire corridor, several overarching themes emerged:**

Respondents believed the entire area should be prioritized for more intense development, including taller buildings, more housing units, and mixed-use projects. Taller buildings (85 feet or 8 stories) were believed to be appropriate along the entire corridor to accommodate growth and meet housing needs. Improved walkability and intersection improvements for pedestrians and cyclists were consistently cited as top priorities across all nodes.

For each node, summarized findings are as follows:

**Gilman Node:** Shops were identified as the most beneficial community feature.

**Ashby Node:** Reduced vehicle speed limits were prioritized more frequently for this segment compared to others. Shops were identified as the most beneficial community feature. Most frequently identified as the least accessible segment.

**Dwight Node:** Shops were identified as the most beneficial community feature, with an emphasis on ground-floor storefronts.

**Cedar Node:** Shops were identified as the most beneficial community feature, though this node had the least interest in additional business development and taller buildings.

**University Node:** Frequently cited alongside Ashby as requiring accessibility improvements. Entertainment or nightlife was seen as the most beneficial community feature, alongside a focus on ground-floor storefronts and more intense development, including taller buildings and mixed-use projects.

## Conclusions

The survey findings highlight a shared vision for San Pablo Avenue as a vibrant, accessible corridor that balances growth with community needs. Key priorities include supporting business growth through streamlined processes, enhancing public spaces with wider sidewalks, improved streetscapes, and addressing safety concerns for cyclists and pedestrians.

Respondents also emphasized the need for affordable, diverse housing options for workforce, seniors, artists, and families, as well as support for higher-density development, particularly when tied to public benefits. These insights will shape the next phases of the San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan, ensuring future developments, public investment, and policies align with community values and priorities.

## Appendices

### Appendix A: Methodology

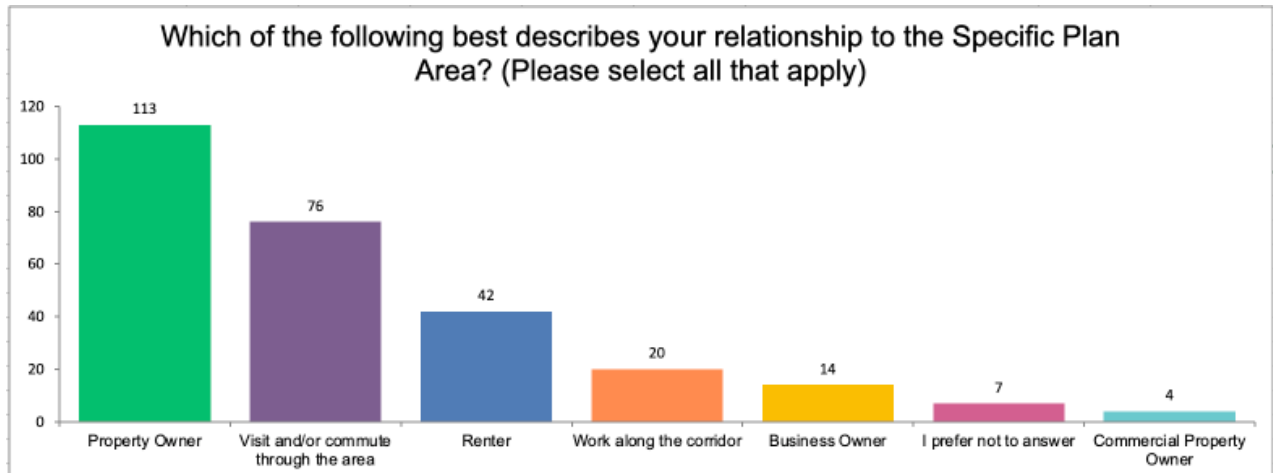
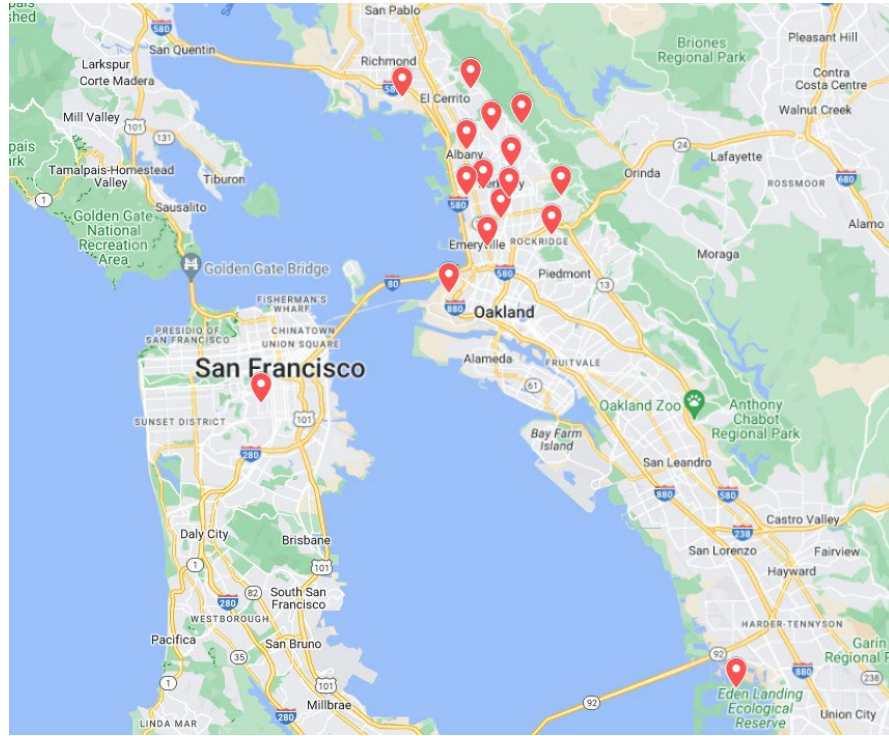
**Postering Along San Pablo Avenue:** The Project Team canvassed the corridor, visiting businesses along the avenue, engaging with pedestrians, business owners, and employees in local shops, cafes, and markets. This in-person interaction was aimed at raising awareness of the survey and encouraging community members to participate by placing posters and handouts along the corridor.

**Community Workshop Advertising:** The Project Team also held a community workshop, where the public was updated on the San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan, its objectives, and policy options. Attendees were reminded of the importance of completing the survey to ensure their input would shape future developments in their community.

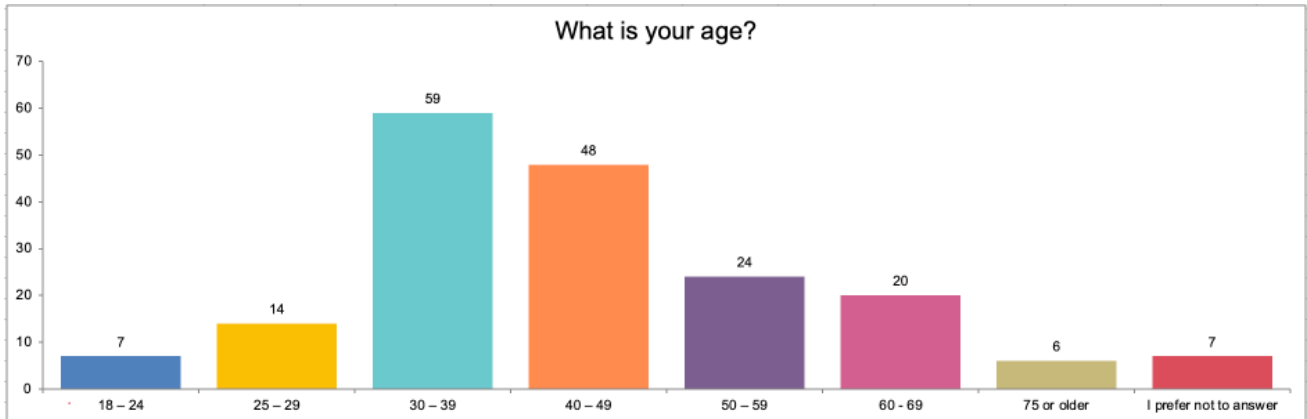
**Council Member Newsletter:** A Berkeley council member included a link to the survey in their newsletter, which significantly increased survey responses and further broadened community input.

## Appendix B: Demographics

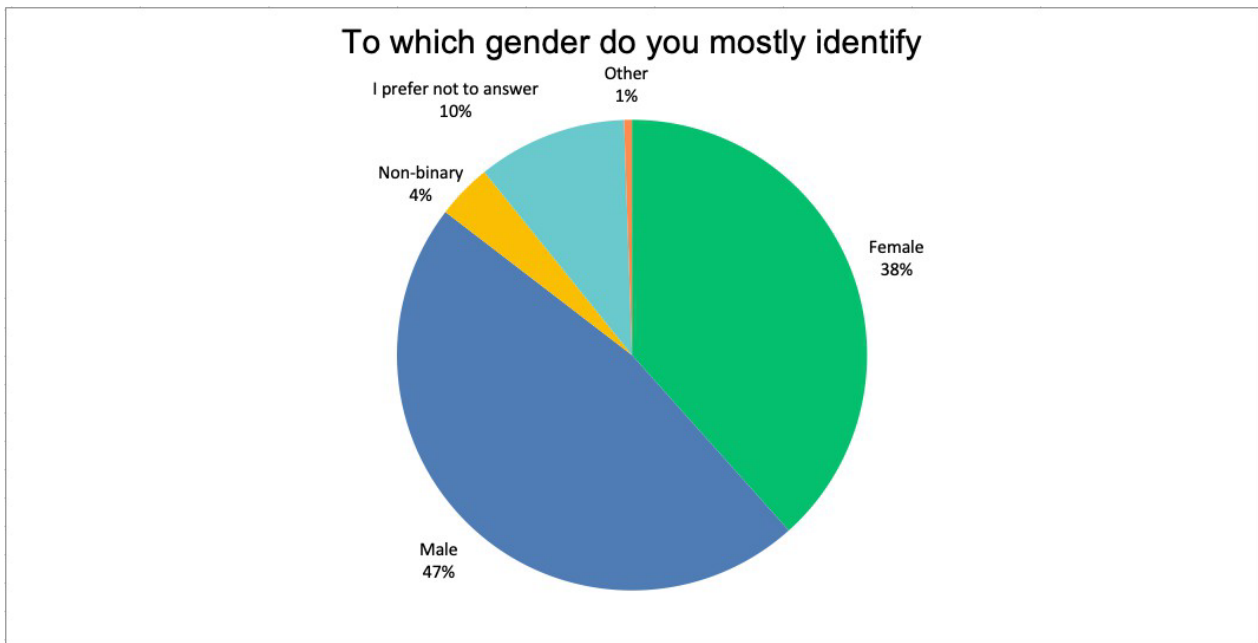
Geographic Reach: Survey Respondents provided their zip code on an optional demographic question. Based on those responses, the map below shows the geographic spread of zip codes.



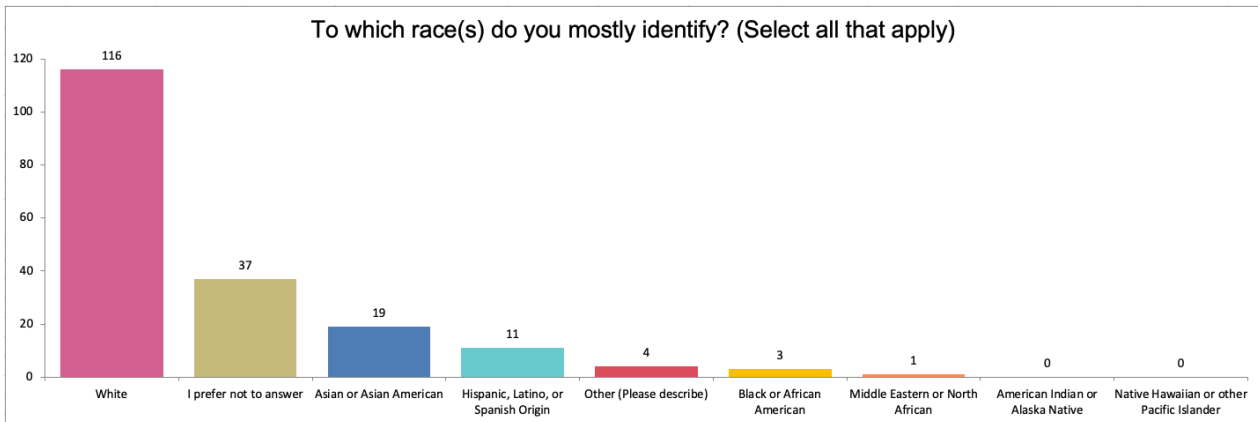
Multiple-Select Question 16; Answered: 187, Skipped: 33



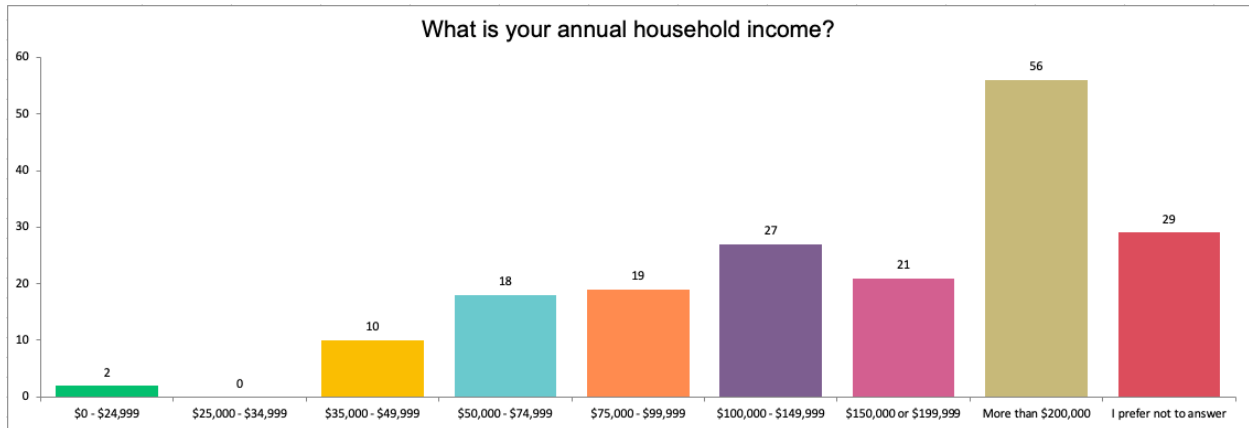
Single-Select Question 17; Answered: 185, Skipped: 35



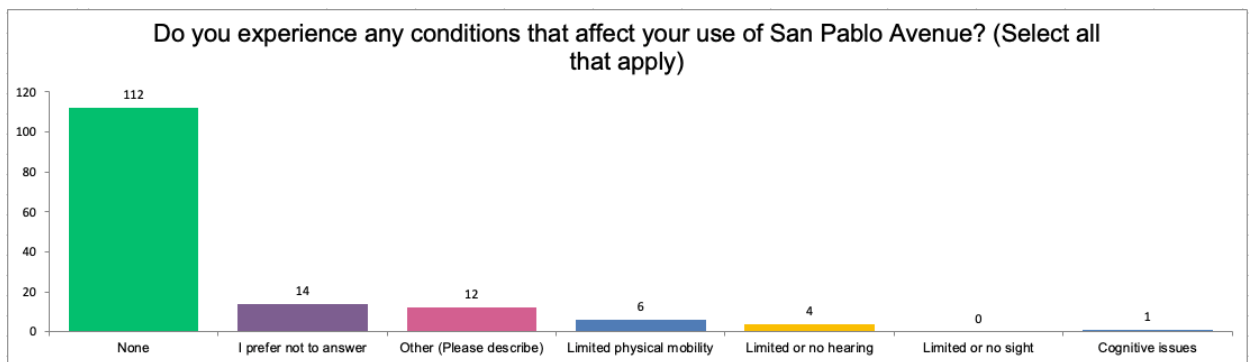
Single-Select Question 18; Answered: 185, Skipped: 35



Multiple-Select Question 19; Answered: 181, Skipped: 39



Single-Select Question 20; Answered: 182, Skipped: 38



Multiple-Select Question 21; Answered: 149, Skipped: 71