

San Pablo Avenue Site Tour Summary

The following document provides a summary of the San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan site tour, which happened on Saturday, November 16th from 10:30 pm to 12:00 pm. Forty-one (41) people RSVP'd for the event, approximately 28 to 33 people attended. Participants were divided into three groups of varying sizes and were each led by a project representative and a notetaker. Some participants joined only for parts of the walk and left earlier. The purpose of this document is to serve as an **internal** summary of key highlights and ideas raised by participants at the Site Tour.

Executive Summary

The Discussion Summary section below provides an overview of the feedback and key themes raised for height and building articulation, building frontage, public realm, and the potential for expanding the Specific Plan into MULI and MUR zones. Overall, participants expressed a wide range of ideas and opinions about development and open space along the corridor. Participants expressed support for additional housing and a diversity of housing types along the corridor. Some concerns were expressed about the tunnelling effects of tall buildings and increased shadows and wind along the corridor. However, most participants focused on their desire for pedestrian friendly corridor and provided feedback on the following topic areas: building architectural details that they like and don't like, ground floor uses and designs that are more and less successful, and public open space and streetscape features.

Overall, the discussion demonstrated that the design of ground floor spaces has a significant impact on the streetscape. Participants also expressed a strong interest in improved open space and streetscape elements, though there were varying ideas on which elements are best and people expressed both support and opposition for closing minor side streets for open space.

Participants were open to rezoning MULI and MUR zones though there was no consensus that they should be exclusively affordable housing, as other ideas such cultural, artistic, open space, and parking uses were also mentioned.

Discussion Summary

a) General Comments

1. **Group 1** highlighted Anthony's Cookies as a potential site for reuse. The Bank of America site at 2546 San Pablo was criticized for its unattractive parking lot and gravel, presenting a larger opportunity.
 - a. Participants suggested further daylighting of Codornices Creek at the Albany border on the east side of San Pablo Avenue (not part of this tour) and increasing access to the area by removing fencing, which could create a more inviting and usable space.
2. **Group 2** was interested in opportunity sites, tenant protections of such sites, and the development framework, which was perceived as overly developer friendly. City staff leading the group educated them on the permitting process to clarify the regulatory framework.
 - a. An architect noted the growing interest in redeveloping underutilized lots for small-scale, economically feasible projects to revitalize the corridor post-COVID.

3. Participants in **Group 3** suggested that the first block of San Pablo Avenue south of University Avenue could serve as a pilot location for a Berkeley Ambassador Program to enhance community engagement. They also emphasized the need for more tours and outreach with small businesses to better understand their needs. Additionally, the group appreciated that The Bloom development introduced condominiums, contributing to a diverse range of housing options along San Pablo Avenue.

b) Height and building articulation

1. Some **Group 1** expressed concerns about the impact of tall buildings, particularly regarding light and the potential for creating unbroken “walls of housing.” They emphasized the importance of thoughtful planning to avoid these issues while also considering how increased density might affect wind circulation and emergency vehicle access. Positive examples included the use of façade details, such as 2527 San Pablo.
2. **Group 2** focused on how tall buildings interact with their surroundings rather than height alone, emphasizing the need for more “thoughtful design features”. Concerns were raised about the “tunnel effect”, with 5+ story buildings that lack interaction with pedestrians on the street level and potential lack of sufficient sunlight for the sidewalk. There was interest in breaking up long developments to incorporate active, walkable, and potentially public spaces.
3. **Group 3** expressed a preference for designs that avoid monolithic facades, provide step downs in the back and the incorporation of greenery at the front façade. The Grinnell was seen as a good example due to its massing and color variation, though some ornament details felt “tacked-on.” The Bloom design was well liked as well. Concerns included the looming presence of solid cement facades in future developments, shadows cast by tall buildings, and awnings that overhang sidewalks. Some shorter buildings at key nodes could maintain pedestrian-friendly environments. Some other key comments included:
 - a. “Sunshine Nodes”: Participants would like to see some shorter buildings, even at nodes to reduce shadowing of San Pablo Ave. One participant noted that the car wash lets in more light onto the sidewalk and may be more pleasant to walk by.
 - b. Issues with awnings and overhang at new developments, casting shadows. Participants would prefer wider sidewalks with no overhang, especially in front of retail and larger buildings.

c) Building frontage: Residential and commercial

1. **Group 1** disliked the reflective glass on the ground floor, such as at The Grinnell (2527 San Pablo). Participants preferred display windows reminiscent of old department stores, which they felt could make storefronts more inviting. First-floor eateries with setbacks were suggested to create more varied and engaging streetscapes. Additionally, there was strong interest in promoting ownership opportunities, such as condos, and activating ground-floor spaces with uses like office or small businesses. Participants also discussed the balance between commercial and residential uses along the corridor, noting the importance of addressing vacancies and ensuring a mix of uses.
 - a. Participants acknowledge that foot traffic is in general difficult on San Pablo Ave.

2. **Group 2** criticized the inactive ground floors and narrow sidewalks that fail to engage pedestrians. Participants emphasized the importance of vibrant ground-floor uses, such as retail or open seating. They think new developments do not provide sufficient engaging building articulation and storefront design and would prefer designs similar to the Heinz building; “varied and character-rich architecture”. Suggestions included storefronts with a setback to widen the sidewalk and open space with seating.
 - a. Positive examples for vibrant commercial areas like Solano Avenue and the frontage of the Cheese Board Collective on Shattuck Avenue were mentioned.
3. **Group 3** widely criticized live-work units for their poor interaction with the sidewalk, due to tinted windows, lack of business signage, and lack of visual evidence whether a unit was occupied. Suggestions included using transparent storefronts for display with private areas in the rear or replacing live-work with standard residential units (Smaller windows, different ground floor frontage). Large trees and ground floor variation with retail between units or housing could make live-work units stand out less.

d) **Public Realm**

1. **Group 1** proposed several ideas to enhance the public realm, including the use of permeable pavement, larger space street tree planting, and native plants to improve walkability and environmental quality. The idea of daylighting creeks, such as the one near Gilman, and removing fencing to increase access was also raised. There was general support for closing some perpendicular streets to San Pablo to create pedestrian-friendly spaces, though some concerns were expressed about emergency evacuation and response times as Berkeley is becoming a denser city. Wider sidewalks were recommended to better accommodate increased foot traffic and to provide more streetscape/landscape space and for some seating.
2. **Group 2** supported temporary street closures to create public spaces. They mentioned the issue of homelessness in connection with sidewalk widening and public setbacks into private property. They would like to see an engaging street experience, with sufficient sunlight, walkability, and vibrant ground-floor use.
 - a. Closure of [Alameda Avenue](#), in Alameda was cited as a positive example.
3. **Group 3** highlighted the importance of incorporating greenery, seating, and sunlight to enhance the pedestrian experience. There was some opposition against minor side street closure, though concerns included maintenance of green spaces with and traffic diversions for increased traffic of new developments if built adjacent to closures. Suggested improvements for expansion included bioswales with native planting (like the ones at the Albany border on San Pablo Ave), parklets aligned with nearby businesses, and wider sidewalks near commercial areas.
 - a. If the Heinz parking lot were developed, participants would like to see an additional open space proposed to provide greenery for future residents.
 - b. Trade-offs with developers for public amenities, such as open spaces, are encouraged by the group to enhance livability.

e) Potential for expansion of the Specific Plan into MULI and MUR

1. **Group 1** Expressed interest in policies that encourage creative elements, such as murals, and in maintaining protections for cultural features, such as the arts, which some worried were being less protected as R&D becomes more prioritized.
2. **Group 2** discussed the concern of lack of parking, as older residents expressed difficulties navigating a car-dependent area without sufficient parking. While they were intrigued by the potential for courtyards in affordable housing developments in the area, they suggested to build affordable housing over parking structures
3. **Group 3** supported strategically locating residential developments near essential resources like grocery stores (Berkeley Bowl). Concerns were raised about inequities in placing affordable housing near areas with environmental hazards. Participants were open to light industrial uses next to residential, and those uses “bleeding” into San Pablo Ave, but emphasized safety due to noise, pollution and toxins.



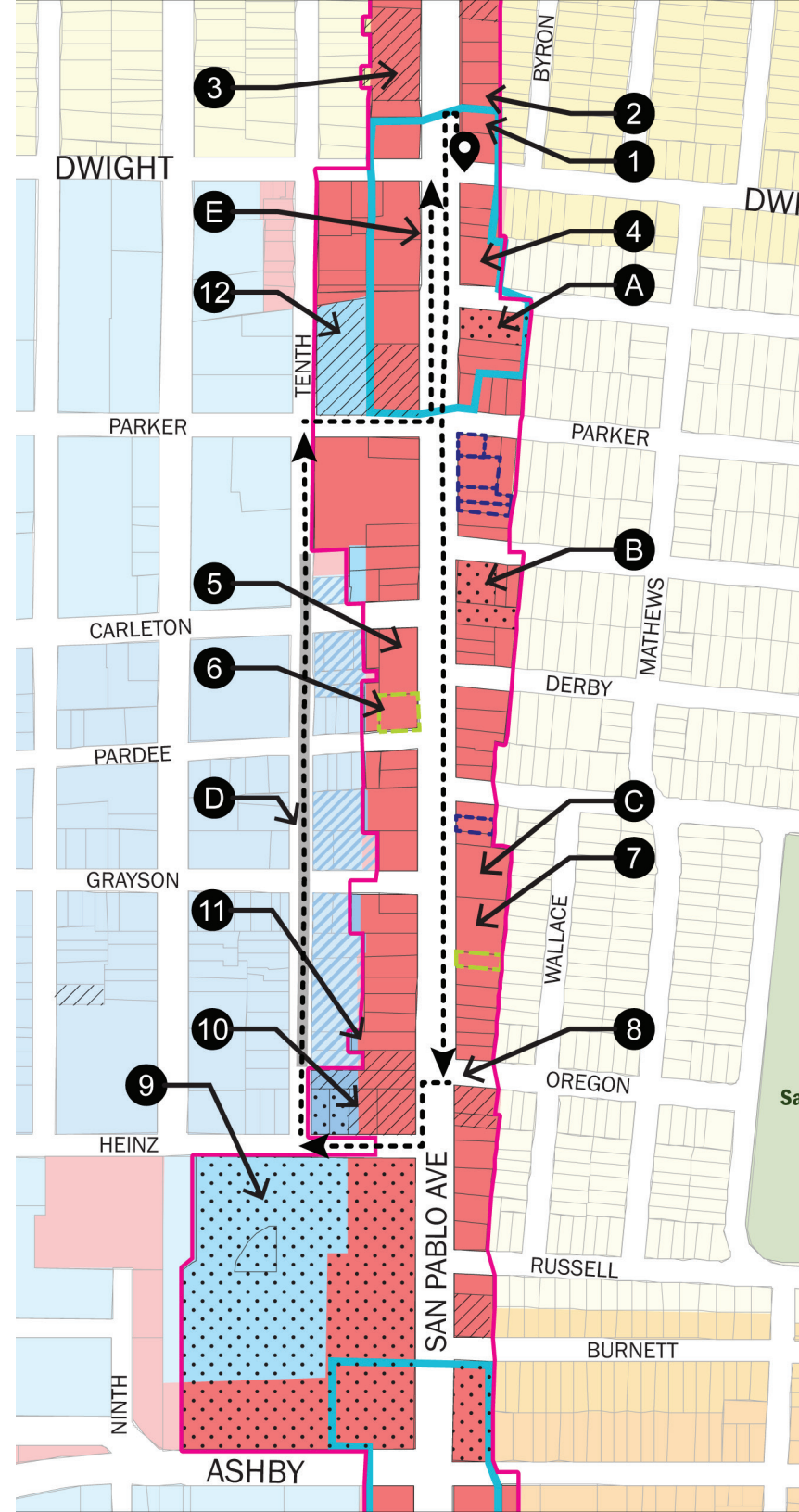
San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan

Walking Tour

- 1** 2435 San Pablo Ave (Poet's Place)
Mixed-use development under construction
- 2** 2427-2435 San Pablo Ave
Mixed-use development proposal
- 3** 2424 San Pablo Ave (Solar Express Car Wash)
Commercial property
- 4** 2527 San Pablo Ave (The Grinnell)
Housing opportunity site
- A** 2551 San Pablo Ave (Existing towing service)
Housing opportunity site
- B** 2625-2641 San Pablo Ave (Car repair shop)
Housing opportunity site
- 5** 2700 San Pablo Ave (Avenue West Apartments)
Existing mixed-use building
- 6** 2720 San Pablo Ave
Mixed-use development proposal
- C** 2733 San Pablo Ave
Mixed-use development proposal
- 7** 2747 San Pablo Avenue (The Bloom Berkeley)
Existing mixed-use building
- 8** Intersection San Pablo Avenue and Oregon St
Public realm
- 9** 2900 San Pablo Ave (Heinz Building)
Commercial property
- 10** 2837 San Pablo Ave (Meyer Sound Properties)
Commercial property
- 11** 2820 San Pablo Ave and 2821 10th St
Mixed-use development proposal
- D** Walk along 10th St
- 12** 2546 San Pablo Ave (Bank of America)
Housing Element opportunity site
- E** 2500-2512 San Pablo Ave and 1094-1098 Dwight Way
Existing commercial building

LEGEND

Zoning Class			
C-N	R-1	M	R-4
C-AC	R-1A	MM	R-BMU
C-SA	R-2	MULI	SP
C-U	R-2A	MUR	Parks
C-W	R-3	Schools	U
New Housing Opportunity Sites	Proposed Specific Plan Area		
Housing Element Opportunity Sites	Designated Nodes		
Potential Specific Plan Expansion	Side streets to study for open space		
Plan Area Likely Sites			
Plan Area Pipeline Sites			





STOP 1+2

2435 San Pablo Ave (Poet's Place)

Under Construction
Height: 4-Stories, 50 ft
Mixed-Use



2427-2433 San Pablo Ave

Proposal
Height: 5-Stories, 70 ft
Mixed-Use



2427-2433 San Pablo Ave Street Strip Elevation

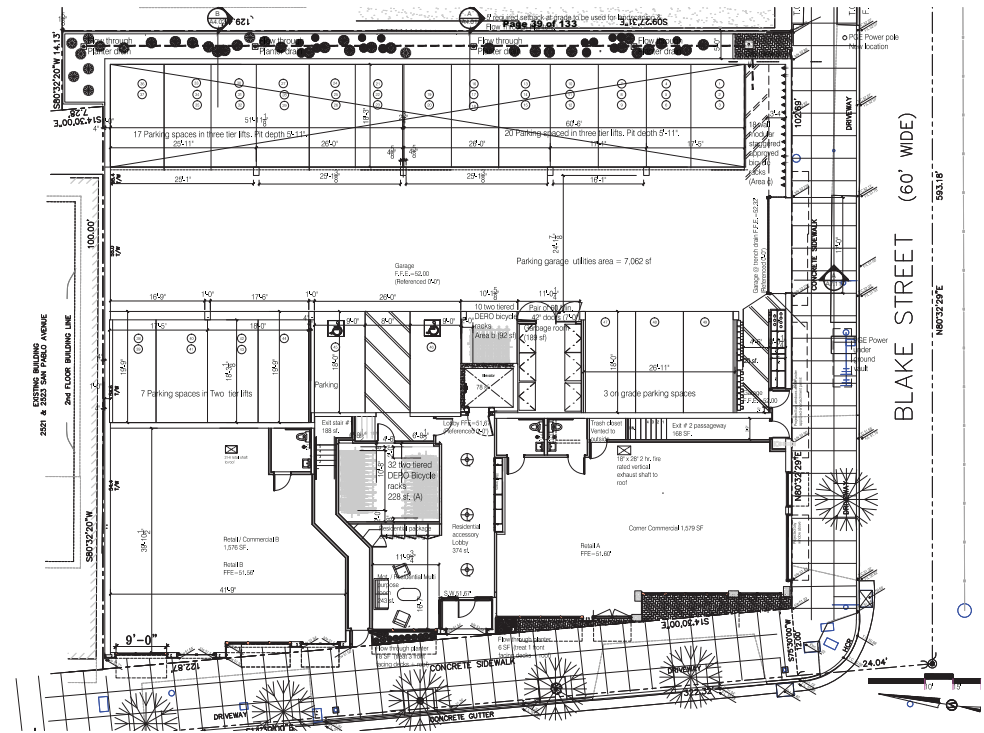


2427-2433 San Pablo Ave Street Strip Elevation

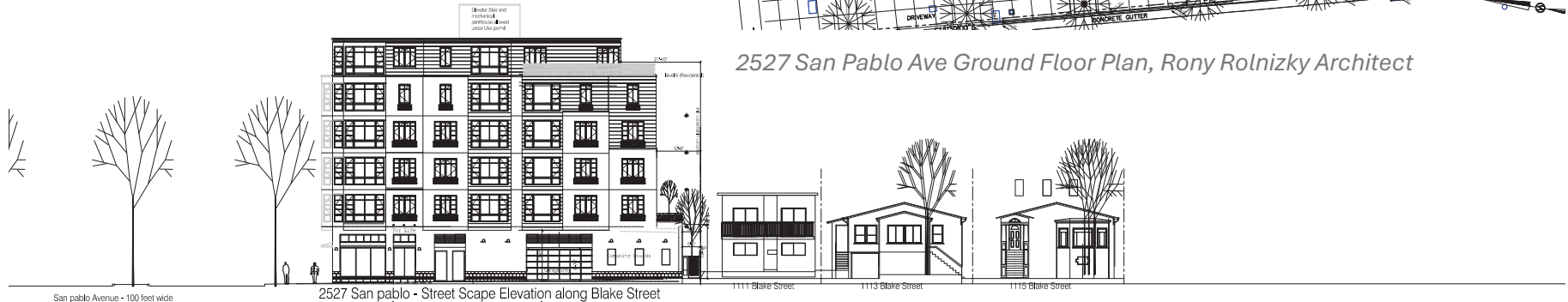
STOP 4

2527 San Pablo Ave (The Grinnell)

Under Construction
Height: 6-Stories, 65 ft
Mixed-Use



2527 San Pablo Ave Ground Floor Plan, Rony Rolnizky Architect



2527 San pablo - Street Scape Elevation along Blake Street



2527 San pablo - Street Scape Elevation along San pablo Avenue Scale 1/8" = 1'-0" (7.27.2017)

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11.29.2016

0 10' 20'



Professional Seal
Street Scape Elevations
2527 San Pablo Ave. & Blake Streets
Scale: 1/8" = 1'-0"
Drawing A.305
11.29.2016
Rev. 248.2.27.2017

2527 San Pablo Ave Streetscape Elevations, Rony Rolnizky Architect

STOP 5+6

2700 San Pablo Ave (Avenue West Apartments)

Existing building
Height: 4-Stories
Mixed-Use



2720 San Pablo Ave

Proposal
Height: 7-Stories, 78 ft
Mixed-Use



2720 San Pablo Avenue elevation, illustration by Trachtenberg Architects



2720 San Pablo Avenue west-side view, elevation by Trachtenberg Architects

STOP 7

2747 San Pablo Ave (The Bloom)

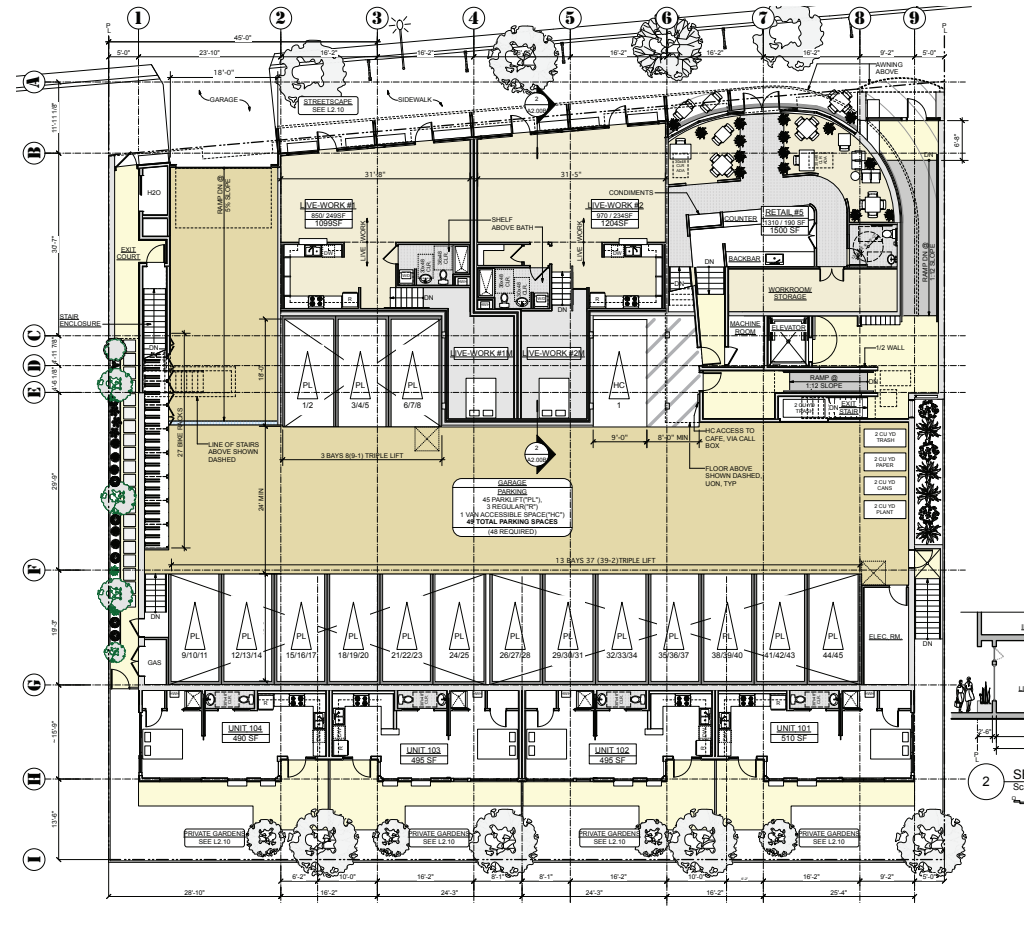
Existing building

Height: 5-Stories

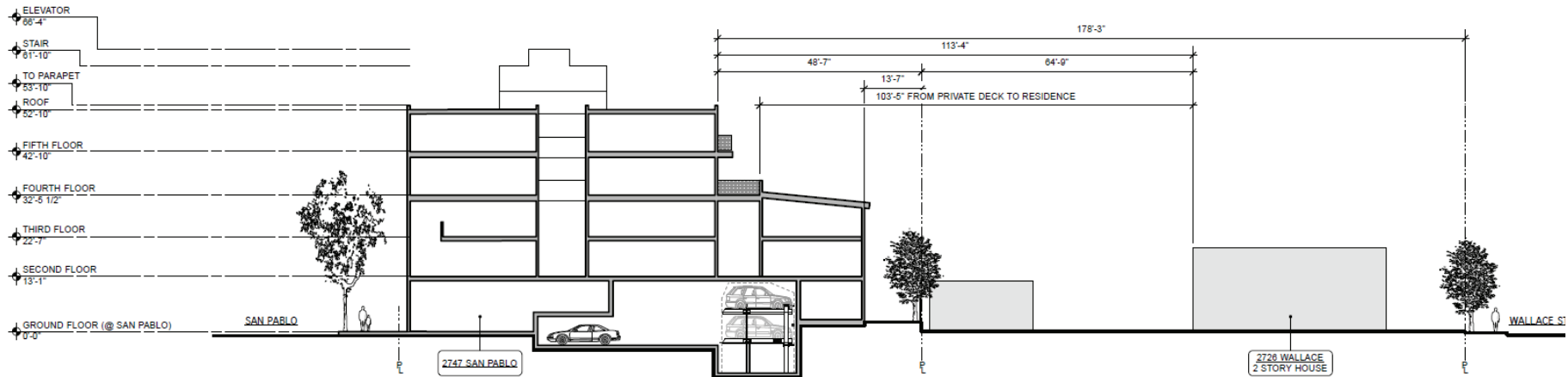
Mixed-Use: Commercial, Live-Work, Residential



2747 San Pablo Avenue Aerial Photo



2747 San Pablo Avenue Ground Floor Plan



2747 San Pablo Avenue East-West Context Elevation

STOP 9

2900 San Pablo Ave (The Heinz Building)

Existing commercial building with large parking lot



2900 San Pablo Ave, Heinz Building Parking Lot



STOP 11

2820 San Pablo Ave and 2821 10th St

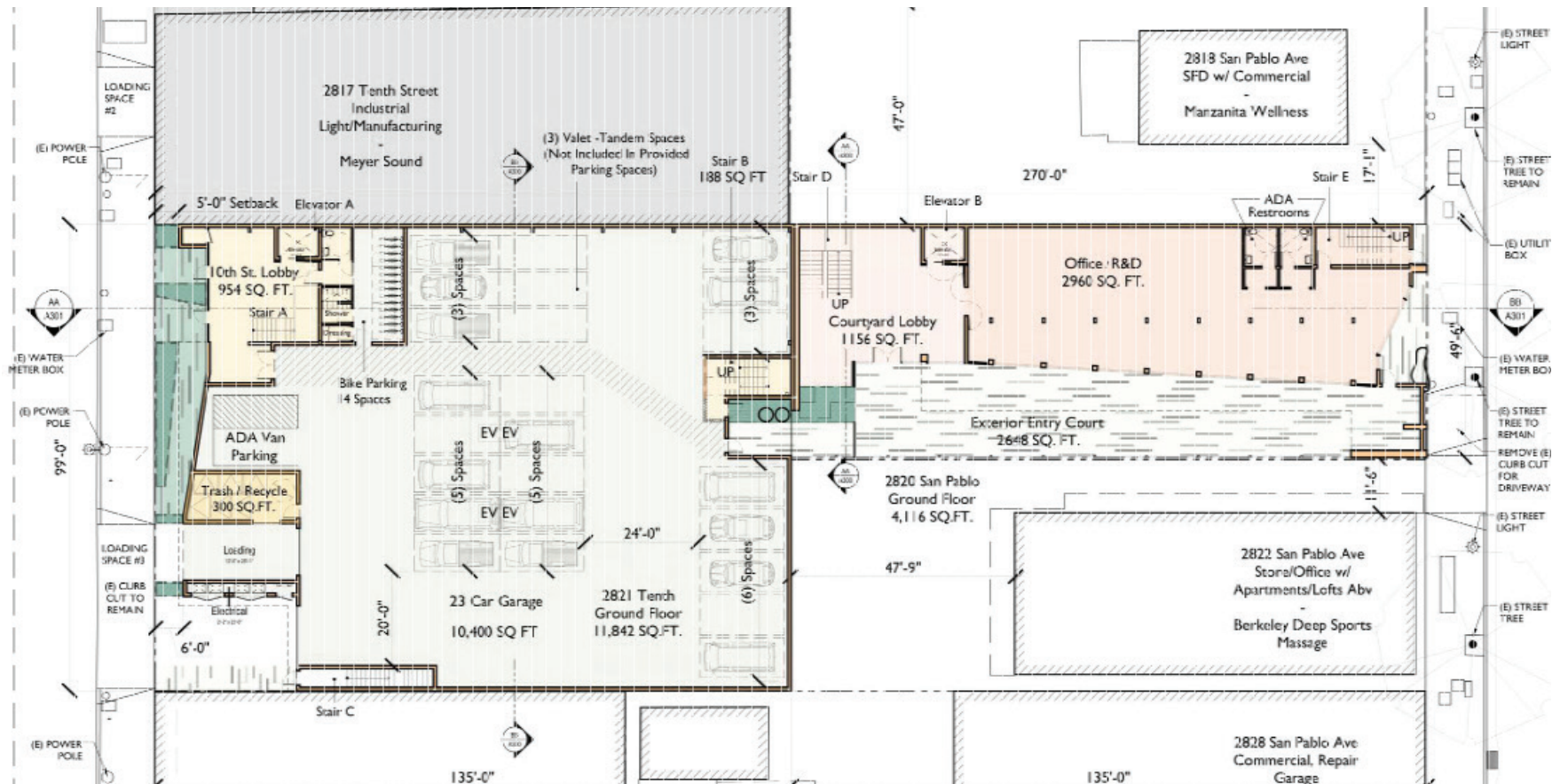
Proposal
 Height: 4-Stories
 Mixed-Use: Commercial, Light industrial, Residential



2820 San Pablo Ave Rendering, Studio KDA



2821 10th St Rendering, Studio KDA



2820 San Pablo Ave Ground Floor Plan, Studio KDA