



## CITY COUNCIL STAFF REPORT

**MEETING DATE:** September 23, 2024

**ITEM TITLE:** Consideration of Adopting a Resolution Endorsing the Refined Street Designs and Direct Staff to Proceed with Preparing the Downtown Specific Plan and Streetscape Master Plan.

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### RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that the City Council adopt a Resolution endorsing the refined street designs and direct staff to proceed with preparing the Downtown Specific Plan and Streetscape Master Plan.

### FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

There are no fiscal impacts associated with receiving a presentation and adopting the Resolution endorsing a street design and directing staff to continue to prepare the Downtown Specific Plan and Streetscape Master Plan. Funding to prepare the Downtown Specific Plan and Streetscape Master Plan (C2105) – Downtown Planning Initiative (Specific Plan) has been previously appropriated. At this time, no funds have been appropriated for construction and implementation of improvements to downtown streets.

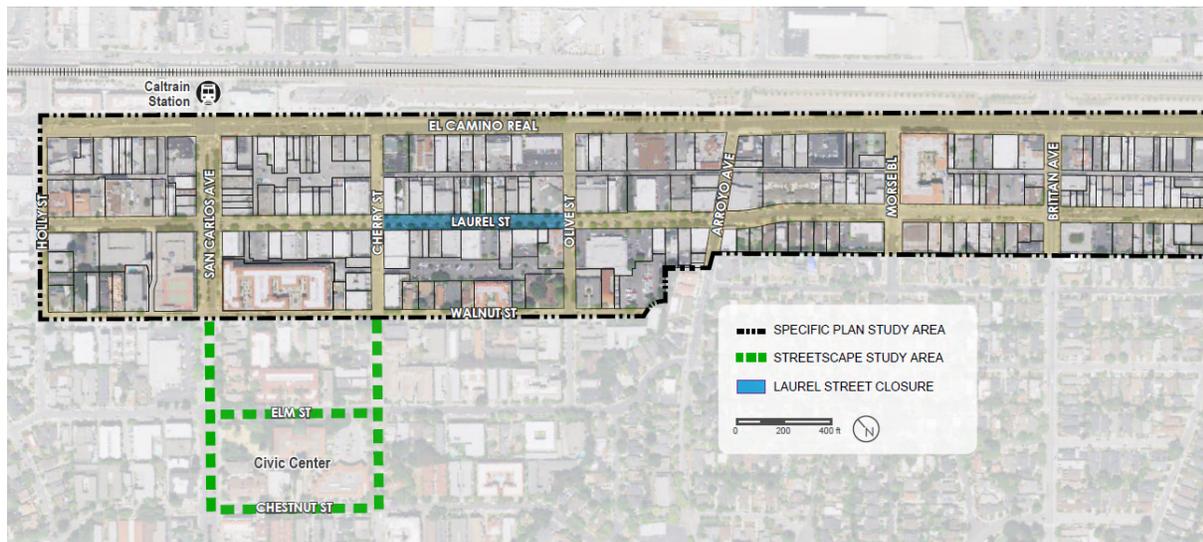
### BACKGROUND:

The San Carlos City Council adopted a Strategic Plan, which directed City staff to:

*“..... work with residents, property owners, business owners, committees, commissions, the Chamber of Commerce, and all other interested members of the community to develop a plan to understand and ensure that the downtown meets the needs of the community and businesses now and into the future.”*

The Downtown Specific Plan and Streetscape Master Plan study area (Figure 1) is framed by Holly Street to the north, Greenwood Avenue to the south, El Camino Real to the east, and Walnut Street to the west. The Downtown Specific Plan will also address the streets around the Civic Center including San Carlos Avenue, Cherry Street, Elm Street, and Chestnut Street, as indicated by the green dotted line in Figure 1 below.

**Figure 1. Downtown Specific Plan and Streetscape Master Plan Study Area**



## Meeting Purpose

Since receiving the Council’s input on the Downtown Advisory Committee’s (“DTAC’s”) endorsed street designs on June 10, 2024, staff and the consultant team worked together to refine the street designs and presented these refinements (plus traffic and parking impact key findings) to the San Carlos business community on August 28, 2024, and to all City of San Carlos commissions and committees on September 3, 2024.

The purpose of this meeting is to present these refined street designs and their effects on traffic and parking outcomes to the Council. Staff is asking the Council to consider adopting a Resolution (Attachment 1, Exhibit A) to endorse these refined street designs so that the project team can continue drafting the Downtown Specific Plan and accompanying Downtown Streetscape Master Plan. Although no final decision will be made, should the Council adopt the Resolution and approve the refined street designs, these drawings will serve as an imprint and influence the policies, standards, and specifications of the Specific Plan and Streetscape Master Plan as they continue to evolve and eventually be released for public review and ultimately, considered by the Council for formal adoption.

## Summary of Benefits

The refined street designs aim to be consistent with and further the objectives of the:

- ✓ Council approved 2020 Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan, and
- ✓ Council approved 2021 East Side Innovation District Vision Plan, which calls for increased connectivity and boosting pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure.

In addition to the above, a draft vision statement (Attachment 2) was developed for this Downtown Specific Plan and Streetscape Master Plan project based on community input, including DTAC. In addition, guiding principles (Attachment 3), were also developed out of the community

engagement process; these guiding principles call for prioritizing and leading with mobility and connectivity, downtown vibrancy, placemaking and identity, all resting on a foundation of equity and resilience. The City-approved 2020 Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan, the 2021 East Side Innovation District Vision Plan, the vision statement, the guiding principles, input from the City Council, and extensive community engagement from City commissions and committees helped shape the proposed redesigns for downtown San Carlos streets.

### **Summary of Design Changes**

- Significantly widened sidewalks (sidewalks proposed to be 20 feet wide on San Carlos Avenue and Laurel Street)
- Protected bike lanes (on San Carlos Avenue and El Camino Real)
- Improved outdoor dining space
- Urban greening: i.e. consistent street trees, tree “groves” (for shade) and rain gardens (for stormwater management)
- Other amenities such as outdoor seating, event and festival space accommodations, pavilions, opportunities for public art, drinking fountains, power outlets and charging stations
- Connectivity between Downtown, Caltrain, and East San Carlos for all modes of travel (enhancing the experience pedestrians and bicyclists, and Caltrain riders)

### **Summary of Outcomes as a Result of Design Changes**

- Added downtown vitality, vibrancy
- Improved shopping and dining experience
- Enhanced pedestrian experience
- Safer bike routes
- Increase in visitors
- More space for downtown programming, and activities
- Resulting in people spending more time in downtown San Carlos

### **Milestones Since June 10, 2024**

On June 10, 2024, the Council received a presentation on street designs endorsed by DTAC, which had been previously reviewed by San Carlos’ Economic Development Advisory Commission (EDAC); the Parks Recreation, and Culture Commission (PRCC); the Planning and Transportation Commission (PTC), and the Youth Advisory Council (YAC). At this meeting, staff and the consultant team received the following comments from the Council (Attachment 6):

*For **San Carlos Avenue**, Council comments and recommendations included:*

- North side of San Carlos Avenue is too constrained (concern about losing sidewalk space)
- General agreement to remove median strip if additional space is needed
- General agreement to remove parking on the south side of San Carlos Avenue
- Concern about drivers being able to parallel park on San Carlos Avenue on the segment between El Camino Real and Laurel Street
- The bicycle lanes should be protected
- Expressed concerns about losing travel lanes because of what that might do to traffic conditions

*For **El Camino Real**, Council comments and recommendations included:*

- Concerns about losing parking spaces on the west side of El Camino Real

*For **Laurel Street**, Council comments and recommendations included:*

- For the 600 block of Laurel Street, make sure there is sufficient space for outdoor dining (along the building frontage and along the proposed tree strip)
- The proposed curbless configuration on the 600 and 800 blocks should consider safety of outdoor diners
- The new plaza off the 600 block of Laurel Street (i.e. 'Wheeler Plaza' – to be renamed), should be a flexible use, with a multi-use pavilion, allowing for change in activities with the seasons, include tables and chairs; pods for business start-ups/incubator space okay
- For the central plaza of the 700 block of Laurel Street – 'Centennial Plaza' – pull the proposed pavilion out toward the center a little more so it is visually prominent from the 700 block

*For **other streets**, the Council comments and recommendations included:*

- For Arroyo Avenue, accommodate outdoor dining on the north side, and simplify sidewalks
- For Brittan Avenue, resolve merging lanes to gain space for bike lanes

***Other comments from the Council:***

- Come back to share the overall parking loss totals
- Provide examples of cities that have 'sway' streets
- Study ways to incentivize parking turnover
- Provide more detailed renderings from a pedestrian's perspective
- Be thoughtful about which trees to plant downtown

## **Online Community Survey**

Since the June 10, 2024 City Council meeting, staff released an online survey asking the public for input on materials, trees, and other streetscape features that would establish the look and feel of redesigned streets in the downtown area. A total of 848 responses were received (Attachments 10 and 11).

## **Council Subcommittee, Businesses Community, Commission and Committee Meetings**

While that survey was underway, the project team refined street designs and tested them to understand what effects these proposed redesigns would have on traffic and parking. Both the refined street designs plus traffic and parking outcomes were presented to the City Council Downtown Subcommittee on August 27, shared with the downtown business community on August 28, 2024, and presented to the DTAC, EDAC, PRCC, PTC, and YAC during an All-Commissions Special Joint Meeting on September 3, 2024. Comments and feedback from the business community and all commissions are provided in Attachments 7 and 8.

Overall, the business attendees reacted positively to the street redesigns, but expressed concerns about loading zones, how much parking would be removed, whether the parklets would remain, parklets blocking storefronts becoming eyesores and when will the City remove them, timeline for the project – including construction timing, how much it would cost to redesign streets and how will the City pay for it, requests to move Farmer's Market to side streets, access to the 600 block

being affected by the 700 block closure, accommodations for deliveries, significant concerns about rodents, and concerns that the streets are getting dirtier.

### **All Commissions Special Joint Meeting**

At the All-Commissions Special Joint Meeting on September 3, 2024, staff and the consultant team received support for the redesigns, including how transformational this project would be to San Carlos. There were comments related to: green building and solar (i.e. go beyond just solar ready); EV charging stations; the use of drought-tolerant native landscaping; clarification needed about remaining parking stalls and where these would be; length of construction periods and phasing and their impacts to traffic and downtown businesses (will the City pay businesses to offset losses during construction periods?); use of the alleys as key resource; traffic queues along San Carlos Avenue and strategic phasing for later implementation; concerns about the accuracy of parking study findings related to parking availability at Wheeler Garage and along Walnut between Cherry and Olive Streets; more information about timing of the project; use of the sidewalk/new plazas and their regulations; a plan for cohesive outdoor dining furniture; stronger parking enforcement in the near term; and, safety features of curbless streets.

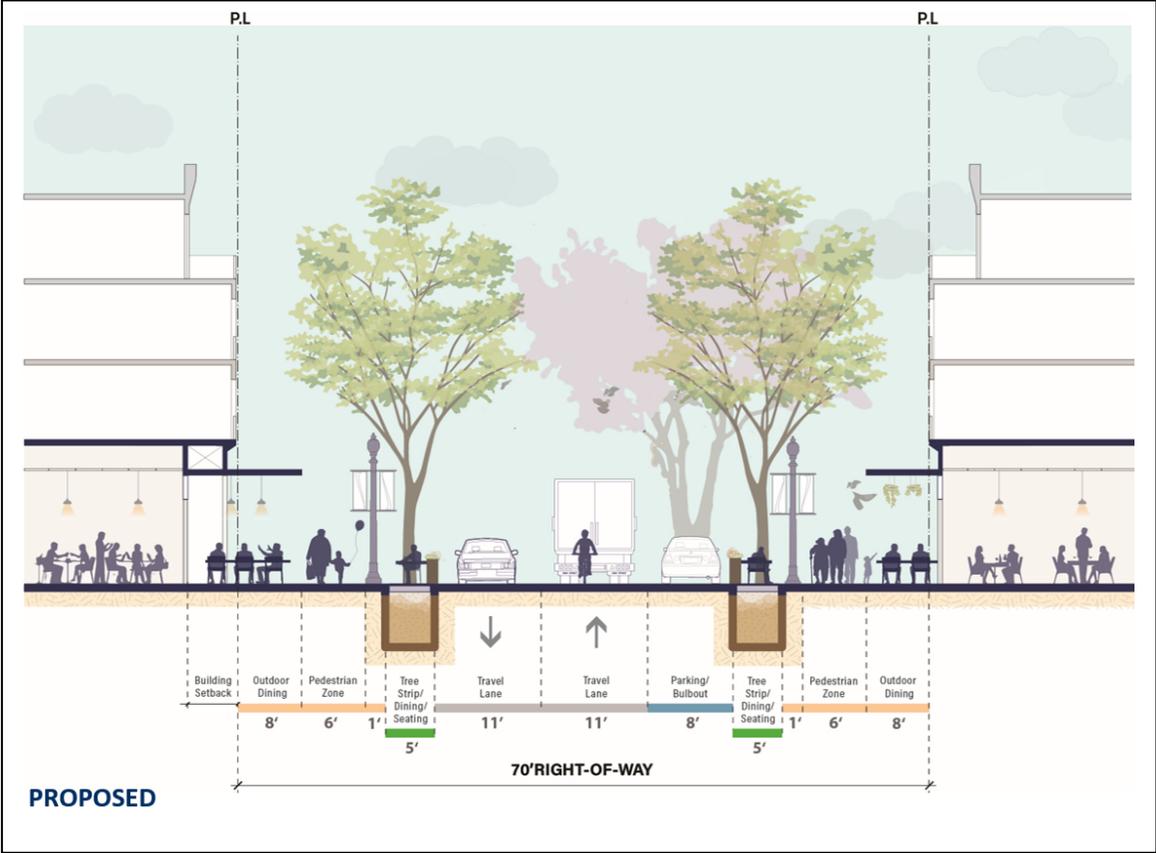
### **Refinements to Street Designs (Exhibit A to Attachment 1):**

#### **600 and 800 Block of Laurel Street**

Key features of the proposed redesign of the 600 and 800 block of Laurel Street include:

- ✓ Increases in sidewalk width from 9 ft. wide to 20 ft. wide on both sides of Laurel Street
- ✓ Curbless street design
- ✓ More room for outdoor dining and public seating
- ✓ Shared bicycle lanes (i.e. “sharrows”)
- ✓ Alternating multi-use curb zone on both sides of street for parking, pick-up/drop off, and deliveries
- ✓ Ability to accommodate festivals and farmer’s market layouts
- ✓ Trees for shading and landscaped “rain gardens”
- ✓ Transforming the temporary parking lot (between Blue Line Pizza and Paris Baguette) into a new public plaza, with new business pop-up opportunities, multi-purpose pavilion, public restrooms, trees and rain gardens, outdoor dining and public seating (complete with utility hook ups, i.e. no generators)
- ✓ Bicycle parking
- ✓ Public drinking fountain
- ✓ Power outlets and electric vehicle charging

**Figure 2. Cross Section of 600 and 800 blocks of Laurel Street (Looking north)**

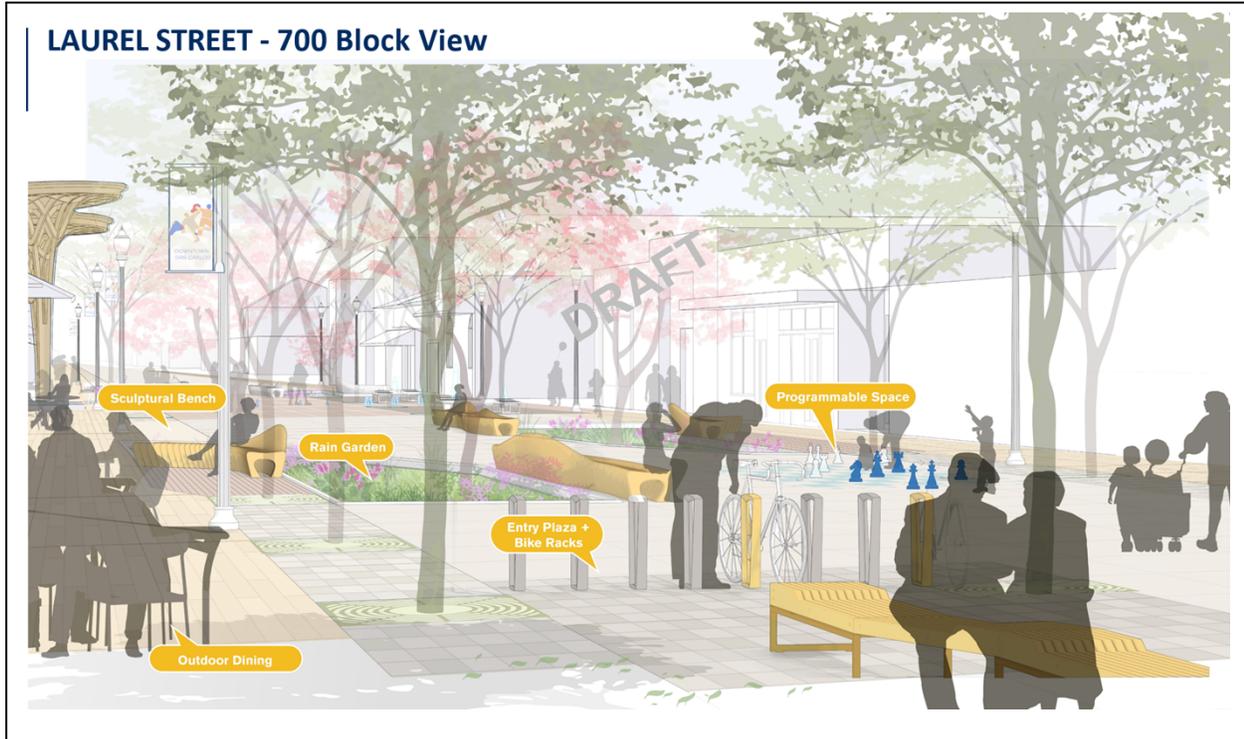


## 700 Block of Laurel Street

Key features of the proposed redesign of the 700 block of Laurel Street include:

- ✓ Maintaining the “sway” design from the 600 block of Laurel Street
- ✓ A full pedestrian plaza experience (closed to cars, and bicycle dismount zone)
- ✓ More room for outdoor dining
- ✓ Ample public seating
- ✓ Groves of trees for shading
- ✓ Public art opportunity for new fountain
- ✓ Activated/programming areas
- ✓ Bicycle parking
- ✓ Public drinking fountain
- ✓ Redesign of Harrington Park with multi-purpose stage/pavilion, public restrooms, trees and rain gardens, public seating

**Figure 3. Draft Rendering of “Centennial Plaza” (700 Block of Laurel Street)**

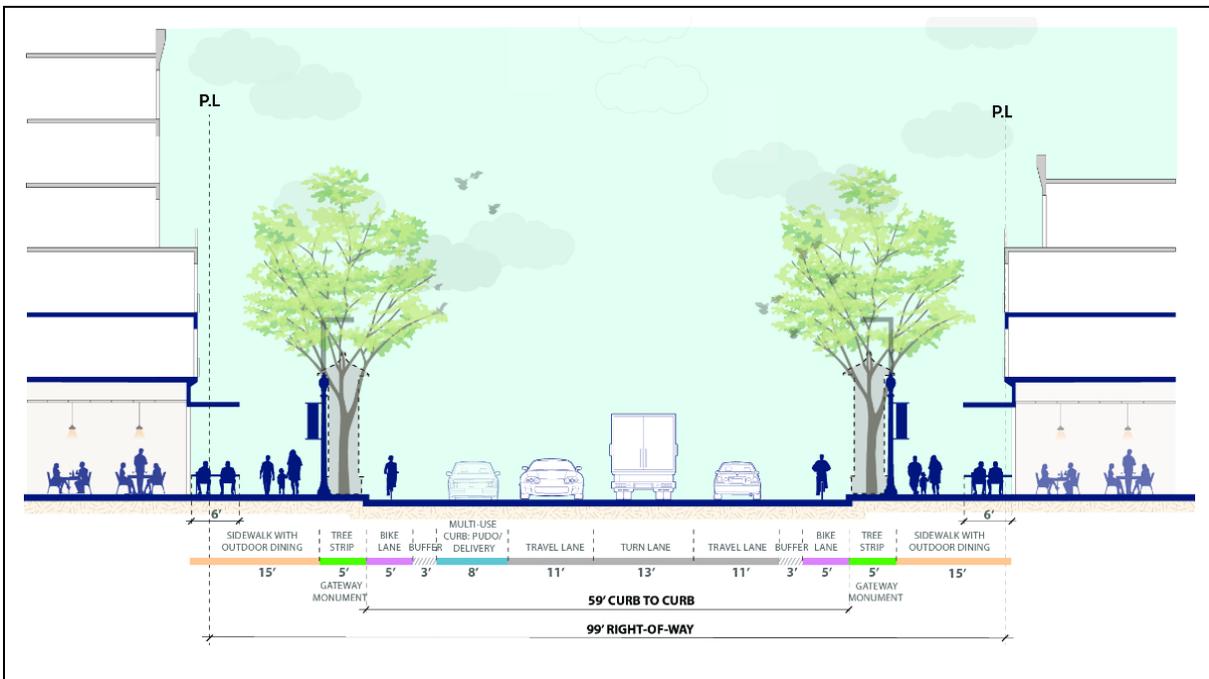


## 1100 and 1200 San Carlos Avenue

Key features of the proposed redesign of the 1100 and 1200 blocks of San Carlos Avenue include:

- ✓ Enhanced pedestrian and bicycle facilities connecting the east side and Caltrain to downtown San Carlos
- ✓ Increasing the sidewalk from 11 ft. wide to 20 ft. wide on both sides of San Carlos Avenue
- ✓ More room for outdoor dining
- ✓ Protected bicycle lanes on both sides
- ✓ Multi-use curb zone for parking, pick-up/drop off, and deliveries (curb zone on south side of San Carlos Avenue)

**Figure 4. Cross Section of 1100 and 1200 blocks of San Carlos Avenue (Looking east, toward Caltrain Station)**

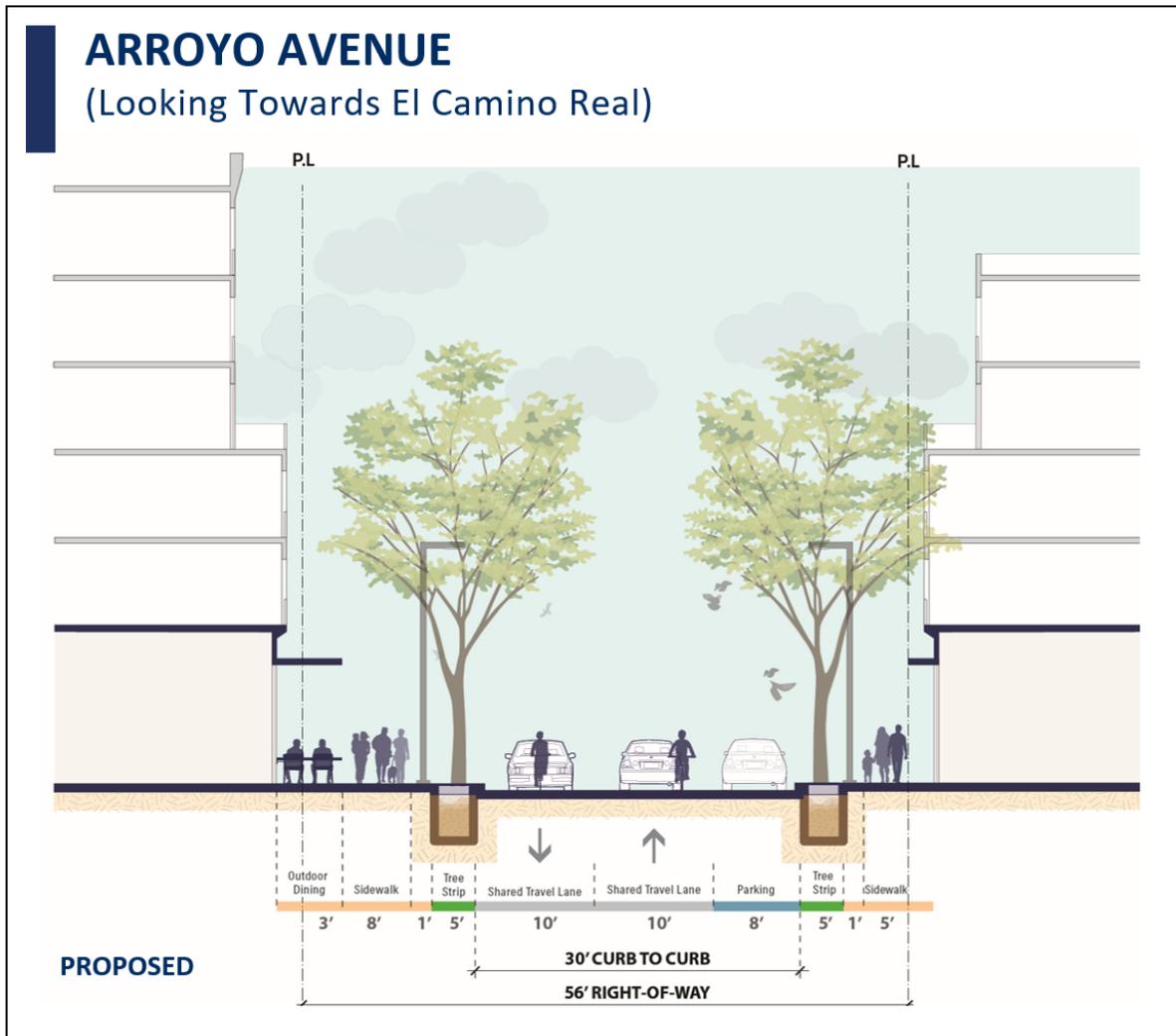


## Arroyo Avenue

Key features of the proposed redesign of Arroyo Avenue include:

- ✓ Increasing the sidewalk from 6 ft. wide to 11 ft. wide on the south side of Arroyo Avenue
- ✓ Increasing the sidewalk from 6 ft. to 17 ft. wide on the north side of Arroyo Avenue
- ✓ New street tree strips
- ✓ More room for outdoor dining on the north side of Arroyo Avenue
- ✓ “Bicycle Boulevard” approach to shared bicycle lane design to prioritize and strengthen east-west bicycle connectivity (through speed calming measures such as chicanes, etc.)
- ✓ Strong bicycle and pedestrian connection from the Arroyo underpass to the East Side

**Figure 5. Cross Section of Arroyo Avenue (Looking east, towards El Camino Real)**

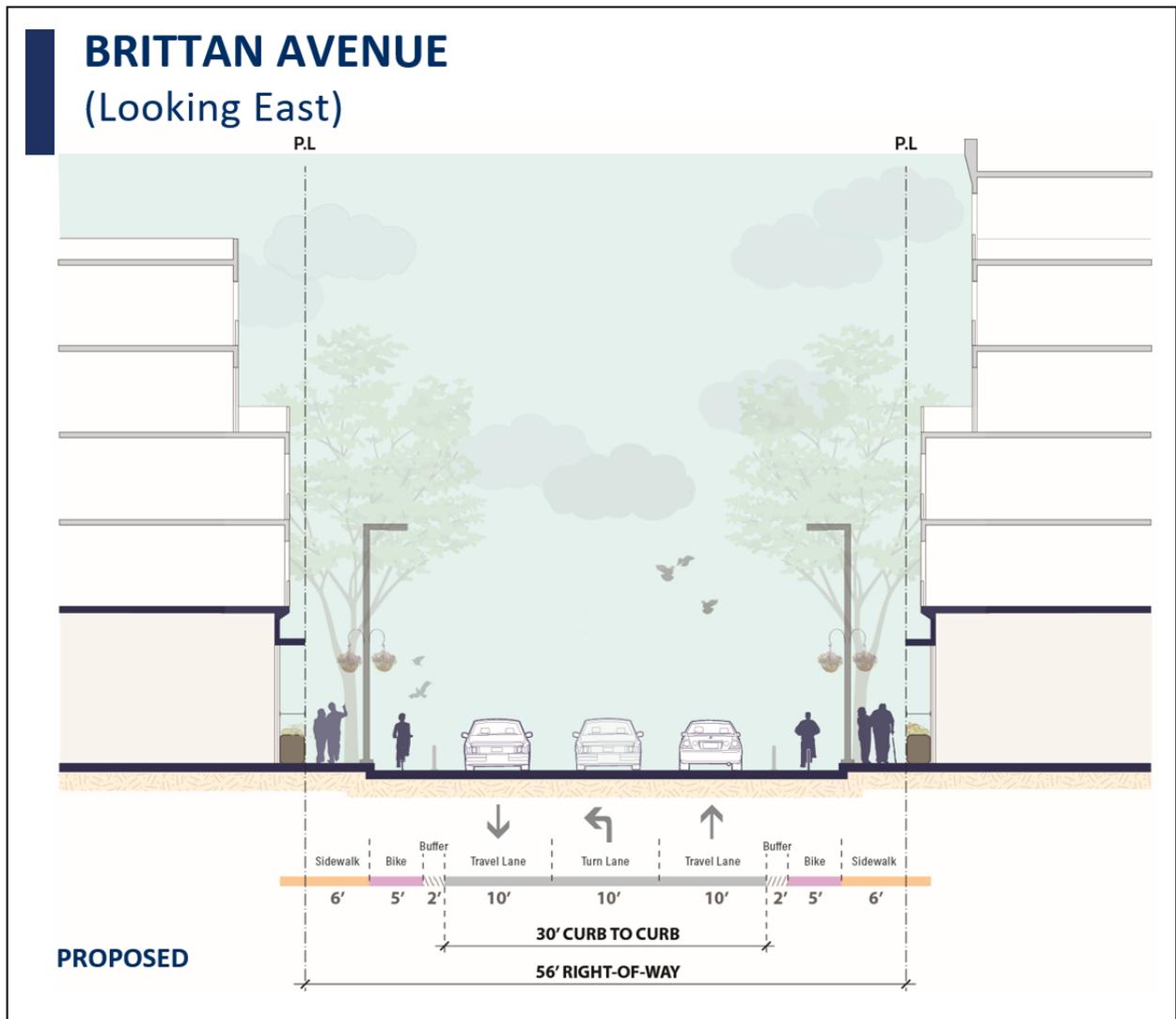


**Brittan Avenue**

Key features of the proposed redesign of Brittan Avenue include:

- ✓ Retention of 6 ft wide sidewalk
- ✓ Reduced travel lane width (remove one of the west bound merging lanes) to accommodate new protected bicycle lanes on both sides of Brittan Avenue (move merging function back to east side of Old County Rd)
- ✓ New street tree strips
- ✓ Strong bicycle and pedestrian connection to the East Side
- ✓ Street design elements such as streetlights with two-way hook style hanging baskets

Figure 6. Cross Section of Brittan Avenue (Looking east, towards El Camino Real)

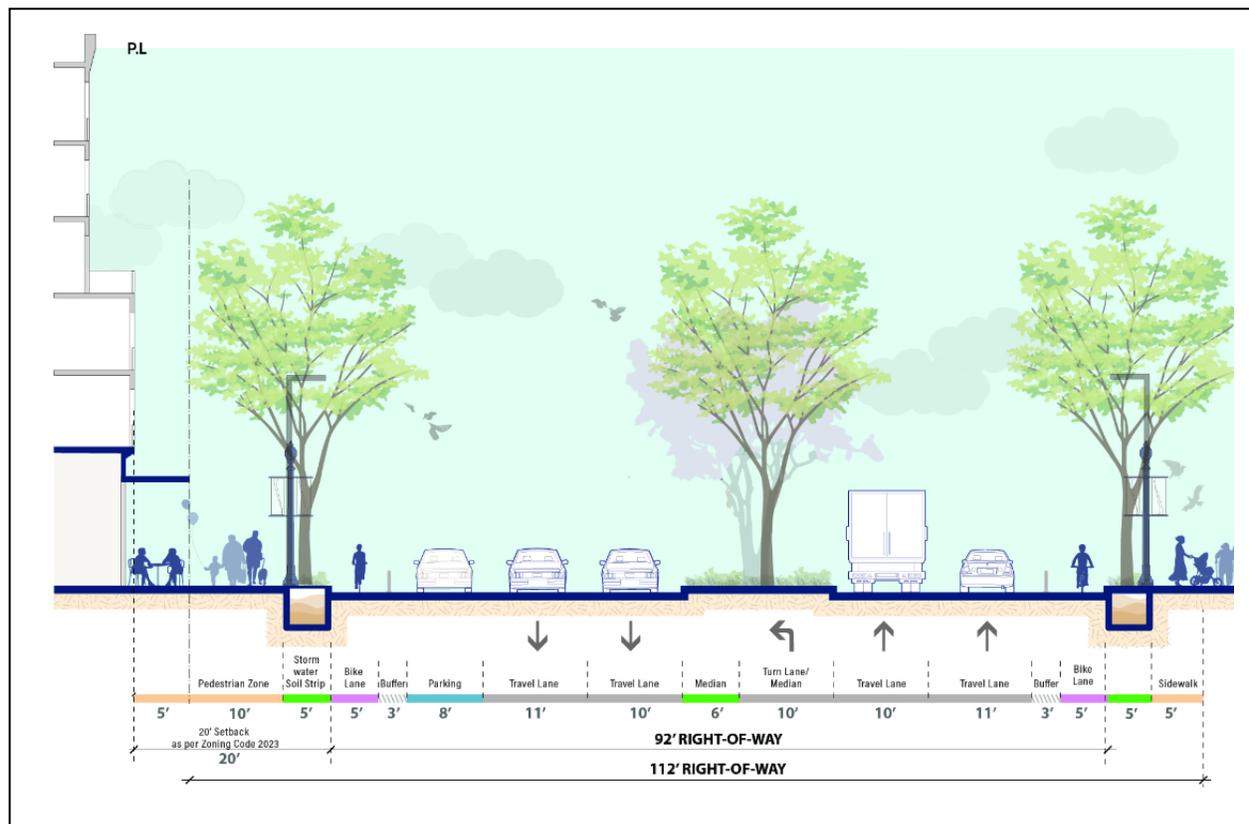


## El Camino Real

Key features of the proposed redesign of El Camino Real (full length of city limits) include:

- ✓ Adherence to the Grand Boulevard Initiative and the San Carlos Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan 2020 strategy to convert El Camino Real into a multi-modal boulevard, supporting equitable right-of-way distribution
- ✓ Increased sidewalk width from 7 ft to 20 ft. wide on the west side of El Camino Real to allow for more outdoor dining/seating area
- ✓ Removal of one southbound lane (reduce from from three to two) to make room for a new protected bicycle lane on the west side of El Camino Real
- ✓ Retention of parking on the west side of El Camino Real
- ✓ Reduction in travel lane width on northbound lanes to make room for a protected bicycle lane on the east side of El Camino Real
- ✓ New street tree strips on both sides of El Camino Real
- ✓ Strong bicycle and pedestrian connections across the city, and leading to and from the East Side

**Figure 7. Cross Section of El Camino Real (Looking north)**



## **Key Findings:**

### **Traffic**

To determine the effects of street designs on traffic and circulation within the downtown, the project team reviewed the existing circulation plan and travel patterns throughout the downtown, including traffic volumes, traffic operations, pedestrian, bicycle and transit infrastructure. A total of 30 intersections were included in the study.

The objectives of the traffic study were to determine:

- ✓ Traffic conditions with the streets in their current conditions (i.e. if the City chose not to redesign any streets)
- ✓ Redesign of streets and their effects on traffic in the near term (i.e. over the next 5 years, by 2030)
- ✓ Redesign of streets and their effects on traffic over the long term (i.e. over the next 20 years, by 2045)

The traffic study showed that while there can be different times when congestion occurs during the week, the identified hotspots are the El Camino Real intersections at Holly Street, San Carlos Avenue, and Brittan Avenue. These three locations experience higher delays and back-ups than the other 27 study intersections (located between El Camino Real and Elm Street, and between Holly Street and Brittan Avenue). However, these three locations currently operate at an acceptable level and are projected to continue operating at acceptable levels in the near term.

The key takeaways of the traffic study include:

- ✓ Traffic adapts to changes in the network. For example, the closure of the 700 block of Laurel Street has led to changes in how traffic is routed and where people park, but has not resulted in circulation or parking deficiencies.
- ✓ Near-term traffic forecast (2030) shows little change, even with road diets on San Carlos Ave and El Camino Real.
- ✓ San Carlos will gain improved connections between downtown, Caltrain, and the City's East Side, with wider sidewalks and bike facilities.
- ✓ Long-term traffic forecast (2045) shows slower traffic and queues due to local and regional growth, yet still at a manageable level overall.
- ✓ Downtown Specific Plan growth will incrementally add to the travel times and queues over time.
- ✓ Transportation Demand Management (TDM) programs will lead to increases in transit, walking, and bicycling, and lessen the effects of increased traffic.

- ✓ Other traffic operational improvements, such as traffic signal timing changes and use of Holly Street as a swing lane, can also lessen the effects of increased traffic.

## Parking

To properly assess the potential effects of streetscape changes, the project team conducted a comprehensive parking inventory and occupancy survey of all public and private on- and off-street parking spaces in the downtown during mid-day, early evening, and late-night hours that gauged parking demand conditions at various times of the day. Parking surveys were conducted on a Thursday, Saturday, and Sunday to collect varying weekday and weekend conditions, including the Farmer's Market.

In total over 3,100 parking spaces were inventoried.

High parking occupancy levels were observed in certain areas (600 and 800 blocks of Laurel Street, public off-street lots on the 700 block of Laurel) while other areas were sparsely occupied (Walnut and Elm Streets, the SamTrans garage, Wheeler garage, and Caltrain lot). Overall, roughly 60% of all spaces were occupied on Thursday from 12:00 p.m. to 1:00 p.m. This is referred to as the peak parking period, where the study found most of the cars parking at a single point in time. As a point of comparison, the total parking occupancy for the entire downtown was 46% on Saturday between 7:00 pm and 8:00 pm when many restaurants and bars are active.

To make room for wider sidewalks, ample outdoor dining, and protected bicycle lanes, the proposed streets designs would require the removal of 47 on-street spaces on San Carlos Avenue and Laurel Street. There is currently a total of 779 downtown on-street spaces between Holly Street and Arroyo Avenue. The removal of 47 spaces will result in a 6% reduction in parking spaces compared with what is available today.

A review of peak (mid-day, Thursday) parking demand data shows that there are 102 empty on-street parking spaces within one block of Laurel and 144 empty public spaces at Wheeler garage. These data indicate there will still be ample available parking for motorists even with the removal of 47 on-street parking spaces. The data also showed that there were an additional 51 to 73 on-street parking spaces available within the immediate plan area during these times.

An analysis of future parking demand generated by new development through 2045 shows that there is *adequate parking supply* to accommodate an increase in commercial and residential development. Although mid-day Thursday is the current overall peak hour of demand for the downtown, the future parking supply will be most impacted on Saturday evenings when restaurants and bars are active and future residents are largely present. The combination of demand from future development on Saturday evening increases overall downtown parking occupancy from roughly half to approximately three-quarters. The removal of 47 spaces under the streetscape plan would have a very small impact compared to the larger effects of development.

While the current on-street parking supply is generally sufficient to meet anticipated parking demand/needs and the future overall parking supply is adequate to accommodate future demand, the Downtown Specific Plan will still need to include parking management strategies to help

manage how the parking is used to increase parking turnover and enhance parking availability for all users. This will be the case with or without improved/redesigned streets.

Parking management strategies can help manage both existing and future parking demand, accommodate parking for the downtown's various users (e.g., employees, residents, patrons, etc.), and prioritize cost-effective strategies.

Based on best practices from other communities, the parking management plan will consider a range of potential strategies such as regulation and pricing, shared parking, new parking opportunity sites, permitting and enforcement, as well as parking and transportation demand management requirements for new development.

The selection and shaping of several of these strategies is necessary due to new state laws regarding parking, pedestrian safety, and mobility. In addition, these strategies are also influenced and directed by current City policies such as those included in the General Plan, the Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan, and the Climate Mitigation and Adaptation Plan.

Overall, to get more sidewalk space, more outdoor dining, new and safe bicycle lanes, there is a need to remove 47 spaces in the immediate downtown core including along San Carlos Avenue (1100 and 1200 block), 600 block of Laurel Street, and the 800 block of Laurel Street (a removal of 6% of 779 total on-street spaces between Holly Street and Arroyo Avenue).

At peak parking hours there were between 83 to 102 empty on-street spaces within one block of Laurel Street, plus an additional 144 spaces in Wheeler parking garage, and another 51 to 73 spaces within the downtown plan area. The parking study verified that yes, there is limited available parking on the 600 and 800 blocks of Laurel Street and in the parking lots behind the 700 block. To better manage these parking spaces that are the closest to shops and restaurants, the project team will develop parking management strategies to encourage parking turnover and designate parking spaces for those who need it most (i.e. mobility impaired). The street designs also plan for designated pick-up and drop-off zones along Cherry and Olive Streets.

The data, both existing parking supply and parking occupancy rates, showed that there is no significant impediment to allowing new and improved street designs for downtown San Carlos.

#### NEXT STEPS:

Should the Council adopt a Resolution (Attachment 1) to endorse the final street designs, City staff and the project team will continue with drafting the Downtown Specific Plan and Streetscape Master Plan based on the Council's endorsement.

#### ALTERNATIVES:

The alternatives available to the City Council include:

1. Adopt a Resolution endorsing the refined street designs and direct staff to proceed with preparing the Downtown Specific Plan and Streetscape Master Plan; or
2. Do not adopt the Resolution; or
3. Provide staff with alternative direction.

Respectfully submitted by:

Al Savay, Community Development Director

Approved for submission by:



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Jeff Maltbie, City Manager

ATTACHMENT(S):

1. Proposed Resolution
  - Exhibit A to Attachment 1 – Refined Street Designs
    - a. 600 and 800 Laurel Street
    - b. 700 Laurel Street
    - c. 1100 and 1200 San Carlos Avenue
    - d. Arroyo Avenue
    - e. Brittan Avenue
    - f. El Camino Real
2. Draft Vision Statement for Downtown San Carlos
3. Draft Guiding Principles for Downtown San Carlos
4. Traffic Key Findings
5. Parking Key Findings
6. Meeting Notes – City Council Meeting, June 10, 2024
7. Meeting Notes – Downtown Business Stakeholder Meeting, August 28, 2024
8. Meeting Notes – All Commissions Meeting, September 3, 2024
9. Public Comments Emailed to City Staff
10. Downtown Streetscape Survey Results
11. Downtown Streetscape Survey – Individual Comments