

# Getting to Great Places

How better urban design can strengthen San Jose's future

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# Getting to Great Places

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The SPUR San Jose Advisory Board reviewed, debated and adopted this report as official policy on August 15, 2013.

# Executive Summary

Silicon Valley, the most dynamic and innovative economic engine in the world, is not creating great urban places. Having grown around the automobile, the valley consists largely of low-slung office parks, surface parking and suburban tract homes. But tastes and values are rapidly moving away from strictly suburban lifestyles. Today's top firms and top talent are increasingly demanding engaging places, diverse experiences and convenient amenities. Simply put, they are demanding urbanism.

The city of San Jose is critical to the future of the Bay Area. The Association of Bay Area Governments projects that San Jose will add more new residents in the coming decades than any other city in the region — more than San Francisco and Oakland combined. The shape of that growth is critically important to the sustainability, livability and economic vitality of the region. San Jose faces a particular set of challenges — shared by many American cities — around how to retool environments built for the automobile for a future that better supports walking, cycling and transit.

In 2011, the City of San Jose adopted Envision San Jose 2040, an ambitious new General Plan intended to guide the city's growth in the coming decades. It calls for the addition of 470,000 jobs and 120,000 housing units by 2040, with most new development concentrated in designated "Urban Villages" and other growth areas. It also imagines a dramatic shift to mixed, walkable "complete neighborhoods" that provide

basic services and amenities close to homes, workplaces and transit.

Achieving this transformation is a daunting challenge — much more so than is immediately apparent. To be successful will require changes in culture, public policy, professional and technical practices, infrastructure, markets and norms. San Jose's real estate market has been relatively soft. The city government faces fiscal challenges that limit its capacity for ambitious investment. Many aspects of this transformation are out of the control of policymakers, and many contradictory imperatives drive decisions within city government.

While the General Plan does an excellent job of sketching a transformational vision, and includes an impressive level of detail in defining the location and density of growth, its successful implementation is far from assured. The physical form of new development at the human scale will determine whether the benefits of denser land use patterns actually translate into livable, walkable, less car-oriented places or simply to denser sprawl — placeless apartment complexes and office parks hemmed in by worsening congestion.

San Jose brings tremendous assets to this challenge. The broad-based enthusiasm for a more urban future — coupled with the city's spectacular weather and natural setting, diverse communities, and legendary capacity for innovation — presents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to retool for a more sustainable and competitive future.

**"The 'Place-making Dividend' [is] the intrinsic value that accrues to a community when districts possess a strong sense of place that in turn results in high levels of repeat visits, increasing rents, retail sales, leasing demand, and capital value. Such a dividend occurs when individual real estate projects are so well designed and interconnected that they work as one integrated place."**

— *The Urban Land Institute*<sup>1</sup>

**"Start where you are."**

— *Pema Chodron*

<sup>1</sup> Geoffrey Booth, Bruce Leonard, Michael Pawlukiewicz, "Ten Principles for Reinventing Suburban Business Districts" (Urban Land Institute, 2002) available at: <http://www.uli.org/report/ten-principles-for-reinventing-americas-suburban-business-districts/>

## Major Project Goals

The recommendations in this report are intended to help San Jose accomplish the following:

### Improve the Development Process

1. Increase the speed, certainty and quality of development
2. Provide support to decision-makers and city staff in upholding policies and implementing the General Plan vision
3. Build urban design knowledge, capacity and enthusiasm
4. Support General Plan implementation and Urban Village planning

### Make San Jose More Livable and Attractive

5. Attract development that increases long-term economic value
6. Cultivate a better quality of life and sense of place
7. Attract top firms and top talent to San Jose

### Build Long-Term Sustainability

8. Support a shift to walking, cycling and transit
9. Create flexible places that can change over time
10. Align city resources and practices to realize efficiencies and support great places

# Taking the Steps to Get to Great Places



Ava Brackett

SPUR takes the vision espoused in the General Plan at its word. We believe that good urban places are both achievable and profoundly important to the quality of life, economic prospects and environmental sustainability of San Jose and the region as a whole. On the other hand, it is important to acknowledge that the urban design of most new development in San Jose falls far short of the mark if this transformation is to take place. The vision is compelling, but the political will and policy apparatus is not yet sufficient to achieve it.

If this were an easy problem, it would have been solved long ago. There is tremendous vision and talent in city government and considerable consensus about the desired outcomes. But the challenge resides in the details — of both the development process and its physical outcomes. A swarm of contradictory imperatives affects every project, and resolving details with an eye to the big-picture vision is essential.

Most of the recommendations in this report are consistent with policies laid out in the General Plan. However, the volume of policies there is immense, and the mechanisms for implementation and enforcement are fairly vague. SPUR's recommendations are meant to underscore, highlight and strengthen what we feel are the most important policies, while proposing additional ideas and mechanisms.

San Jose remains largely suburban in character, even in places where the city has made good-faith attempts to implement a more walkable urban form. How can this be? The challenge, it turns out, lies not in understanding what walkable, transit-supportive communities look like but in actually implementing such



Wikimedia Commons

This report is intended to diagnose the impediments to creating excellent, walkable urban places in San Jose and to recommend changes in policy and practice that will improve urban design outcomes. It is directed at implementing the vision outlined in the 2040 General Plan. In particular, it emphasizes the Urban Village planning process as a timely opportunity to improve implementation through clearer, more effective policies and codes.

This purpose of this report is *not* to lay out an additional set of urban design guidelines. Many excellent guidelines exist in San Jose and the South Bay, but they have had limited effects on the quality of the built environment to date.

This is a pragmatic effort, intended to meet the state of markets, politics and professional practice where they stand today and make common-sense improvements. Although some of the recommendations are modest in scope, they are made with an eye to dramatic long-term improvements in San Jose's built environment. Other recommendations are more ambitious, and we put them forward with the expectation that they will not be implemented right away.

environments. An urban environment does not appear fully formed, but emerges from a thousand small decisions by dozens or hundreds of actors responding to a host of imperatives and constraints. Planners, developers, elected officials, traffic engineers, lenders, transit providers, environmental agencies, builders and tenants are but a few of the major players. Importantly, most of the policies, standards, assumptions, markets and professional practices of these disciplines emerged in the 20th century, when the built environment was designed to prioritize the private automobile and walkability was simply not a consideration. It should come as no surprise that retooling for a different approach would be an immensely complex and frustratingly slow process.

Efforts to achieve better urban design outcomes are nothing new in San Jose. In fact, sound urban design principles have been articulated repeatedly in city guidelines since the 1980s. But despite great strides in the downtown and some gradual improvement elsewhere, development in San Jose is still overwhelmingly auto-oriented and has not produced the kinds of pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods that can truly support a shift away from the private car. Financial pressures and fierce competition for employment uses have hampered the city's ability to uphold the principles espoused in its plans. Efforts to implement the current General Plan are promising and ambitious, and this report is issued in the spirit of supporting its success.

## Project Geography and Scope

This report looks at opportunities to improve urban design citywide, neither emphasizing nor excluding downtown San Jose. It especially focuses on Urban Villages and other growth areas designated by the General Plan, which are intended to accommodate most of the city's growth in the coming decades.

We emphasize areas lacking a strong urban context, where the kinds of walkable communities envisioned in the General Plan will need to be created from the ground up. We examine the development process and how it affects the design of new development, particularly on larger, multi-building projects. It is the shape of these projects that will determine the success or failure of San Jose's shift away from car dependence and toward walking, biking and transit.



Sergio Ruiz

## Actors and Audience

**The transformation envisioned here will require the enthusiastic participation of many different actors:**

**Elected officials ...** will need to commit steadfastly to the vision and support professional staff

**Planning officials ...** will need to create actionable Urban Village plans and binding implementation policies

**Economic development officials ...** will need to develop innovative financing strategies and promote San Jose to attract new investment

**Building and public safety officials ...** will need to revise codes and policies to facilitate excellence in site design

**Transit providers ...** will need to substantially improve service and user experience

**Developers ...** will need to accept new processes and new values and embrace the value proposition of well-designed urban places

**Institutions and foundations ...** will need to lead the market by example

**Lenders ...** will need to accept and support new models and new precedents

**Designers and artists ...** will need to infuse the public realm with comfort, humanity and delight

**Residents and advocates ...** will need to embrace urban life and support leaders who pursue quality design

# Understanding Urban Design



Benjamin Grant

## Why Urban Design? The Case for Walkable Urbanism

Dense development and mixed land uses are the cornerstones of “smart growth,” a planning approach meant to address the problems of suburban sprawl, from obesity to traffic congestion to climate change. But building densely and mixing land uses such as housing, jobs and retail do not in themselves deliver the many benefits of urbanism. The different uses must be integrated into “complete neighborhoods,” places that are designed for people and serve their daily needs comfortably and efficiently within close walking distance. This is the function of urban design.

For the purposes of this report, we define urban design as:

*the physical organization of buildings, streets and open space into whole places that work for people.*

### Urban design addresses:

- The placement, orientation and form of buildings
- Site planning, or the physical arrangement of buildings and uses within development projects
- Multiple scales, from the human body to the neighborhood or district
- Circulation and access for all travel modes
- Human experience, activity, social interaction and travel behavior
- The arrangement and design of streets and open spaces
- The connection of buildings to the public realm and to one another
- Above all: the *integration* of all these things

In this report, urban design does *not* include architectural style and visual aesthetics, as important as these may be. Ugly or banal buildings may embody good urban design principles — and often do. Stunning, sophisticated buildings may fail profoundly in this regard — and often do. Although aesthetics are not the focus of this effort, the human dimensions of the built environment — such as comfort, convenience and sociability — are paramount.



Benjamin Grant

“Walkability” is excellent shorthand for good urban design. People react to cues in the environment. If a space is designed for people — if it’s welcoming, safe and comfortable — they will walk. If a place is designed for cars, people will drive if they can. Although physical planning is tremendously complex and involves a host of actors, trade-offs and compromises, walkability is an intuitive measure of placemaking success.

Walkability emerges from the mix and density of land uses, the placement and orientation of buildings, the safety and quality of streets, the accessibility of transit, and the design and interconnection of open spaces. It also depends on the real estate development market’s willingness to build with these elements in mind and the public sector’s ability to invest in them. A walkable place only happens when the entire placemaking ecosystem succeeds.

Research shows a significant and growing “walkability premium,” with higher walkability ratings associated with higher residential values and commercial rents,<sup>2</sup> as well as more favorable lending conditions.<sup>3</sup> Walkable areas are also more economically resilient. The Brookings Institution found that after the 2008 real estate collapse, homes in walkable urban neighborhoods experienced less than half the average decline in price from the housing peak in the mid-2000s. Meanwhile, recovery lagged in peripheral suburbs relative to urban areas.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Pivo, Gary and Jeffrey Fisher, “The Walkability Premium in Commercial Real Estate Investments,” *Real Estate Economics*, 39(2):185-219, 2011, available at: [www.u.arizona.edu/~gpivo/Walkability%20Paper%20February%202010.pdf](http://www.u.arizona.edu/~gpivo/Walkability%20Paper%20February%202010.pdf)

Cortright, Joe. “Walking the Walk: How Walkability Raises Home Values in U.S. Cities” CEOs for Cities, 2009, available at: <http://www.ceosforcities.org/research/walking-the-walk/>

<sup>3</sup> The study in *Real Estate Economics* found that, “Walkability was associated with lower cap rates and higher incomes, suggesting it has been favored in both the capital asset and building space markets.” Pivo and Fisher, “The Walkability Premium in Commercial Real Estate Investments.”

<sup>4</sup> Doherty, Patrick C. and Christopher B. Leinberger, “The Next Real Estate Boom” Brookings Institution, 2010, available at: <http://www.brookings.edu/research/articles/2010/11/real-estate-leinberger>

## The benefits of walkable urbanism include:

### Sustainability

Urban dwellers consume far fewer resources and emit far less carbon than their suburban counterparts. (See Figure 1.) Urban environments provide more activity in less space and facilitate access by foot, bike and transit. They save resources in transportation, energy, heating and cooling, and their compact physical footprint preserves land for open space and agriculture.

### Mobility and Access

Compact mixed-use areas facilitate “access by proximity,” resulting in less driving and more walking, cycling and transit use. Density supports transit ridership, allowing for improved service. Walkable environments also support access and independence for people with limited mobility, including the elderly, the disabled and those without access to a car.

### Prosperity and Economic Development

Many of today’s most dynamic firms and workers — particularly in the knowledge and innovation sectors — are favoring urban lifestyles and amenities. Attractive and memorable places become self-reinforcing, drawing new investment and sustaining long-term value.

### Public Life

Compact urban neighborhoods offer public places for people to interact with one another, to gather together and to build community. These activities create a positive sense of place and interconnectedness. Research has shown that people living in walkable neighborhoods trust their neighbors more, participate in community projects and volunteer more than those in less walkable areas.<sup>5</sup>

### Public Health

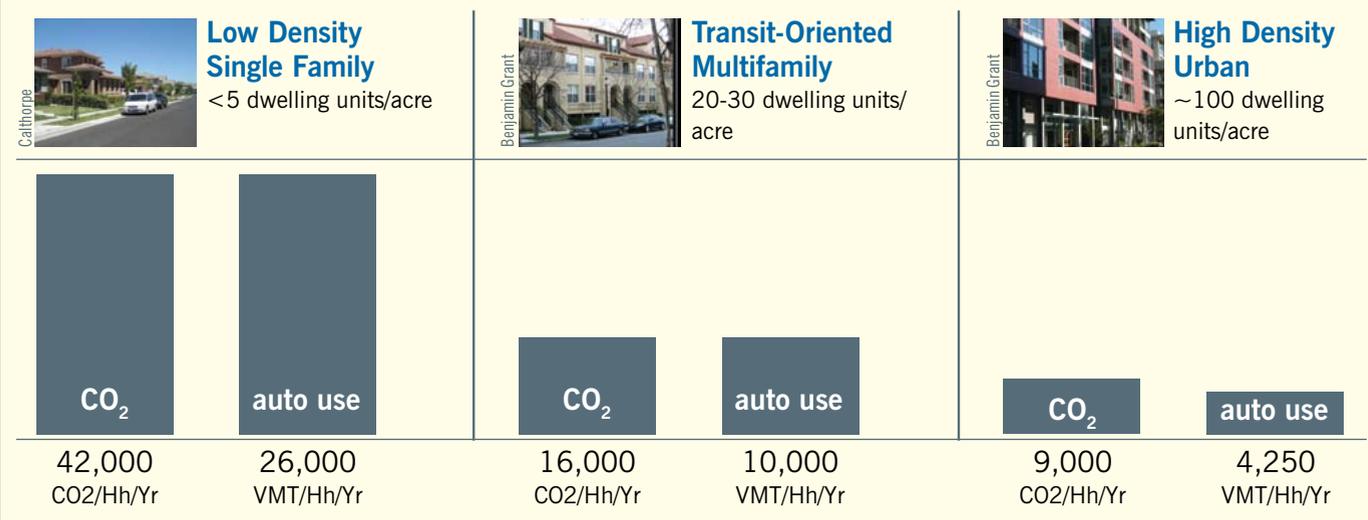
Americans’ sedentary lifestyle and the associated epidemics of obesity and chronic disease have been repeatedly linked to the auto-dependent built environment.

### Social Equity

Where suburbs are heavily privatized, urban environments rely on public amenities like transit and open space, which are available to everyone. Not only is this more efficient, but it’s also more inclusive. Although urban areas can be expensive, suburban settings are especially punishing for low-income people, who find extremely limited housing and mobility options and can face spatial, social and economic isolation.

Figure 1. Residential Density, Auto Use and Carbon Emissions

Compact development generates far lower carbon emissions and car use (measured in vehicle miles traveled) per household per year than suburban development.



All figures approximate. Images for illustrative purposes only.

<sup>5</sup> Rogers, Shannon H. et al. “Examining Walkability and Social Capital as Indicators of Quality of Life at the Municipal and Neighborhood Scales.” University of New Hampshire, 2010, available at: [http://www.unh.edu/news/cj\\_nr/2010/dec/bp13capital.cfm](http://www.unh.edu/news/cj_nr/2010/dec/bp13capital.cfm)



## Terminology: A Word About Words

A number of urban design terms are used throughout this report. We define most of them upon first use, but a few are key to understanding the core concepts of the practice and deserve special attention:

**Use (or Land Use)** — The functions within a building or property, such as residential, office, retail, parking or open space. “Mixed-use development” puts multiple uses in a single building or site. “Active uses” are those that generate pedestrian activity or visual interest, such as retail, restaurants or lobbies.

**Form** — The physical shape of buildings, streets, blocks and public spaces. The length of a block, the height of a building and the placement of parking are all form issues and might be regulated through “form-based codes.”

**Context** — The conditions that surround a particular location, including other buildings, streets, public spaces, transit and patterns of activity and movement. Effective urban design requires that development projects connect and respond to their contexts, such as through the placement of entrances and active uses.

**Integration** — The functional and spatial interconnectedness of a place. In a well-integrated place, each element is designed to connect to those around it. Buildings open onto sidewalks, retail opens onto plazas and buildings provide edges to open spaces. Suburban environments are often poorly integrated, with each building or project turned inward and buffered from its surroundings.

**Orientation** — The direction a building faces. For example, a building is oriented to the street if its façade is close to and parallel to the street edge and its primary entrance is from the street.

**Placemaking** — Deliberate attention to and investment in the human, experiential qualities of a place. This often extends beyond urban design fundamentals into public art, civic beautification and programming.

**Public Realm** — The complete network of public and publicly accessible spaces, including streets and sidewalks, plazas, walkways, public transit, trails and parks. In a walkable community, the public realm provides continuous connections among buildings, services and amenities.

## Compact Development and Multifunctional Environments



Landscape Architecture Foundation

In an urban environment, land is scarce and every scrap of space is devoted to multiple functions. This is why dense urban areas are challenging to design and build in, and also why great cities are so efficient and richly layered. In suburban areas, where land is abundant, spaces often serve single functions. This is true of parking, landscaping and stormwater management. It is also true of road capacity and even city boundaries.

Making the transition to a more urban condition requires much greater integration of functions in space — and therefore of agency jurisdictions. With increased densities come increased constraints, which can produce frustrating complexities and hamper development. City agencies that have operated with relative independence need to work together to resolve these challenges, and their functions, funds and requirements must become intermingled. If this is done proactively, with policy goals in mind, it can offer powerful synergies and support effective placemaking.

### Compact development is ...

- more complex
- more efficient
- more expensive (per acre)
- more valuable

### And requires...

- clarity of purpose
- comprehensive design
- interagency collaboration
- multifunctional solutions

Put simply, more intensive land use requires more intensive effort—and pays bigger dividends.

## Design for Walkability: Seven Key Components



### The spatial components of walkable environments are simple and well understood.

A large body of academic and professional research by organizations like the American Planning Association and the Urban Land Institute validates many centuries of design thinking and lived experience. San Jose itself has numerous sets of urban design guidelines espousing the same principles, including the Downtown Strategy, the North San Jose Urban Design Guidelines, the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) Community Design and Transportation Manual and the 2040 General Plan.<sup>6</sup>

The following seven principles represent SPUR's distillation of the urban design fundamentals that determine walkability.

<sup>6</sup> San Jose Downtown Design Guidelines, 2004, available at: <http://www.sanjoseca.gov/DocumentCenter/Home/View/427>

San Jose Commercial Design Guidelines, 1993, available at: <http://www.sanjoseca.gov/DocumentCenter/Home/View/426>

San Jose Residential Design Guidelines, 1997, available at: <http://www.sanjoseca.gov/DocumentCenter/Home/View/434>

North San Jose Design Urban Design Guidelines 2010, available at: <http://www.sanjoseca.gov/DocumentCenter/Home/View/432>

San Jose Community Design and Transportation Guide, 2004, summary available at: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/25011/San-Jose-Community-Design-and-Transportation-Guide-2004>

BART Transit-Oriented Development Guidelines, 2003, available at: [http://www.bart.gov/docs/planning/TOD\\_Guidelines.pdf](http://www.bart.gov/docs/planning/TOD_Guidelines.pdf)

Benjamin Grant

# 1. Create fine-grained pedestrian circulation.

Frequent and densely interconnected pedestrian routes are fundamental to walkability, shortening both actual and perceived distances. This can be accomplished by making city blocks smaller or by providing access through blocks via publicly accessible alleys, pathways or paseos (pedestrian boulevards) coupled with frequent crosswalks. A good rule of thumb is that a comfortable walking environment offers a choice of route about once per minute, which is every 200 to 300 feet at a moderate walking pace — typical of a traditional, pre-war city block. This not only allows pedestrians efficient access but also provides visual interest and a sense of progress as new structures and intersections come into view with reasonable frequency.

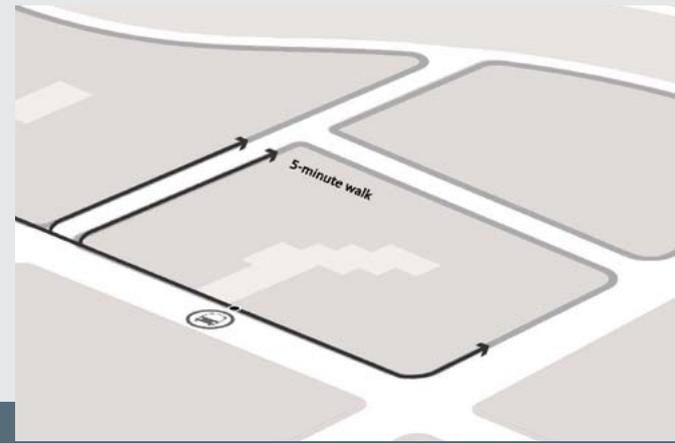
This kind of “permeability” sometimes meets with resistance from developers and property owners, who may cite security, property rights or site-planning concerns. But street networks are fundamental to walking. Walking five 200-foot blocks through Portland, Oregon, is easy and comfortable. Walking the same thousand feet on a suburban commercial street, past a single distant building and no intersections, is very uncomfortable.

A major statistical analysis<sup>7</sup> found that intersection density and street connectivity are more strongly correlated with walking than even density and mixed land uses. Only proximity to the city center has a stronger effect.

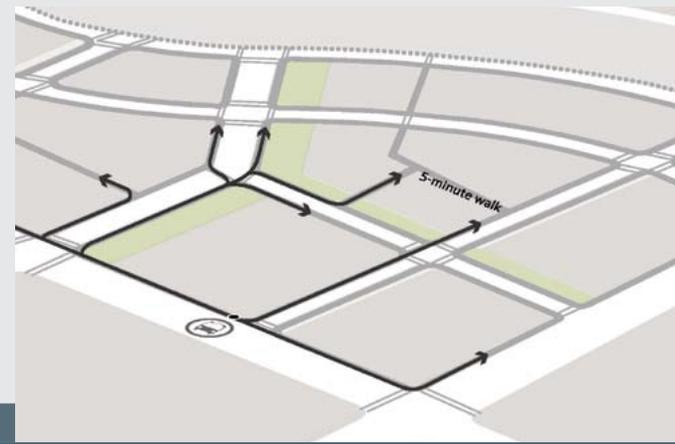
<sup>7</sup> Cervero, Robert and Reid Ewing. “Travel and the Built Environment: A Meta-Analysis,” Journal of the American Planning Association, 2010, available at: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01944361003766766#.UnIEjo2E6Xd>  
Car graphic designed by Ess Eich from The Noun Project.



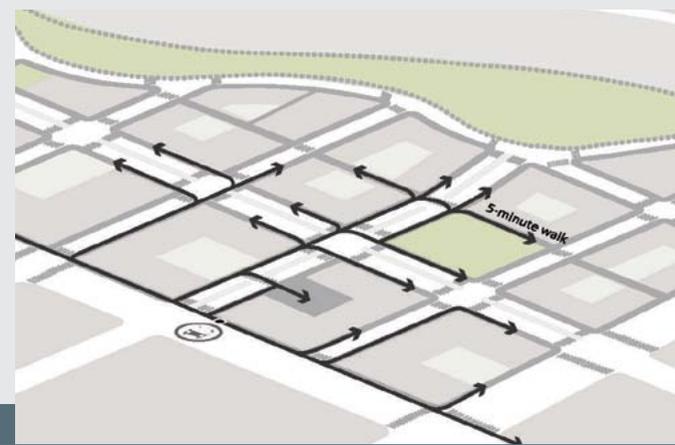
TYPICAL



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BEST



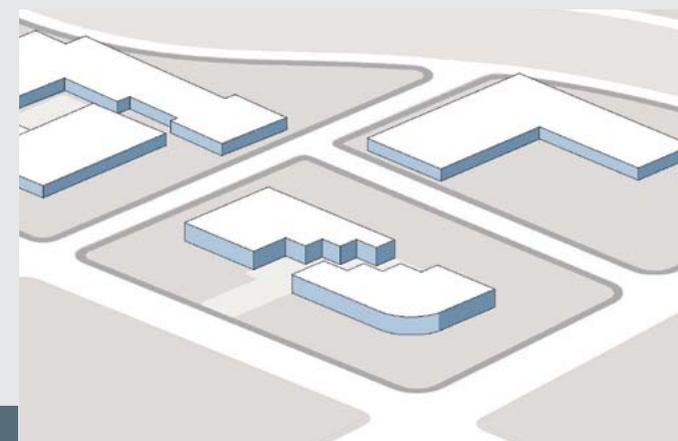
## 2. Orient buildings to streets and open space.

In walkable urban environments, buildings are placed right at the edges of streets and public spaces, rather than being set back behind parking lots or expanses of landscaping. These built edges provide a sense of definition to streets and other spaces, which helps makes the environment more legible and coherent. At all scales, from Manhattan to Willow Glen, edges help reinforce circulation routes while allowing easy pedestrian access to buildings. Building entrances are on or next to sidewalks. Setbacks from the street are short and exist only to provide public space or a transition from public to private life.

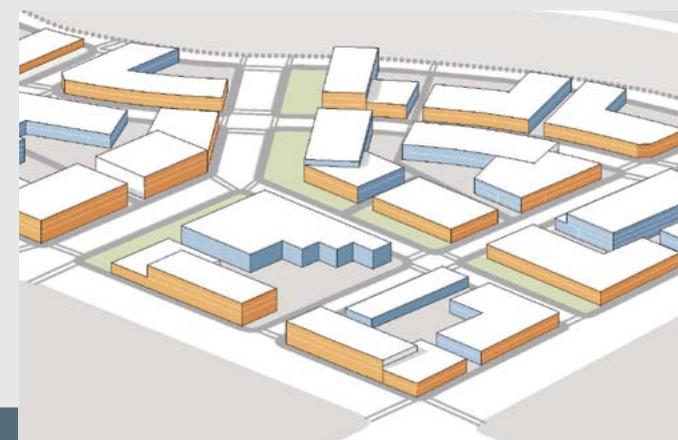
Where buildings are set back behind parking lots or landscaping, pedestrians are isolated from uses and activities, exposed to traffic and forced to walk greater distances. Even if a walking path or sidewalk is provided, pedestrians and transit users receive the message that they are of secondary importance. Loading docks, service entrances, blank walls and driveways should be limited in size and located where they minimize disruption of pedestrian access.



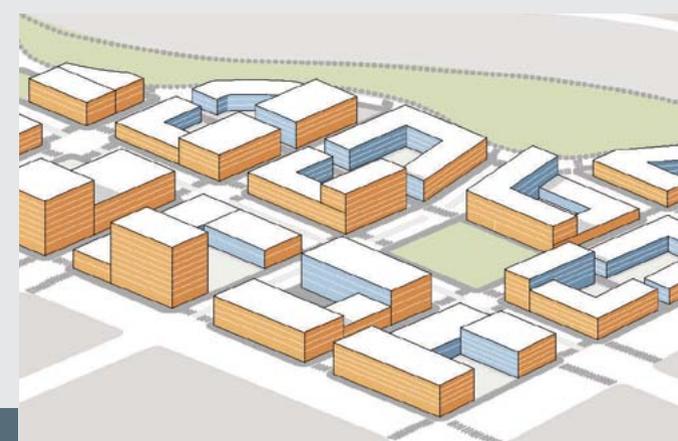
■ Facades Facing Public Realm  
■ Facades Facing Private Spaces



TYPICAL



BETTER



BEST

### 3. Organize uses to support public activity.

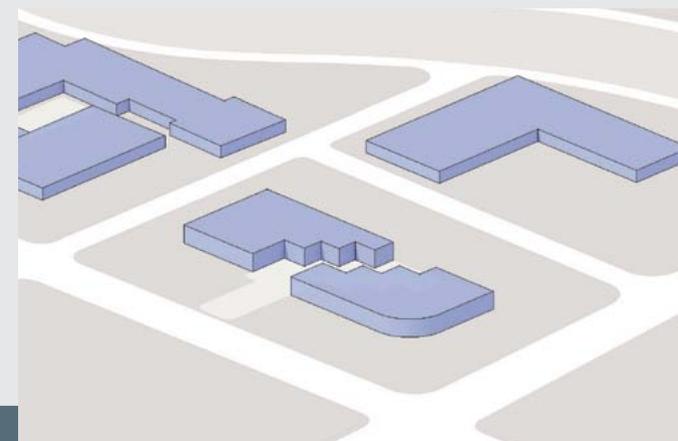
The way uses are arranged on a site has a major impact on the activity, vitality, security and identity of surrounding streets and spaces.

- Active uses (such as retail, lobbies and event spaces) should be placed strategically along pedestrian routes to engage the public and should be designed for transparency and interest.
- Secure, private spaces should be placed at site interiors, away from public streets.
- Residential entrances should be designed to provide a graceful transition from public to private. Stoops, front porches, balconies and lobbies can all provide privacy while supporting sociability and greater security by increasing the number of “eyes on the street.”<sup>8</sup>
- Certain uses, such as garages and cinemas, should be tucked deeply away, but their points of access can be major nodes of activity.
- Loading and utility spaces should be hidden from pedestrian frontages.

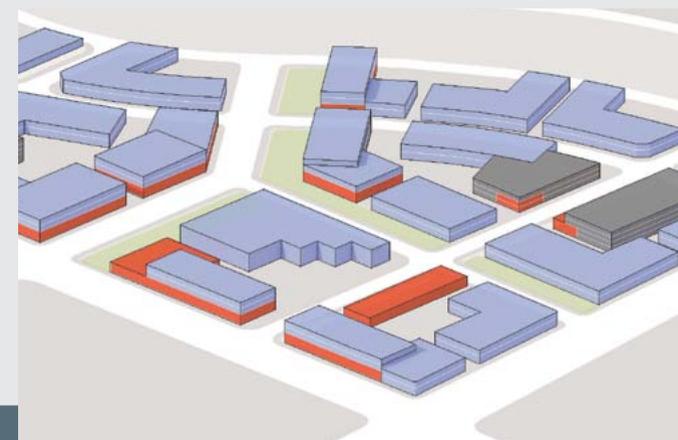
<sup>8</sup>“Eyes on the street” is Jane Jacobs’ term for the natural surveillance afforded by well-design neighborhoods. See *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961).



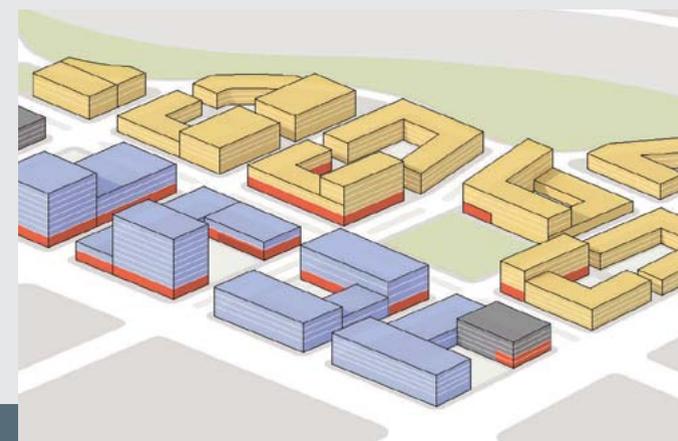
- Office
- Retail
- Residential
- Parking
- Public Open Space



TYPICAL



BETTER



BEST

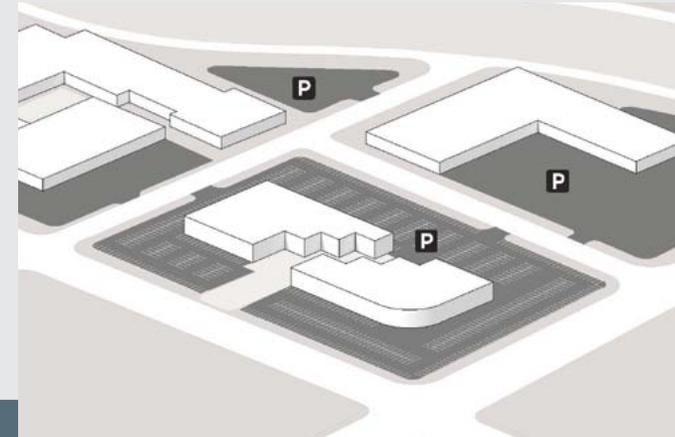


## 4. Place parking behind or below buildings.

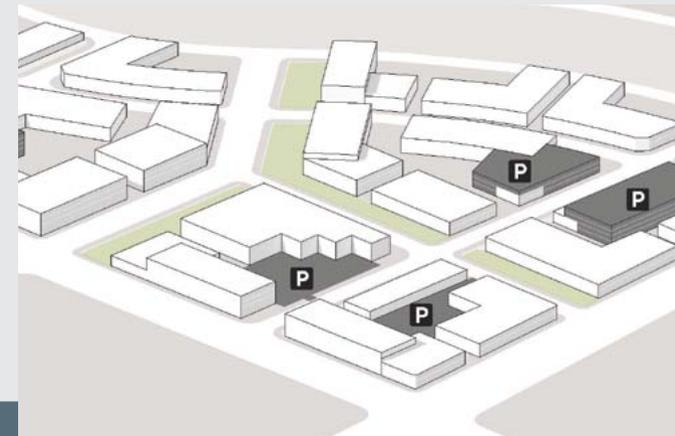
In newer development, good places for people depend heavily on the artful accommodation of cars. Parking is an expensive, space-hungry and unattractive use — and it’s a key driver of site planning and project finances. It should be provided in multilevel structures where possible and placed where it will not disrupt pedestrian spaces. Well-designed garages can serve multiple buildings, draw people onto streets and allow parking to be managed efficiently. Once they have parked, every driver becomes a pedestrian, so pedestrian garage exits should be located to support and enliven public spaces.



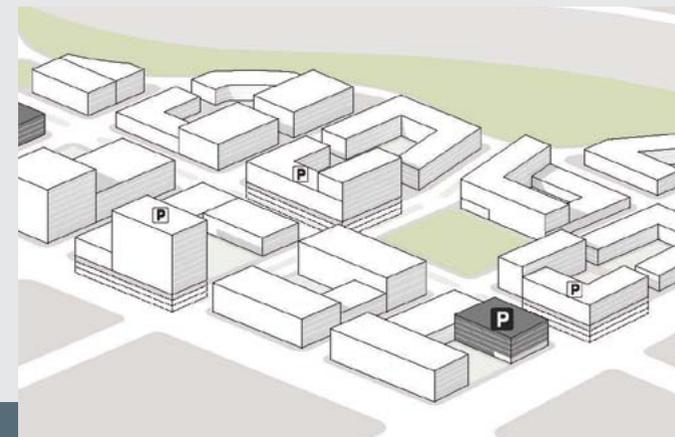
**P** Above Ground Parking  
**P** Underground Parking



TYPICAL



BETTER



BEST

## 5. Address the human scale with building and landscape details.

People experience the built environment at the scale of their own bodies in space. Buildings should meet and engage people at that scale, with awnings, façade elements, lighting, signage and other features along sidewalks. Building forms can be broken down or subdivided visually to lighten the sense of mass. Even very large buildings can meet the human scale in a gracious and accommodating manner.



TYPICAL



BETTER



BEST



## 6. Provide clear, continuous pedestrian access.

Wide sidewalks that include elements like trees, lighting, street furniture and public art are the city's connective tissue. In great walking cities like Barcelona and New York, sidewalks 40 feet wide are not uncommon, but a well-designed 10-foot sidewalk can be adequate in some contexts. Sidewalks should form a continuous network connected by frequent, safe street crossings.

Sidewalks, while fundamental, are only one part of the broader public realm. They should be seamlessly integrated with walkways, paseos, building entrances, transit facilities, plazas and parks. In order for people to feel comfortable walking, the continuity of pedestrian access among major uses and amenities, including transit facilities, is essential.



TYPICAL



BETTER



BEST



## 7. Build complete streets.

Streets can accommodate a variety of travel modes while also serving as public amenities, sites of commerce and green spaces. Vehicular roadways should be no bigger than necessary for their function, and they should apportion space safely among private vehicles, transit, bicycles and parking. If they are well designed, streets can move significant volumes of auto traffic and still support other activities. Small streets are equally important and can limit vehicular speeds and capacity in the service of other functions, from deliveries to social activity.

From the 2040 General Plan:

*“A Complete Street provides safe, comfortable, attractive and convenient access and travel for pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and transit users of all ages, abilities, and preferences. The design of a Complete Street considers both the public right-of-way and the land uses and design of adjoining properties, including appropriate building heights and the planning of adjoining land uses that actively engage the public street realm.”*



TYPICAL



BETTER



BEST



Benjamin Grant

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New York City Department of Transportation

# The State of Planning in San Jose



Benjamin Grant

## The 2040 General Plan

The Envision San Jose 2040 General Plan, adopted in 2011, presents an ambitious land use agenda that seeks to grow up instead of out, to target growth in appropriate settings and to improve the physical form of the city, creating a “city of great places.” It aims to accommodate 470,000 new jobs and 120,000 new residents over the life of the plan, put the city on a sound fiscal footing and shift transportation patterns away from dependence on private autos.

**It is a “jobs-first” plan**, which seeks to rectify the city’s existing fiscal imbalance (see “Jobs vs. Housing: The Fiscal Impacts of Land Use” on page 31) by raising the ratio of jobs to employed residents from 0.8 to 1.3. It is permissive with respect to commercial development, and while it includes significant housing growth, it allows such growth only in tightly controlled phases, or “horizons.”

**It includes aggressive transportation goals**, such as a reduction in drive-alone commuting from 80 percent of all commutes to 40 percent and a 40 percent reduction in per-capita vehicle miles traveled (the number of miles the average person drives in a year). It also embraces many admirable placemaking and transit-orientation principles.

**It establishes 70 Urban Villages and other designated growth areas.** These include downtown, employment areas such as North San Jose and Edenvale, and areas with existing Specific Plans. Urban Villages are targeted for dense, walkable mixed-use development, primarily along transit corridors. (See map on page 30.) The plan identifies several Urban Village types:

- Regional Transit Urban Villages, around rail transit of regional significance, including Caltrain and future BART stations
- San Jose Transit Urban Villages, around significant local transit stops, including VTA light rail and bus rapid transit stations
- Commercial Center Urban Villages, around significant concentrations of retail and commercial activity
- Neighborhood-Oriented Urban Villages, around existing neighborhood retail that serves local needs

**It identifies itself as a “form-based plan” but is more detailed on land use.** The plan contains numerous general policies in support of better urban design, in line with the principles in this report. However, it contains few physical planning specifics, deferring such decisions to the Urban Village planning process. Form-based planning tools usually pair physical specifics like “build-to” lines

(specifying where building façades must be located) or minimum heights for the ground floor of buildings with looser land use regulations. In contrast, the 2040 General Plan is far more specific with respect to use than to form.

**It emphasizes “complete, cohesive neighborhoods”** in which “most of the residents of San Jose will have access to an attractive urban setting within walking distance of their home.”

**It limits growth in established single-family neighborhoods**, discouraging development above existing densities in these areas.

## Growth Areas and Urban Village Plans

The General Plan designates nearly 70 Urban Villages to accommodate denser growth in a compact, walkable pattern and establishes target development capacities for each village. These targets define how much growth and what types (residential, commercial etc.) will be planned for in each case. The General Plan envisions a process in which individual plans for each Urban Village will translate these targets into a physical framework for development. This process is relatively undefined and may or may not include revision of the zoning codes in Urban Villages.

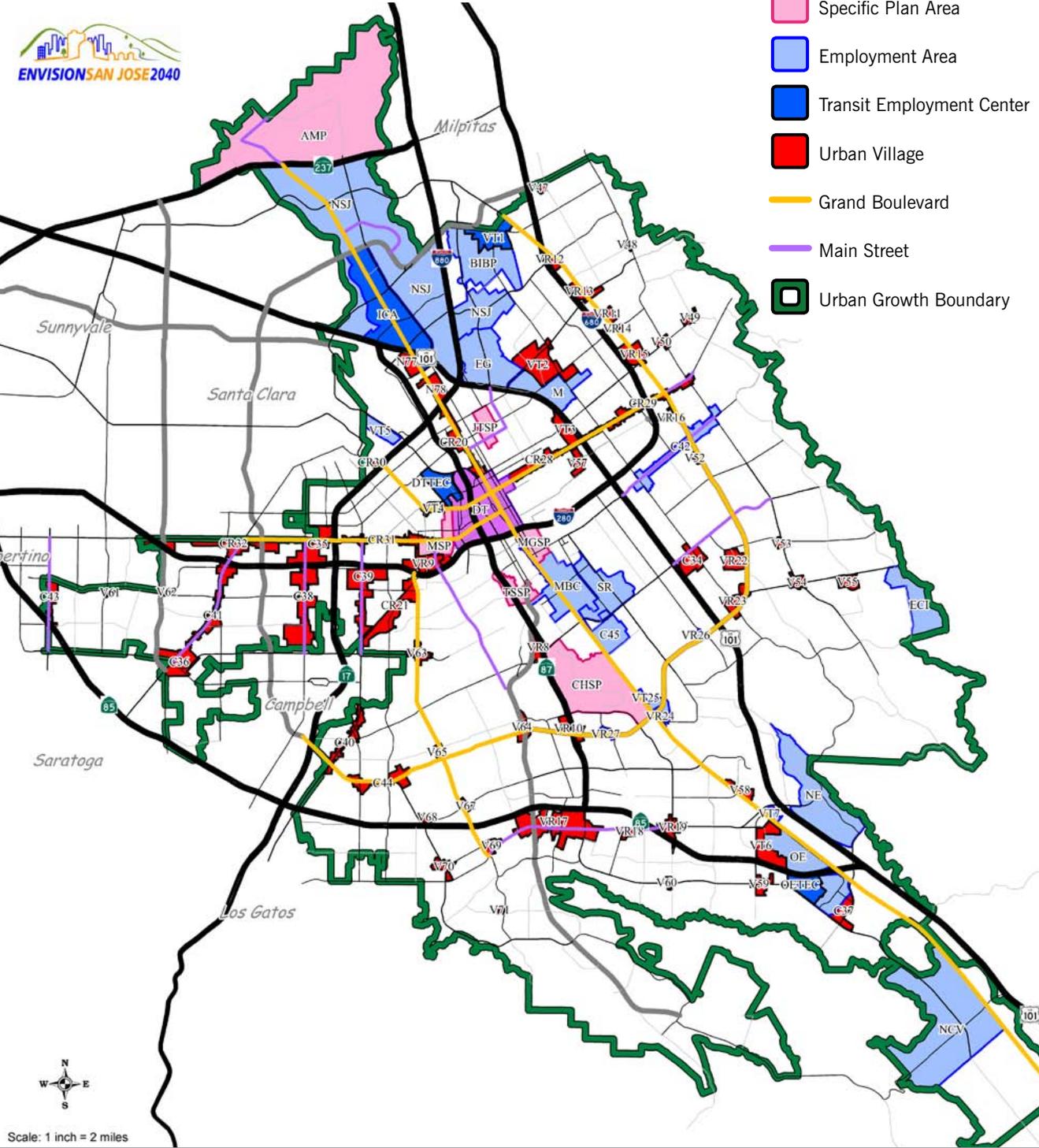
The 2040 General Plan growth areas are divided into planning “horizons,” or phases, a method intended to channel growth to strategic locations in a clearly defined sequence, with the ability to revise the sequence over time to ensure that the General Plan vision is being achieved.

Another key aspect of the phasing strategy is to “meter out” the rate of residential growth to ensure that employment growth keeps pace, eventually moving the city toward a healthier jobs-housing balance. Commercial development can proceed “as of right” (with no discretionary approvals required) but residential development must wait for the completion of Urban Village plans. Within Urban Villages, the General Plan makes an exception for projects that exceed the average target employment and residential densities, provide open space and meet the urban design principles in the General Plan. These so-called Signature Projects can be approved and built ahead of the regular Urban Village planning process.

The General Plan sets a number of parameters for the Urban Village planning process, but many details remain to be established. It includes formulas for translating job and housing growth targets into density and land use programs at the site level. It stipulates that Urban Village plans provide approaches to circulation and

Figure 2. Designated Growth Areas: Envision San Jose 2040 General Plan

The Envision San Jose 2040 General Plan designates growth areas, including more than 70 “Urban Villages” (shown in red), for compact, livable urban development.



parking, as well as calculate parkland dedication fees and determine potential park sites. What is less clear is how the physical integration of these elements across parcels and sites is to be achieved. It is at that level — a strong, coherent physical framework — that the urban design integration, and hence the walkability and transit orientation, of each village must be clearly established.

## Next Steps: Making Urban Village Planning Work

To succeed, Urban Village plans will need to spatially coordinate infrastructure, streets, parks, plazas, paseos, transit facilities, stormwater management and regulations for site development. To accomplish this, they will need to:

**Define a specific package of public improvements and target resources for their implementation.** This package, which we are calling a “public realm framework,” should identify the physical elements that stitch each Urban Village together, and its designation should confer meaningful access to funding and give shape to development.

**Establish site development standards.** These should use form-based policies at the parcel level to ensure that development projects are integrated with the public realm. They should control frontage design, entrances, vehicular and pedestrian access, the placement of active uses and the provision of publicly accessible open space.

**Create zoning districts for Urban Villages.** General Plan designations such as Urban Villages and other growth areas should be converted into zoning districts with clear form controls. These may vary by village type, but they should be designed to incorporate General Plan design policies into binding codes. They should be applied citywide on an interim basis in advance of Urban Village plans.

**Deploy financing and assessment tools.** The Urban Village planning process is an ideal opportunity to develop and standardize the use of new financing and assessment tools to fund public improvements in the absence of state redevelopment agencies, which were eliminated in 2012. (See “The Legacy of Redevelopment” on page 36.) The Urban Village plans provide a ready mechanism to define a financing package in the areas targeted for growth. Whatever the process, the financing mechanisms should ensure the urban design integration of the villages, strengthen the city’s ability to shape development and implement General Plan policies.

## Jobs vs. Housing: The Fiscal Impacts of Land Use



Both jobs and housing generate property and sales taxes, but housing creates much more demand for city services such as schools, parks, health services and waste disposal. A city needs to have a balance of both jobs and housing to bring in enough income to support these vital services. Relative to its Silicon Valley neighbors, San Jose is housing-rich and jobs-poor. It has functioned as a bedroom community for nearby job centers, creating a fiscal imbalance in which revenues do not keep pace with the demand for city services.

The San Jose 2040 General Plan is explicitly a “jobs-first” plan, which seeks to promote employment uses. Specifically, it aims to shift the current ratio of jobs to employed residents from 0.8 to 1.3 over a 20-year period. This is a challenging proposition, given the relative strength of the city’s housing market. On the other hand, some have argued that the dramatic difference in commercial rents and land costs between downtown San Jose and other parts of Silicon Valley may result in renewed interest in building downtown.

Attempts to promote a balance between jobs and housing do not in themselves present urban design problems. Housing, employment, retail and public facilities are all essential to complete urban communities, and although a diverse mixture is desirable, each of these uses may predominate in well- or poorly designed areas.

Traditional zoning regulates land use in advance of individual development projects. Over the last few decades, many development projects in San Jose have been implemented through two alternate mechanisms: redevelopment (a set of special financing mechanisms, now defunct) and planned development zoning, in which parcels are rezoned to accommodate a project while it is going through the entitlement process.

In recent years, the San Jose Planning Department has been moving away from planned development zoning. Although it can be a useful tool, rezoning through planned development opens the regulation of land use to the influence of individual project proponents, who have a financial interest in the outcome. Sometimes those interests align with public policy goals, and sometimes they do not. In San Jose, where the market has yet to fully embrace the vision of a more compact, walkable and transit-oriented city, there is tension between the interests of developers and those of policymakers. Even a developer who is committed in principle to the city's transformation must still finance, entitle, construct and sell their product in the market as it stands today. In this context, a rational developer will tend to negotiate for zoning that supports status quo — rather than transformative — development.

The traditional regulatory functions of planning — zoning and the entitlements it enables — are sometimes perceived as secondary to negotiating real estate deals through planned development zoning or developer agreements. But they are powerful tools that have the force of law, can eliminate certain kinds of negotiation and are insulated from political forces. These tools also provide certainty to developers about city policies, making for a more efficient development process. SPUR believes land should be zoned in advance with regulations that are nuanced and flexible but nonnegotiable.

So far, the regulation of form in San Jose has been limited. While the General Plan espouses form-based approaches, the city has implemented only limited examples, such as the Alum Rock Form-Based Zoning Standards. These have taken considerable staff resources, and the comprehensive use of these tools in the future is uncertain. We recommend that Urban Village zoning districts should include form controls that require the basic components of walkable urbanism until site-specific development standards can be defined through Urban Village plans.

Most of San Jose's current policies defining urban design and site-planning fundamentals are nonbinding. The North San Jose Urban Design Guidelines — which were created to accompany the North San Jose Area Development Policy — present an excellent set of physical planning principles, but they are not binding regulatory code, so they may erode under pressure from developers, political officials and other city policies (like transportation, fire and building codes) that have regulatory force. Similarly, the General Plan lays out a series of urban design fundamentals, but until they are incorporated in zoning codes and the codes are upheld by elected officials, their impact on the ground is likely to be limited.

## SPUR's Recommendations for Implementing the 2040 Plan

### URBAN VILLAGE PLANNING AND ZONING

*Objective: Ensure that the Urban Village planning process defines a clear physical planning vision that implements walkability goals defined in the General Plan.*

- 1. Develop Urban Village zoning districts incorporating baseline regulations for built form. Variations of these districts can apply to each of several typical Urban Village conditions (e.g., underutilized large-parcel industrial, incremental corridor infill, arterial strip commercial). These should be applied on an interim basis prior to Urban Village plans.**

General Plan concepts are not yet written into the zoning code, and the Urban Village planning process does require rezoning. Basic physical planning standards should be written into zoning codes for the various types of Urban Villages.

*Responsible party: San Jose Department of Planning, Building and Code Enforcement (PBCE)*

- 2. Rezone land in Urban Villages proactively as resources allow. Apply Urban Village zoning districts in lieu of the planned development zoning process with project approvals.**

Zoning is often revised in response to proposals through the planned development or Signature Project process. Although rezoning in advance requires resources, it can also create certainty, save time and limit political interference.

*Responsible party: PBCE*

- 3. Require commercial development that precedes Urban Village plans to meet baseline urban design criteria defined in Urban Village zoning districts or revised commercial design guidelines.**

Prioritizing employment uses should not mean that anything goes, especially in Urban Villages. Many model codes and standards exist and could be applied on an interim basis while detailed plans are still pending for these areas.

*Responsible party: PBCE*

- 4. Establish appropriate minimum density requirements through Urban Village plans, in transit station areas and at key growth areas including the downtown core, Diridon Station and North First Street.**

The areas immediately surrounding transit stations represent major public investments. Adequate density at these locations is essential to shifting travel behavior over the long term. Minimum densities can help protect these areas from underdevelopment when the real estate market is soft.

*Responsible party: PBCE*

- 5. Codify key form principles from the North San Jose Urban Design Guidelines into appropriate zoning districts, including those for Urban Villages.**

The North San Jose guidelines include many excellent urban design principles, but in their current form they are nonbinding. These principles can be incorporated selectively into zoning codes under development citywide.

*Responsible party: PBCE*

- 6. Deny entitlement applications that do not conform to the General Plan/Urban Village vision and code.**

Planning staff and city council members should send a strong signal that they are committed to a different physical pattern in San Jose. Saying no requires political will but is important to shifting the assumptions about what can be built.

*Responsible parties: PBCE, San Jose City Council*

### PUBLIC REALM FRAMEWORKS

*Objective: Designate key public improvements that organize and integrate Urban Villages, target funds to implement them and ensure that private development is designed to support and respond to them.*

- 7. Each Urban Village plan should define its own public realm framework — an integrated package of public realm improvements, including parks, plazas, paseos, trails, public art and streetscape**

**improvements. The public realm framework should:**

- Emphasize complete communities, providing a mix of walkable streets, gathering spaces, natural areas and open spaces.
- Establish safe, comfortable and continuous pedestrian access connecting transit facilities, major uses, activities and amenities.

SPUR recommends establishing a public realm framework as part of each Urban Village plan. This framework would define a list of public improvements that would tie these districts together, guiding project design and infrastructure investment in support of the integrated, walkable places envisioned in the General Plan.

*Responsible party: PBCE*

- 8. Public realm framework improvements should be eligible (as appropriate) for additional funding streams, such as assessment district revenues and bond funds, parkland dedication and stormwater fees, traffic mitigation and (where applicable) impact fees, and construction and conveyance tax funds.**

A public realm framework should be more than a wish list — it should have standing in guiding public and private investments. It should also provide the basis for aligning a variety of funding streams to serve placemaking goals.

*Responsible parties: PBCE, San Jose Office of Economic Development (OED)*

- 9. Development proposals in Urban Villages and other designated growth areas should be required to identify, map and demonstrate appropriate design responses to:**

- Nearby elements of the public realm framework
- Likely paths of pedestrian travel to nearby transit facilities and other amenities

Project proponents should be required, at the preliminary review stage, to map their site plan's relationship and response to the surrounding context. The public realm framework makes that context (both existing and planned) explicit, allowing

both staff and proponents to prioritize the design of important building frontages, to connect the project to adjacent amenities and to provide key access routes. This exercise will ensure that, at a minimum, questions of site integration are raised and public priorities for the district are acknowledged.

*Responsible party: PBCE*

**10. Use public realm framework mapping to create a hierarchy for types of building frontages and apply them to development proposals, including:**

- **Active:** Used on retail streets and plazas. Requires transparency and active uses such as retail, live-work spaces, lobbies and activity spaces. Restricts utilities and vehicular access. Prohibits blank walls, loading docks and exposed parking. Allows setbacks only for public spaces.
- **Pedestrian-oriented:** Used on pedestrian access routes and open spaces. Requires pedestrian entrances and detailed articulation. Encourages active uses where permitted. Limits utilities and vehicular access. Prohibits exposed parking and loading docks. Allows setbacks only for public space or short residential transitions of less than 10 feet.
- **Baseline:** Used on public rights of way. Limits blank walls, auto access and utilities as a proportion of linear frontage. Requires building to street or short setbacks. Limits surface parking exposure as a proportion of linear frontage and mitigates with plantings and other elements.
- **Utility:** Used on frontages with demonstrated minimal pedestrian interaction, where above constrained uses may be concentrated.

Not every building edge can be active and engaging. Mapping a proposed project against the public realm framework will demonstrate which frontages are most important to creating a walkable Urban Village, and a hierarchy of development standards can then be applied.

*Responsible party: PBCE*

**STATION AREA PLANNING**

*Objective: Maximize ridership and capture the value of public transit investment by ensuring dense, well-designed development at transit stations, especially those with regional access.*

**11. Proactively develop detailed land use and physical plans within a half-mile of all regional rail/BART stations (e.g., Berryessa, Alum Rock, Diridon) with funding from and in partnership with transit providers and regional agencies.**

Although station areas are generally slated for Urban Village plans, they are not called out for special interagency planning processes befitting their role in the regional transit network and the major investments they represent. Not only do these areas demand focused planning, they are well positioned to secure planning and implementation resources from partner agencies.

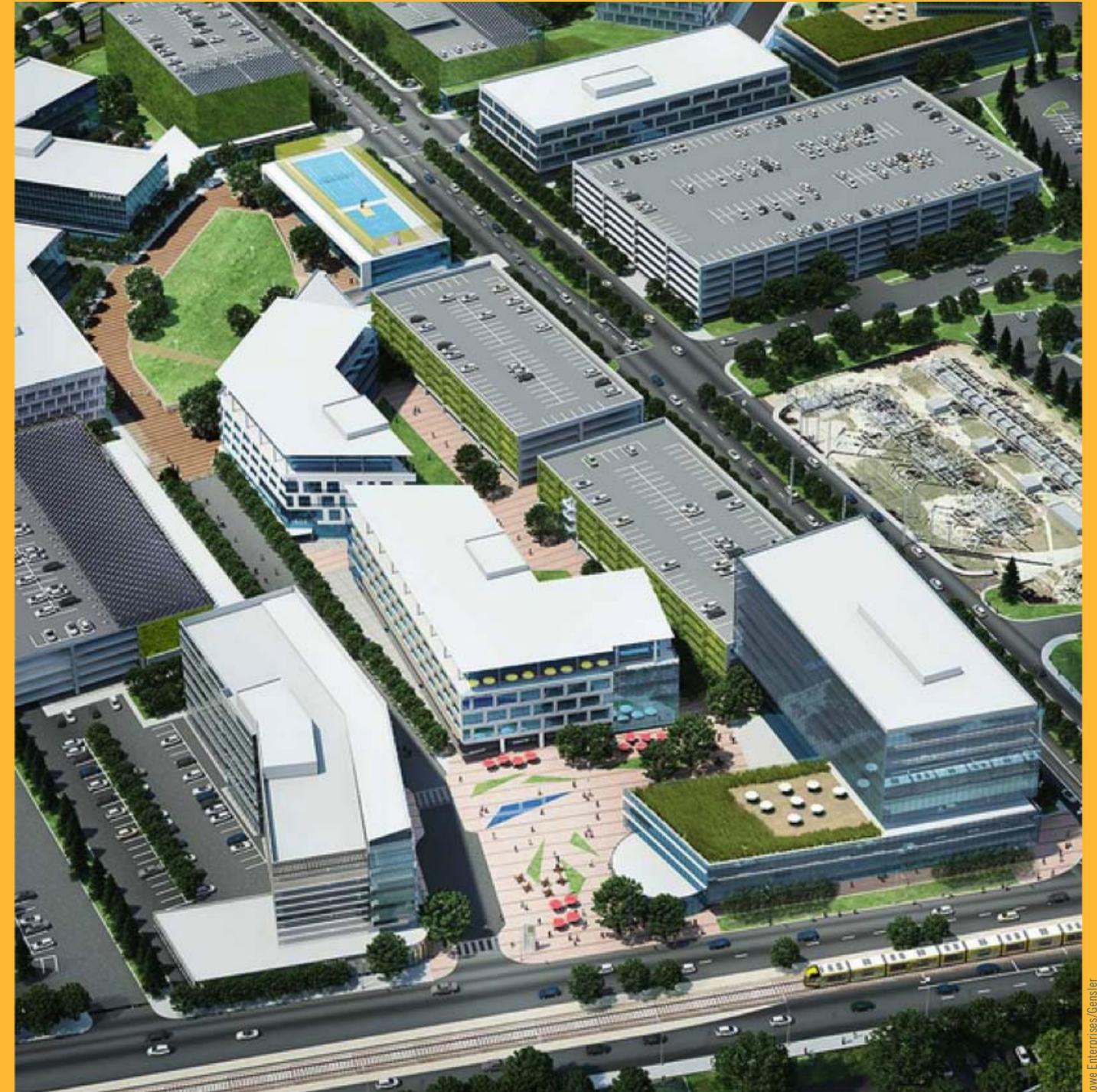
*Responsible parties: PBCE, Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA), BART, Metropolitan Transportation Commission*

**12. Create a Regional Transit Hub zoning district, including density minimums, parking maximums and regulations for building form.**

This zoning district would be one type of Urban Village zoning, developed in collaboration with regional agencies and geared toward supporting ridership and capturing the value of public investment in transit. (See also Recommendation 4.)

*Responsible party: PBCE*

# Project Review and Entitlement



## The Legacy of Redevelopment

The San Jose Redevelopment Agency (RDA) was, for half a century, one of the most active entities in shaping the city and the second-largest such agency in the state. Redevelopment agencies used a tool called tax-increment financing to fund substantial new construction and improvements in California cities. When a redevelopment area was formed, the value of all properties within the project area was assessed. Improvements were planned, and a new assessment was done to determine the higher land value that the improvements were expected to generate. The difference between the property taxes on these two assessed values — the “increment” of tax increase — was transferred to the redevelopment agency for up to 45 years after the plan was approved.

Under financial pressure, the State of California eliminated redevelopment agencies statewide in 2012. Significant bond debt from RDA investments continues to weigh on San Jose’s balance sheet, and struggles with the county and the state over tax-increment funds are an ongoing challenge. In addition, the state does not allow cities to use certain tools, such as infrastructure finance districts, in former redevelopment areas.

The RDA made urban design and placemaking a major focus, particularly downtown, leaving those capacities underdeveloped in other agencies. In particular, the agency had dedicated staff in architecture, urban design and landscape architecture. The ability to bring public resources to development negotiations — and to take an integrated view of development, public space, transportation and marketing — was a powerful combination. San Jose, like many cities, must now pick up the pieces and create post-redevelopment tools and capacities, including strong leadership of interagency processes, new financing techniques and a comprehensive approach to placemaking.

San Jose is generally a pro-development city. Its politics are much less defined by conflict over growth than those in some other cities, and debate over the nature of that growth is fairly limited. City council members often steward favored projects, whether or not they conform to city policies, and developers often call on elected officials to influence staff decisions. In many cases, planning staff have neither binding codes nor internal backing in asserting physical planning principles, and staff may not always have a strong understanding of urban design. External smart-growth advocates are spread thin, and public awareness of and engagement with planning issues is relatively limited. Where policies are subject to political intervention, developers and property owners have a strong incentive to invest time and resources negotiating a better deal.

Flexibility, which can seem like an asset in attracting development, is a double-edged sword for cities. In past decades, the San Jose Redevelopment Agency frequently negotiated with project proponents (see “The Legacy of Redevelopment” at left), but the agency brought significant subsidies to the table and could therefore negotiate from a position of strength. Today, San Jose is resource-constrained and faces conflicting imperatives from multiple agencies. In that context, flexibility is unlikely to result in favorable outcomes.

Ironically, while these circumstances give developers the incentive to push for more favorable terms, they actually undercut what developers want most: certainty. Negotiations take time, money and political capital — while project entitlements hang in limbo. But as long as the rules are malleable, it is only rational to resist them.

Clear rules will prevent certain projects from moving forward but will enable better ones to proceed more quickly and efficiently. They will also build market confidence in the kinds of places and amenities that future projects will generate.

## Design Review

The city’s ability to implement its physical planning vision depends on effective, focused design review of proposed development. This process must provide clear feedback at an early stage and focus on the kind of site-planning fundamentals that have the biggest impact at the human scale. These considerations should be part of preliminary entitlement review to ensure that feedback is both timely and effective.

Currently, review of proposed project designs occurs through several processes:

**Preliminary review** is optional for most projects although required in certain cases. There are several versions, including comprehensive preliminary review, which solicits multi-

departmental feedback (from fire, building, transportation and environmental services), delivered in 30 days. Actual times can be slower because agencies are currently understaffed.

**Planned development rezoning and development permits** involve rezoning of property for a specific project. They are becoming less frequent for reasons discussed on page 32.

**Signature Projects.** In Urban Villages, well-designed, dense mixed-use residential projects can proceed ahead of village plans, subject to a high level of scrutiny. This is a new process whose effectiveness remains to be determined.

**Enhanced design review** applies to high-rise projects (over 100 feet) citywide and downtown projects over 1 acre or 150,000 square feet. This includes review by the Architecture Review Committee (ARC), a group of outside design experts whose feedback advises the planning director but is nonbinding. Because it deals primarily with downtown and high-rise projects, which are inherently more urban in type and context, the ARC is more likely to focus on building aesthetics rather than site-planning fundamentals.

Design review is only as good as the staff capacity. At present, there are no senior-level design specialists in the planning department. Planning staff are generally land use and entitlement planners, who can evaluate permissible uses and forms, but they may be less equipped to tackle the nuances of physical design. Staffing levels are generally very low. Efforts are underway to improve urban design staffing, but a sustained effort will be required to approach the capacities of other major cities.

In Seattle, a robust design review process includes a pre-submittal conference, early design guidance and public hearings before a Design Review Board for most significant development projects. A separate Civic Design Commission advises the city on the design of public projects.

The San Francisco Planning Department has more than 10 full-time staff devoted to urban design and architecture, including the City Design Group, which “works to improve San Francisco’s livability through concern for the physical qualities of the city.” It also has a senior-level city architect and an interagency Urban Design Advisory Team, which brings together leadership to weigh in on significant projects.

Although both San Francisco and Seattle are smaller and less populous than San Jose, these are booming cities with intense public engagement on design issues, and San Jose is unlikely to have the resources to match their processes. However, the particular challenge of retrofitting an auto-oriented city to a more urban pattern will require real commitment to increasing staff capacities, advisory bodies and the review process.

Design review is most important at the earliest “napkin sketch” stages, when site plans are not locked down and the costs of changes are relatively low. Often, projects are completed with what could have been all the components of a good urban place — had they been better organized and integrated. There are an overwhelming number of parameters to a large development project. Review planners should be trained on urban design fundamentals to help them zero in quickly on those issues that will have the most impact on urban design outcomes. These issues should also be provided to developers and project proponents in clear, distilled and visually compelling materials.

Often, developers are preoccupied with issues entirely unrelated to placemaking and walkability. Part of a preliminary review (and any other entitlement application) should involve detailed mapping and analysis of surrounding uses, amenities and transit services. Site plans should indicate likely paths of pedestrian travel and the proposed interactions of building placements and frontages, active uses and circulation. This exercise can in itself improve site planning in (quite common) cases where applicants have simply not considered these questions. Prominently identifying a handful of key urban design objectives for the site (like activating an adjacent retail street or creating a strong connection to a nearby rail stop) would be a valuable addition to the entitlement, especially if it were to change hands.

A common complaint about the development process in San Jose is that the design quality of the built project falls well short of the designs originally presented to planners and to the community. It is not uncommon for a developer to hire an excellent architect to carry a project through the entitlement process, then revert to a more compliant designer, sometimes in-house, for “value engineering” (i.e., changing the design to reduce costs) and construction management. Projects can also suffer when entitled land is sold and new owners erode the spirit of the design. To limit these practices, the planning department should use tightly worded conditions of approval that will trigger re-entitlement if projects are substantially changed.

San Jose has several sets of design guidelines, for different uses and parts of town, and although planners do use them as the basis of findings in the entitlement process, they are not code, so they are often subject to negotiation and political pressure and sometimes conflict with the priorities of other agencies (such as fire, building and transportation departments), whose codes are generally binding.

More recent design guidelines, notably those for North San Jose, present a comprehensive and sophisticated urban design framework. The challenges lie in implementing them. One notable exception is the Citywide Commercial Design Guidelines, which are quite suburban in approach and should be revised to reflect General Plan priorities or subsumed into codes or guidelines for Urban Villages.

## Retail Design

Major retailers are exceedingly prescriptive site planners, and they overwhelmingly prefer auto-oriented suburban retail formats: single-story buildings fronted by abundant surface parking. Retailers often stipulate things like sightlines for their logos and signage, non-compete buffer zones, surface parking and building placement and orientation. Nearly every major retailer also has an “urban format” available — smaller stores with multiple levels and less parking — and various “hybrid” formats that combine the qualities of the other two. But retailers hold back on offering urban and hybrid formats unless local regulators negotiate aggressively and demand is very strong. Conflicting priorities at play within city government and uneven commitment to the importance of physical design make it difficult for city representatives to speak with one voice and work with retailers to develop solutions.

Retail designs can be street-friendly and also accommodate drivers. San Jose was able (with subsidy) to secure an urban-format supermarket on the ground floor of a downtown residential tower. Other efforts — outside of a high-rise context — have been less successful. In other jurisdictions around the region and the country, a variety of hybrid formats have been built — stores with underground or rooftop parking, or big-box stores above ground-floor parking that’s screened by small, leasable retail spaces at ground level.

Local jurisdictions, which depend on sales tax revenue and want retail services, are often reluctant to push back against retailers, or they’re internally divided. As a result, they’re left with stores that reinforce auto dependence, congestion and placelessness. Cities that are trying to develop a more walkable urban form are likely to be offered stores that match what they have been in the past, not what they are striving to become. Once a local jurisdiction has shown that it will accept a suburban-format store, subsequent negotiations become even more difficult. Given that urban formats will not be feasible in every location, it is important that policies about which formats are permitted in what locations and contexts are developed in advance of project proposals.



Proehl Studios



LPS Architects

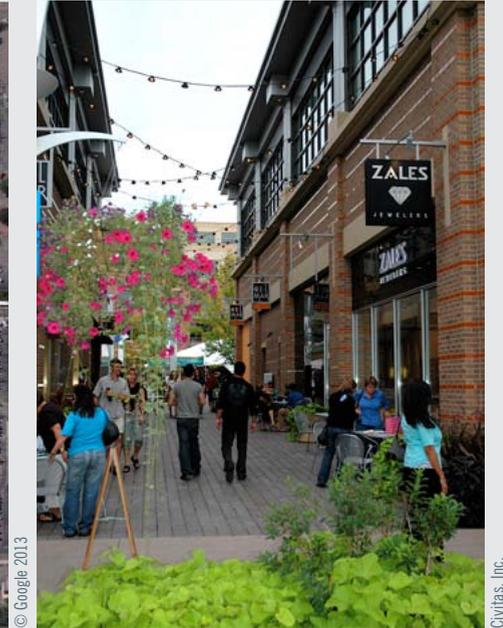


Benjamin Grant

Urban and hybrid retail designs in Oakland (top), Portland, OR, (center) and Sunnyvale (bottom).

## CASE STUDY From Dead Mall to Downtown

Belmar • Lakewood, CO



© Google 2013

Civitas, Inc.

### Land use program:

- 777,000 square feet of retail space
- 868,000 square feet of office space
- 190,000 square feet of hotel space
- 1,048 housing units
- 9 acres of public parks/plazas
- 22 city blocks on 103 acres
- 5,000 parking spaces (garage, surface and street)

**Developer:** Continuum Partners

**Designers:** Van Meter Williams Pollack, Elkus Manfredi, Civitas

Belmar represents a national model of “suburban retrofit” in which a dying midcentury mall was replaced with dense mixture of shopping, housing and employment on a fine grid of 22 new city blocks. According to its developer, Belmar is designed to “encourage pedestrian traffic, promote community building and emphasize the importance of public spaces.” It provided an urban downtown for the Denver suburb of Lakewood, which had none. Over several phases, retail was redesigned to face new streets and public spaces. Active uses enliven street frontages, even in garages, which are lined with art spaces, and sustainability features are incorporated throughout.

### Lessons for San Jose

Belmar introduced density and urban vitality in a suburban setting where retail was weak. While many mall retrofits provide an urban experience that is largely about luxury shopping and entertainment, Belmar offers day-to-day needs like groceries and services as well. Belmar’s small blocks, public streets and neighborhood parks make for a complete neighborhood that can evolve over time.

# SPUR's Recommendations for Project Review and Entitlement

## DESIGN REVIEW

*Objective: Create a new design review process to emphasize walkability through site planning, access, orientation and programming. Provide developers and project proponents with clear feedback from a single point at an early stage.*

### 13. Increase the city's internal urban design capacity:

- Hire a senior-level urban designer with strong economic, real estate, transportation and architecture experience
- Hire additional staff with urban design and physical planning expertise as feasible
- Provide training for project review staff — including those in planning, transportation, public works, parks and recreation, and environmental services — in urban design fundamentals and General Plan urban design policies.
- Create an Urban Design Advisory Group, including staff from multiple agencies and consulting urban designers, to participate in preliminary review.

Implementing the General Plan vision of walkable, well-integrated Urban Villages will require real investment in the design capacity of city agencies.

*Responsible parties: PBCE, San Jose City Council*

### 14. Explore the creation of an Urban Design Committee of citizen experts to review public projects against General Plan policies.

This proposal is modeled on the City of Seattle's system, which uses a select committee to push for civic design excellence in public projects.

*Responsible parties: PBCE, San Jose City Council*

### 15. Entitlements should prominently highlight site-specific urban design fundamentals in conditions of approval, which travel with the entitlement if transferred.

Entitlements often change hands, and designs are often modified or value engineered by people who were not immersed in preliminary discussions with staff and the community. A short, prominent list of the urban design principles underlying a project approval can clarify which of a design's myriad details matter the most to the city.

*Responsible party: PBCE*

### 16. Require preliminary review of all development proposals in Urban Villages. Require comprehensive preliminary review of projects in Urban Villages with more than 200,000 square feet or 150 dwelling units.

In Urban Villages, large projects should undergo the city's most rigorous early review as a matter of course to provide clear feedback and certainty and to prevent costly later-stage revisions.

*Responsible party: PBCE*

### 17. Write conditions of approval to a high degree of specificity and lower the thresholds for re-entitlement if a project changes significantly, as determined by the planning director.

It is common for project designs to degrade after entitlement, creating community frustration and eroding public support for new development. Clear, specific conditions of approval, and the prospect of reapplying for project entitlement if conditions are not met, can provide an important lever for regulators.

*Responsible party: PBCE*

### 18. Revise outdated residential and commercial design guidelines or replace with form-based code that's designed around contemporary building types and best practices.

While many of San Jose's design guidelines are excellent, the city-wide Commercial Design Guidelines and Residential Design Guidelines are out of date and reflect a more suburban set of priorities. These should be revised or replaced with clear form regulations through Urban Village zoning districts.

*Responsible party: PBCE*

## RETAIL DESIGN

*Objective: Promote urban-format retail in locations targeted for compact, walkable development. Negotiate effectively with retailers.*

### 19. Develop and adopt a consistent city policy on retail formats, using precedents from other jurisdictions. Define which formats are permitted in which locations in advance of negotiations with retail projects.

Urban-format retail will not be possible in all locations, but the lack of a clear policy hampers the city's ability to negotiate effectively with retailers. The city should develop a policy proactively.

*Responsible parties: PBCE, OED*

### 20. Codify tiered retail development standards to apply in Urban Villages, including the following tiers:

- **Urban:** Prohibit surface parking; allow setbacks for public space only; require transparent street frontages; strongly encourage a vertical mixture of uses; allow loading docks in garages or alleys only.
- **Hybrid:** Minimize surface parking; strongly encourage rooftop or underground parking; allow setbacks for public space only; require entrances on public streets, sidewalks or plazas; require loading docks at rear.
- **Peripheral:** Limit setbacks; require entrances at public streets or on clear pedestrian access routes; require loading docks at rear.

Retail standards should be appropriate to a store's surrounding context and should define best practices for several conditions, from the downtown core to more suburban neighborhoods.

*Responsible party: PBCE*

# Market Conditions and Development Practices



Sergio Ruiz

## Market Conditions

While planning can establish a vision and policies to support it, the transformation of San Jose will ultimately be the result of private investment. To be effective, policies must be attuned to local market conditions and assumptions, which can be challenging.

**San Jose has a relatively soft land market.** Many planners are accustomed to thinking about the Bay Area land market as perpetually white-hot. Indeed, in aggregate it is among the most dynamic urban regions in the United States. But demand is unevenly distributed and San Jose, notwithstanding its connection to Silicon Valley, is a considerably softer market than San Francisco, Mountain View or Palo Alto, particularly for the office and retail sectors. (See Figure 3.) In those hotter markets, planning is often about setting limits on the pace and scale of growth, with the assumption that the market will fill whatever container is defined by policy. This allows physical planning to be quite prescriptive and to put aesthetic or community preferences ahead of market concerns. In San Jose, however, the more tenuous market requires policies focused on attracting investment. If policies are perceived as onerous or uncertain, projects will not go forward. On the other hand, proactively facilitating high-quality development can build investor confidence in the city's long-term prospects.

**The housing market is generally much stronger than the commercial market.** Historically, this has resulted in the conversion of industrial and commercial land to residential use — one reason for the city's policy focus on attracting jobs. Significant multifamily housing development is reshaping many parts of the city, including North San Jose and downtown.

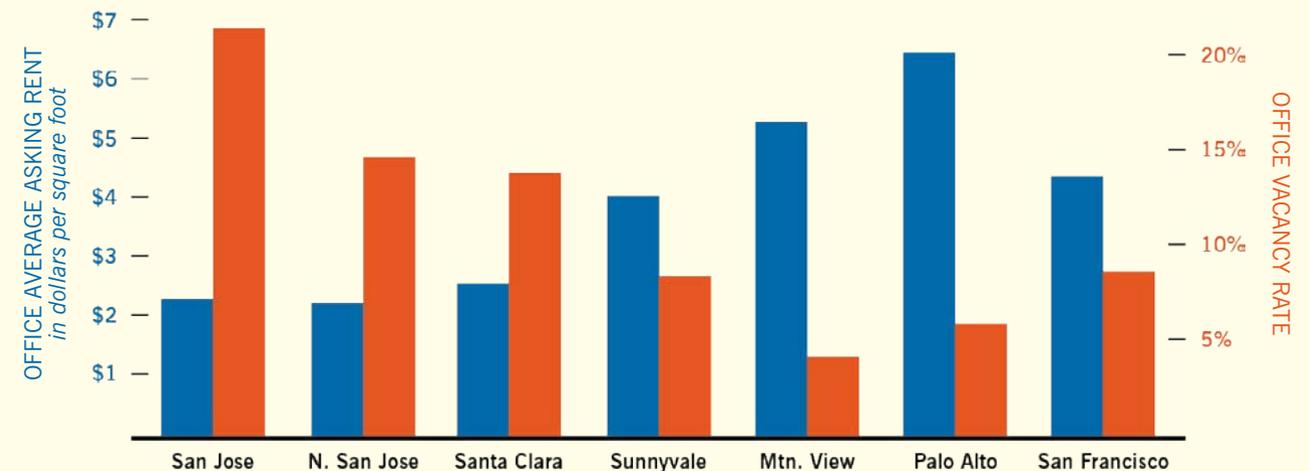
**Downtown San Jose has struggled to find market traction,** despite its inherent assets (including urban amenities and transit), billions of dollars in public investment by the RDA and renewed interest in urban settings nationally. A wave of high-rise condominium and apartment towers (20+ stories) opened just as the market collapsed in 2007, but they were largely occupied as the economy recovered. New rental projects followed, capitalizing on the city's high-rise residential incentive program and the success of San Pedro Square Market. These signs of life have not been matched on the commercial side, which has hovered near 20 percent vacancy (much of it attributable to a few large vacancies). There has been some concern about letting key sites in the downtown core be developed as housing rather than office space, especially near future BART stations, which could limit a resurgent commercial sector — and limit BART ridership — in the future.

**Citywide, a wave of development followed the Bay Area's recovery** from the recession, led in San Jose by rental housing and technology uses. In addition to downtown projects, Samsung's new campus, housing at Crescent Village and commercial projects at Santana Row indicate a renewed interest in San Jose development. Densities are also increasing, creating opportunities for more urban conditions provided that projects are designed to integrate effectively.

**There is a tension between the planning vision and the market.** In San Jose, as in all softer markets, planning can only be successful insofar as it creates attractive conditions for investors. The current San Jose real estate market favors housing. But in general, the city's planning policies favor commercial and employment uses, seeking a more fiscally sustainable jobs-housing balance. Where housing is permitted, policies often call for more density than the market has

Figure 3. Silicon Valley Commercial Rent and Vacancy Rates

San Jose has struggled with low commercial rents and high vacancy rates relative to other municipalities.



Source: CBRE Silicon Valley/SF Office Market View Q2 2013

been willing to build. For example, in several key locations, plans call for high-rise housing on major corridors outside downtown, but developers have balked, preferring more reliably profitable four- to six-story housing. In North San Jose, the Specific Plan calls for a dense mix of commercial and residential uses on a new, smaller block pattern. The market response has been cagey, and North San Jose's nonbinding design guidelines, established in 2010, have yet to be wholeheartedly expressed in new development.

In the era of redevelopment, public resources might well have been brought to bear to bridge the mismatch between plans and the market, but that option is not easily available today. How, then, to attract development without compromising away the placemaking vision? To be utterly uncompromising is to court failure and chase development to other cities. By the same token, each compromise erodes both the value that accrues to excellent urban places and the market's confidence that the rules will be upheld and produce such a place. Indeed, building according to today's market expectations locks in today's development patterns and travel behaviors.

**It's hard to both attract projects and push them to change.** The fiscal imperative to attract employment and the intense competition among cities to draw firms makes it especially difficult to advocate for better design of commercial development, lest the project simply move over the city boundary to a more accommodating jurisdiction. This report's emphasis on employment stems from the intensely competitive market in this area, as well as the city's desire to maximize employment growth above other uses, the disproportionate impact of employment location on travel behavior, and the cultural shift toward amenity-rich urban environments in the technology sector.

**Land is abundant, and attentions are dispersed.** In the postwar period, San Jose grew tenfold in land area by annexing neighboring farmland and orchards. This growth was highly dispersed and developed in an auto-dependent pattern. The city's 177 square miles include a large and diverse portfolio of underutilized, undeveloped or obsolescent land. While this is an asset insofar as it enables San Jose to accommodate its projected growth by intensifying internally rather than sprawling outward, it is a challenge in that there is not a scarcity of land to drive density naturally. The scale of the city and the sheer number of locations that could accommodate growth make it very difficult to provide the kind of sustained policy or market focus required to create great places.

For related reasons, there is a limited supply of local precedents for dense, well-designed urban places. It is difficult to point to examples that inspire community support for change, investment by developers and commitment by decision-makers under pressure to follow through on policy decisions.

### Creating an Urban Context: The "First Mover" Problem

Shifting to a new development pattern entails significant risk. Walkable environments accrue value over time, but current development and lending practices demand quick returns and clear comparables. In addition, successful higher-density development requires more up-front investment in the infrastructure and amenities that integrate urban places. Urban development thrives through its interaction with projects and amenities controlled by other property owners, both public and private.

Imagine, for example, that a project proponent is asked to orient building entrances to the street to support a walkable environment. Downtown, this is a simple matter of matching the existing context. In a suburban setting where the surrounding buildings are set behind parking, the first property owner to build the new pattern assumes the risk. This risk can be mitigated in several ways:

- Policymakers can offer incentives as a way of acknowledging the risk.
- Clear, binding codes and plans can build investor confidence that others will follow suit.
- Cities can reframe the risk as opportunity by proactively seeking creative developers and lenders who have bought into the urban vision or by sponsoring design competitions that help property owners visualize the potential outcome.

Another approach is to seek a "first mover" who does not require a rapid return on investment. Public agencies (such as the city, county, VTA or San Jose State University), in partnership with other mission-driven institutions (such as hospitals or foundations), can initiate development projects that demonstrate good urban design principles. Without the need for an exit strategy or rapid return on investment, these institutions can create places that are ahead of the private market and thereby build investor confidence in the larger vision.

### Financing

Real estate development is driven by the need to minimize risk, and visionary experiments are rare. Securing financing involves demonstrating the success of recent comparable projects in the same market and whittling away any differences between your project and the proven successes. This results in a powerful reinforcement of the status quo and makes it very hard for the market to lead transformative or even incremental changes. Developers we interviewed often said words to the effect of "I would love to be building the sorts of places you describe, but I could never get them financed." Although this challenge is very real, there are numerous ways that well-designed projects can secure financing:



The Gates Foundation headquarters, designed by NBBJ architects, brings a bold, permeable design to an urban location in Seattle, illustrating the impact non-market investors can have on the built environment.

**Alternative lenders.** Private equity, pension and union funds often have a different perspective than local banks, sometimes incorporating sustainability and social benefit goals. Funders in other regions of the country or the world may have a greater comfort level or expertise with urban and mixed-use products.

**Codes that prescribe better design.** The recent credit crisis notwithstanding, lenders need to lend. Where guidelines intended to change development are negotiable, lenders expect developers to push for a familiar product, and the developers do. Where codes are specific and binding, certainty is increased, and lenders must shift their expectations.

**Motivated end users.** Some of the most creative development proposals have come from end users who are financing their own projects, such as Google's ambitious campus reconfiguration or Amazon's high-rise headquarters in downtown Seattle.

**Public-private partnerships.** Samsung's North San Jose campus, currently under construction, was made possible by significant state and local subsidies, which can also give public policy priorities a stronger voice in project design. Samsung embraced the vision of the North San Jose Urban Design Guidelines and will help demonstrate the appeal of a transit-oriented vertical tech campus. The end of redevelopment and the fiscal challenges faced by the city make such investments tough to justify, but they may be worthwhile for key catalytic projects that will serve policy goals and set precedents for future projects. In addition, various post-redevelopment financing and assessment tools can be deployed in key locations.

**Institutional projects.** Mission-driven institutions may choose to invest in facilities with higher-quality urban design features than could be financed through the speculative marketplace. Universities, public agencies, hospitals and philanthropic organizations may embrace people-focused and sustainable design strategies as expressions of their institutional missions and are not likely to be driven by exit strategies or short-term returns. These investments in good design fundamentals can lead to associated private sector development; for example, a cluster of life-sciences firms have located near the new UC San Francisco campus at Mission Bay.

**Affordable housing developers.** Like institutions, these developers can be excellent development partners, bringing significant tax credits and other subsidies to a project and investing for long-term quality, not quick returns.

## Ten Principles for Reinventing Suburban Business Districts

How can we change sprawling suburban business districts into attractive, economically thriving communities? The Urban Land Institute suggests these 10 principles:<sup>9</sup>

1. Understand your position in the market.
2. Build community support.
3. Develop a vision and a plan.
4. Stress results over regulation.
5. Break up the superblocks and optimize connectivity.
6. Embrace mixed use.
7. Honor the human scale by creating a pedestrian-friendly place.
8. Think transit — think density.
9. Create a public/private partnership.
10. Share and manage parking.

<sup>9</sup> Booth, Geoffrey, Bruce Leonard and Michael Pawlukiewicz. "Ten Principles for Reinventing Suburban Business Districts." Urban Land Institute, 2002, available at: <http://www.uli.org/report/ten-principles-for-reinventing-americas-suburban-business-districts>

## CASE STUDY

# Near-Term Financial Challenges, Long-Term Market Transformation

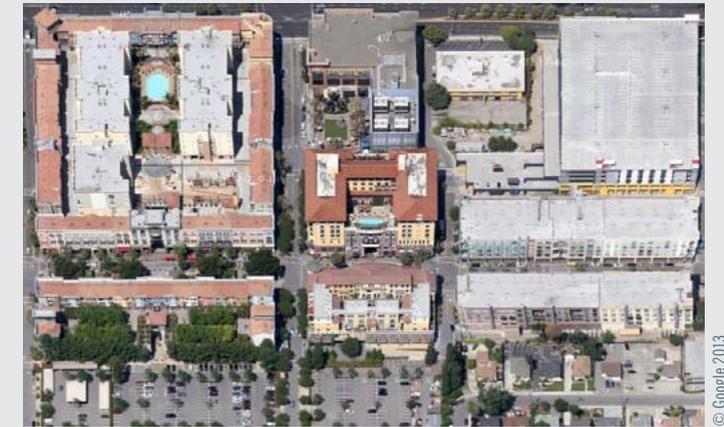
Santana Row • San Jose, CA



Federal Realty



Federal Realty



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### Land use program:

- 42-acre site
- 622 housing units (1,182 planned)
- 214 hotel rooms
- 672,500 square feet of retail/restaurant/entertainment space
- 65,000 square feet of existing office space (700,000 square feet planned)
- 3,516 parking spaces

**Developer:** Federal Realty Investment Trust, Wilson Meany

**Master Planning:** StreetWorks, Inc.

**Architects:** BAR Architects, Studios Architecture, WRNS

**Landscape Architects:** SWA Group, April Philips Design Works

Santana Row, a 42-acre mix of high-end retail and housing on a walkable central street, is a revealing example of the opportunities, challenges and contradictions of placemaking in San Jose.

While Santana Row is in a somewhat peripheral location and is often criticized for damaging downtown San Jose's retail prospects, it has created a dense, thriving mixed-use environment that combines housing with shopping and entertainment. Although it is not well served by transit (conventional bus lines are nearby), it has become a genuinely walkable environment that draws crowds from throughout the Santa Clara Valley.

Santana Row is exceptionally well designed and constructed, with housing placed over retail; well-appointed, walkable streets and plazas; and parking artfully tucked into the interiors of city blocks. The street is modeled on the *Rambles de Catalunya* in Barcelona and includes an imported gothic stone chapel, repurposed as a wine bar. It is simultaneously an ersatz theme park and a genuine expression of many core urban design principles. There is certainly room for improvement, particularly in its integration with public transit and the surrounding neighborhoods. With that said, many observers rightly cite Santana Row as an illustration of the hunger for good places in San Jose and an example of the economic return on investments in quality pedestrian environments.

On the other hand, many in the real estate profession describe Santana Row as a cautionary tale. Federal Realty, the master developer, suffered serious financial setbacks on this project. These stemmed from extremely high construction costs coupled with a devastating fire that gutted the project during construction, followed by the recession that hit shortly after Santana Row opened in late 2002.

Today, Santana Row is thriving, providing a small pocket of the richly layered amenities that well-designed cities can generate. It is so alluring that three new commercial office buildings are under development at Santana Row, a sign that urban amenities indeed shape the market for employment uses.

Santana Row illustrates many of the issues in this report:

- Good design carries high up-front costs.
- South Bay residents are hungry for great places.
- Developers expect rapid returns and see placemaking as risky.
- Investing in quality places creates sustained value.
- Urban amenities and walkable places draw employment.

Is Santana Row replicable? Does it prove the risk or the value of good design? Certainly, its ultra-high-end retail market is not a good general model. However, the urban design fundamentals could and should be applied to more ordinary settings. The recommendations in this report are directed at creating this kind of pedestrian vitality in neighborhoods across San Jose.



Suburban development is often designed to be broken apart and sold as self-contained modules.

### Exit Strategies and Flexibility

Commercial office development is often an exceptionally conservative market when it comes to design. Office space is a volatile and liquid commodity, and exit strategies often drive site planning. In suburban settings, the potential to some day subdivide and sell off commercial buildings tends to yield designs that are modular, have excessive parking and hew very tightly to standardized market expectations — products that do not challenge any expectations an imagined buyer might hold.

Because property is more salable if unencumbered, the need for an exit strategy also complicates efforts to capture efficiency through shared resources like parking garages, public access easements, heating and energy cogeneration systems or stormwater infrastructure.

Contrast the suburban model of flexibility with a traditional urban setting in which individual floors, buildings, parcels and blocks can all be redeveloped and reoccupied. Access, amenities and environmental services are publicly shared and external to any given property, providing a framework that allows flexible transformation. This urban framework is self-reinforcing, attracting additional investment and supporting higher land values and sustained economic returns.

### Near-Term and Long-Term Value

Economic data support a strong correlation between walkable urbanism and sustained high property values. One study found that a 10-point higher Walk Score<sup>10</sup> yields 5 to 8 percent higher commercial property values.<sup>11</sup>

New urban places take time to mature and develop synergy and critical mass, but real estate markets expect quick returns and clear exit strategies, even though investments in better places are likely to create higher returns over the long haul. Projects that are built to occupy or to hold and lease rather than to sell often show significantly better attention to placemaking. New multifamily rental housing at Crescent Village, built to hold and lease, is one example of placemaking as an investment to be recouped over time.

The Urban Land Institute has referred to the accrual of value associated with better urban design as the “Place-Making Dividend,” which it describes as “the intrinsic value that accrues to a community when districts possess a strong sense of place that in turn results in high levels of repeat visits, increasing rents, retail sales, leasing demand, and capital value. Such a dividend occurs when individual real estate projects are so well designed and interconnected that they work as one integrated place.”<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Walkscore (<http://www.walkscore.com>) rates walkability with an algorithm that measures the proximity of services and amenities, among other factors. Although imperfect, it has quickly become a standard metric.

<sup>11</sup> Cortright, *supra* note 2.

<sup>12</sup> Booth et al., *supra* note 1.

Achieving this premium will require developers to think differently about site design and the urban context of their projects.

## Development Culture

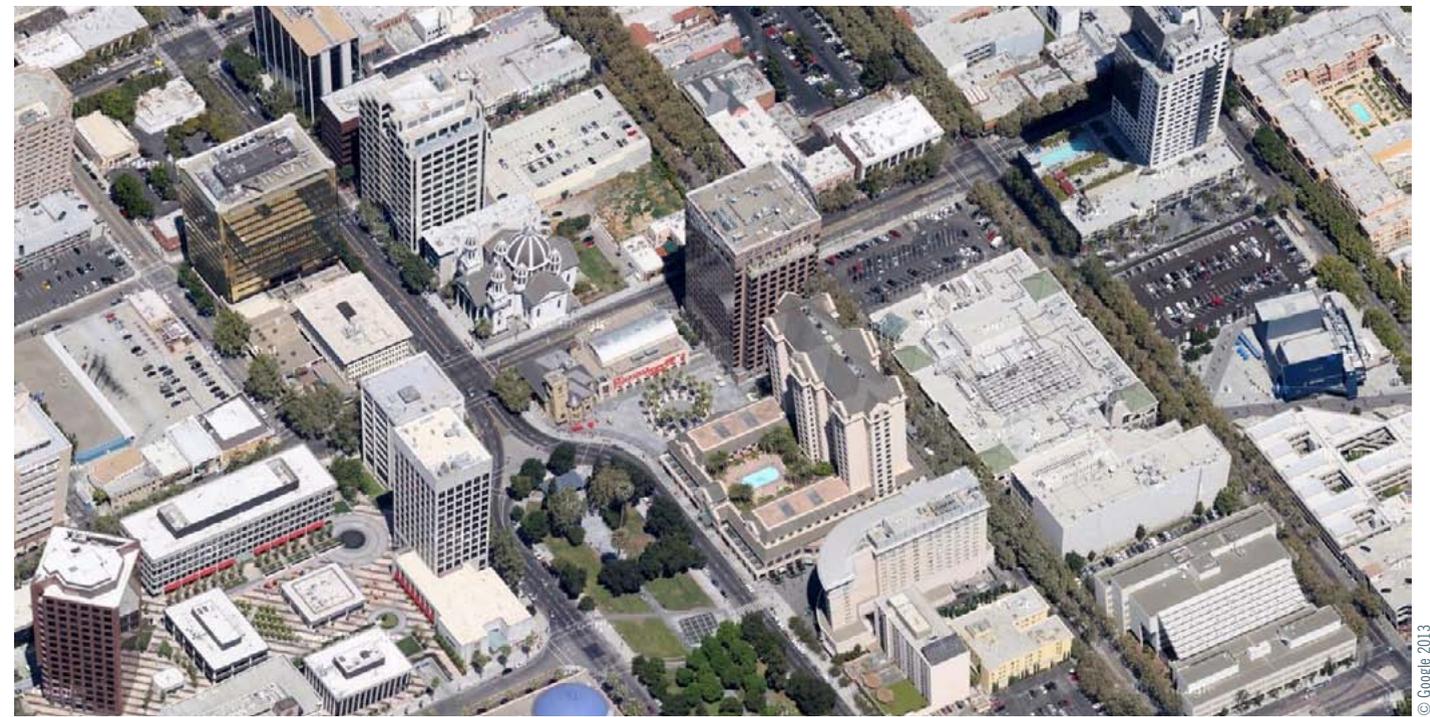
San Jose grew quickly in the postwar period, annexing large swaths of orchards in the Santa Clara Valley — the “Valley of Heart’s Delight,” as it was known. Like most suburban communities, the city grew up around the automobile, in substantial tracts (residential subdivisions, shopping malls, industrial parks) that were designed as inward-focused worlds unto themselves. In the suburban model of development, an ideal site is near enough to existing uses to be valuable, near enough to freeways to be accessible but otherwise completely isolated. Development projects in this context tend to turn away from the surrounding landscape and provide an attractive internal experience. Subsequent development extends to nearby open space and agriculture, thus degrading the physical environment.

In an urban setting, new development occurs within a strong physical pattern, such as a street grid with small parcels. The more development occurs, the more that pattern is filled in and the more attractive and functional it becomes. Increasing density, far from degrading the environment, improves it, as services and amenities cluster within walking distance, public spaces come to life and travel options beyond the private automobile become possible.

The challenge in San Jose is to move from one pattern and set of practices to the other. This will require overcoming the skepticism toward visionary planning currently held by much of the development community and some political officials. Many factors underlie this skepticism, some more reasonable than others. The RDA was ambitious and visionary, and its demise left a vacuum from which the city is only now recovering. Ambitious plans for retail downtown and employment in North San Jose have been perceived as insufficiently attuned to market realities. Elected officials are under pressure to support lesser projects in the near term, eroding political will to support long-term transformation.

Local developers, having succeeded in the more laissez-faire environment of suburban expansion, often see attempts to effect change through planning policy as intrusive and the entitlement process as cumbersome and understaffed. Planners have felt political pressure to emphasize speed over quality. In fact, several developers who have worked in multiple Bay Area jurisdictions told us that San Jose’s entitlement process is not unusually onerous. Although staffing shortages have indeed been a challenge, it is strategic planning (rather than permit processing) that has suffered the most. SPUR believes that strategic planning is critical to the city’s transformation and deserves the backing of elected officials and other agencies.

Again and again, SPUR heard from stakeholders a version of “Those are fine ideas, but this is San Jose — that’s not going to happen here.” The combination of lukewarm markets, entrenched political and development culture, and a sense of being a second-tier city



Urban development is embedded in existing networks of transportation, public space and amenities, which allow flexible change of any particular lease, building or parcel.

produces a self-fulfilling prophecy that is a serious impediment to change. Many of the recommendations in this document — such as developing catalytic projects, engaging developers from other cities and holding design competitions — are aimed at shaking up those attitudes and shining a spotlight on the city’s considerable assets and potential significance.

## SPUR’s Recommendations for Market Conditions and Development Practices

### RESEARCH, ANALYSIS AND ENGAGEMENT

*Objective: Increase the state of knowledge and practice around common design challenges and solutions.*

#### 21. Engage advocates and researchers to conduct a “grayfield audit” of underutilized land within a half-mile of rail and bus rapid transit stations. Conduct outreach to property owners about development potential and partnership opportunities.

A grayfield audit can help highlight the latent, unrealized value in underutilized land, especially surface parking lots near transit resources.

*Responsible parties: OED, PBCE and advocates such as the Urban Land Institute, the American Institute of Architects, SPUR and the Greenbelt Alliance*

#### 22. Collaboratively develop and publish widely applicable solutions to common development challenges, such as:

- Stormwater management solutions
- Walkable site design
- Site planning for densification over time
- Ground-floor residential units and retail in parking podiums
- Retail design formats
- Liner buildings on surface lots and setbacks

Site design challenges tend to repeat themselves, and a well-researched series of best-practices guides could help provide city staff and developers with effective, proven solutions that turn design challenges into great places.

*Responsible parties: OED, PBCE and advocates such as the Urban Land Institute, the American Institute of Architects, SPUR and the Greenbelt Alliance*

### PROJECT PHASING

*Objective: Ensure that Urban Villages can reach planned densities over time and support urban design solutions for the interim.*

#### 23. Require multiphase projects that are seeking entitlement to demonstrate the urban design/walkability performance of early phases, including:

- The placement of first-phase buildings
- Placement and access to surface parking
- Pedestrian access from adjacent rights of way
- Fencing or other treatment of unbuilt portions
- Temporary activation (see Recommendation 24)

Projects are often entitled based on designs that work at full build-out, which may be decades away. The design of early phases is critical because it establishes a pattern, and sometimes the early phases are all that is ever built.

*Responsible parties: PBCE, project proponents*

#### 24. Encourage temporary activation of underutilized land/setback zones with food trucks, pop-up retail, and arts and cultural uses.

*Responsible parties: OED, San Jose Office of Cultural Affairs, nonprofits*

#### 25. As a condition of entitlement, development in Urban Villages that is less dense than development targets in the General Plan should have a viable densification plan and demonstrate best practices in urban design for all phases. The plan should outline:

- Channelized utilities planned for future access and modification
- Additional buildings and structured parking
- Site grading and stormwater management

Sites can be designed for change. Where the market is not able to deliver the densities envisioned in the General Plan, project proponents should be required to show how a site could grow denser over time.

*Responsible parties: PBCE, project proponents*

#### 26. Allow and encourage a reduction in parking requirements in subsequent phases if justified by rates of use.

Parking is generally provided at rates that assume today’s auto-oriented travel patterns. Entitlements can be designed so that subsequent phases require less parking if these patterns shift.

*Responsible party: PBCE*

### PUBLIC DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES AND PARTNERSHIPS

*Objective: Create a few great walkable places to model urban design excellence and catalyze market shifts.*

#### 27. Create one to three “catalytic clusters” — districts where all available tools and resources are brought to bear to support development and where design standards are uncompromising.

- Develop projects in partnership with mission-driven developers and land-owners, including:
  - Public agencies
  - Educational, cultural and philanthropic institutions
  - Nonprofit housing developers
- Use public competitions and requests for proposals to solicit proposals from market-rate developers.
- Use assessment districts, such as infrastructure finance districts and community facilities districts, to generate resources for infrastructure and public improvements.

d. Possible sites: Diridon, VTA headquarters, Stevens Creek Boulevard, former city hall site, Santa Clara County headquarters

- e. Possible project types:
- Model tech campus/mixed-use district through an invited competition, using the VTA headquarters or former city hall site
  - Student-oriented downtown “micro-unit” housing
  - Walkable/transit-oriented retail/entertainment

There are few finished models of the kinds of walkable places envisioned for Urban Villages and vast amounts of land vying for attention. A sustained focus on creating a few great places could help prove the Urban Village concept while honing new tools and processes.

*Responsible parties: OED, SPUR, VTA, nonprofit developers*

#### 28. Use new San Jose city government offices, buildings and public facilities to demonstrate high-quality urban design and placemaking.

*Responsible parties: San Jose Department of Public Works (DPW), San Jose City Council*

## The Technology Workplace



The proposed n1 campus in North San Jose would provide the facilities that tech firms demand, with a design that creates urban amenities near transit.

Because of the importance of the technology sector to San Jose's economy and the General Plan's emphasis on employment uses, the evolving nature of the technology workplace is worth exploring.

The physical format of the technology sector is in flux. The suburban tech campus of low-slung tilt-up concrete buildings set behind seas of surface parking lots is giving way to a variety of forms and settings, none of which has emerged as the clear standard. Several factors are at play:

**Top firms and younger talent want urban-style amenities.** Many of today's innovators and entrepreneurs are far less interested in a suburban lifestyle, where time is spent commuting by car to isolated campuses with few amenities. Studies show a striking decline in driving by young people,<sup>13</sup> who report that they thrive on the bustle and interaction that cities provide. Many Bay Area firms, especially in social media, are locating in cities like San Francisco and Oakland rather than in suburban campuses on the peninsula or in the South

<sup>13</sup> Fewer young people are buying cars. In 1995, people age 21 to 30 drove 21 percent of all miles driven in the U.S.; in 2009, it was 14 percent, despite consistent growth of the age group. Living car-free in walkable areas fits younger lifestyles. See Neff, Jack. "Is Digital Revolution Driving Decline in U.S. Car Culture?" *Advertising Age*, 2010, available at: <http://adage.com/article/digital/digital-revolution-driving-decline-u-s-car-culture/144155>

Bay. Those that are not are providing large-scale shuttle services from desirable urban neighborhoods to campuses that provide a range of on-site services, from food to haircuts to ersatz "streets" that mimic urban social experience. Increasingly, human resources managers, who must recruit firms' talent base, are involved in decisions about where firms are locating and the format and design of the workplace.

The ability to attract top firms and top talent are critical to the future of San Jose's economy. One commercial broker referred to the North First corridor as "an amenity desert" where even finding lunch requires a trip in the car. In this sense, better urban design is becoming an economic development imperative. Thus, the area where city officials have the least appetite for asserting a physical planning vision (for fear of chasing away fiscally important employment uses) is the area where physical transformation is most essential.

**Tech offices are denser and more flexible.** Today's larger tech offices are getting denser at two levels: in the office and on the site. In the office, considerably less floor area is being devoted to each worker. Many offices are using "hot desk" systems in which workers have no fixed location and spaces are designed to be easily reconfigured

to match teams and projects. This has two implications for urban design. First, the market is demanding large, flexible floorplates of 30,000 or 40,000 square feet. Slender towers and small parcelization are unlikely to succeed in the marketplace, so urban spaces will need to be shaped by larger, more horizontal structures. Second, more workers per square foot means more commute trips per square foot. Firms will need to shift commute trips away from the private car just so their existing parking supply remains adequate. Put another way, pressure on parking is increasing even as firms help get workers out of their cars with shuttles and other transportation amenities. Urban settings are therefore competitive in that they offer transit options, but they require relinquishing assumptions about ubiquitous auto commuting and may not offer the building types some firms demand.

At the site level, tech uses are getting denser as well. Multistory buildings and parking structures are increasingly the norm in areas like North San Jose. Projects like Brocade, Hitachi, Samsung and the n1 campus are looking to maximize site potential in an increasingly mature and constrained land market. This presents real opportunities for urban design and placemaking, as tech

### High-design mega-structure

This approach takes the existing model of an internally focused suburban campus and gives it a striking signature design, typically at a higher density. The Apple "spaceship" by Foster + Partners, planned for Cupertino, is the preeminent example, with similar approaches in proposals by Facebook and NVIDIA. This model creates striking objects with design appeal but does not change the equation of car dependence and isolation. Though transportation demand-management programs (which may include shuttle systems, transit incentives and guaranteed rides home) can shift travel behavior — sometimes impressively — they are working against the spatial fundamentals, which favor driving.

### Moving downtown

Firms like Twitter, Salesforce, Adobe and Amazon have chosen to locate in downtown settings to take advantage of location efficiencies and attract top programmers and developers, who often prefer high-amenity urban locations. These firms often combine new and old structures and create environments that are permeable to the public while protecting internal security. Abundant transit and other transportation modes reduce the need for costly parking. These workplaces both support and draw from their surroundings.

employment sites are reaching densities conducive to urban life and are storing cars in a more efficient and less disruptive manner. With the market adopting denser formats organically, a significant opportunity exists to promote site planning that leverages that density into walkable, transit-supportive environments without major bottom-line impacts.

It is important to note that not all technology businesses have the same needs. Hardware manufacturing and prototyping — long a strength of the South Bay — requires specialized facilities and heavy security, while software and social media are more adaptable and people-centered.

**Tech campuses are taking new forms, and the future is unclear.** With these shifts underway, tech firms and developers are seeking new models that can attract top talent, create or tap the kind of spontaneous interaction that feeds innovation, provide a mix of amenities and services and build brand identity.

Several directions are emerging, with very different urban design ramifications:



City of Cupertino



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### Urbanizing in place

Of the greatest interest here are projects that transform traditionally suburban settings into more amenity-rich urban environments, sometimes including a mix of uses. Google has proposed: transferring development rights from more remote parcels into the core of its Mountain View campus; introducing small, walkable blocks; and even adding housing for some of its workers in a live-work-play environment. San Jose is ripe for this type of development, in which private and public sector goals converge and new placemaking models are possible.

Samsung's 10-story facility on North First Street (pictured, developed with significant public sector participation) puts density and public amenities adjacent to light rail transit and is compatible with the fundamentals of the North San Jose Design Guidelines.

Nearby, Lowe Enterprises' proposed n1 campus brings this transitional model into a spec office proposal. It also orients to North First light rail, framing a public gathering space with active uses on the ground floors of flexible, large-floorplate class-A office buildings. In so doing, it deftly bridges the gap between market expectations and placemaking cachet while also serving public policy goals.



NBBJ

### Startups

A wellspring of the innovation economy — and one that San Jose is well positioned to nurture — is the startup. Startups are most active in authentic urban settings, where like-minded entrepreneurs can collaborate, find talented staff and grow in inspiring spaces. For these firms, good coffee and evening entertainment are more important than parking ratios and floorplates. While San Francisco and Palo Alto are clear leaders here, downtown San Jose has many of the critical ingredients. The robust pipeline of young engineers from San Jose State University; the presence of entertainment, arts and culture; incubators like NextSpace and Techshop; and established startups like Pinger give downtown San Jose a competitive position in this space.



Sergio Ruiz

## CASE STUDY

# A Master Developer Guides a Strong Urban Vision

Bay Meadows Phase 2 • San Mateo, CA



Courtesy Wilson Meany



Courtesy Wilson Meany

#### Land use program:

- 1,250,000 square feet of office space
- 150,000 square feet of retail space
- 1,250 residential units
- 15 acres of public parks

**Developer:** Wilson Meany

**Designers:** Cooper, Robertson & Partners; CMG Landscape Architecture

San Mateo's former Bay Meadows racetrack is currently being redeveloped into a mixed-use district organized around the Hillsdale Caltrain Station and connected by a variety of public spaces. Offices, retail, residential buildings and parks are oriented toward walkable streets, with office and retail uses arrayed around the station. The master developer is responsible for implementing a detailed design plan negotiated with the city and for ensuring that individual projects support the overall vision of a new urban neighborhood.

#### Lessons for San Jose

Sites of this scale are not always available, though San Jose has several. The specificity of the design program at Bay Meadows provides a high degree of certainty to both the city and to project developers, and the master developer is invested in the district's overall success. The regional access afforded by Caltrain — to both San Francisco and Silicon Valley — is reflected in the site design, which aims to attract tech firms that want transit and urban amenities.

# Public Policy and Placemaking



While planning can elaborate visions and set permissible uses and forms, its powers are limited, in part because it must interact with a host of other agencies and policy frameworks. To implement better urban design in San Jose, a wide range of policies and resources must be aligned. Public funds are raised and spent through a variety of mechanisms, including fees, exactions, taxes and assessments. Economic development activities can result in significant development deals. Codes, standards and practices set by regulating and implementation agencies have a major impact on what can be built in both private and public projects. This section examines opportunities to shift public policy in a variety of arenas so they work together to support the development of dense, walkable and livable communities in San Jose.

## Financing and Assessment Tools in the Post-Redevelopment Era

State redevelopment agencies allowed cities to generate revenue for public amenities and infrastructure through tax-increment financing. In addition to these direct benefits, this approach helped cities leverage private investment and provided a strong public framework to shape urban form before development began. The state's elimination of these tools has been a blow to local city-making capacities.

However, several tools exist that can replicate aspects of redevelopment. Coupled with the Urban Village planning process, these post-redevelopment assessment and financing tools could provide a toolkit for making public improvements (including streets, parks and other infrastructure) and shaping new development in San Jose. Urban Village boundaries provide ready-made assessment districts, and the public realm frameworks described in "The State of Planning in San Jose" can define a package of eligible improvement projects for each Urban Village.

Each tool has its pluses and minuses. Most require a vote of property owners to initiate. Some cannot be used in former redevelopment areas. Some cannot currently be used for public space maintenance (a critical need in San Jose). But among them, significant opportunities exist to support the implementation of the General Plan vision.

### Financing and Assessment Tools

**Community Facilities District (CFD) or "Mello-Roos" District** <sup>14</sup>  
A CFD is a special tax on property within a district, initiated by a

<sup>14</sup>The Mello-Roos District is named for the co-sponsors of California's 1982 Community Facilities Act, which created the CFD mechanism.

two-thirds vote of property owners. It raises funds for local public facilities, maintenance and services and for select private facilities such as renewable energy and stormwater management.

*Recommended Application:* Use CFDs for capital improvements, operations and maintenance (O&M) for public space, which could hasten capital investments that have gotten stuck because of inadequate O&M funds. CFDs can also support off-site stormwater facilities.

#### Infrastructure Finance District (IFD)

An IFD is a tax-increment financing tool that (like redevelopment previously) captures a portion of future growth in property taxes within a district; it's initiated by a two-thirds vote of property owners. Bonds may then be issued against the future increment. IFDs can fund public facilities of community-wide significance, but *not* O&M.

*Recommended Application:* Consider IFDs to make up-front investments in streets, public space and stormwater facilities. IFDs are currently not applicable in former redevelopment areas or to affordable housing projects, though this may change.

#### Business Improvement District/Community Benefit District (BID/CBD)

A BID or CBD is a privately managed mandatory levy on property within a district; it's created by a weighted majority vote of assessed parties. It raises funds to provide neighborhood services, typically including maintenance, street and sidewalk cleaning, security, public space programming and marketing.

*Recommended Application:* BIDs or CBDs can support public realm O&M and can hasten capital investments that have gotten stuck because of inadequate O&M funds. These levies can also support cultural and arts programming in public space.

#### Transfer Fees

A "contractual transfer tax" can be recorded against the title of a property to raise funds for capital or O&M costs.

*Recommended Application:* Use these fees to capture the value of initial development or ongoing condominium sales in designated locations such as Urban Villages in order to fund public realm improvements or O&M.

#### Developer Agreements

Developer agreements allow zoning through contracts to provide for public improvements over and above existing baselines, outside nexus requirements. These are likely to be most effective where market demand is high.

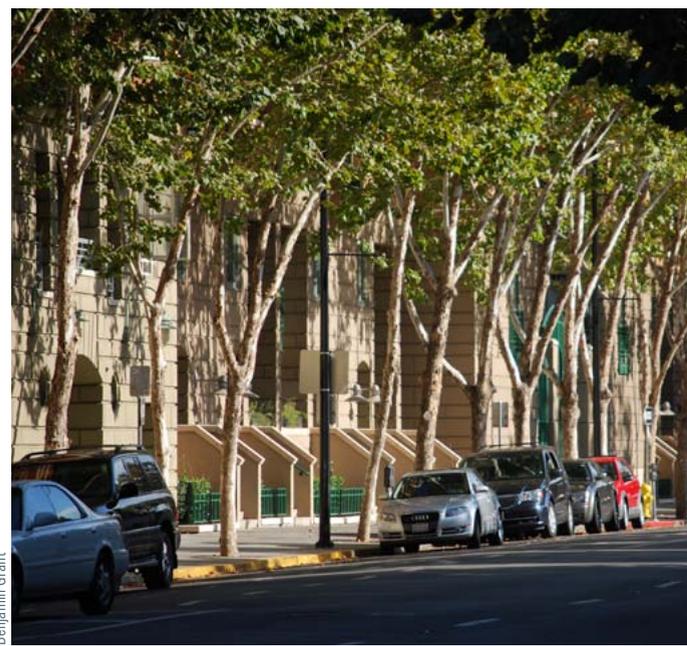
*Recommended Application:* Capturing value in housing development can subsidize employment uses or provide public realm improvements or O&M.

## Layering Funds and Functions to Solve for Density

As noted in “Understanding Urban Design,” urban densities require land to be used much more efficiently, with every location serving multiple functions. Today’s development practices and administrative framework tend to seek separate sites for each mandated function, whether it is parking, stormwater management or open space. With increasing densities, this becomes challenging and eventually untenable. One reason for this is the prevailing suburban attitude that every parcel of land is an island and all problems must be solved within it. One researcher we interviewed referred to this as “the tyranny of the individual site.” Many problems are best solved at a district scale, relieving pressures at the site level that can hinder development. Instead of trying to resolve every issue, site owners and developers can pay fees toward a public solution that supports broader policy goals.

Similarly, tremendous efficiencies can be gained by combining functions vertically, whether by placing jobs or housing above parking structures, using green roofs to capture stormwater runoff or designing streets that serve as public space amenities.

Administrative and funding mechanisms are similarly segregated: There are separate resources to fund open space, stormwater management, streetscape improvements and traffic mitigation, when a single well-designed street could provide all of those functions. When functions are compartmentalized, the shape and experience of our urban communities seems like an afterthought, the result of many uncoordinated decisions.



Benjamin Grant



Benjamin Grant

Stormwater management is integrated into park landscapes at San Francisco’s Mission Bay.

### Opportunities to combine efficiencies include:

**Stormwater management.** Under a recent regional stormwater permit, new development projects must use low-impact development tools to manage stormwater on-site or work with local municipalities to secure off-site treatment through in-lieu fees. Although on-site stormwater management can be artfully integrated into site designs, many developers view it as simply another constraint. If the city were to initiate a revolving fund for off-site stormwater management facilities, it could relieve developers of a site-level burden while giving the city a stronger hand in shaping the urban landscape.

Stormwater management can also be integrated with streetscape and park designs, leveraging stormwater fees to support other functions that serve placemaking goals. San Jose has experimented with stormwater features in parks with mixed results, but abundant precedents exist for successful projects. Urban Village plan infrastructure and financing strategies offer a useful planning tool. If designed right, these financing strategies could be used to acquire more parkland, improve street designs and relieve developers of site-planning challenges.

**Parkland dedication fees.** The fundamental charge of the San Jose Department of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services (PRNS) is to offer adequate parks and recreational facilities, a continual challenge given the city’s limited resources. The Parkland Dedication Ordinance (PDO) is designed to generate fees on a per-unit basis using property valuation formulas and to provide as much green space as feasible. But the kinds of large parks that are the priority for PRNS do not by themselves fill out the full spectrum of public open space types that complete urban communities require.



Jarrett Walker

A sustained commitment to well-designed compact development can create profoundly humane and welcoming places. (Pictured here: Vancouver, B.C.)

Good urban places require a public realm that runs the gamut, including wild lands, trails, major city parks, community gardens, intimate neighborhood parks, plazas, paseos and walkable streets. At best, these work as a coordinated network to provide the city’s connective tissue. In fact, smaller, better integrated parks often work better than larger ones when it comes to improving urban design and the quality of public life.

At present, this system prioritizes securing maximum acreage, rather than creating a comprehensive public realm. For example, Crescent Village has an excellent, generous park that resulted from the PDO process, but the surrounding streets, including a link to light rail one block away and the Guadalupe River Trail beyond, remain unwelcoming to pedestrians.

Given the ongoing, pressing need for conventional parks, pulling PDO funds from the conventional process would be ill-advised. However, the provision that allows a percentage of PDO fees to develop private recreational amenities does not have a strong public policy rationale. Current policy allows features like private swimming pools, dog runs and bocce courts to be credited against up to 50 percent of PDO obligations. These funds are far better spent providing a broader suite of public spaces, such as walkways and pocket parks to support the integrated, walkable environments envisioned for the Urban Villages.

The public realm framework SPUR proposes for Urban Village plans could provide the mechanism for identifying the appropriate investments for each Urban Village. Publicly accessible amenities currently eligible for PDO offset, such as

plaza and community gardens, should continue to be eligible. The list should be expanded to include a variety of publicly accessible features, such as paseos, connective walkways and pocket parks.

Limits to PDO credits for private amenities could be coupled with an expansion of public features eligible for PDO funding.

**Shared parking.** Parking is among the most expensive parts of development and is generally an unattractive feature. In partnership with developers, the city can provide or facilitate the development of well-designed shared garages, which allow the flexible management of parking supply over the long term, rather than building high levels of parking into each structure. These garages can be shared by uses that need parking at different times of day, such as office spaces and entertainment venues, with leases and use agreements ensuring the necessary supply. Garages can also generate revenue to invest in improvements to other modes of transportation. Shared parking strategies can be accomplished through the Urban Village planning process.

Similarly, impact fees (such as the current North San Jose Transportation Impact Fee) should be used to serve the city’s broader policy goals. Funds from these fees can provide complete streets that serve a variety of functions, including enhancing public life, facilitating commerce and managing stormwater while establishing a clear physical setting for development.

## CASE STUDY

# Green Infrastructure as Urban Placemaking

Thornton Place • Seattle, WA



Mithun



Mithun

### Land use program:

- 530 housing units (significant affordable/senior component)
- 96 dwelling units per acre
- 50,000 square feet of retail space, with a multiplex cinema
- 2.5 acres of open space, integrated with a stormwater feature
- 880 underground parking stalls (350 shared with transit operator)

Thornton Place converted a 9-acre suburban parking lot into a dense, mixed-use community centered on 2.7 acres of new open space. An attractive, day-lit stormwater channel, financed by a revolving public fund, treats runoff from 680 acres of the Thornton Creek watershed while providing open space and pedestrian connections to the surrounding neighborhood. Parking is shared with a nearby transit facility, reducing the overall need by 200 spaces.

### Lessons for San Jose

Thornton Place illustrates how effective site design can turn constraints into assets. The need for stormwater management in a flood-prone area was converted into the site's signature amenity through a public-private partnership. A creative parking deal lessened costs while increasing efficiency. These solutions are excellent models for San Jose.

**Developers:** Lorig Associates, Stellar Holdings

**Designers:** Mithun, SvR



Mithun

## Revising Codes to Support Urban Design

Very often, projects that embody good urban design principles are eroded by the city's own codes, code interpretations and standards. These regulations tend to be codified more forcefully and explicitly than design guidelines or planning principles, and thus tend to prevail where contradictions arise.

The need to accommodate all functions — including things like access for emergency vehicles — in less space is a basic feature of urban living. The reform of codes has been a challenge in many cities, particularly as suburban areas become denser. Older cities often have codes adapted to historic structures and street patterns, but changing standards that were developed for suburban areas is difficult. In addition, as densities increase, codes interact with other site constraints and can present challenges that degrade urban design. For example, the need to provide emergency vehicle access and ladder pads under residential windows, combined with the need for stormwater infiltration, has resulted in developers abandoning plans to put stoop entrances on a residential building in at least one case. Codes and code interpretations that could be better aligned with urban design goals include:

### Fire Code Interpretation

- Ladder pads
- Emergency vehicle access perimeters
- Fire lane dimensions and load-bearing requirements

### Public Works/Transportation Standards

- Lane widths
- Turning radii
- Driveway apron/garage portal dimensions
- Parking stall dimensions

## Transit Orientation

The General Plan sets a policy a goal of reducing drive-alone commuting from 80 percent of all commutes to 40 percent by 2040. It also sets out to make San Jose a “model city” in the reduction of per-capita vehicle miles traveled, envisioning a reduction of 40 percent over the life of the plan. These are extraordinarily ambitious goals and their success will depend on fundamental changes in urban form.

Walkable environments are transit-supportive environments because transit riders depend on pedestrian access to services and amenities. They also support commerce, health, sustainability and quality of life. It is worth underscoring that everyone is a pedestrian once they step out of their car. Indeed, “park-once” environments like Willow Glen or Santana Row — which allow several activities in a single car trip — can represent a major step forward in auto-oriented areas. These places can be efficient, livable and supportive of access by transit, bike or foot. The 2040 General Plan repeatedly advocates for a network of walkable places connected by transit.

Density — even near transit — will not in itself change travel behavior. All too often, “transit-oriented” development is in fact simply “transit-proximate”; it might be near a transit station, but it is not always well integrated into a walkable environment. Public transit infrastructure and transit-oriented zoning confers value on private land by increasing connectivity and development potential. Nearby development should be obliged to fully orient toward transit and contribute to a walkable environment.

## The Transit Network

A less auto-dependent city will require more viable transportation choices, and an effective and efficient mass transit network is essential. San Jose is served by a variety of transit services, including VTA light rail and bus services and regional commuter rail service operated by Caltrain, Altamont Corridor Express (ACE) and Amtrak.

Although regional rail is a bright spot, in much of the city local transit is underutilized, underperforming and undervalued. As in many auto-oriented cities, mass transit is considered a low-prestige lifeline service, even by those who believe in its value. VTA light rail service has some of the lowest ridership rates in the nation among services of its kind, with fewer than 800 daily boardings per service mile. (Denver and San Diego light rail systems each have over 1,400; San Francisco has more than 2,200.)

In this context, developers have generally not taken seriously the mobility and placemaking potential of mass transit in the South Bay. Although a considerable amount of higher-density development has occurred near transit services, real design integration remains the exception, not the rule.

Significant transit improvements are coming, some of which will dramatically reshape San Jose's position in the region. These include:

- **Bus rapid transit** on the Santa Clara/Alum Rock, El Camino and San Carlos lines
- **The Light Rail Efficiency Project**, designed to improve the speed of existing service
- **A BART extension to San Jose**, set to open in the Berryessa District in 2017 and downtown in the future
- **Caltrain electrification and the arrival of California High-Speed Rail**, which will dramatically improve service to Diridon Station

Both the City of San Jose and the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority espouse a future in which transportation and land use are mutually supportive, resulting in a shift from private cars to transit, cycling and walking as modes of choice. In practice, however, collaboration between the city and its transit provider is uneven at best. City actions do not always reflect the policy commitment to transit, and VTA struggles to make the case for its transit investments to local communities and decision-makers. Improving both strategic and day-to-day cooperation would serve the interests of both agencies.

## SPUR's Recommendations for Public Policy and Placemaking

### SPECIAL DISTRICTS AND ASSESSMENT TOOLS

*Objective: Generate resources for public improvements, relieve site-level burdens and support integrated district-level solutions.*

#### 29. Incorporate special assessment tools into key Urban Village and growth area plans to simultaneously facilitate development and create a strong urban design framework. Tools should include:

- Infrastructure finance districts (IFDs)
- Community facilities districts (CFDs)
- Community benefit districts (CBDs)
- Developer agreements (DAs)

The end of redevelopment eliminated key financing strategies, but several important tools are available. These can be integrated with Urban Village plans to support investment in key public improvements in support of the General Plan's walkability goals.

*Responsible parties: PBCE, OED*

#### 30. Use assessment revenue (as applicable) for public improvements that support better urban design at the district scale, such as:

- Integrated stormwater management
- Integrated parking management
- Public space, including public realm framework improvements
- Multimodal transportation and street enhancements
- Transportation demand-management programs

Certain kinds of issues are better managed not on the individual parcel but at the district level, where they can be aligned with policy goals. This can also relieve pressure at the site level,

simplifying site design. For developers, the use of in-lieu fees or assessments is often preferable to accommodating space-intensive functions on each site.

*Responsible parties: PBCE, OED, San Jose Department of Transportation (DOT), DPW, Santa Clara Valley Urban Runoff Pollution Prevention Program (SCVURPPP)*

#### CODE ALIGNMENT

*Objective: Remove code impediments to good urban design.*

### 31. Revise fire code interpretation to square with both local firefighting operations and best practices in dense urban areas. Review the following elements:

- Ladder pad requirements
- Emergency vehicle access requirements
- Load-bearing pavement requirements

Fire codes have a major impact on site design and sometimes create impediments to more compact, space-constrained patterns. Best practices from older cities can be applied to the changing San Jose landscape.

*Responsible parties: PBCE, OED, Fire Department*

### 32. Revise Transportation and Public Works standards to allow narrower streets, tighter turn radii and smaller garage portals and driveway aprons.

*Responsible parties: PBCE, Fire Department, San Jose Department of Environmental Services (DES), DPW, DOT, OED*

#### PARKING MANAGEMENT

*Objective: Manage parking to support General Plan transportation and placemaking goals.*

### 33. Revise the zoning code to allow smaller parking stalls and narrower driving aisles in parking structures, such as (for 90-degree parking):

- Standard stall: 8.5 feet by 16 feet
- Compact stall: 8.5 feet by 14 feet

- Small compact stall: 7 feet 9 inches by 12 feet

Small changes to the dimensions of parking stalls can yield more efficient site design and reflect recent changes in public taste toward smaller vehicles.

*Responsible parties: PBCE, DOT*

### 34. Eliminate parking minimums in downtown and in Regional Transit Urban Villages.

Generally, the market is demanding more parking than required, but city policies should not include minimum parking requirements in transit-oriented districts.

*Responsible party: PBCE*

### 35. Require the unbundling of residential parking from residential leases or condominium purchases.

Separating the cost of parking from the cost of a residential unit reveals accurate costs and allows buyers to opt out of a parking space they don't need or can't afford. This approach need not be presented as paying a premium for parking; it can be presented as a discount from the full price for opting out.

*Responsible parties: PBCE, DOT*

### 36. Allow parking spaces leased from off-site facilities to apply to parking requirements in all uses.

To increase shared parking and efficiently utilize existing parking, a private market in off-site parking spaces should be encouraged. Where parking minimums exist, or where parking ratios are defined in project entitlements, leased off-site parking should count toward the minimum requirement.

*Responsible party: PBCE*

### 37. Explore the development of a fee in lieu of required parking in Urban Villages and growth areas, with fees used for multimodal access improvements to transit facilities, bicycle infrastructure and streetscape improvements.

*Responsible parties: PBCE, DOT*

### 38. Allow and encourage time-based shared parking arrangements among compatible uses with different peak demands (i.e., office and entertainment, or residential and transit).

*Responsible parties: PBCE, OED, DOT, VTA*

### 39. Revise California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) traffic impact standards to reflect multimodal performance.

Currently, VTA measures the traffic impacts of new development by "auto level of service," which looks at how the speed of traffic would be affected by a potential project but does not look at impacts on any other mode of travel. Neither does it fully align with the city's "protected intersections" approach. The implementation of Senate Bill 731, which replaces auto level of service with a new multimodal performance measure, is an opportunity to align these policies.

*Responsible parties: DOT, VTA*

#### STORMWATER

*Objective: Integrate sustainable stormwater management into the built environment in a way that enhances the public realm and does not impede walkable site design.*

### 40. Encourage stormwater treatment features to be incorporated into park and streetscape design.

Parks and streets can be designed as "green infrastructure" that contributes to the retention, infiltration and cleaning of stormwater and reduces the need for separate stormwater treatment facilities.

*Responsible parties: DES, SCVURPPP, San Jose Department of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services (PRNS), DPW*

### 41. Allow in-lieu fees for off-site stormwater treatment to be applied to the acquisition and development of usable parkland with integrated stormwater treatment features (without reducing PDO fees).

The regional stormwater management permit allows stormwater treatment to be accomplished off-site through in-lieu fees. These fees should be used to add to the supply of public open space.

*Responsible parties: DES, PRNS, SCVURPPP*

### 42. Allow parks and streets conveyed to public ownership by developers to provide off-site stormwater management for their parcels of origin, in exchange for maintenance provided privately.

Today, if new streets and parks are being conveyed to public ownership, their stormwater systems must be fully separate.

This policy change would instead allow a more integrated system but would require private maintenance.

*Responsible parties: PBCE, DES, DPW*

### 43. Incorporate off-site stormwater management facilities into Urban Village plans, integrate them with parks and streets through public realm frameworks and include so-called "regional" (i.e., multi-site) facilities where feasible (see Recommendation 44).

Urban Village plans provide an appropriate mechanism for integrated stormwater management that makes use of urban landscape features to treat and convey stormwater at the district scale. This would be funded by in-lieu fees and relieve individual sites of having to treat all stormwater.

*Responsible parties: PBCE, DES, PRNS, DPW, SCVURPPP*

### 44. Create regional facilities with grant funds and public investment. Recoup costs through off-site in-lieu fees to establish a revolving off-site stormwater fund.

The existing regional stormwater permit allows for treatment to be provided off-site in what it calls "regional" (i.e.- multi-site) facilities, funded by in-lieu fees. This can become the basis of a revolving fund that helps facilitate development by relieving site-level stormwater burdens.

*Responsible parties: DES, DPW, OED, SCVURPPP*

#### PARKS AND PARKLAND DEDICATION

*Objective: Locate and design parks so that they serve as neighborhood centers and tie together surrounding development.*

### 45. Continue to encourage the use of building edges to help define open spaces. Place primary open spaces between housing developments rather than placing them within each separate development.

The integration of parks and residential buildings has been an urban design success for San Jose in recent years. A next step will be the more effective use of public parks to integrate multiple development projects with each other.

*Responsible party: PBCE*

**46. Allow more flexibility in the use of development fees, including private operation and maintenance of public open spaces financed by new development, through homeowners' associations or BIDs/CBDs.**

Private operation and maintenance of parks has proven successful in many locations. As long as public access is protected, this model can help San Jose stretch limited O&M resources.

*Responsible parties: PBCE, PRNS*

**47. Revise parks department policies to permit residential entrances to open onto open spaces where appropriate.**

*Responsible party: PRNS*

**48. Require that buildings immediately adjacent to parks and public spaces have entrances on the space.**

Parks should be integrated into residential neighborhoods. If buildings are located along parks, the buildings and parks should have a strong mutually supportive relationship, with building entrances that support pedestrian access and enhance safety by increasing the number of "eyes on the street."

*Responsible parties: PBCE, PRNS*

*Objective: Build "complete communities" integrated by a full range of public spaces without eroding core parks resources.*

**49. Limit to 15 percent the proportion of PDO fees that can be credited through the provision of private amenities that are not publicly accessible.**

Today, up to 50 percent of PDO fees may be devoted to private amenities like pools and gyms. This represents resources that are not supporting public space.

*Responsible parties: PRNS, San Jose City Council*

**50. Allow up to 35 percent of PDO fees to be applied to or credited against non-park public realm improvements such as paseos, plazas and streetscape improvements defined by Urban Village plan public realm frameworks.**

This would allow resources to be applied to a broader range of public spaces than the current PDO structure allows without reducing the fees available for traditional larger parks.

*Responsible parties: PRNS, PBCE*

**51. Allow PDO credit for privately owned public spaces that are:**

- Publicly accessible
- At street level
- Connected and integrated with adjacent public rights-of-way
- Designed to encourage public use and activity

Publicly accessible private plazas can currently be funded as a private amenity in this manner. Other kinds of spaces, such as walkways, parklets and community gardens, should also be eligible.

*Responsible party: PRNS*

**52. Work with open space partners, including the Santa Clara County Open Space Authority and the Trust for Public Land, to develop support strategies for public realm framework implementation.**

More acreage alone is not adequate to create great urban places. The idea of "complete communities" and a walkable public realm can be the basis of new partnerships and initiatives with the advocacy community.

*Responsible parties: PRNS, PBCE and advocates such as the Santa Clara County Open Space Authority, the Trust for Public Land and the Greenbelt Alliance*

## Appendix

### Our Research and Outreach Process

This report was developed over an intensive yearlong outreach process designed to assess current conditions and issues and solicit expert feedback from a range of stakeholders. The process included the following:

#### Stakeholder Interviews

SPUR staff conducted more than 30 interviews with local practitioners and thought leaders in San Jose. These included planners, architects, developers, lenders, code specialists, advocates and city leaders. These interviews helped SPUR staff gauge the state of thinking and practice around placemaking and development in San Jose, and identify the issues and opportunities presented here.

#### Urban Design Task Force

SPUR convened a task force of high-level professionals from the full range of relevant disciplines to advise and support the development of recommendations presented in this report. Chaired by SPUR San Jose Advisory Board members Kim Walesh and Rob Steinberg, the task force met on a monthly basis over the duration of the project to review and comment on emerging work.

The task force also conducted an urban design precedents tour, visiting sites along the peninsula (from San Francisco to San Jose) where new development projects are introducing more walkable fabric into suburban areas.

#### Specific Leadership Workshops

SPUR also conducted several workshops with task force members; real estate development, brokerage and design experts; and city leadership for a deeper exploration of specific issues, including trends in employment location, post-redevelopment assessment tools, code reform and suburban retrofits.



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