



Fall 2022-Spring 2023

Community & Stakeholder Engagement Report

Car-free Streets: California Avenue & Ramona Street

Fukuji Architecture and Planning

Fehr & Peers

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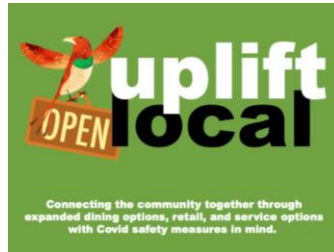
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“Even 10 years ago, reclaiming streets from cars to create space for people to walk and to bike was considered a radical - almost revolutionary - act. Today, people-focused streets are a proven global best practice and the first-line response for transportation and transit agencies during COVID-19 crisis, from Berlin to Brussels.”

Jannette Sadik-Kahn
Chair of the National Association of City Transportation Officials



ASSIGNMENT

UPLIFT LOCAL CAR-FREE STREETS INITIATIVE

The City Council authorized Car-free Streets early in the COVID-19 pandemic as an economic recovery effort and to provide community members with outdoor spaces to gather socially distant. The *Uplift Local Car-free Streets: California Avenue and Ramona Street* initiative is a Council-supported effort enabling outdoor dining, retail, and personal services in business districts such as California Avenue and the downtown core. In May 2022, the City Council extended the program through the end of 2023 and directed staff to issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) to study various alternatives and impacts of different street configurations.

From October 2022 to April 2023, City staff, Bruce Fukuji, the City's urban design consultant and Fehr & Peers, the City's on-call transportation consultants engaged key stakeholders and the community through meetings, interviews, focus groups, a community workshop and an online survey to better understand priorities for California Avenue and Ramona Street, and to determine the topics and themes to study and include as part of the RFP.

This report summarizes the research questions, data collection and analysis, business and community perspectives and demonstration projects to invest in the transformation of California Avenue and Ramona Street to be vibrant, attractive destinations.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the community engagement process are to:

- Solicit local stakeholder and community perspectives regarding current issues, opportunities for change and potential near-term projects to advance the Car-free street initiative.
- Receive feedback on a potential scope of work for an RFI (Request for Information) or RFP (Request for Proposals) to design and implement priority projects and study different potential street configurations.

STAKEHOLDERS AND OUTREACH METHODS

To gain an in-depth understanding of key stakeholders' perspectives with long-term interests in the California Avenue and Ramona Street, City staff and consultants undertook the following outreach:

- Nearly a dozen structured interviews with business and property owners, non-profit and for-profit developers, Chamber of Commerce leadership, local architects, property managers, the Palo Alto Art Center Director, and Councilmember Pat Burt.
- Two rounds of focus group meetings with:
 - Local business owners on California Avenue,
 - Local business owners on Ramona Street, and
 - City Commission Chairpersons
- Two community meetings: an in-person Community Workshop on California Avenue, attended by over 60 people, with facilitated small group engagement followed by informal discussion with elected officials, local business owners and community members, and a subsequent online community meeting, attended by 30 people with facilitated individual feedback.
- Online survey on the City's website, viewed by 617 people with 356 responses, predominantly Palo Alto residents, with only 1 percent Palo Alto business owners, and 15 percent of respondents living outside of Palo Alto.

ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

The outreach process was organized into two phases:

- Assessment – comprised of background research, context mapping, framing key questions for stakeholders and community members; conducting initial outreach; collecting data and conducting analysis; and formulating preliminary findings (Fall 2022 through Winter 2023).
- Validation – comprised of conducting a second round of outreach for stakeholders and community members to validate what was learned by City staff and consultants from initial outreach, and solicit feedback on demonstration projects and upcoming Alternatives study (Winter 2023 through Spring 2023).

CONTEXT SETTING

To frame the community inquiry process for the potential future of California Avenue and Ramona Street as post-pandemic, people-first streets, the following background context was shared with stakeholders as to the potential long-term implications of the COVID-19 pandemic, lessons learned from the U.S. experience of converting main streets to pedestrian malls, and current best practice on the transformation of street travel ways to multi-modal and public use.

IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC ON CITIES

UNPRECEDENTED FORCES CHANGING MAIN STREET

The COVID-19 pandemic has radically altered how most people go about their daily lives with huge shifts to how we move in the world, how we get groceries and food, whether we go outside, where we go, who we see, and what we do.¹

2020 ushered in the trauma of COVID-19, with the world shutting down with shelter-in-place orders resulting in one half of the world's population asked to stay home and avoid public places.² Never had the world seen such striking images of ghostly empty city streets, parks, and cities. Five main forces are leading to long lasting transformations of cities³ that bear on how to reconfigure California Avenue and Ramona Street:

1. Fear and avoidance of crowded public places
2. Technological transition to remote work, school and online shopping which has drastically reduced office occupancies and commuting, expanded home delivery and integrated digital life deeply into society, including over-exposure of youth to social media
3. Need adequate hygiene standards and rapid adaptability of publicly facing businesses, gathering places and infrastructure to secure the urban environment from future public health crisis's

¹ Janette Sadik-Kahn, "Streets for Pandemic Response and Recovery." *National Association of City Transportation Officials, Global Designing Cities Initiative*, 6/25/2020.

² Jordi Honey-Rosse, "The Impact of COVID-19 on Public Space: an Early Review of the Emerging Questions – Design, Perceptions and Inequities," *Cities, Health and COVID-19: Initial Reflections and Future Challenges*, 21 April 2021
<https://doi.org/10.1080/23748834.2020.1780074>

³ Richard Florida, "Cities in a Post-COVID World," *Urban Studies*, June 27, 2021,
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/00420980211018072>

4. Economic and public health inequities to frontline workers
5. Reconfiguring indoor and outdoor spatial use for social distancing

NEW PRIORITIES FOR MAIN STREET

As the unparalleled disruption of daily life extended for over a year, people struggled with mental health issues with continued unemployment and working from home without childcare or school for children and teens. Public life came to a halt with State and County public health mandates. Streets became a first line of defense:

The requirement of “social or physical distancing”—maintaining at least 6’ (2 m) distance between people, with significant reductions or bans on group gatherings and crowds—combined with what we know today about the transmission of this coronavirus and its increased communicability in indoor settings, requires that we reallocate our streets and sidewalks for public use during this crisis and for the future.⁴

With the rollout of vaccines, and a fall in cases and deaths, public health officials progressively reopened public settings for in-person use. As pandemic restrictions were slowly lifted, streets provided room for restaurants, vendors, schools, and daycare to expand outdoors, allowing businesses to re-open and people to return to the office. Public health requirements for social distancing lead to a global epiphany that cities need to completely rethink the allocation of street space for public use and economic recovery:

“As we think about ways to reopen during this pandemic, its’ staring us in the face: sidewalks and street spaces are right there outside every business, restaurant, hairdresser.... particularly in the developed world, these spaces have long been underutilized, and are far more equitable distributed across cities...we can create more space for those businesses to start to move outside.⁵”

Collectively, we experienced an immense sense of hope and relief with the return of the social life of public places, of reconnecting to friends and loved ones in person, and the affirmation of our common humanity through the daily interactions of urban life. Unfortunately, remote work and online shopping drained the life out of downtowns. The daily concentration of downtown workers evaporated, and online shopping looted the viability of small independent businesses. With communities now coming to terms with the “new normal” of

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Carey L. Biron, “Public Space a Lifeline for Post-Lockdown Cities,” Reuters. June 15, 2020, <https://news.trust.org/item/20200615091609-7dluu/>

post-pandemic economic and social life, the permanent closure of main street to vehicle traffic needs to consider the emerging needs for economic recovery and desires for social life.

“The feeling of city life – people were hungry for this...as businesses expanded into the city’s closed streets...there was unimaginable enthusiasm on the first day...as competition arose [for outdoor dining space], the City had to come up with metrics for deciding which establishment would have access to which piece of public space, and this became part of a broader strategy aimed to draw in young families and new talent. This is an important factor of economic recovery, but we were thinking even more about the spirit of the City.”⁶

Regmigijus Simasius, Mayor of Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania

LESSONS LEARNED FROM PEDESTRIAN MALLS

Michael Berne, in *American Downtown Revitalization Review*, argues that pedestrian malls were a “good concept at the wrong time” and that [pre-pandemic], with the growing appreciation for the benefits and attraction of dense urban living, and the emergence of Business Improvement Districts, the closing a main street to vehicle traffic pedestrian mall maybe less of a “gamble” with the right fundamentals, nuanced attention and a good exit strategy.⁷

Research overwhelmingly indicates that closing Main Street to vehicle traffic has been an economic failure in the United States with 89 percent of “pedestrian malls” re-opening to vehicle access after experiencing increased vacancies, deteriorating retail mix, and changing retail focus from comparison/destination goods/services to convenience stores. In cities where few people lived downtown, pedestrian malls turned lifeless after work, becoming uncomfortable, threatening environments. Only 11 percent continue as pedestrian malls today⁸ and this is primarily due to community organizing and implementing a successful main street management program. This has resulted in low vacancy rates, higher pedestrian traffic levels and greater mix of businesses and uses for these closed streets.

Civic leaders and City Planners believed main street conversions to pedestrian malls were the answer to suburbanization and the decline of downtowns because of post-World War II population investing in the American dream of single-family home ownership and relocating from the urban core to the periphery of regions.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Michael Berne, “Pedestrian Malls: The Newest Fad?” *The American Downtown Revitalization Review*, Volume 2, 2021.

⁸ Cole E. Judge, “The Experient of American Pedestrian Malls: Trends Analysis, Necessary Indicators for Success and Recommendations for Fresno’s Fulton Mall” *Downtown Fresno Partnership*, October 2013.

The Interstate Highway Act of 1956 exacerbated this trend by shifting investment from central business districts to the highways with convenient auto exits to shopping malls with free parking. Planners in the 1960's installed over 200 pedestrian malls as an effort to lure shoppers back to downtown and bring economic development back to the core of cities.⁹ Pedestrian malls failed in part because these downtown locations were not able to compete with destination shopping and large chain stores at newer suburban locations, as they continued to lose tenants and offer comparatively less retail selection.

Research from the Downtown Fresno Partnership on trends of American pedestrian malls found the key findings for success:

- Need to be near or attached to a major anchor such as a university, or in close proximity to a beach
- Designed to be short in length in terms of city blocks
- Located in a city with population under 100,000 and/or a city with a major tourist location
- Cities that embrace the Main Street model have experienced turnarounds in their downtowns with more investment, higher occupancy rates and more pedestrian traffic

REVITALIZING MAIN STREET

The Main Street America is a program of the National Main Street Center, established by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The purpose of the program is to revitalize older and historic commercial districts and build vibrant neighborhoods and thriving economies.¹⁰ The Main Street approach offers community-based retailization strategies to transform a local economy and enhance quality of life. Foundational to this approach is the creation of a local organization to promote and manage the placemaking and economic development of the area.

Expanded outdoor dining has the potential to revitalize California Avenue, create an anchor destination to attract people locally and regionally and counter the technological trends of remote life on retail use. Across the United States, communities are finding, in the aftermath of street closures and the lifting of emergency shelter-in-place orders, outdoor dining has not only allowed restaurants, cafes, and bars to stay open and survive the pandemic, it is wildly popular, giving cities a more European street life feel. This approach has

¹⁰ <https://www.mainstreet.org/aboutus>

statewide political support, as shown by the unanimous bipartisan California State Senate vote to approve on Senate Bill 314 the Bar and Restaurant Recovery Act.¹¹

INTERIM STREET TRANSFORMATIONS

In response to citizen frustration with the conventional project development process that takes several years to plan, design, environmentally analyze, bid, award, and finally construct a capital improvement, several cities are implementing short term improvements strategies, such as San Francisco’s “Quick-Build”¹² projects and NACTO’s “Interim Design Strategies.”¹³ These efforts are identifying tools and tactics to enable cities to rapidly deliver low-cost community projects.

The informal street environment of California Avenue and Ramona Street, with temporary outdoor dining, and ample travel way space, is an ideal candidate to apply this approach. Key benefits are:

- Repurpose existing street infrastructure
- Demonstrate new ideas
- Engage and empower stakeholders
- Implement change quickly
- Explore and refine designs
- Inspire new policies and practices

The interim street transformation process relies on the City capacity to deliver improvements and creative local partnerships to take ownership to activate, program and maintain the space.

¹¹ <https://sd11.senate.ca.gov/news/20210602-senator-wiener's-legislation-allowing-outdoor-dining-alcohol-post-pandemic-passes>

¹² <https://www.sfmta.com/vision-zero-quick-build-projects>

¹³ <https://nacto.org/publication/urban-street-design-guide/interim-design-strategies/>

STREET CHARACTER & VITALITY

CALIFORNIA AVENUE

HISTORY

In its heyday, California Avenue was a bustling Main Street with a theater, bookstores, camera shops, magazine shop, pharmacy, clothing, shoes, candy, ice cream, cafés, and restaurants. California Avenue is considered by residents as Palo Alto's second "main street." It is located within the oldest part of the city, with origins dating back to the 1850s when it was the main commercial street for the town of Mayfield, which was incorporated into Palo Alto in 1925.

The closure of California Avenue across the Caltrain corridor to Alma Street with the building of the Oregon Expressway in the 1960's reduced the accessibility and vitality of the street. The growth of Stanford Research Park, with more than 150 companies, many industry leaders in technology, brought 23,000 workers near California Avenue, providing a daytime population to support the retail and restaurant uses.

ASSETS

The California Avenue District has the structure of a sustainable neighborhood per LEED Neighborhood Design criteria, with its walkable street and block pattern, mixed-use, access to regional transit and proximity to a regional employment center, Stanford Research Park. California Avenue is served by a multi-modal, regional rail Caltrain station. It is locally and regionally planned as a transit-oriented neighborhood. With predominantly one and two-story buildings, California Avenue is a lower-density commercial environment with air space for multi-story mixed-use development. The California Avenue right-of-way is 90 feet wide, which is similar width to two successful pedestrian streets, Pearl Street in Boulder, Colorado, and the 3rd Street Promenade in Santa Monica, California.

California Avenue has become a lunch and evening destination for outdoor dining offering over 20 restaurants, and the Sunday Farmer's Market is vibrant with pedestrian activity with 70 vendors. The close knit, local business community has a long standing, multi-generational presence on California Avenue. Live music is adding life to the street, with public art recalling the history of the area. Residents find California Avenue more local serving that University Avenue downtown.

CURRENT ENVIRONMENT

Today, California Avenue is open to pedestrians and closed to through vehicle traffic from El Camino Real to Birch Street. California Avenue is more local serving than the University Avenue/Downtown, and it is the closest business district to employees and visitors to Stanford Research Park and portions of Stanford University. Electrification of Caltrain by 2024 can increase service and improve travel times for riders at California Avenue Caltrain Station, further improving regional transportation access.

67 percent of survey respondents visit California Avenue at least once a week, and 1/3 visit several times a week. 90 percent visit for outdoor dining, and 2/3 attend the farmer's market. Half of visitors go to grocery shopping or to a café, 40 percent to retail shops, and 25 percent use professional services.

Key concerns for California Avenue:

- Undifferentiated space with travel way markings
- Too many vacancies
- Loss retail shops
- Does not feel like a care-free community space
- Tents ugly, no aesthetic unity
- No people gathering places
- Underutilized street space
- No appealing storefronts or buildings
- Landscaping blocks views to storefronts
- Conflicts between pedestrians & bicyclists
- Barriers are not inviting
- Emergency lane divides street, limits creating public space
- Pedestrian connections from parking have no signage, just blank walls

RAMONA STREET

HISTORIC ASSETS

Ramona Street is recognized as a Historic District in the National Registered Historic Places. The cohesive character of the architecture is in Monterey and Spanish Colonial styles with archways, balconies, wrought iron work, tile roofs of varying heights, and courtyards.

CURRENT ENVIRONMENT

Ramona Street is open to pedestrians and closed to vehicle traffic for a half block in between Hamilton Avenue and University Avenue in downtown Palo Alto. This portion of Ramona Street has become an outdoor dining destination downtown. Visitors enjoy the safety and community feeling of the street closure. An emergency access lane divides the street with parklets and outdoor dining lining replacing on-street parking, extending from the sidewalk into the street on both sides.

30 percent of survey respondents visit Ramona Street at least once a month, with 1/4 visiting at least once every six months. 26 percent of respondents are regular visitors at least once a week. The predominant reason to visit Ramona Street is dining for 81 percent of respondents, and over half visit a cafe. 1/3 of respondents visit for retail shopping.

Challenges to be addressed to advance City Council objectives to enhance community experience and economic vibrancy of Ramona Street are:

- Temporary situation is not visually attractive
- Emergency lane divides street, limits creating public space
- Need aesthetic standards for improvements
- No gathering places
- Too many vacancies
- Loss of retail shops
- Not enough parking
- Road closure barriers not welcoming

STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES

LOCAL BUSINESS AND PROPERTY OWNERS



CALIFORNIA AVENUE

Initial outreach to local business and property owners confirmed that, in consideration of the continued closure California Avenue to vehicle traffic, these stakeholders have the “most at stake.” Some California Avenue retailers feel they are at high risk of further economic impact with the permanent closure of the street. In the absence of compelling data otherwise, these retail business owners want to keep street open to at least a single lane of vehicle movement. Restauranters are the economic beneficiaries of the street closures, and want outdoor dining extended indefinitely. Several restauranters are appreciative of the closure of the street and the opening of outdoor dining. This has saved their businesses. Nevertheless, if outdoor dining can continue, they are indifferent if the street is re-opened to vehicles.

Local business owners have several concerns regarding the future economic health of the California Avenue, citing the loss the daytime population of Stanford Research Park workers to remote work and the evaporation of destination retail due to online shopping. Retail rents are down, and vacancies reported as high as 25 percent including “shadow” vacancies, which are storefronts where lease payments are made but there are no tenants occupying the space. Restaurants are benefiting from the use of the street for outdoor dining; however, they are challenged with finding workers and the increasing costs to stay in business. While sales tax revenues have returned to pre-pandemic levels, with California Avenue contributed approximately 4 percent to the City’s sales tax revenues in 2022, small, independently owned retail business are not back to pre-pandemic

cash flows and required revenue margins.¹⁴ Several interviewees felt that today's California Avenue:

- Has no destination stores, and therefore there is no reason to go there other than for outdoor dining, groceries or to take Caltrain. For example, the now closed Keeble & Shuchat Photography store was a destination store for camera shopping, a regional attraction now lost.
- Is at risk of “out-of-sight, out-of-mind,” where the closure of the street to vehicle traffic eliminating drive-by awareness of retail shops and creating a circuitous driving route to find a shop from the rear alleys and parking. The belief is that this limits attracting new retail tenants, and overtime erodes the shopper base as people forget what is there and never return.
- While people like outdoor dining, there are no free places to sit or work.
- Is a dirty, empty space with nothing charming to draw you to it, with no building height, or buildings worth saving.
- Doesn't have the density of housing (employment or tourism) of a major metropolitan city; unrealistic to imagine California Avenue becoming State Street in Santa Barbara.

At the second California Avenue Business Owners focus group it was clear that, to attain the support of those who provided their input, to achieve the City Council's objectives the following issues would need to be addressed:

- Their need to be a high priority voice in decisions on future of street
- Their interests are respected and represented, as shown by senior staff and City Council level engagement
- There is an alternative that has at least a single vehicle lane that provides customers store front access, which includes exploration of parklets.
- There is not a “Car-free” bias in the selection, analysis, and evaluation of alternatives
- There needs to be more demonstrated progress since City Council action in February 2021
- Zoning regulations need to eliminate barriers to opening new businesses, including conditional use permits, restrictions to convert ground floor space to non-retail uses, and parking.

¹⁴ Streetsense, “Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Update,” City Council Study Session Item #2 11/7/2022

RAMONA STREET

Local business owners on Ramona Street want to see it permanently closed to vehicular traffic. Main perspectives are:

- The impact the emergency access lane, which divides the street along its length in half and displaces a third of the street, significantly limits creating a destination public space.
- The desire for high quality design and uniform standards for parklets, outdoor dining and street improvements that complement the historic character of the street; business and property owner willingness to invest with clear guidance and City commitment to create a high-quality environment.
- A need for wayfinding and signage to direct visitors to dining on Ramona Street from University Avenue and Hamilton Avenue.
- Reallocating curbside loading space along the west side of Ramona Street between University Avenue and the alley to accommodate door-to-door deliveries, passenger pick-up and drop-off and loading.
- High demand for and lack of availability of bike racks.
- Cars turning around in front of the Wine Room, creates confusion and vehicle congestion.

At the second focus group, local business owners wanted to see Ramona Street space allocated to community use, including how to repave the street to reflect the historic architectural character of the area. They expressed concerns about street drainage, and how to provide alternatives to an emergency access lane extending the entire length of the street.



COMMUNITY MEMBERS

CALIFORNIA AVENUE

The December 2022 Community Workshop, plus the online community survey show a predominant preference to continue closure of both California Avenue (79 percent in favor) to car traffic except emergency vehicles. Additional feedback received on California Avenue includes:

- Extend street closure permanently, continue outdoor dining
- Reduce vacancies and loss of retail, increase diversity of retail shopping
- Ensure pedestrian and bike safety, avoid conflicts, consider bike lanes
- Design street to attract people to linger and shop at a vibrant pedestrian promenade, add community gathering places with street furniture and lighting and explore introducing nature areas and more trees
- Need wayfinding and signage to attract attention and guide visitors to arrive and shop
- Expand use of public art
- Need variety of events – music, theater, and community services to both attract and serve the residents and regional visitors
- Need district economic development, small business support, and anchor destination uses to ensure long-term viability
- Need equity with use of public space for private economic benefit
- Area underutilized, no appealing storefronts or buildings
- Need aesthetic unity, consistency and beauty, street is empty without cars, but it does not feel like a car-free community place

At the April 2023 Community Meeting, comprised primarily of long-term residents who frequently visit California Avenue, the main points were:

- General support for closure
- Enjoyment of outdoor dining
- Support for retail businesses, with a recognition of the impact of online shopping and the pandemic, and a need for the City to lift zoning restrictions for retail, and support economic development partnership for retail to be successful
- Concerns on pedestrian/bike conflicts recognizing the important role of California Avenue in the city's bicycle network
- Want to see a range of alternatives: street closed to vehicles, open to vehicles with at least one-lane, with district wide traffic, and parking analysis
- Broad support for demonstration projects and upcoming Alternatives study

RAMONA STREET

Similarly, at the December 2022 Community Workshop and results from online the community survey show a predominant preference to continue closure of and Ramona Street (70 percent in favor) to car traffic. Additional feedback received on Ramona Street includes:

- Create an outdoor dining destination (70 percent survey respondents)
- New planting and streets trees that complement the historic buildings (61 percent of survey respondents)
- Over half want to maintain the historic character and scale of the street, small-scale public spaces with seating and high-quality design
- There is a lack of people gathering places and the loss of retail
- Visitors appreciate the safety and feeling of community with the street closure

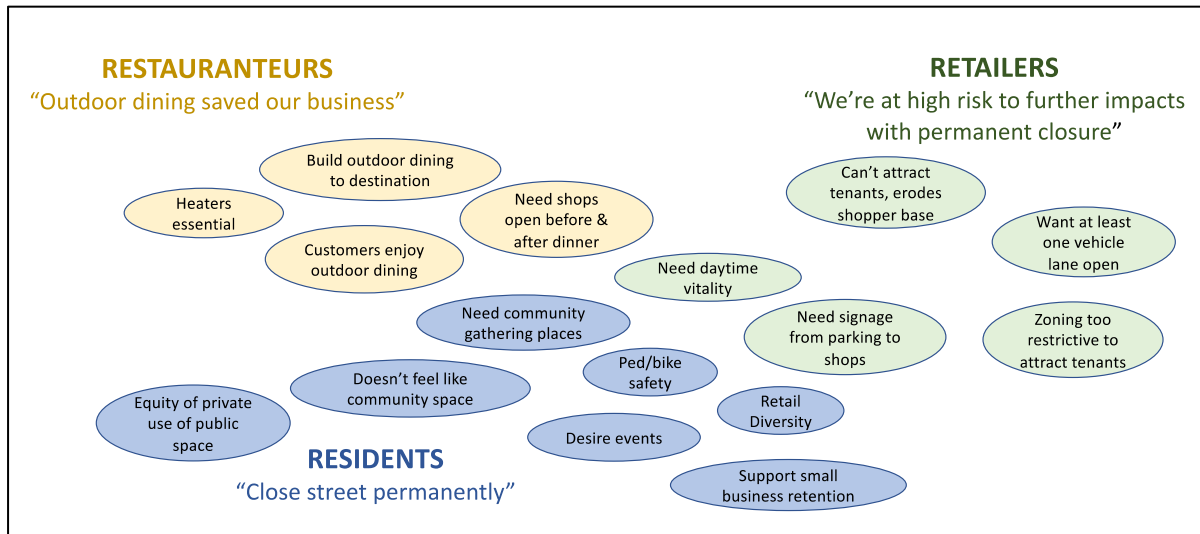


Figure 1: Stakeholder Perspectives

CONSENSUS BUILDING

CALIFORNIA AVENUE

The closure of California Avenue to vehicular traffic, in response to the pandemic, has introduced new possibilities to reshape the use of these streets by Palo Altans and visitors to advance the city’s economic vitality, community livability, sustainability, and public health.

Stakeholders have different perspectives on how to shape the future physical environment of California Avenue, as shown in *Figure 1: Stakeholder Perspectives*. On one hand, the discussion is divided between local retail business owners and residents on the allocation of street space for vehicle access:

- Some local businesses have a strong preference for an alternative that is not car-free (a single travel lane or re-open the street except for the Farmer’s Market).
- Many residents favor the closure of the street for safety, outdoor dining, and public spaces without vehicles. However, some residents feel that public gathering spaces and outdoor dining do not need use of all the street space to the complete exclusion of cars.

On the other hand, local retail business owners, restaurateurs, and residents agree on several points:

- California Avenue is a highly valued, frequently visited environment integral to community and economic vitality of the Palo Alto.

- The District needs to be revived as a destination with a new identity, and that economic development, urban design, and community partnerships need to work together to realize the potential of California Avenue.
- California Avenue's wide, 90-foot right-of-way offers opportunities for restaurant, retail, and community needs to be met and create a more vibrant destination environment, by building on the assets of the area and addressing the barriers to attracting ground floor uses.
- The current street environment is temporary, unattractive, and needs to change.
- Retail businesses are suffering from the loss of daytime activity from Stanford Research Park employees due to remote work and the loss customers to online shopping.

RAMONA STREET

Stakeholders all agree that Ramona Street, as a historic district, is an ideal setting downtown to shape a vibrant public space as an outdoor dining destination. Local business owners and community members expressed great interest in maintaining Ramona Street permanently closed to vehicle traffic, however the emergency vehicle lane dividing the street in half presents a barrier to realizing the potential to transform this street into cherished urban place. Stakeholder all agree that Ramona Street is of such importance to the downtown Palo Alto experience that it merits investment in high quality, historically respectful urban and landscape architectural design.

MOVING FORWARD

The Car-free Streets effort proposes two parallel approaches to advancing the City Council's objectives: demonstration projects and an upcoming Alternatives study.

DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS

Local business owners and residents strongly supported the idea of demonstration projects to initiate immediate change. To improve the current temporary environment, the City is planning to implement the following demonstration projects for both California Avenue and Ramona Street as shown in *Figures 2 and 3 California Avenue – Demonstration Projects*, and *Figure 4 Ramona Street – Demonstration Projects*.

- Install removable bollards
- Flexible community spaces
- Wayfinding and signage
- Ground plane public art and building murals (California Avenue)

UPCOMING STUDY

The following topics were presented to stakeholders for the Alternatives study. Overall, people were supportive of this approach for California Avenue and Ramona Street:

- Streetscape design & amenities
- Circulation
- Design guidelines for private outdoor dining and public areas
- Fee/pricing for use of Right-of-Way
- Parking strategies
- Historic resources
- Signage
- Legislative options
- Equity & accessibility
- Partnership building

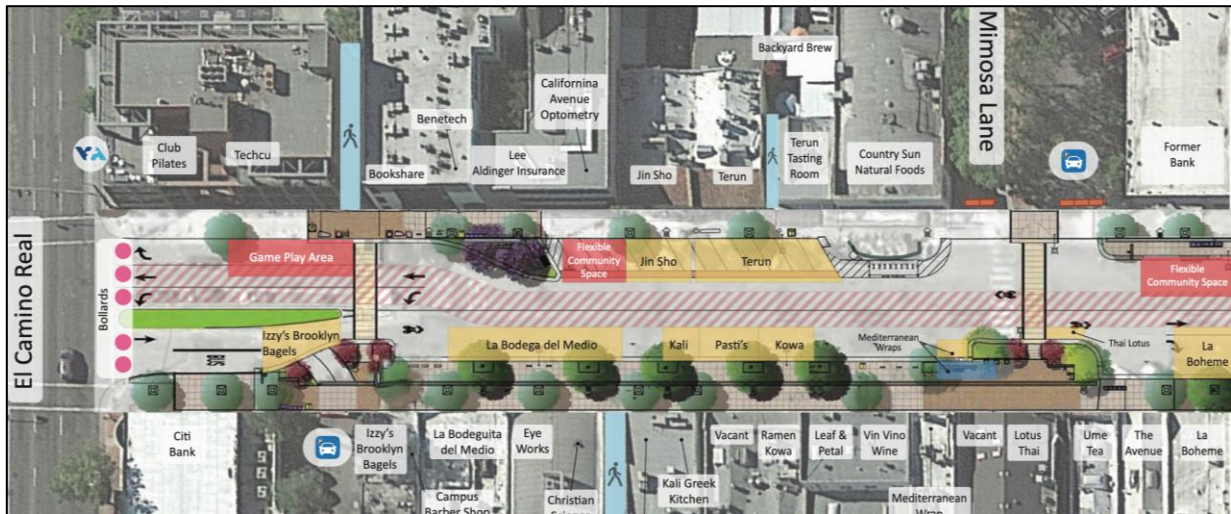


Figure 2: California Avenue Demonstration Projects El Camino Real to Mimosa Lane



Figure 3: California Avenue Demonstration Projects Mimosa Lane to Birch Street



Figure 4: Ramona Street Demonstration Projects Lane

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

Based on what was learned from this stakeholder engagement effort, there are three transformational strategies needed to advance the City Council's goals to enhance community experience and economic vibrancy of California Avenue: economic development, organizational capacity building, and urban design.

- **Economic development** will need resourcefulness and creativity to establish the area's market position and focus investment to enhance the vibrancy of the street, per Streetsense.¹⁵
- **Organizational capacity building** is creating a California Avenue Business Association that can take a leadership role in the revitalization of California Avenue. The leadership role needs to cultivate partnerships, build consensus, recruit staff, secure funding, focus on an economic vitality plan, placemaking and promotion of the area. Based on stakeholder engagement so far, there is no functioning California Avenue Business Association.
- **Urban design** can improve the quality and function of the physical environment, however by itself it is insufficient to advance economic

¹⁵ City Council staff report 2/10/23.

vibrancy of California Avenue without the other two strategies leading the way.

The three strategies need work together with a consensus building process among local businesses and community stakeholders to shape a vision for California Avenue. Economic development and building organizational capacity need to be prioritized. Local business concerns need to be addressed in the short-term. Demonstration projects can build trust and credibility with local business owners, but ultimately will be insufficient without these two transformational strategies.

California Avenue's wide, 90-foot right-of-way has ample space to balance economic, placemaking, and environmental considerations to create a vibrant main street destination. Stakeholders all agree that California Avenue has tremendous potential. The interviews, focus groups, community meetings, and survey have a wealth of observations and ideas about California Avenue to build upon – what brings people, what is and is not working, and desires for the future.

Stakeholder agreement on goals and evaluation criteria will enable alternatives to be designed, tested, and refined. Feedback on potential benefits and impacts of each alternative will enable selection of a feasible, achievable, and optimal solution for City Council action. It will take well-managed, on-going stakeholder engagement to advance the City Council's direction to enhance the community experience and economic vibrancy of California Avenue and Ramona Street.