

**From:** [Cafe Venetia](#)  
**To:** [Council, City](#)  
**Subject:** In Opposition to Current Preferred Concept Plan - University Streetscape  
**Date:** Thursday, December 14, 2023 10:47:50 AM

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Lydia Kou, Mayor and Council Members  
 City of Palo Alto  
 250 Hamilton Ave  
 Palo Alto, CA 94301

December 14, 2023

***Re: Opposition to Current Preferred Concept Plan***

Dear Major Lydia Kou and Council Members,

As longtime business owners and active members of this community, we are writing to express our strong opposition to the proposed concept plan for the University Avenue Streetscape Improvement Project to be discussed in the City Council meeting on Monday December 18th.

There are several points which we urge you to consider from the perspective of both business owners as well as the entire community who currently benefit from the existing parklets:

- **The current ‘preferred option’ will wipe out valuable improvements to outdoor urban space made during the pandemic.** Sunny, outdoor parklet spaces have been enthusiastically greeted and consistently used by citizens of our community. They provide a healthy space for meeting and contribute to a vibrant atmosphere that makes our city attractive to visit, shop, and spend time in.
- **This plan is threatens our long-term survival and ultimately could mean a homogeneous downtown.** Parklets allowed our fragile businesses to survive economically during the pandemic. Even in a post-pandemic context, we are still under rigorous competition from other nearby outdoor dining options such as at the Stanford Shopping Center. Eliminating parklets further reduces our ability to attract customers, and would likely result in the closing of many dining establishments, resulting in an unattractively homogenous retail-only downtown space — or worse, empty storefronts.
- **Frequent redesigns cost us in time, energy, and money.** Re-architecting yet again our outdoor spaces, after the re-architecture of what was meant to be a *permanent* parklet program (set to take place in March 2023) is stressful and costly for business owners. Constantly changing the goal post, and needing to react to these changes adds yet another layer of instability for businesses.
- **A \$40 million price tag — passed down to us.** This cost will be assessed on the landlords but they will subsequently pass it down to us, the tenants. The \$40m price tag of this project could be much smaller if it were used to beautify the downtown instead of re-configuring it.

**A work-around Option 3, benefitting all constituents,** would consist of:

- Extend the sidewalk by 24 feet instead of 17.5 (8 feet will be reserved for pedestrian use)
- Make the Commerce Zone 10-12 feet instead of 6.5 feet, which will make all constituents neutral on this matter.

Finally, **consider the enormous contribution that cafes, restaurants, and bars make to the City:** not only from the perspective that we contribute to the bulk of sales taxes, but also to *social capital*. Our citizens are happier by frequenting social spaces, our governments are more efficient, and our city is safer. [See scientific evidence from Yale professor, Dr. Laurie Santos.](#) And these spaces are diminishing.

**What do citizens want?** Multiple petitions and the city's own surveys have shown overwhelmingly that residents want to keep University Avenue closed to cars. Meetings related to this redesign — which will have significant impact on both residents and businesses — have been dominated by landlords speaking for their own interests rather than on behalf of what citizens have been loudly requesting for years now: parklets, safe cycling and parking for bicycles (which seems to have disappeared from the project despite earlier promises), outdoor spaces for socialization and dining. **Residents and businesses need to be surveyed when making such long-term, consequential decisions** given the outsized impact that these decisions will have on all of us. As other business owners have pointed out, when landlords drive these conversations, it can be a precarious position for us to stand up and disagree with their outlook; these choices need to be put to the community as a whole, as they *affect* the community as a whole.

We deeply appreciate your consideration of these points when making this decision.

Sincerely,  
Café Venetia

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