

San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan

Introduction to Public Review Draft Specific Plan

October 29, 2025

Meeting Agenda

I. Project Background

II. Specific Plan Overview

- Vision and Desired Results
- How the Plan leads to Desired Results
 - Land Use Zoning Changes
- Objective Design Standards
- Economic Development
- Streets and Public Realm
- Implementation

III. Next Steps & How to Stay Involved

IV. Open House Conversations



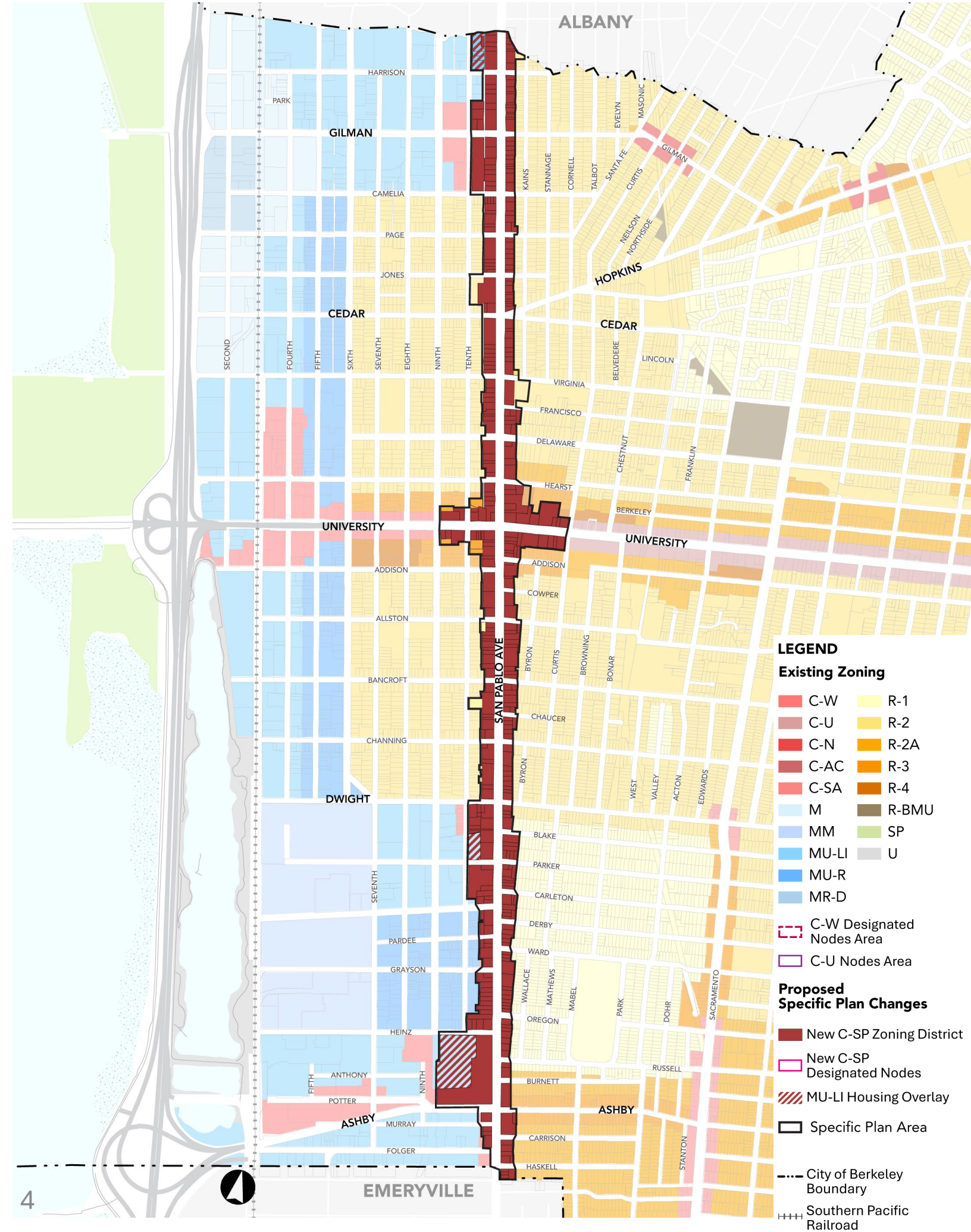
Develop a San Pablo Avenue Corridor PDA Specific Plan, which will increase allowed densities and/or development capacity, and study design standards, public improvements, and mechanisms to incentivize affordable housing.

Why this Specific Plan?

1. 2015 City Council Referral – “Develop a Plan to guide development on San Pablo Ave”
2. Priority Development Areas (PDA) Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) and Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) designation
 - a) ABAG/MTC Grant 2021
3. Housing Element 2023-2031: Program 27 - Priority Development Areas (PDA), Commercial and Transit Corridors – “increase new housing opportunities...on commercial and transit corridors”

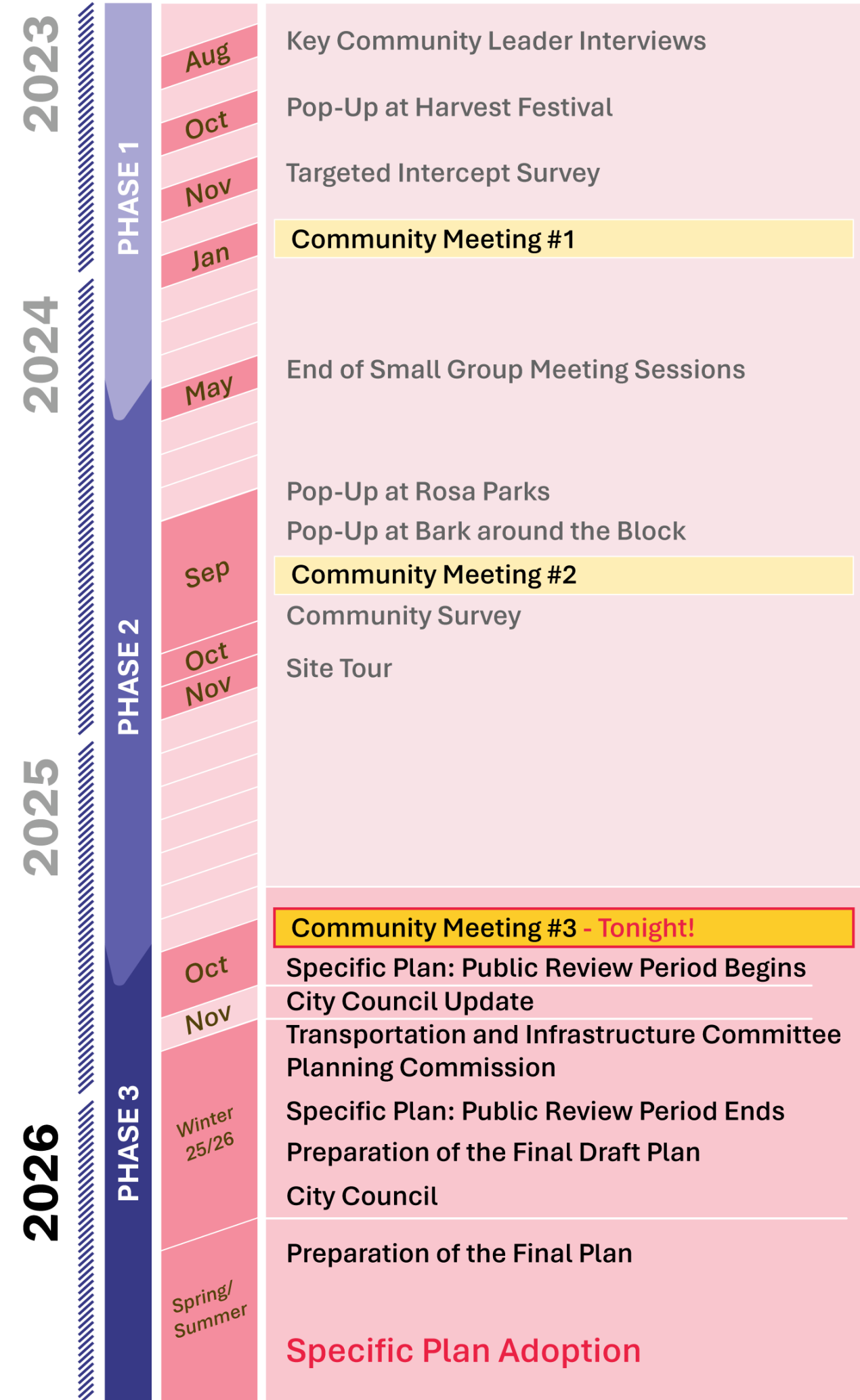
Specific Plan Boundaries

- Derived from previously defined Priority Development Boundary (PDA)
- Includes parcels in the West Berkeley Commercial (C-W) district and West Berkeley Plan Area
- Expands to include
 - Additional opportunity sites
 - Better define University Avenue Node

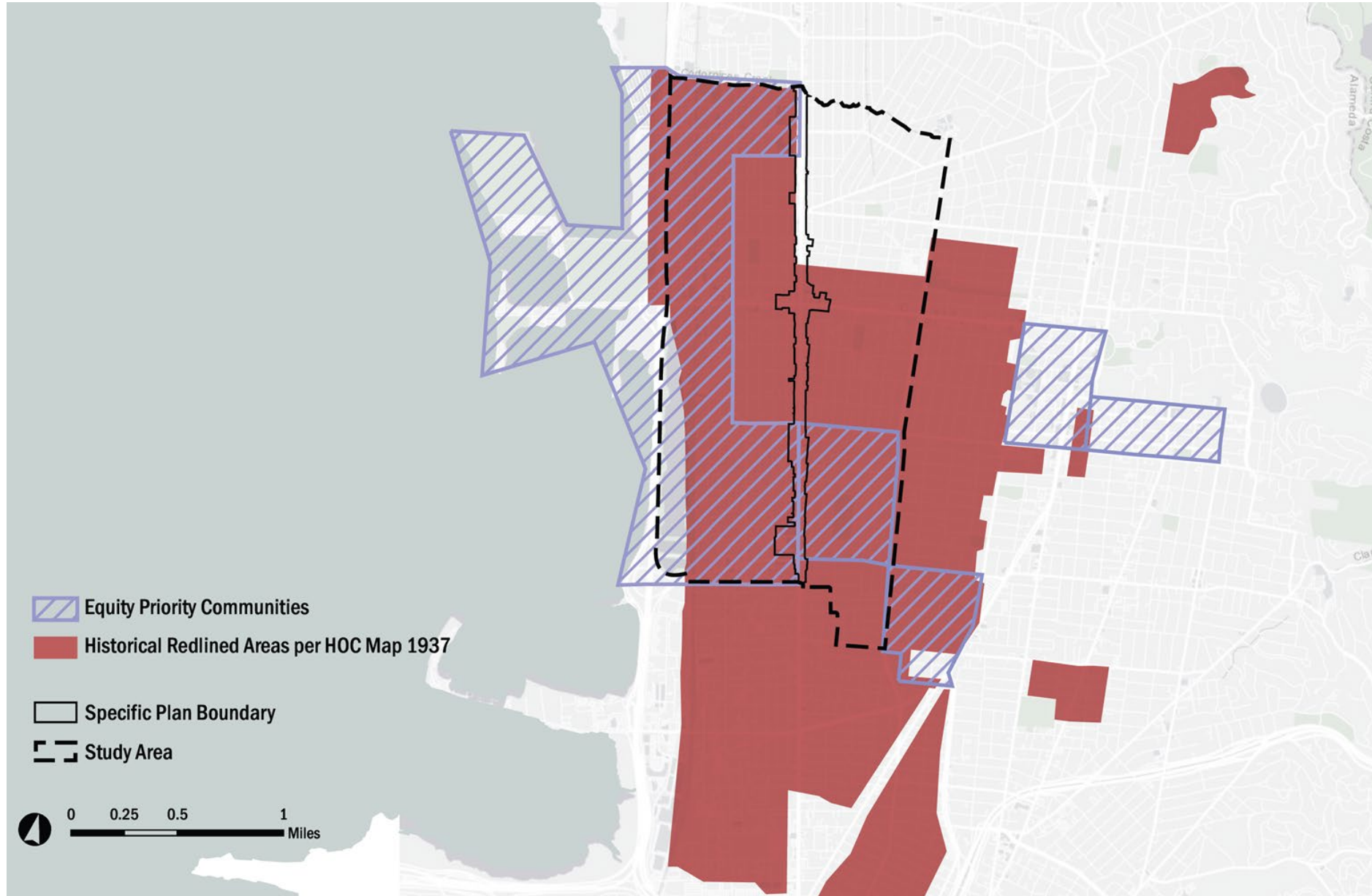


Community Engagement and Plan Development Process

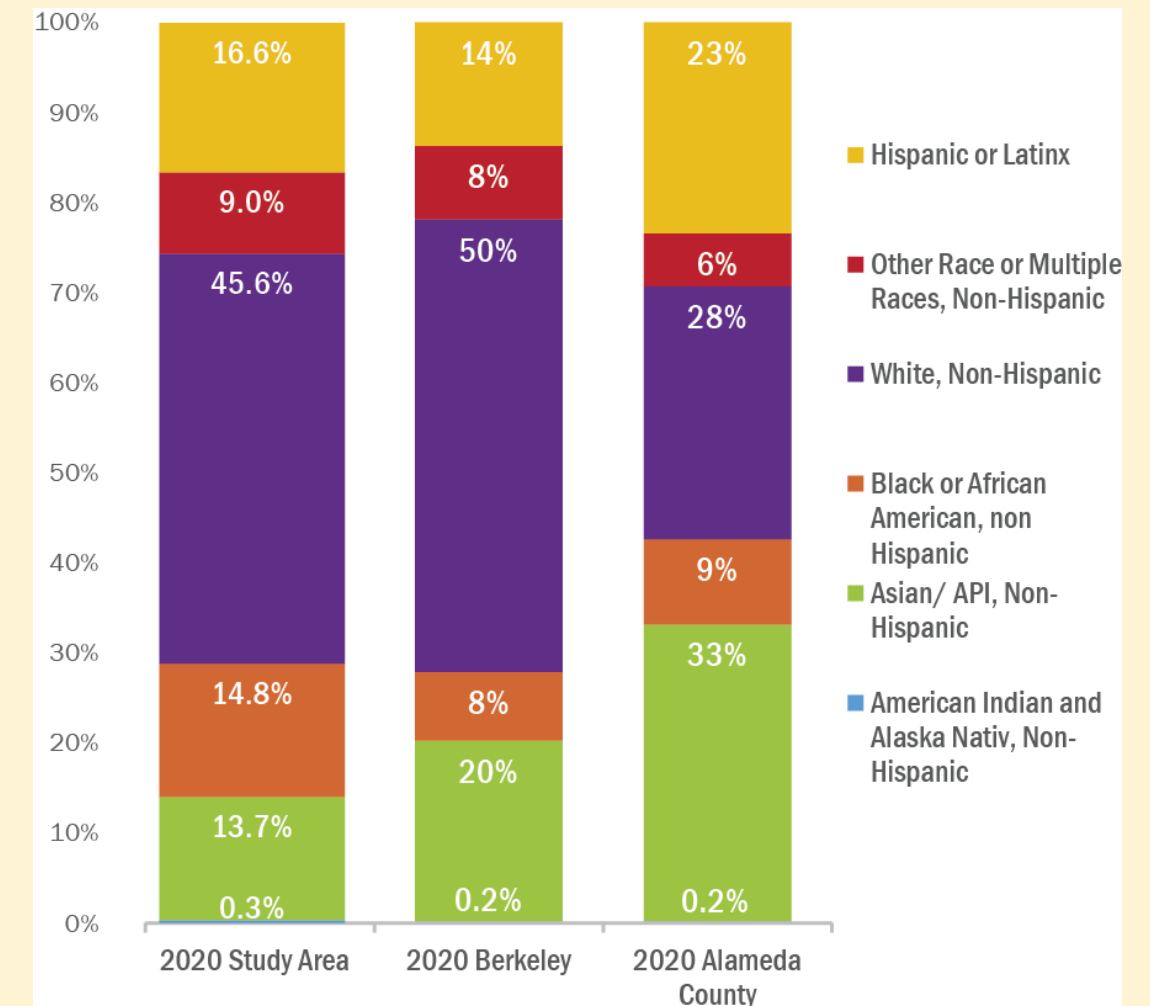
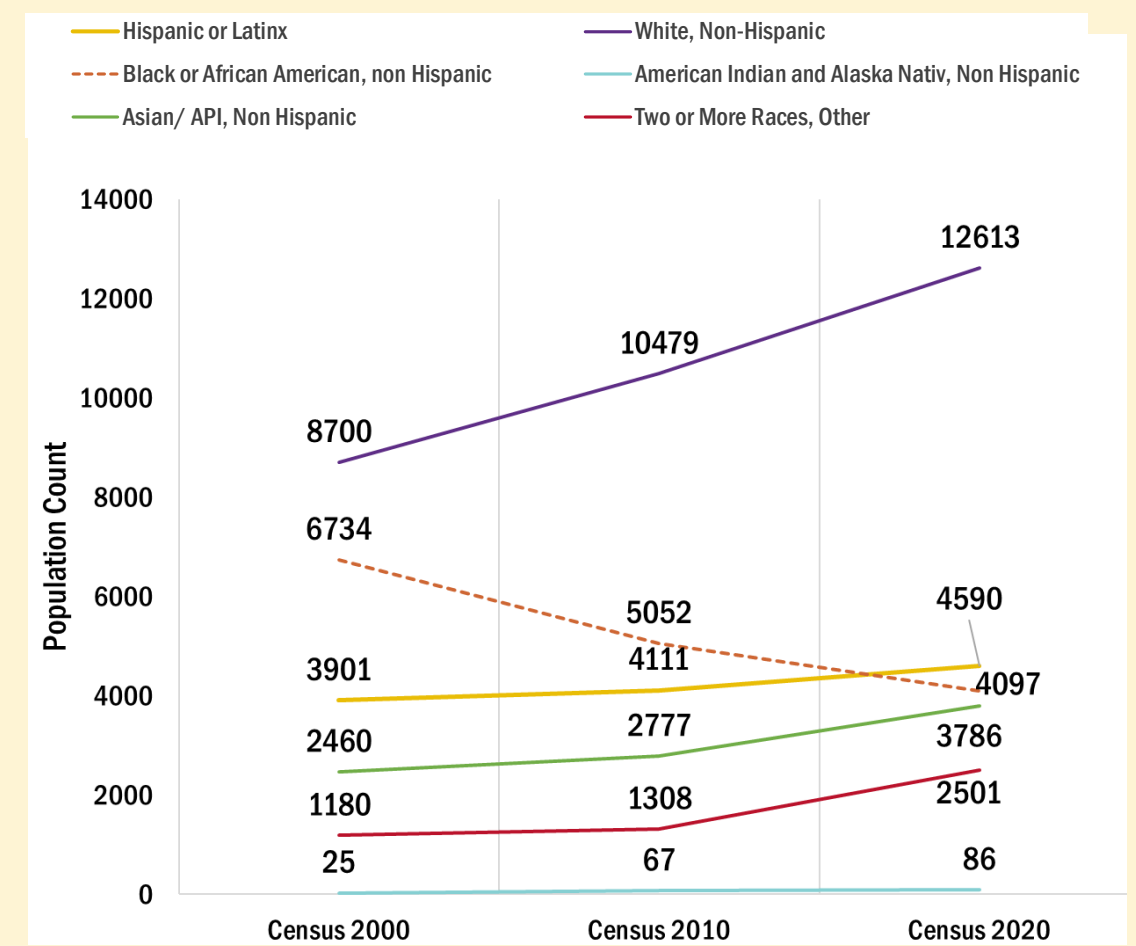
Phase 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key Community Leader Interviews • Pop-up at the Harvest Festival • Small Group Meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted Intercept Survey • Community Meeting #1
Phase 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pop-up at Rosa Parks Elementary • Community Survey 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Meeting #2 • Site Tour
Phase 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Meeting #3 – Tonight! • Specific Plan Public Review Draft Period 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public Hearings



Demographics and Equity



Equity Priority Communities and Redlined Communities. Source: Robert K. Nelson and Edward L Ayers, Mapping Redlining, 2023. MTC, EPC Data, 2021.



Racial Distribution in Study Area by Census Tracts, Source: U.S. Decennial Census, 2000 Table P7, 2010-2020 Table P9

Commercial Activity

- In 2023, 90% of brick-and-mortar businesses are locally owned:
 - 21% are woman owned
 - 41% are people of color owned
- Local businesses are more vulnerable to displacement or closure
- Ground-floor vacancy rate estimate for San Pablo Avenue
 - Doubled from 2017 to 10.8% in 2022
 - 7.1% in 2024
- Retail continues to be largest source of sales tax revenue for the area



Woman Owned Auto Repair Shop on San Pablo Ave.



Vacant Storefront.

Transportation and Public Space

- **San Pablo Avenue is a State Highway**
- **Alameda CTC San Pablo Corridor Projects**
 - Safety Enhancement Projects (Berkeley and Albany)
 - Parallel Bike Improvements Project (Berkeley, Albany, North Oakland)
 - Bus Lane and Bike Lane Project (Oakland, Emeryville, South Berkeley)
- **Public Space**
 - No public parks or plazas along San Pablo Avenue
 - Sidewalk is only public space
 - Sidewalk conditions vary
 - Tree canopy is unique to Berkeley along full length of San Pablo Avenue



Mature London Plane trees define the character of San Pablo Ave



Sidewalks in many locations in need of maintenance

What We've Heard from the Community

- Support for affordable, mixed-income, high-density housing
- Concerns about “tunnel effect” and “flat” facades of new buildings
- Frustration with poor lighting, sidewalk and mobility conditions
- Desire for engaging, greener, more vibrant and social public realm
- Strong interest in allowing flexible use in ground-floor spaces to reduce vacancy and improve vibrancy



5 Community Leader Interviews

5 Focus Groups

2 Community Workshops

3 Pop-ups

2 Surveys

1 Site Tour

Vision

San Pablo Avenue will be a vibrant, mixed-use district that connects neighborhoods, supports a variety of housing and local business, and reflects Berkeley's cultural heritage.

"It is our urban center or spine. Be more for the people that live here. [We are] Missing boutiques, groceries, and practical things."

– Open House Comment

"It is essential to ensure that the plan addresses the needs of the historically underserved communities around San Pablo Avenue."

– Community advocate from Beautiful San Pablo Avenue

"SPA is stressful. Just realized it acts as a border, and I hate crossing over it. Increase space for people, less space for cars"

– Open House Comment

Desired Results



Increased Diversity and Supply of Housing



Increased Business Activity to Support a Thriving Community



Enhanced Interaction between Public and Private Spaces

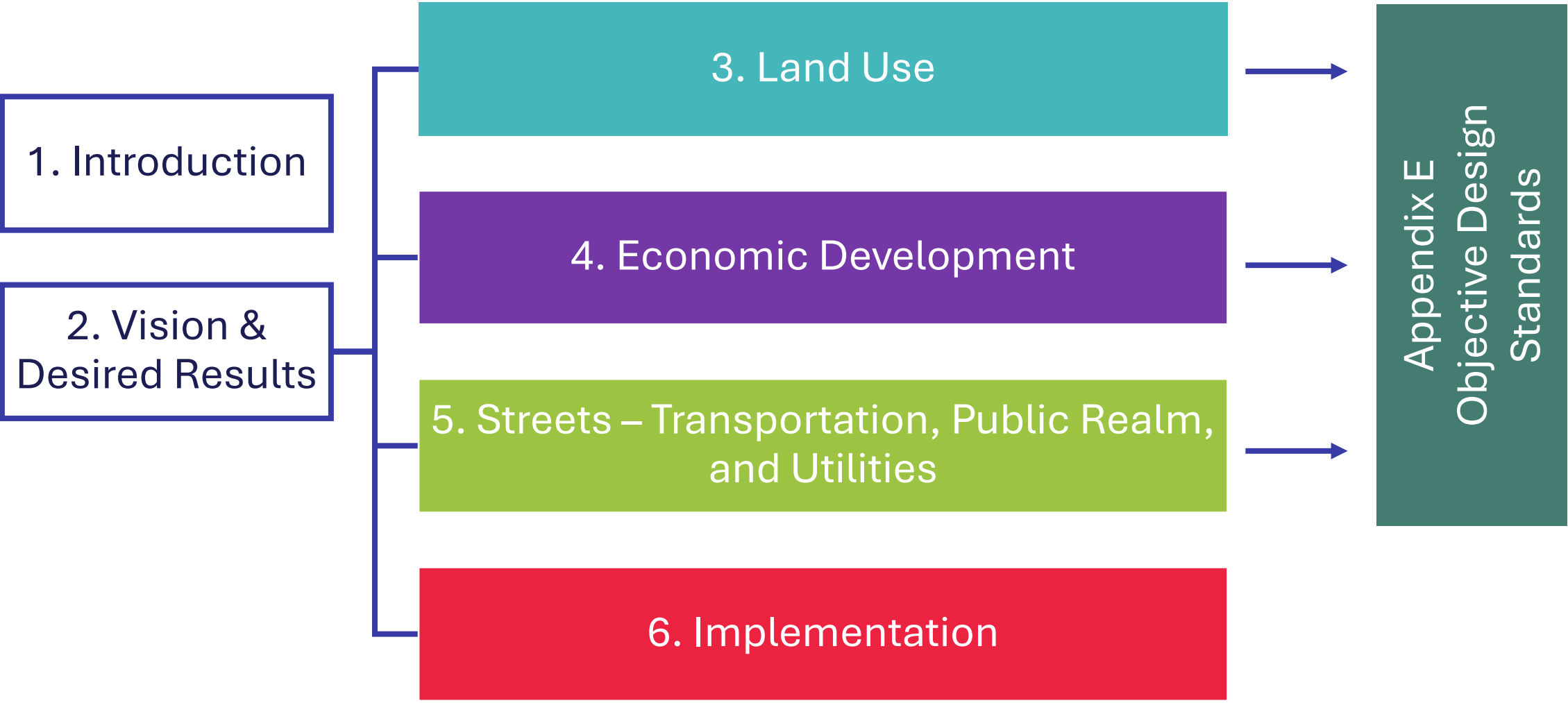


Enhanced Local and Citywide Access

“[A] Lively corridor where people from all walks of life can enjoy, mingle, and support local businesses. Good mix of housing, restaurants, stores.”
– Community Open House #1

Specific Plan Overview

The Plan is organized into six chapters and includes supplemental Objective Design Standards:



Icons Legend

LU-P.4 Relationship to other policy (In a different chapter)

ODS Relates to an Objective Design Standard

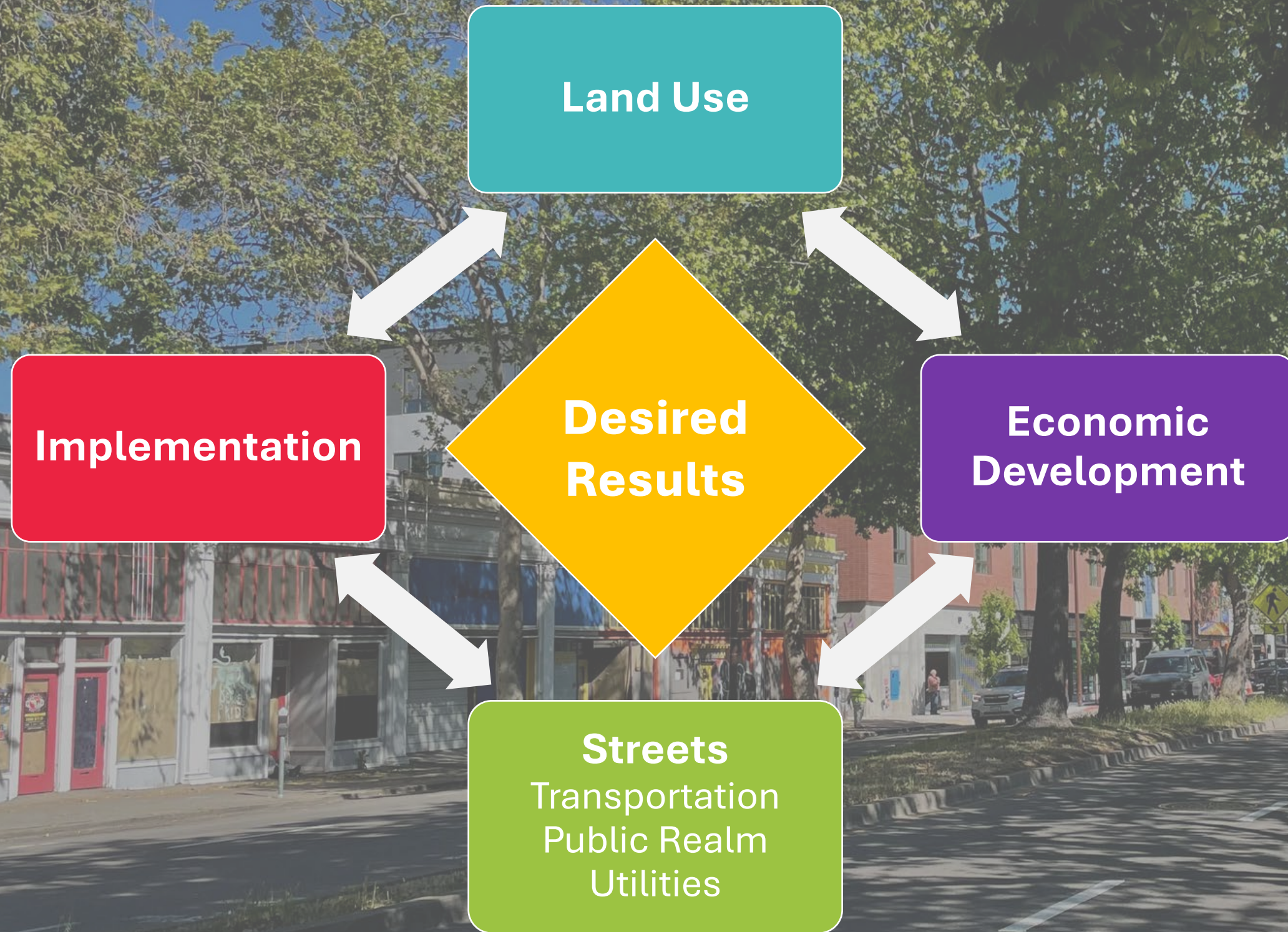
Review the Draft Specific Plan

The Public Review Draft Plan is available on the City’s Website at the QR code below



City Website LINK

Achieving the Desired Results



“[A] Lively corridor where people from all walks of life can enjoy, mingle, and support local businesses. Good mix of housing, restaurants, stores.”
– Community Open House #1

Zoning Changes

The Specific Plan makes several changes:

- I. Establishes the Commercial San Pablo (C-SP) Zone to replace the West Berkeley Commercial Zone (C-W) within the Plan Area



LEGEND

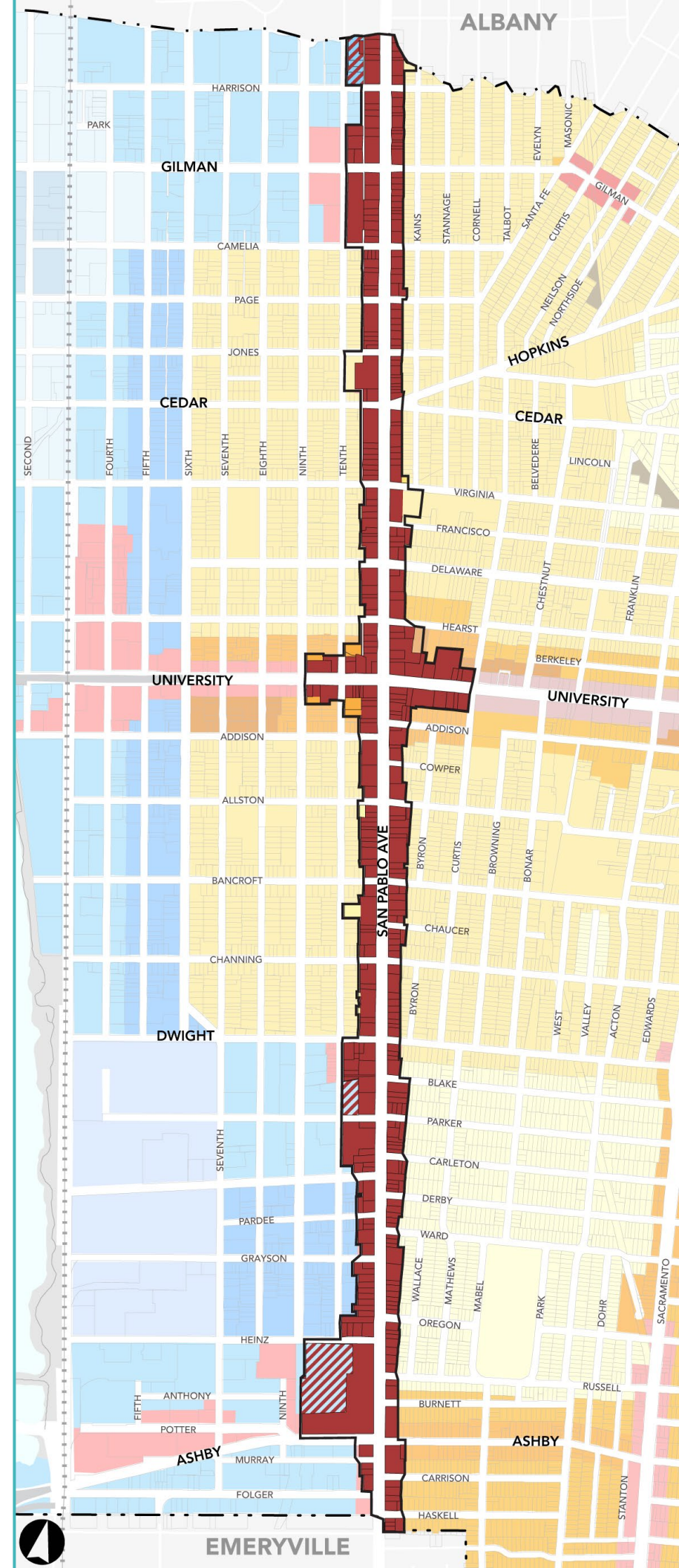
Existing Zoning

- C-W
- C-U
- C-N
- C-AC
- C-SA
- M
- MM
- MU-LI
- MU-R
- MR-D
- R-1
- R-2
- R-2A
- R-3
- R-4
- R-BMU
- SP
- U

- C-W Designated Nodes Area
- C-U Nodes Area

Proposed Specific Plan Changes

- New C-SP Zoning District
- New C-SP Designated Nodes
- MU-LI Housing Overlay
- Specific Plan Area
- City of Berkeley Boundary
- Southern Pacific Railroad



Zoning Changes

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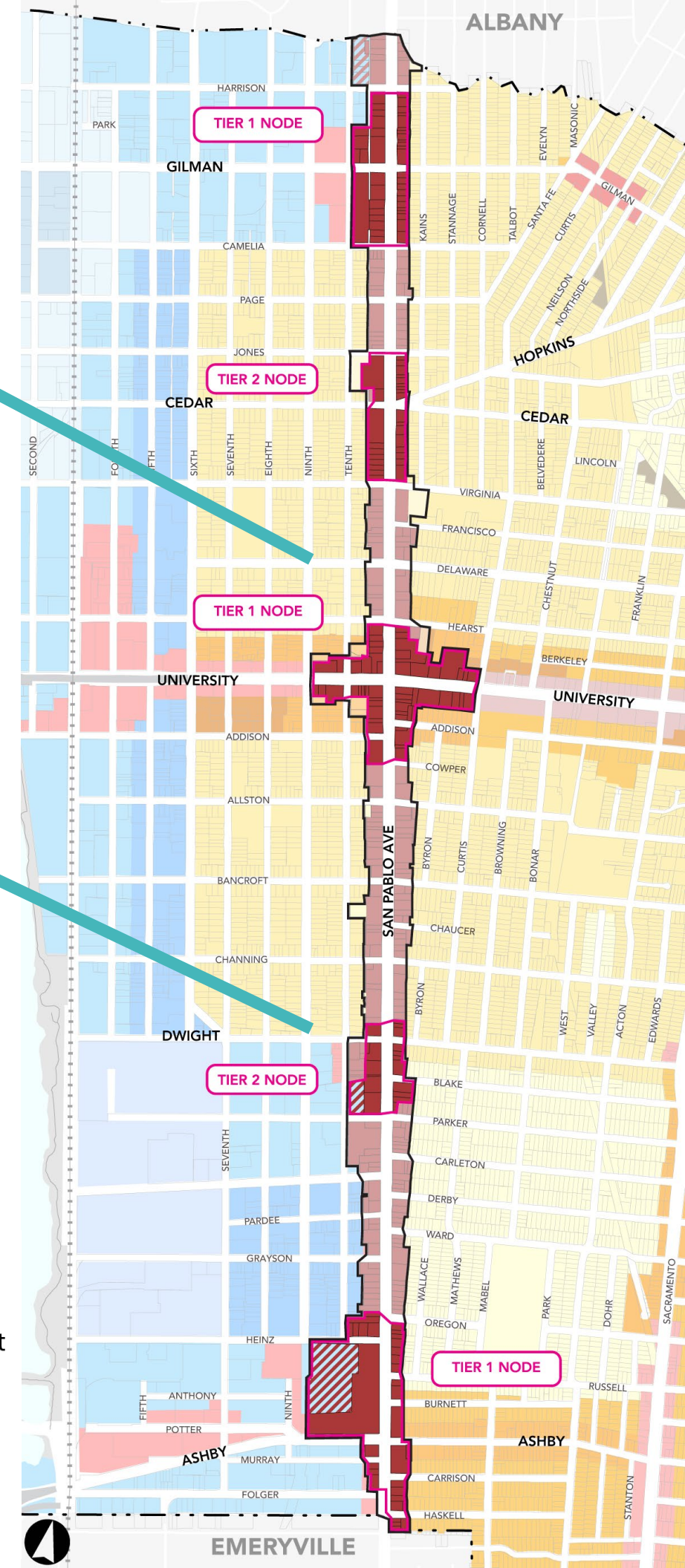
- I. Establishes the Commercial San Pablo (C-SP) Zone to replace the West Berkeley Commercial Zone (C-W) within the Plan Area
- II. Establishes a Two-Tier Node Structure to strategically concentrate:
 - Higher-intensity development
 - Commercial uses



Example Tier 1:
University Node



Example Tier 2:
Dwight Node



Proposed Specific Plan Changes

- New C-SP Zoning District
- New C-SP Designated Nodes
- MU-LI Housing Overlay
- Specific Plan Area



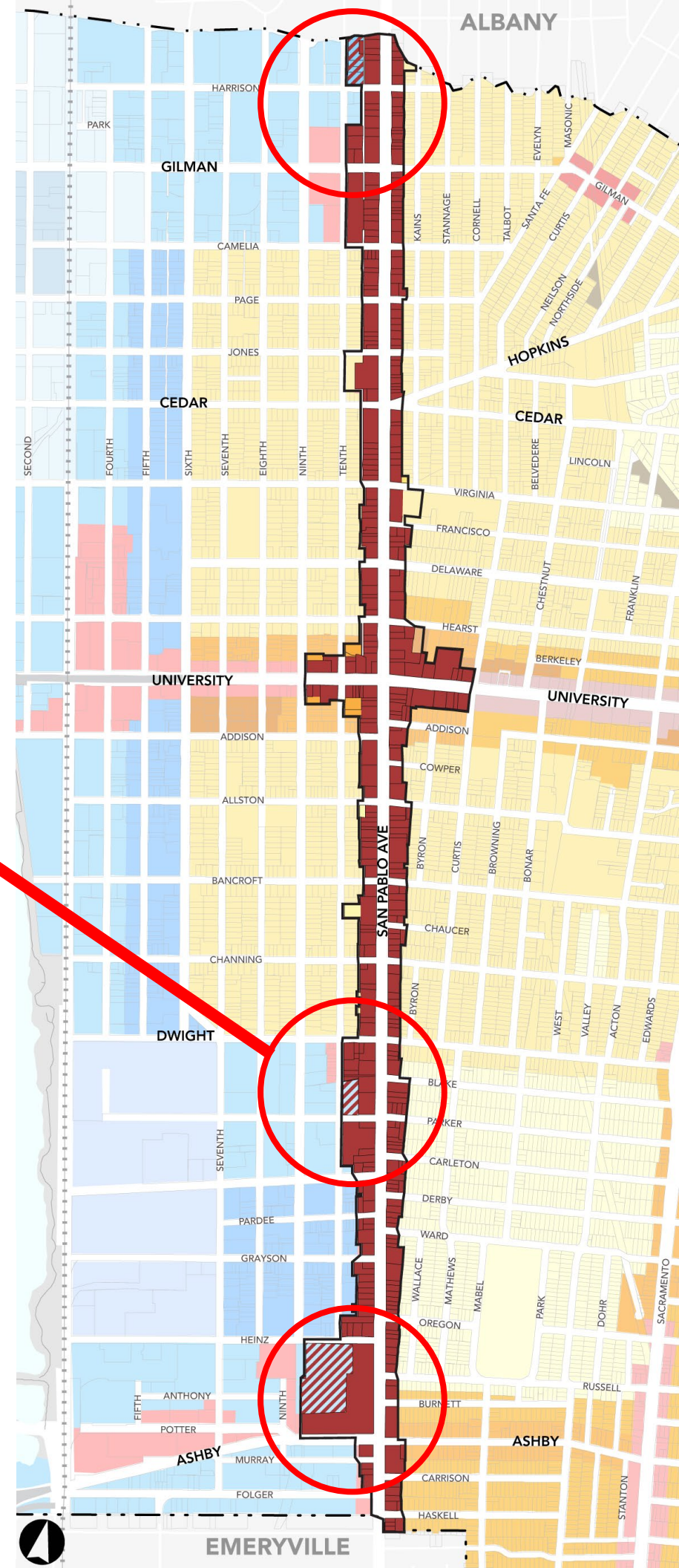
Zoning Changes

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- I. Establishes the Commercial San Pablo (C-SP) Zone to replace the West Berkeley Commercial Zone (C-W) within the Plan Area
- II. Establishes a Two-Tier Node Structure to strategically concentrate:
 - Higher-intensity development
 - Commercial uses
- III. Allows for housing at 6 MU-LI zoned parcels for 100% affordable or family-friendly housing

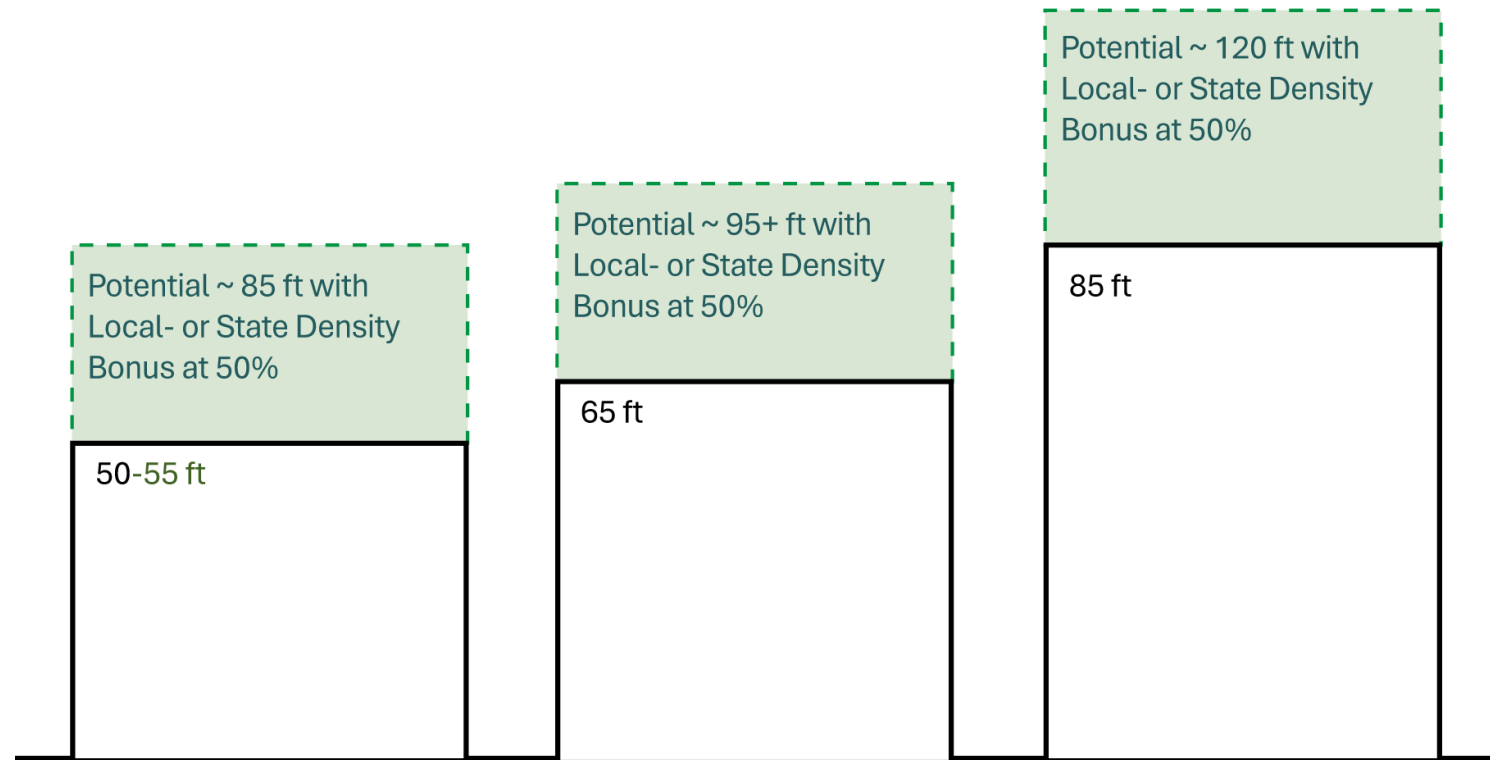


Example Location
Parker and San Pablo Avenue



San Pablo Avenue Proposed C-SP Development Intensity

Zone/ Category	Existing C-W		Proposed C-SP				
	Single-Use	Mixed-Use	Outside Nodes		Proposed C-SP Nodes		
			Single-Use	Mixed-Use	Commercial/ Light Industrial	Tier 1 Nodes	Tier 2 Nodes
FAR	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	4.75	3.75
Max Height	40'	50'	40'	55'	40'	85'	65'
Max Storeys	3	4	3	5	3	8	6
Usable Open Space	40 SF/Unit (only applies to residential uses)						
Lot	100%						



Berkeley San Pablo Ave Proposed C-SP development intensity

Potential Buildout

Estimated Amount of New Development that could Occur

Housing: New C-SP Zoning increases opportunity for housing

- Estimate of ~ 6,700 new homes (~16,875 residents)
- Housing Element Update estimated 3,500 new homes

Commercial: The new commercial in-lieu fee supports focusing commercial development in key Nodes

- Estimated ~321,000 sq. ft. reduction in commercial potential

Community Benefits:

- More housing and rebalancing commercial potential helps reduce vacancies and increase vitality
- All Plan Area residents can easily walk to a Node
- Nodes focus housing and commercial use close to crossing bus routes

Estimated Buildout (Rounded)

Type	Units Sq. Ft.
Residential (Multi-family)	Units
Total New Units	6,700
Existing Units	2,350
Total New and Existing Units	9,050
Commercial	Sq. Ft.
New Commercial	92,000
Removed by New Housing	413,000
Net Change	-321,000
Existing	1,491,000
Total New and Remaining Existing	1,170,000



Increase Housing Supply and Diversity

LU-P.11 Establish a San Pablo Avenue Density Bonus Program

- Provides an alternative to the State Density Bonus
- Developers must follow key **Objective Design Standards**
- **In-lieu fee** to the City's **Housing Trust Fund** to support the creation and preservation of affordable housing



*Current **State Density Bonus Law** let's developers waive or reduce development standards*

LU-P.9 Define Residential Mixed-Use with On-Site and In-Lieu Options

- Allows residential **ground floors in-lieu of commercial space** outside the nodes
- Supports more housing and concentrates retail in nodes
- **In-lieu fee** to San Pablo Avenue Focused **Small Business Support Fund**



ODS

ODS

ED-P.1



Increase Business Activity to Support a Thriving Community

LU-P.9

ED-P.1 Small Business Support Fund

- Financed through a combination of **ground floor in-lieu fees**, community benefits, and other sources



Small businesses can apply for a loan to:

- *Improve a new space*
- *Reduce cost of relocation*

ED-P.4: Study Feasibility of Forming a Business Improvement District (BID)

PR-P.2

LU-S.1 Sidewalk Expansion Incentive

- Encourages developers to expand sidewalk space



ODS

LU-P.10 Establish Ground Floor Typologies to Promote Pedestrian-Scaled and Flexible Ground Floors

- Storefront, Other Non-Residential, Active Residential, and Live-work frontages **defined by Objective Development Standards**



Enhanced Interaction Between Public & Private Spaces

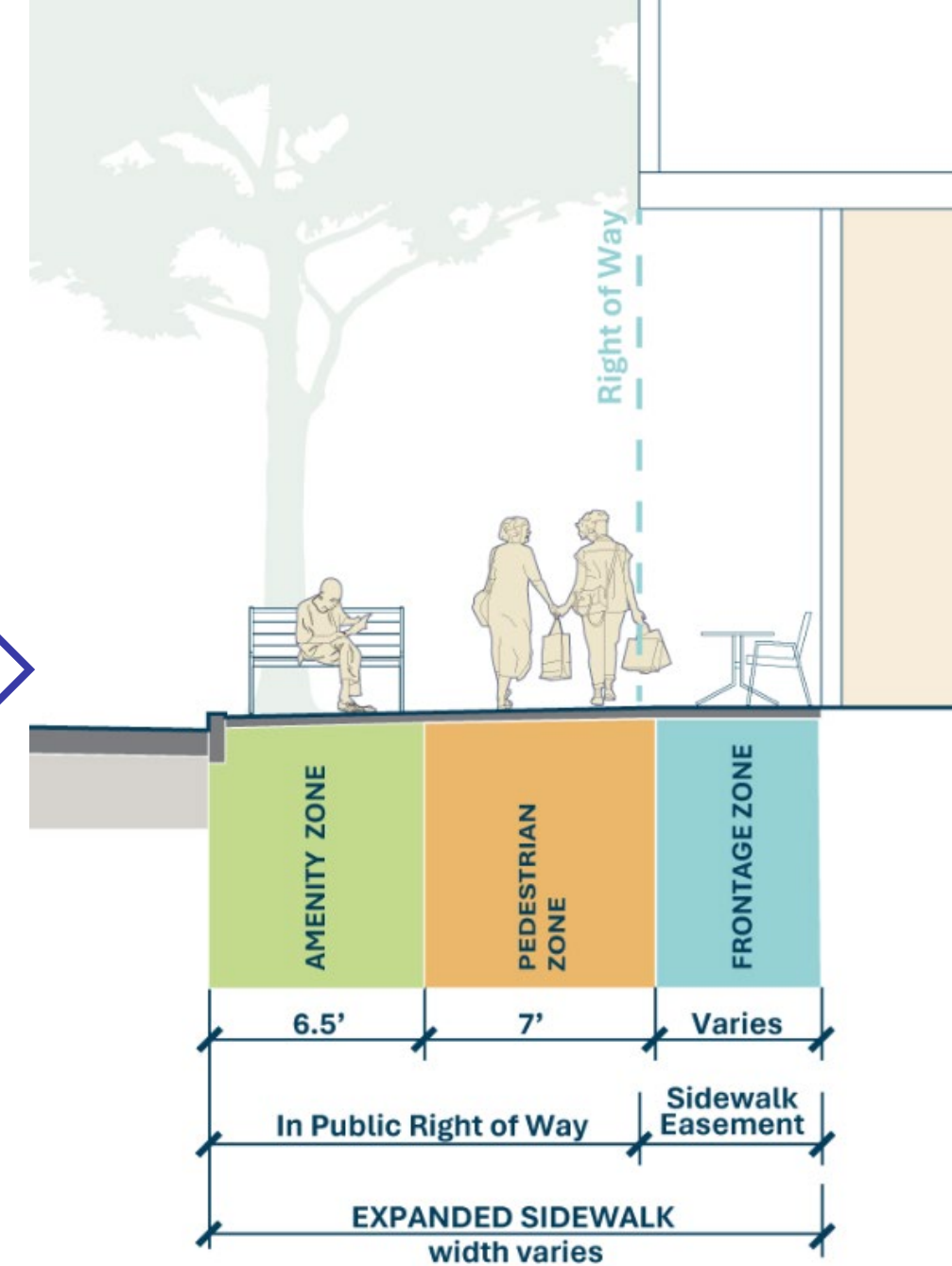
LU-S.1

PR-P.2 Sidewalk Easements

- Widening sidewalks for more public realm space

Streetscape Improvement Standards

- For elements like pedestrian-scale lighting, furnishing, trees, and other landscaping



ODS

LU-P.6 Public Space Development Incentives

- Incentives and requirements for sidewalk easements, Privately-Owned Public Open Space, and Side-Street Plazas

ED-P.#



LU-S.3

PR-P.14 Side Street Plazas

- Convert minor streets into small side street plazas

Objective Design Standards

Increased Diversity and Supply of Housing

Standards for Medium and Mid-Rise Multi-Family

- Modulation & Articulation
- Step backs & Neighborhood Transitions
- Roof Treatments & Fenestration



Increased Business Activity to Support a Thriving Community

Storefront Standards

- Frontage Setbacks & Character
- Entry and Window Façade Standards (orientation and transparency, awnings, etc.)
- Dimensions & Interior Requirements for Tenant Spaces
- Venting / Grease Interceptors



Enhancing Interaction between Public and Private Spaces

Residential Ground Floor

- Setback and Frontage Character
- Floor Above Grade (balance privacy and eyes on the street)
- Individual Unit Residential Entries (transition from public to private space, etc.)
- Shared Residential Entries (frequency and design)





Enhance Local and Citywide Access

Collaboration and Coordination with Alameda CTC and AC Transit

- T-P.3 Maintain and improve bus service in collaboration with Alameda CTC and AC Transit
- T-P.4 Implement signal timing and transit signal priority (TSP)

Implement Mobility Hubs

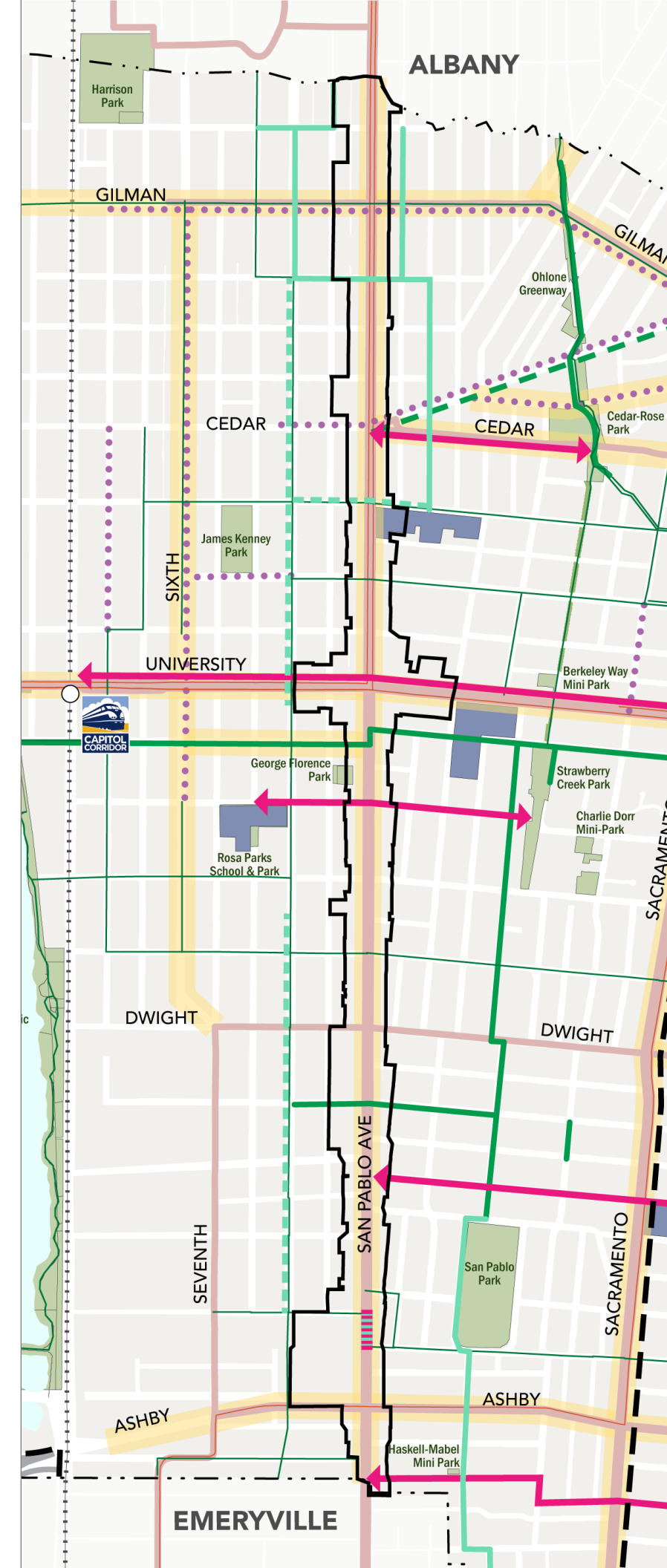
- T-P.6 Implement Mobility Hub features at University Node
- T-P.7 Evaluate other locations for Some Mobility Hub features

T-P.8 Lower Speed Limit on San Pablo Avenue

- Study ability to lower speed limit via AB 43-based assessment

Continue to Improve Intersections and Connections

- Study resulting benefit of planned improvements
- Make improvements as need and funding are identified



Implementation

How Policies Turn into Action

- **Adopt the Plan** and its Policies and Standards
- **Adopt General Plan & Zoning Ordinance Amendments** for consistency
- **City & Partner Actions:** Deliver public improvements, new funding tools, and partnerships
- **Adaptive Approach:** Evaluation and updates responding to changing land use laws, funding, and community priorities
- **Implementation Table:** Full list of actions, timelines, and responsible agencies



Implementation Table

How Policies Turn into Action

Action Description	Lead Responsibility	Partners	Timeline	Potential Funding Source
<p>PR-P.14 Side Street Plazas</p> <p>Implementation of this policy shall utilize a phased process:</p> <p>In the near-term, City staff will reach out to non-profits, businesses, - neighborhood groups, and other community organizations to identify opportunities for implementing quick-build plazas. If community partners are identified and commit to supporting implementation, funding can be pursued, improvements can be designed and implemented along with an assessment to verify viability of full or partial street access.</p>	PW, OED, and PR&W	Community partners and Caltrans	0-3 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General Fund for initial staff time • Community partner’s funds • Grants
<p>In the longer-term, City staff and community partners, including potential future BID(s) can pursue design, fund raising, and implementation of permanent side street plazas.</p>	Community partners	PW, OED, PR&W, and Caltrans	3-6 years and after	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community partner’s funds • Potential new Parks and Recreation Fees • Grants
<p>New development projects may design, build, and provide activation for side street plazas adjacent to their projects.</p>	Developer	PLNG, PW, PR&W, and Caltrans	As proposed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developer

San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan

Land Use Policies and Standards



What We Heard

Affordable Housing and Supportive Services

Community members expressed a desire for more housing, both in quantity of units and diversity of housing types. Several community comments noted that an increase in affordable units should be met with an increase in supportive services.

"It is essential to ensure that the plan addresses the need for the historically underserved communities around San Pablo Avenue."
-Community Advocate

Ground Floor Activation and Vacant Storefronts

Across all outreach events, we have heard concerns about high storefront vacancy rates, and reduced activity and vitality. Additionally, the design of ground floor commercial spaces in new developments is currently not suitable for many small businesses. Broadly, community members have expressed support for expanding permitted ground floor uses to include, for instance, temporary events, such as pop-ups, and other programs or incentives to fill vacant ground floor storefronts.

Designated Nodes

Overall, community members expressed competing priorities for the Nodes, but agree that the Nodes should be the focus for Plan Area vitality.

"Taller, denser housing urgently needed to house more people."
-Open House Comments

Policies and Standards Highlights

- LU-P.1 Establish the Commercial San Pablo (C-SP) Zoning District
- LU-P.2 Establish a Tiered Node Structure to Focus Growth and Commercial Uses
- LU-P.3 MU-LI Housing Overlay District to Allow Affordable and Family Friendly Housing
- LU-P.4 Amend the General Plan and Zoning Map
- LU-P.5 Planning Approval and Building Permit Streamlining
- LU-P.6 Public Space Development Incentives
- LU-P.7 Encourage a Mix of Community-Serving Uses
- LU-P.8 Expand the list of Allowed Uses and Allowed Temporary Uses
- LU-P.9 Define Residential Mixed-Use with On-Site and In-Lieu Options
- LU-P.10 Establish Ground Floor Typologies to Promote Pedestrian-Scaled and Flexible Ground Floors
- LU-P.11 Establish a San Pablo Avenue Density Bonus Program

LU-P.2 Establish a Tiered Node Structure to Focus Growth and Commercial Uses

The Plan defines a two-tiered Node structure to strategically concentrate higher-intensity mixed-use development and commercial uses at key intersections, including tier-specific development standards to incentivize ground-floor commercial in Nodes:

Tier 1 Nodes (University, Ashby, Gilman):

These are the highest intensity areas in the Plan Area, allowing for increased height and FAR to support housing and commercial services near major intersections.



Tier 2 Nodes (Cedar, Dwight):

These allow for moderate increases in height and FAR, comparable to standards outside of the Nodes.



LU-P.3 MU-LI Housing Overlay District to Allow Affordable and Family Friendly Housing

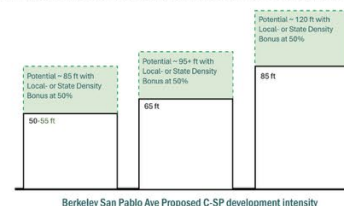
Allow 100% affordable or family-sized housing (2-3 bedrooms) on six MU-LI parcels where residential uses are currently prohibited. Projects that meet the affordability or family-sized unit size requirements may apply the development standards of the C-SP Zoning District.



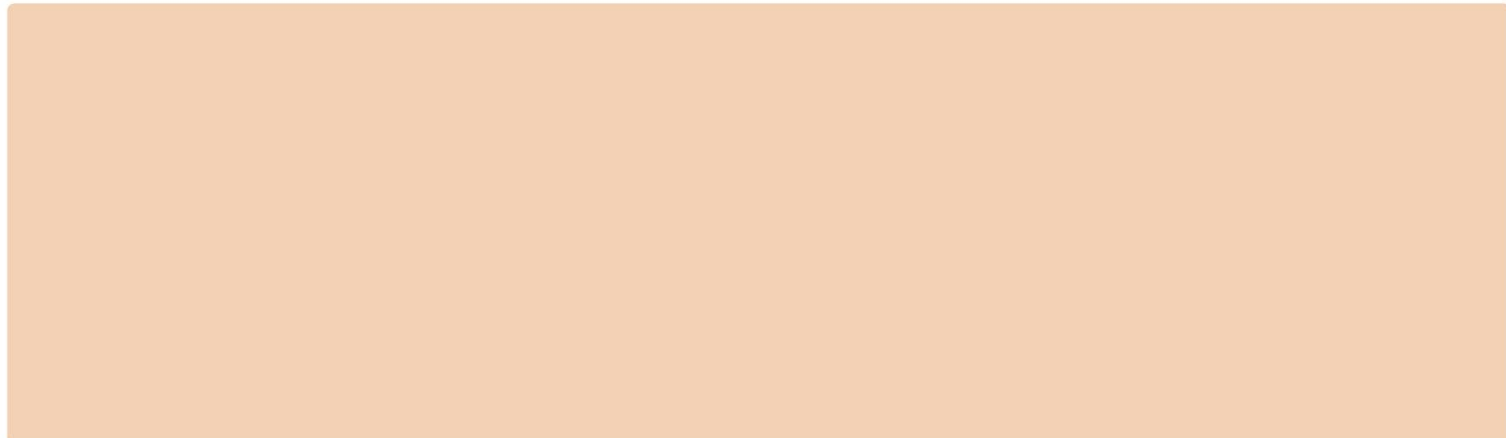
LU-P.11 Establish a San Pablo Avenue Density Bonus Program

Establish a San Pablo Avenue Density Bonus Program by developing an affordable-housing benefit for new, single-use and mixed-use residential projects that is exclusively met through paying an in-lieu fee to the City's existing Affordable Housing Trust Fund. The following components shall be included in the program:

Program Exclusivity	Affordable Housing Contribution	Incentives	Advantages
A project may utilize only the San Pablo Avenue Density Bonus Program, and would be required to waive the ability to use the State Density Bonus for the project.	In-lieu fee shall be placed in the City of Berkeley's Housing Trust Fund and prioritized for projects within the Plan Area to support the creation and preservation of affordable housing. Fund management and allocation will be determined in accordance with the City of Berkeley Housing Trust Fund and Small Sites Program Guidelines, as amended.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Streamlined approval process • Bonus density • Other waivers and concession may mirror the State Density Bonus 	Certain Standards, such as ground floor frontage use requirements and certain ODS, would not be eligible for waivers.



Comments



Open House Conversations Format

• Stations:

- Map of the Plan Area
- Vision and Desired Results
- Land Use
- Objective Design Standards
- Economic Development
- Streets and Public Realms
- Implementation

• City Staff and Consultants available for Q&A

Next Steps

- **October 29 to January 2026**
 - Public Review Period
- **November 6, 2025**
 - City Council Update on SPASP Process
- **Winter 2025/2026**
 - Transportation and Infrastructure Commission
 - Planning Commission Meeting
 - Preparation of the Final Draft Plan
 - City Council Meeting
- **Spring/Summer 2026**
 - Preparation of the Final Plan
 - Plan Adoption at Planning Commission and City Council

How to Stay Involved

- **Comment on the Public Review Draft**
- **Sign-up for Updates on the City's Website including Public Hearing Dates and More**
- **Contact the City with Questions**
SanPabloPlan@Berkeleyca.gov



City Website LINK



Survey Monkey LINK
for Making Comments
and
Viewing Full Plan or
Chapters