

# Downtown MOUNTAIN VIEW California

## TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PANEL



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# About ULI

The Urban Land Institute is a global, member-driven organization comprising more than 45,000 real estate and urban development professionals dedicated to advancing the Institute’s mission of providing leadership in the responsible use of land and in creating and sustaining thriving communities worldwide.

ULI’s interdisciplinary membership represents all aspects of the industry, including developers, property owners, investors, architects, urban planners, public officials, real estate brokers, appraisers, attorneys, engineers, financiers, and academics. Established in 1936, the Institute has a presence in the Americas, Europe, and Asia Pacific regions, with members in 80 countries, including over 2,200 in the ULI San Francisco district council ([sf.uli.org](http://sf.uli.org)). ULI San Francisco serves the Greater Bay Area with pragmatic land use expertise and education.

# About ULI TAPs

The ULI San Francisco Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) Program is an extension of the national ULI Advisory Services program. ULI’s Advisory Services panels provide strategic advice to clients (public agencies, nonprofit organizations, or nonprofit developers) on complex land use and real estate development issues. The program links clients to the knowledge and experience of ULI and its membership.

Since 1947, ULI has harnessed the technical expertise of its members to help communities solve difficult land use, development, and redevelopment challenges. More than 700 panels have been conducted in 12 countries. Since 1996, ULI San Francisco has adapted this model for use at the local level, assisting more than 30 Bay Area cities.

TAPs include extensive preliminary briefings followed by a two-day intensive working session in the client’s community. A detailed briefing package and guided discussion is provided by the client to each TAP participant before the working sessions. In these sessions, ULI’s expert panelists tour the study area either by bus or on foot, interview stakeholders, and address a set of questions proposed by the client about a specific development issue or policy barrier within a defined geographic area. The product of these sessions is a community presentation and final report. This report presents highlights of the panel’s responses to the client’s questions, as well as a diverse set of ideas and suggestions.

# Downtown Mountain View Technical Assistance Panel

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# Acknowledgements

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# Executive Summary

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The City of Mountain View engaged ULI to convene a Technical Assistance Panel. The panel was asked to address the following questions provided by the City:

- Based on stakeholder interviews, what are the panelists' observations and what themes should the City consider for Downtown Mountain View? Provide a draft mission statement for Downtown.
- How might future planning efforts positively influence the success of Castro Street and Downtown Mountain View? What can the City do to leverage its assets and address its challenges (as identified by the stakeholders) in light of changes and growth?
- Based on what the panel heard, what land use concepts and retail/experiential uses are recommended for Downtown Mountain View? What policies, programs, and actions should the City consider to support these concepts and uses and to maintain a successful Downtown? What unique things about Mountain View can/should be capitalized on?

Following several months of preparation and a two-day onsite workshop with walking tours, stakeholder interviews, and panel deliberations, the Technical Assistance Panel proposed the following draft mission statement for consideration:

*Downtown Mountain View has great bones and a great brand! The City and stakeholders should build on this strong character to ensure that Castro Street continues to be the vibrant heart of Mountain View in the future.*

Based on this, the panel identified four main areas for focus, with associated recommendations:

## POLICY AND PARTNERSHIP

**Recommendation 1:** The City and stakeholders should continue to proactively make investments and implement policy to incentivize Downtown development.

## OPPORTUNITY SITES

**Recommendation 2:** Preserve older, smaller buildings as a backbone, but encourage new development to accommodate a range of retail uses.

## PUBLIC REALM

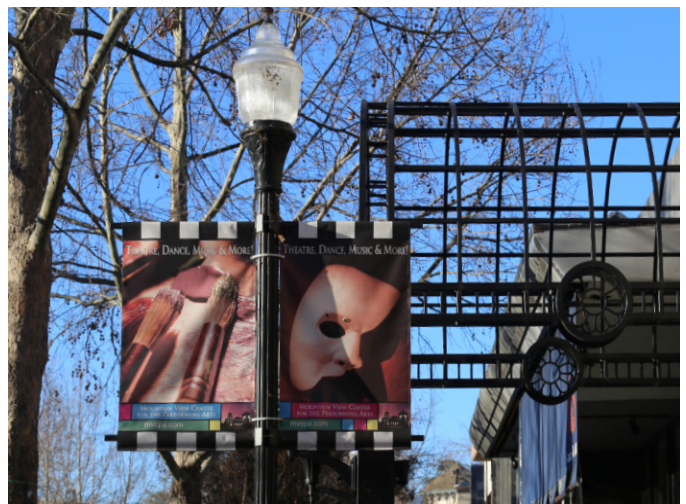
**Recommendation 3:** Ensure an appealing environment that encourages active users.

## PARKING

**Recommendation 4:** Manage parking for efficiency and user convenience.

The panel provides suggested implementation strategies for each recommendation. These range from tax incentives and enforcement of existing standards to development of specific underutilized sites. The purpose of both the recommendations and suggested implementation strategies is to provide the City and stakeholders very specific actions they may take as steps to reach larger aspirations.

The overall sense of the panel is that Downtown Mountain View should build on its strength, which is a robust food and beverage area in the first three blocks of Castro Street. While ongoing success will take intentional, proactive investment, both the desire and the resources may already be in place.



# Context<sup>1</sup>

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Centrally located in Silicon Valley, the City of Mountain View occupies 12.2 square miles in Santa Clara County, and is situated 15 miles northwest of San Jose and 36 miles southeast of San Francisco. Several major highways and freeways (101, 280, 85, and 237) connect the City to the broader Bay Area region. Mountain View is also a regional transportation hub and has transit stops for the Caltrain commuter train (two stops) and Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) light rail system (two stops).

Mountain View began as a stagecoach stop and an agricultural center for Santa Clara Valley. The town was incorporated in 1902 with a population of fewer than 1,000 people and was eventually covered in orchards and vineyards. By 1960, with the growth of the electronic and aerospace industries, the City population grew to more than 30,000. In 2017, the population was 81,438 and the City is now considered a modern, high-tech hub with diverse neighborhoods and an active downtown.

Multiple major technology companies are located in Mountain View, including Google, Intuit, LinkedIn, Microsoft, Samsung, Siemens Medical Solutions, and Symantec, among others. These tech companies are some of the top employers in the City. Google alone—with parent company Alphabet—has more than 20,000 Mountain View-based employees. Although the largest technology companies are located in the North Bayshore area and other neighborhoods, Downtown Mountain View also has a strong and growing tech office presence.

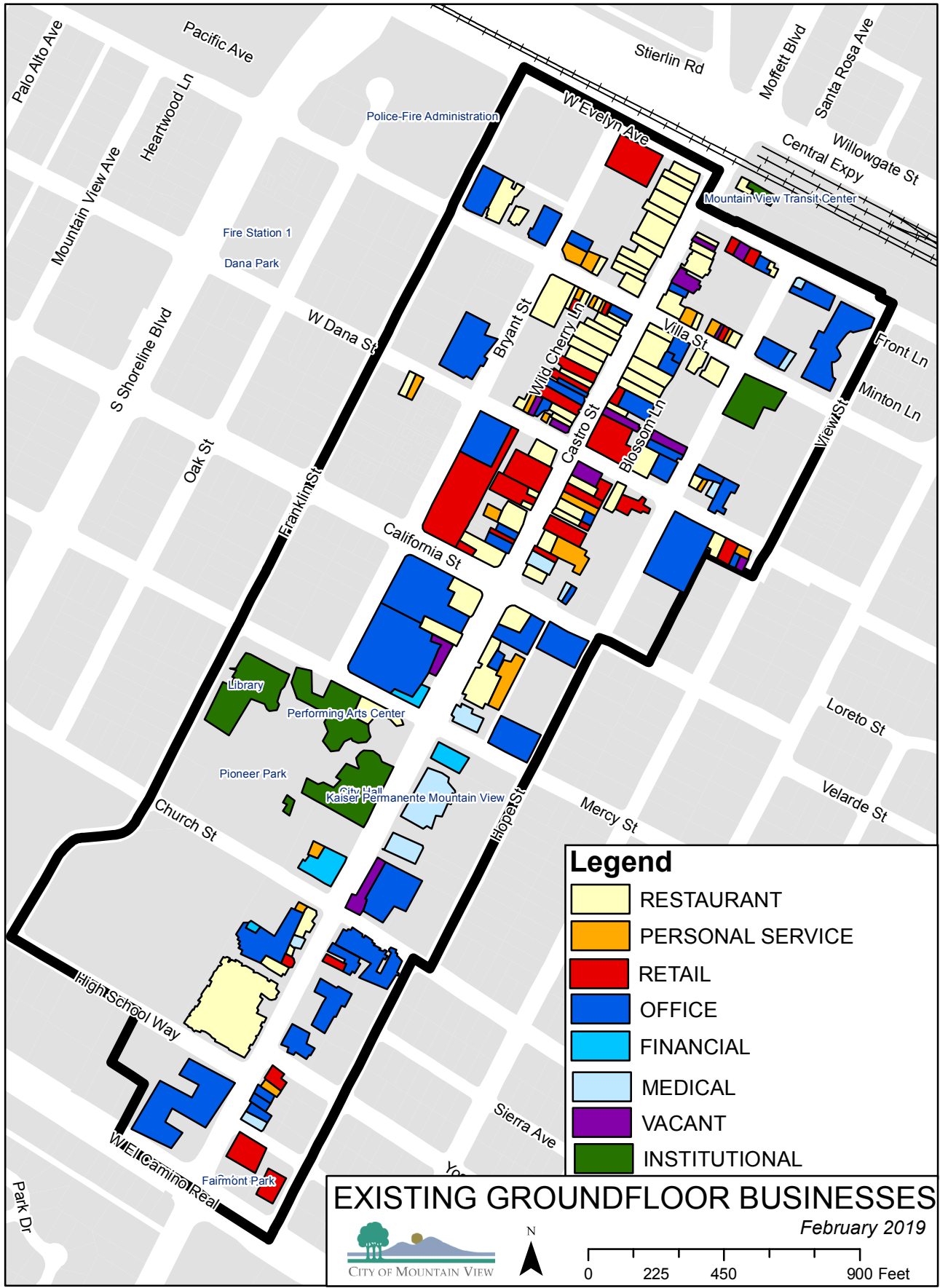
Downtown Mountain View, located on Castro Street between Central Expressway and El Camino Real, is a diverse commercial district with a mix of uses, a multimodal-transit station, and civic and cultural amenities serving the Mountain View community and Bay Area region. Downtown is home to approximately 318 businesses, with 464,000 square feet of retail and restaurant space, 1.2 million square feet of office space and 11 public parking facilities (approximately 1,600 off-street public parking spaces).

The City has supported Downtown over the last several decades through a variety of policies, initiatives, and investments such as the Downtown Precise Plan, the former Revitalization Authority, the Downtown Parking Maintenance and Assessment District, and Downtown Business Improvement Areas. This support resulted in constructing civic facilities (Civic Center with City Hall, Library and Performing Arts Center), making Castro Street streetscape improvements, performing the study for a new Transit Center, developing public parking facilities, adding commercial office buildings, diversifying the type of Downtown restaurants, supporting affordable housing, and partnering with the Central Business Association and Chamber of Commerce.

The Downtown Committee is the advisory body to the City Council that promotes the economic vitality of Downtown through policy and program recommendations. In 2017, the City's Economic Development Division began discussions with the Downtown Committee with the discussions focusing around Downtown retail opportunities and challenges.

The committee hosted several Downtown Retail Panel Discussions to learn about current retail trends and challenges both at the regional Bay Area level and locally within Downtown Mountain View. In addition, staff completed a Downtown economic study to assess commercial and residential growth. As a result, staff developed a Downtown Economic Vitality Program that was approved by the Downtown Committee and City Council in February 2018. The goal of the program is to support the Downtown businesses and continue to encourage economic vitality.





Courtesy of City of Mountain View.

## Downtown Mountain View

Downtown Mountain View is defined as the blocks on either side of Castro Street between Central Expressway and El Camino Real. The historic retail core of Downtown is the 100 to 300 blocks of Castro Street from West Evelyn Avenue to California Street which has a continuous frontage of retail and restaurant uses at the ground floor dominated by food and beverage venues. The remaining portions of Castro Street provide a mix of uses (retail, office, and residential uses) and larger-scale buildings including civic, office, and mixed-used buildings. Downtown Mountain View is surrounded by predominantly single-family neighborhoods that are buffered by transitional areas with multi-family residential or mixed residential and office uses compatible with the adjoining single-family neighborhoods.

The aerial view below shows the mix of food and beverage, retail and other services offered in Downtown Mountain View. The blocks along Castro Street between California Street and Evelyn Avenue have a high density of restaurants with retail outlets interspersed.

Additional food and beverage and retail outlets are along Castro Street and El Camino Real, though not nearly as densely packed as the northern blocks.

An eclectic mix of one and two story buildings define the historic retail core along Castro Street. The sidewalks are lined with mature street trees and the blocks are broken mid-way with alleys running perpendicular to Castro Street. The scale and spacing of the buildings, blocks and trees create an intimate, walkable, human-scaled public realm.

Currently 11 City-owned parking facilities are within two blocks on either side of Castro Street, between West Evelyn Avenue and Mercy Street. Of these, nine are surface parking lots and two are parking structures. These lots provide about 1,600 off-street parking space. The lots offer a mix of timed parking and permit parking options.



Aerial view of Castro Street retail in Downtown Mountain View. Courtesy of Newmark Knight Frank.

## Public Transit



Caltrain crossing Castro Street to pull into Downtown Mountain View station.



Shuttle buses pick up and drop off passengers with a VTA train in the background.



Downtown Mountain View Station is served by Santa Clara VTA light rail and Caltrain regional rail service.

The Downtown Transit Center, just off Castro Street at the Central Expressway, supports the inter-City Caltrain which runs from San Francisco to San Jose, local VTA light rail) and bus service. In more recent years, the City has partnered with major employers and property owners to create shuttle systems with Downtown stops. Google first partnered with the City to provide the Mountain View Community Shuttle which provides free enhanced transportation connections throughout the City. The second shuttle system is sponsored by the Mountain View Transportation Management Association (MTMA), a nonprofit organization run by Mountain View businesses and landowners to reduce traffic on Mountain View streets for the benefit of the entire community. The shuttle system, MVgo, provides shuttle service to and from major employment areas (North Bayshore and East Whisman) to the Downtown Transit Center.<sup>2</sup>

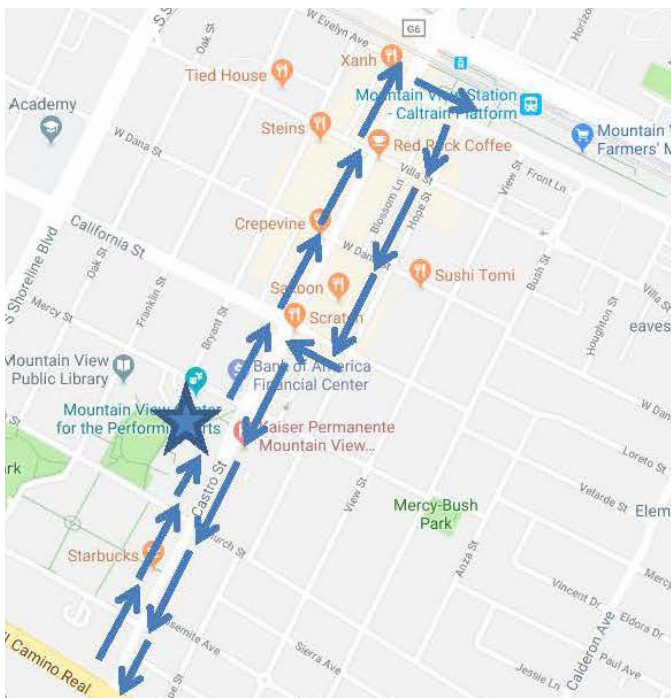
# Panel Assignment and Process

The City of Mountain View requested the assistance of ULI San Francisco to help provide a vision and framework for shaping Downtown Mountain View. ULI assembled a team of real estate professionals, economists, landscape architects, urban designers, architects, and public-sector experts.

The City had several issues it wanted the ULI TAP committee to explore. A key issue was consideration of the mix of Downtown commercial uses. Although Downtown is known for food and beverage venues, the City was concerned whether it had enough retail for a vibrant economy and street life and that vacant storefronts are an ongoing problem. Office space demand also created a concern that street level offices were further crowding out otherwise sparse retail. Perceptions of parking problems were also a key theme to explore relative to downtown's attractiveness as a retail and dining destination. At a larger scale, the City wanted to better understand Downtown's economic viability in relationship to other regional competitive commercial shopping and dining areas.

The panel was asked to address the following questions provided by the City:

1. Based on stakeholder interviews, what are the panelists' observations and what themes should the City consider for Downtown Mountain View? Provide a draft mission statement for Downtown.
2. How might future planning efforts positively influence the success of Castro Street and Downtown Mountain View? What can the City do to leverage its assets and address its challenges (as identified by the stakeholders) in light of changes and growth?
3. Based on what the panel heard, what land use concepts and retail/experiential uses are recommended for Downtown Mountain View? What policies, programs, and actions should the City consider to support these concepts and uses and to maintain a successful Downtown? What unique things about Mountain View can/should be capitalized on?



TAP walking tour route (Courtesy of City of Mountain View).



Panel members review and analyze satellite imagery of Downtown.

Beginning approximately a month before the two-day TAP, the panel reviewed the Briefing Book and other documents provided by the City, gathered other relevant information such as real estate and retail competitive set backgrounds, and had prep-calls to prepare for the TAP workshop.

On day one of the TAP, City staff led the panelists on a walking tour of Downtown along Castro Street. The Panel then met for briefings and interviews with representatives from the City as well as stakeholders from the community and businesses. The afternoon was a closed door session dedicated to further research and the formulation of recommendations.

Representatives from the City, including the following persons:

- Tiffany Chew, Economic Development Specialist
- Dawn Cameron, Assistant Public Works Director
- Michele Peterson, Recreation Coordinator
- Aarti Shrivastava, Assistant City Manager/Community Development Director; and
- Stephanie Williams, Planning Manager

On the second day of the TAP, the panel reconvened for further deliberations and to finalize their findings and recommendations, which was presented at a public meeting in City Council chambers. This presentation was attended by local citizens, members of business and community groups, and City government representatives.



Following a walking tour of Downtown, representatives from the City met to discuss and collaborate with TAP members.

# Panelist Site Tour: What We Saw

The following are images that the panelists and ULI staff captured during their time in Downtown Mountain View. These images are representative of what caught the panel's attention and helped spur conversations about urban vitality, strengths, and opportunities for greater contributions.



Pedestrians leaving the Transit Center, a hub for intermodal mobility.



Storefronts along Castro Street — human scaled with layers of landscape.



Integrated street furnishings.



Intimate scale of existing buildings.



Pass-through alleys create a convenient and functional rhythm to the street.



Public and private partnership provides people with local transit options.



Street furniture is people friendly.



Cast gratings are a legacy detail.

In addition to the observations made of the downtown urban realm, noted on the previous page, the panel took note of some particular strengths in the design and planning of Castro Street, such as the following:

- Good use of street furnishing for placemaking (restaurant tables and chairs, umbrellas, planters);
- Design elements used to indicate public access (arch-top trellises at alleyway and connections from Castro Street to blocks beyond); and
- Eclectic mix of building size and character in historic core of Castro Street.

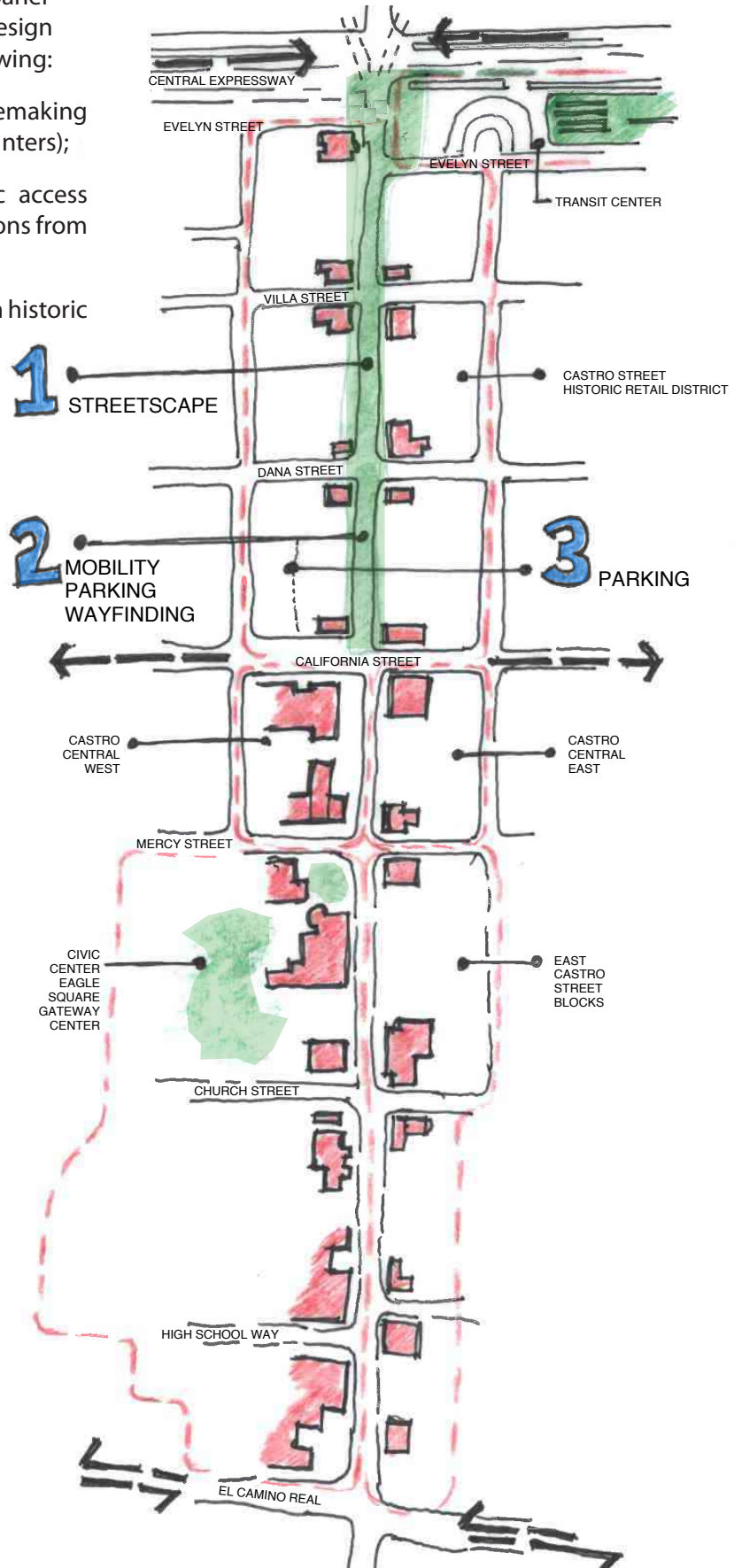


Diagram of key Downtown elements.

# Stakeholder Interviews: What We Heard

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The panel split into smaller teams to meet with City stakeholders, including members from a variety of civic and business groups to better understand a range of perspectives, experiences and proposals from the various stakeholders.

The questions included inquiries into what the stakeholders felt was the character of Mountain View in general and Downtown specifically. They were also asked about what they thought worked well and where opportunities existed for improvement. The panel heard from the following stakeholder groups:

- City Staff (Assistant City Manager/Community Development, Economic Development, Planning, Public Works, Recreation);
- Central Business Association;
- Chamber of Commerce;
- Downtown Committee;
- Downtown Business Owners;
- Old Mountain View Neighborhood Association; and
- Youth Advisory Committee.



Michele Petersen of the City of Mountain View offers insight.



Tiffany Chew of the City of Mountain View provides context.



The Youth Advisory Committee offered fresh perspectives.





City of Mountain View government representatives meet with TAP panelists.

From listening to the stakeholder groups, the panel organized feedback as follows:

WANTS	LIKES	ISSUES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better retail mix</li> <li>• Different uses</li> <li>• Higher-end restaurants</li> <li>• High-end retail</li> <li>• Offices that provide services like spa, physical therapy</li> <li>• Breakfast spots (other than bakeries) with broader menus</li> <li>• Rooftop restaurant or at least some elevated access to give clear public “views across Mountain View”</li> <li>• Keep Castro clean on weekends</li> <li>• Bring art into the mix: galleries and public art</li> <li>• Support seniors’ use and access to, from, and within the corridor</li> <li>• Make sure that young people are accommodated with shops and venues of interest</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eclectic, fun, cool, hip</li> <li>• Diversity</li> <li>• Edginess, funky</li> <li>• Physical dimensions of Castro</li> <li>• Mix of buildings</li> <li>• Walkability</li> <li>• Blending of old and new</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More parking</li> <li>• Need a Transportation Management Association (TMA) for Downtown (Palo Alto example)</li> <li>• Costs of regulations impacts rent</li> <li>• Disconnect/lack of collective vision</li> <li>• Independent retailers struggle</li> <li>• Balancing between chains and independent retail and restaurants</li> </ul>

# SWOT Analysis

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Based on the context, site tour, and stakeholder input, the panel used a “SWOT” analysis. SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats and is a strategic planning technique that identifies factors that support or get in the way of reaching a goal. Factors may be internal or external.

- Strengths are characteristics that provide an advantage in reaching a goal.
- Weaknesses are characteristics that get in the way of reaching a goal.
- Opportunities are elements that could be exploited for advantage.
- Threats are internal or external factors that may cause trouble and hinder reaching an objective.



The City’s investment in landscape is a strength.

## Strengths

- Good physical form/good bones
- Authentic urban fabric
- Proactive government with resources
- Vibrant streetscape and pedestrian activity
- Transit accessible
- Strong restaurant scene
- Active community
- Social and ethnic community diversity
- Strong local economy
- Food and events destination

## Weaknesses

- Landlords not motivated to invest in upgrades
- No proven market for higher-end retail
- Many small commercial spaces in poor shape
- Zoning that allows office on ground floor
- Perception that City lacks resources, and responses to stakeholder needs such as permit processing takes longer than desired.
- 100 to 300 block – streetscape is older and inconsistent



Vacant storefronts are both a weakness and an opportunity.



Inter-modal mobility options are a strength.

## Opportunities

- Electrification of Caltrain will lead to more foot traffic (i.e., shoppers)
- Developing large sites – adds demand and space for modern/larger retail
- Improving mobility – will integrate with employment nodes
- Blocks 100-300 – build on unique character
- Business attraction, ombudsman
- Landlord assistance
- Flexibility on codes
- New forms of retail attracted to unique place
- Underused/vacant corners and opportunity sites



Building stock is a strength while internet shopping and competition from surrounding retail are threats.

## Threats

- Internet shopping
- Competition from surrounding retail development in Mountain View and surrounding area
- Perceived lack of parking
- Large employers – too much power to control culture/uses
- High operating costs (rent, wages, taxes, parking, BID)
- Castro Street could feel stale over time, lose its attractiveness



Pop-up shops are opportunities to explore business viabilities.

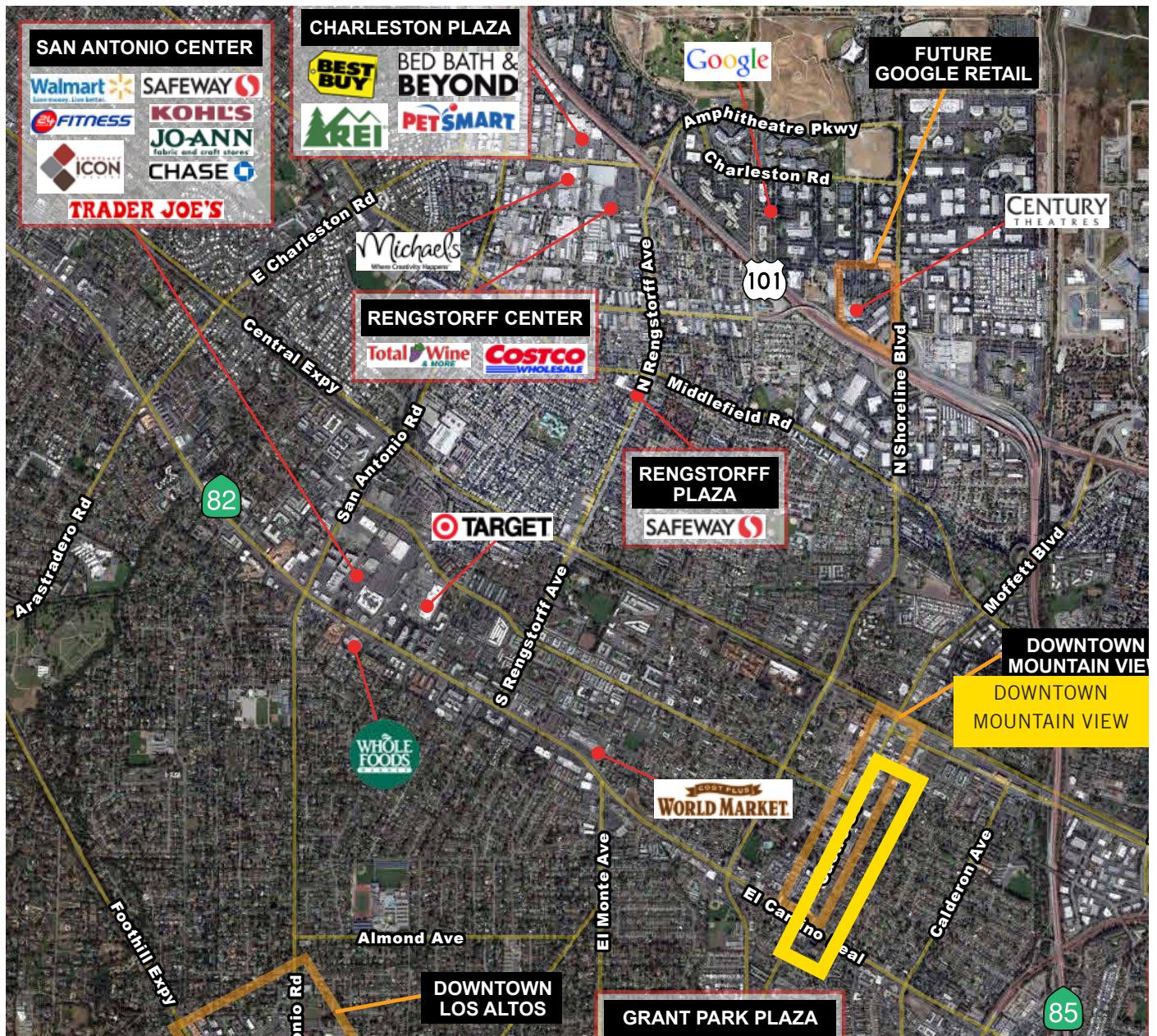


Well-developed streetscape is a definite strength.

# Market Analysis

In considering the future of Castro Street, the panel felt understanding Downtown Mountain View in the context of the larger competitive region and the changing nature of retail was important.

As shown below, a number of retail centers are within convenient driving distance of Downtown Mountain View. National and regional chains dominate these centers.



Aerial view of Downtown Mountain View's retail competitive set. Note: Due to the changing nature of retail, not all of this information may be currently accurate or remain accurate. Courtesy of Newmark Knight Frank.

Retail centers near Downtown include the following:

- San Antonio Center (Walmart, 24 Hour Fitness, Chase, Safeway, Target, Kohl's, Jo-Ann Fabrics, Showplace Icon Theatre, Trader Joe's );
- Charleston Plaza (Best Buy, REI, Bed Bath & Beyond, PetSmart);
- Future Gateway Master Plan site;
- Rengstorff Center (Ross, Total Wine, Costco);
- Rengstorff Plaza (Safeway);
- Downtown Los Altos;
- Grant Road Center (Nob Hill Foods, Marshalls, Ranch Market, City Sports); and
- Cityline in Sunnyvale (Whole Foods, Target, Century Theatres).

The panel concluded that Mountain View is well-served by retail centers and that Downtown and Castro Street will need to continue to offer a unique and distinct environment and experience continuing into the future.

### Retail Analytics

As noted earlier, the panel included real estate developers and brokers with expertise in retail as well as a specialist in urban economics. As part of the data gathering, this group provided context for local market economics, including the following:

- Small independent retailers are attracted to lower market rents (+/- \$40 sq ft).
- Retail rents are too low to support major upgrades to building systems or facades (quality improvements \$30-\$50 sq ft).
- Some other retailers (national, regional brands, online retailers) are willing to pay rents that support the improvements (+/- \$70 sq ft).
- New restaurants will pay \$60-\$70 sq ft in rent.
- Restaurant tenant improvement allowances are much higher than those for retail tenants (\$100-\$150 plus parking in-lieu fee).

This information helps demonstrate the challenge of attracting new businesses to Downtown and the importance of landlords' ability and willingness to invest in their properties to make attractive for leasing.



A vacant storefront along Castro Street — a lost opportunity to contribute to the economic and cultural vitality of Downtown.

### A South Bay Broker's Perspective

"Existing Mountain View landlords (mostly independents) with vacancy don't aggressively market their properties. Many South Bay retail brokers are not aware of existing vacancies and the Downtown story to be told. Retail brokers don't frequent Downtown unless a retail tenant directs them to tour specifically."

"Downtown Mountain View has become a destination for office users. With access to transit, millennials wanting a South Bay urban experience with walkability and a broad mix of restaurant choices extends the trade area. Downtown already has a vibrant 24-7 customer base that will only get stronger with additional lodging and residential developments. With proper marketing, retailers will increase the amount of attention paid."

## The Changing Nature of Retail

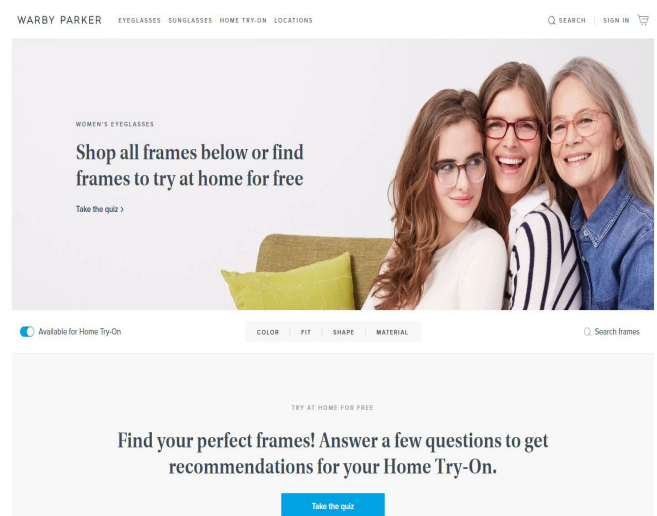
Opportunities for Downtown Mountain View are affected by the changing nature of retail in the United States. One important factor is the decades-long and continuing concentration of retail into national chains, often large-format “big box” national chains usually situated on very large parcels surrounded by parking, or ubiquitous chain stores in malls or mall-like settings. Another is the growing shift of retail sales onto the internet, Online shopping now accounts for about 10 percent of all sales<sup>3</sup>, but this is the average across all retail sectors—and the percentage is much higher in many categories including electronics, clothing, books and music. Both of these factors make growing and maintaining a thriving traditional downtown with independent unique stores highly challenging.

However, many local, regional and national brands are emerging that reflect the direction of retail for their target audience currently visiting and desired for Downtown Mountain View. Some of these brands are multi-channel with both strong online retail presence and brick-and-mortar presence like Warby Parker eye wear or Everlane apparel and accessories. Other brands, like Heath Ceramics cater to consumers’ aspirations for goods that are thoughtfully designed and well-crafted with a rich and appealing story. And yet another group of retailers like Shinola Detroit and Barry’s Bootcamp buck traditional retail real estate maxims and establish fun and funky outlets in bold and non-traditional locations.

For this next generation of retailers and restaurateurs, unique locations are preferred in contrast to cookie-cutter locations of the past. Downtown Mountain View already has many elements that typically make locations unique, including a well-defined sense of place with streetscape, programming (street art, buskers, etc.) and lighting. Varied architectural styles, scales, vintages and forms also contribute to a unique identity. This includes the scale of the storefront with materials, detailing and lighting that capture interest. By contrast, other non-viable downtown suburban retail districts do not have the critical mass and concentration of shops and restaurants found in Downtown Mountain View. To thrive through ongoing change, it is critical to preserve and promote the unique parts of Downtown Mountain View which provide a density of storefronts that will allow for these new and evolving types of retail.



Warby Parker brick-and-mortar shop.



Warby Parker web-based retail.

## Case Study: Cedros Avenue in Solana Beach, California

Cedros Avenue is a retail and dining destination in San Diego’s North County coastal community of Solana Beach. More than 80 independent shops, restaurants and galleries line the approximately two and a half blocks, interspersed with street-level and second-floor office space. Although many visitors arrive by private auto, the Amtrak station at the Solana Beach Transit Center is only a block away. Many of the original buildings are renovated warehouses and light industrial sheds. Part of the charm of Cedros is this non-uniform and idiosyncratic architectural collection. Cedros Avenue also hosts a weekly farmers market, set up in a parking lot adjacent to the street. Of particular note are the Belly Up Tavern and SoLo. The Belly Up Tavern has been showcasing live music for more than 45 years and provides evening vitality to Cedros. SoLo is a curated collection of eight different retailers sharing space in a restored warehouse. SoLo reflects the changing nature of retail by allowing flexibility for displays, opportunities for pop-ups and shops-within-shops and a fluid shopping experience for their customers.



North and south ends of Cedros Avenue clearly marked.



Amtrak station at the Solana Beach Transit Center.



Belly Up Tavern marquee featuring local, national, and international acts.



Curated offerings inside SoLo's renovated warehouse.

# Panel Assessment and Recommendations

Synthesizing all of the information gathered along with follow-on analysis and discussion, the panel developed the following proposed mission statement for consideration, based on the analysis that follows:

**Downtown Mountain View has great bones and a great brand! The City and stakeholders should build on this strong character to ensure that Castro Street continues to be the vibrant heart of Mountain View in the future.**

As discussed, many downtown retail streets are challenged by competition from big box stores, malls, and the internet. Other downtowns in the area and nationally are trying to change to emphasize “experiences,” usually anchored by food & beverage offerings as an “internet-resistant” way to draw customers in the face of these changes. Downtown Mountain View has three particularly strong elements that create its strong customer draw. These are: food-and-beverage, retail and the public realm.

## 1. Food-and-Beverage

The Downtown Mountain View historic district already has a food and beverage orientation in an authentic setting. This concentration of restaurants with outdoor seating creates a lively, attractive atmosphere that must be valued and appreciated—and built upon for the future.

The quantity and mix of restaurants are, in a large part, what make Downtown a memorable destination. From West Evelyn Street to California Street, Castro Street supports almost three solid blocks of restaurants with intermittent retail and only a few vacancies.

Varied, high quality, and independent describe many of the Downtown restaurants. Examples include Xanh – a Vietnamese Restaurant, Oren’s Hummus, Eureka! Asian Box Street Food, and Cascal. As consumers continue to become ever more sophisticated, the local restaurateurs must in-turn push themselves to increase the quality of their offerings. Quality might range from freshness of ingredients to authenticity as well as innovations in recipes.

## 2. Retail

The panel also believes that growing a stronger retail presence will continue to support a healthy economy and culture. Retail should be further incentivized to enhance the public sphere. Just as diverse restaurant menus define Downtown Mountain View, so too can diverse and high-quality shopping.

The eclectic mix of buildings in the historic area of Castro Street is a rare asset, found in only a handful of Bay Area suburban downtowns. The buildings are “a mixture of ages and architectural styles, but there are unifying characteristics including limited height, narrow building widths and small storefronts that create a fine-grained pedestrian scale and a largely continuous frontage of retail and restaurant uses.”<sup>4</sup> This asset should allow Downtown Mountain View to attract the desired retail tenants. As each of these new concepts takes root and succeeds, it will in turn draw others. The success of these businesses can provide proof of concept to attract progressive and desirable retail that will keep the area fresh.

## 3. Public Realm

The Downtown area already authentically possesses what developers spend years, and untold sums, trying to recreate, often unsuccessfully. This is a neighborhood of intimately scaled buildings that displays a patina earned only through decades of organic growth.

The well-developed, albeit aging, streetscape and extensive outdoor seating support a vibrant public space—whether on a typical day or for one of Mountain View’s outstanding special events. The Transit Center anchors one end of Downtown, ushering in a lively mix of residents, commuters and visitors.

To achieve even greater results, Mountain View must continually increase investments. Possibly, continuity of the status quo may actually result in reduced value, given the regional competitive offerings. City government, local associations, private landowners and developers should proactively commit resources in the form of refined policies, economic incentives, and direct investments.



The panel suggests the best way to build on these strengths is through incremental change rather than wholesale repositioning. Development focus should be on step-by-step elevation of what already is working and step-by-step remedying of underused sites. The panel identified four main areas for focus, with associated recommendations:

**RECOMMENDATION 1: POLICY AND PARTNERSHIP**

Continue to proactively make investments and implement policies to incentivize Downtown development.

**RECOMMENDATION 2: OPPORTUNITY SITES**

Preserve older, smaller buildings as a backbone and a magnet for retailers who are increasingly seeking authenticity of place. Concurrently encourage new development to accommodate a range of retail uses.

**RECOMMENDATION 3: PUBLIC REALM**

Ensure an appealing environment that encourages active users.

**RECOMMENDATION 4: PARKING**

Manage parking for efficiency and user convenience.



Downtown Mountain View parking district. Courtesy City of Mountain View.



Partial plan of the Downtown Business Improvement area, highlighting Area H Historic Retail District. Courtesy City of Mountain View.

## POLICY AND PARTNERSHIP

**Recommendation 1:** Continue to proactively make investments and implement policies to incentivize Downtown vibrancy and development

The panel believes that Mountain View can enhance the occupancy level and diversity of uses in downtown through increased allocation of staff and financial resources and policy initiatives.



Mountain View can continue to build on its strength where public and private partnerships and programs are already established. This includes the annual Art & Wine Festival (top) and the Farmer's Market (above two images).

### 1a. Increase staffing and consulting resources.

Additional City staff resources are needed to support Downtown business development. Working with a singular vision of activating and improving Downtown, a dedicated staff person can be a liaison to landlords and tenants to help move projects more quickly through regulatory and administrative processes, oversee outside consultants, and provide leadership and input to other City departments involved in Downtown (for example on public realm, parking, and development projects as identified in following sections).

- *Retain a retail curator/business attraction specialist.* As discussed in the Broker's Prospective on page 19, Downtown Mountain View is not "visible" enough to the brokerage community and to potential tenants. A third-party consultant with deep understanding of the larger Peninsula market can act as a curator and advocate for Downtown Mountain View retail opportunities. The curator can provide proactive and consistent outreach to businesses and property owners to match them with potential tenants who may be attracted to Castro Street. This consultant could market Downtown opportunities to the regional retail brokerage community who represent small independent businesses and select chains in the retail as well as food and beverage areas. In addition to ongoing one-on-one work, this consultant could consider could a monthly newsletter to the business and brokerage communities highlighting new tenants coming to Downtown and vacancies that are available.
- *Provide real estate consulting assistance to property owners.* Most Downtown properties, particularly within the historic section of Castro Street, are owned by small landlords with limited market knowledge. The City should consider retaining a consultant to help property owners evaluate the financial options and benefits to upgrading their properties to attract higher-performing retail tenants, to access other programs that may be available, and to negotiate fair leases with new tenants. To ensure "skin in the game" the cost of such services could be shared by the property owners.

**1b. Simplify and update City policies.** Property owners and business operators can be overwhelmed by the time, complexity and cost of complying with City requirements. In addition to providing staff and consultants, there should be regular reviews, led by the dedicated staff person, to adjust and update policies that best serve a vision for an active and diverse Downtown. Some specific ideas offered:

- *Consider revisions to the Precise Plan land use policies.* The Precise Plan currently allows continued office uses in retail spaces on Castro Street, which can be very enticing to property owners. However, these uses can undermine the retail “fabric” of Downtown. The City should consider prohibiting office uses from the Precise Plan area, except for certain institutional users such as Kaiser and government and municipal services at Civic Center Plaza. Storefronts now used for office should be not be permitted to re-lease as office upon vacancy of the current tenant.
- *Revisit building design policies.* The City may also consider revisions to policy framework and enforcement. One area of focus would be review of signage and facade design policies for both existing and new uses. These policies would set standards for appearance and maintenance and create an enforcement mechanism, to counteract what the run-down appearance of several key properties. On the other hand, the panel encourages the City to allow dynamic and distinctive storefront design approaches even within the 100-300 blocks of Castro Street, while respecting the historic nature of certain buildings.
- *Create a handbook for Downtown.* This handbook would be for developers, property owners, and prospective businesses to provide clear and transparent information regarding the City’s permitting and approval processes for Downtown. This effort will also help highlight confusing, unnecessary or out-of-date requirements that should be addressed.

**1c. Create “carrots and sticks” to encourage change.** Even with the demise of redevelopment agencies, cities have the ability to create incentives and disincentives for desired uses, behaviors, and investment. Using the focus of the types of quality retail and restaurant operators that Mountain View would like to attract, the panel encourages broad thinking and experimentation, such as the following as ideas:

- *Expand the use of loans and grants to assist landlords and tenants to fund property improvements.* Financial assistance should of course be matched at a ratio to private investment, and grants may be structured as “forgivable loans” based on achieving milestones of opening, operations, and employment.
- *Consider upzoning and development bonuses.* This would apply for key sites that are underutilized, such as the Opportunity Sites offered in the next section of this report.
- *Offer streamlined processing and waiver of fees.* This can be used for desired development projects, tenant improvements, and business permits.
- *Though controversial, consider a “vacancy tax” on property owners with persistent vacancies and empty properties.* This can be used to help get landlords to work more closely with the City to take advantage of assistance and incentives offered for Downtown.
- *Step up enforcement on poorly maintained buildings, storefronts and outdoor seating areas.* Poor maintenance and shabby appearances affect not only the offending property, but surrounding uses as well.
- *Encourage short-term experiments by allowing and incentivizing “pop-up” retail in vacant or underused storefronts.* This could be one per storefront, or many small users in one space, allowing business owners to explore short-term proof-of-concept, which may lead to longer-term commitments. This may require relaxing certain building codes, eliminating permit costs and long waits, and even offering financial assistance to both owners and operators. It would be one of the opportunities for property owners to avoid a potential vacancy tax.

## OPPORTUNITY SITES

**Recommendation 2:** Preserve older, smaller buildings as a backbone but encourage new development of select sites to accommodate a range of retail uses.

### 2a. Preserve older, smaller buildings as a backbone.

The existing building stock creates much of the memorable character of Downtown Mountain View. Their composition and details are closely associated with human proportions thus creating a comfortable environment to stroll, dine, shop and socialize. While building at this scale might not currently make economic sense, the existing array of architecture maintains high value not least because it is no longer common.

### 2b. Encourage new mixed-use development to accommodate a wider range of retail users.

Some sites are already slated for mixed-use development and the panel has identified others that may be good candidates for development. Given the existing older, smaller buildings, new buildings should consider the needs of contemporary retailers that may need spaces larger and more flexible than existing stock. It is also possible that private developers may need to build larger than the historic precedents simply to make their projects economically feasible.

The Panel suggests that the City focus primarily, though not exclusively, on Castro Street corner conditions, between West Evelyn Avenue and the train tracks at the north east end and El Camino Real at the south west end. The City and stakeholders should focus on preserving and upgrading these building and restrict allowable uses to retail and restaurants.

Corners are important for urban vitality because they:

- Provide choices;
- Frame views;
- Allow for memorable architecture with exposure of multiple elevations of particular buildings;
- Provide measure markers for rhythms of pedestrian and vehicular circulation; and
- Set the tone as gateways for blocks they anchor.

Secondly, the panel suggests that the City classify these select (mainly) corner buildings based on their contribution to the public realm and economic vitality

of Castro Street. As a larger group, these are identified as “Opportunity Sites.” Specific designations include the following:

- *Opportunity for stronger contribution:* Pieces of real estate that could provide a stronger contribution to urban vitality with upgrades to their current state.
- *Development opportunity:* Sites where the land use could be modified with new, mixed-use construction or major building construction, that would further support the aspirations for a vital and successful Downtown.<sup>5</sup>
- *Strong contributor:* These sites already fortify the vitality of Downtown. Strong contributor sites are meant to be references in terms of scale, use, upkeep, architectural character and connection of interior to the streetscape.

The panel developed a diagram of proposed opportunity sites as shown on the following pages. This diagram shows color coding for “opportunity for stronger contribution,” “development opportunity,” and “strong contributor” sites.

While many of these opportunity sites are on Castro Street corner lots, a few are mid-block and some are on adjacent streets within a block of this main commercial corridor.

Overall, the panel identified approximately 20 sites. Of these 20, 14 are designated “opportunity for stronger contribution.” Three are designated “development opportunity” and three are designated “strong contributor.” The panel used the intersections of Castro and Villa Streets, Castro and Dana Streets, Castro and California Streets and Castro and Mercy Streets to illustrate the recommendations to focus effort on both corner sites and opportunity sites.

**OPPORTUNITY SITES: OVERALL STREET VIEW AND COLOR-CODED LEGEND**



Intersection of Castro Street and Villa Street



Opportunity for Stronger Contribution



Strong Contributor



Development Opportunity

Color-coded legend identifying different types of opportunity sites.

Diagram of proposed opportunity sites along Castro Street between West Evelyn and El Camino Real.

## Opportunity Sites: Intersection of Castro Street and Villa Street

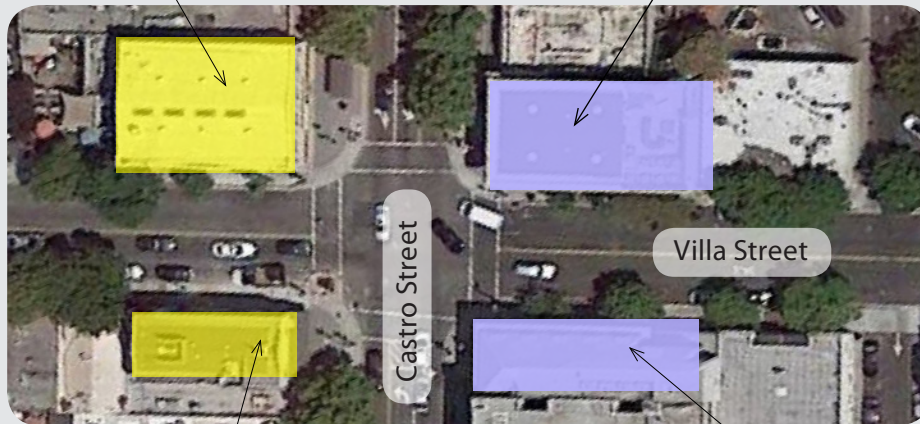
### Opportunity for Stronger Contribution:

194 Castro Street. This building contributes to the urban fabric, but the street-level details are lacking compared to the second level. The storefront and door hardware are generic and without character. Recommend new paint and new street-level doors and windows.



### Strong Contributor:

191 Castro Street. General preservation of original architectural features, with well-maintained exterior. Strong visual connection between interior and streetscape. Recommend this building be used as a reference for successful contribution.



### Opportunity for Stronger Contribution:

823 Villa Street. Scale of building contributes to sense of streetscape intimacy. However, covered street-level windows are unwelcoming and create ambiguity as to whether the building is inhabited. Recommend new paint and encouraging at least street-level window displays if not actually opening up window coverings.



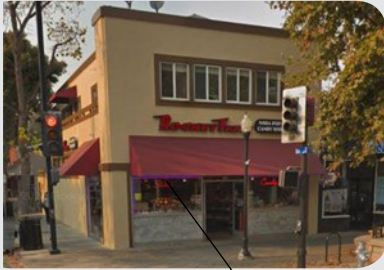
### Strong Contributor:

201 Castro Street. Rich original exterior details, strong visual connection between interior and streetscape. Awning and suspended sign at entry further bring scale down adjacent to pedestrian circulation. Recommend this building be used as a reference for successful contribution.

## Opportunity Sites: Intersection of Castro Street and West Dana Street

### Opportunities for Stronger Contribution:

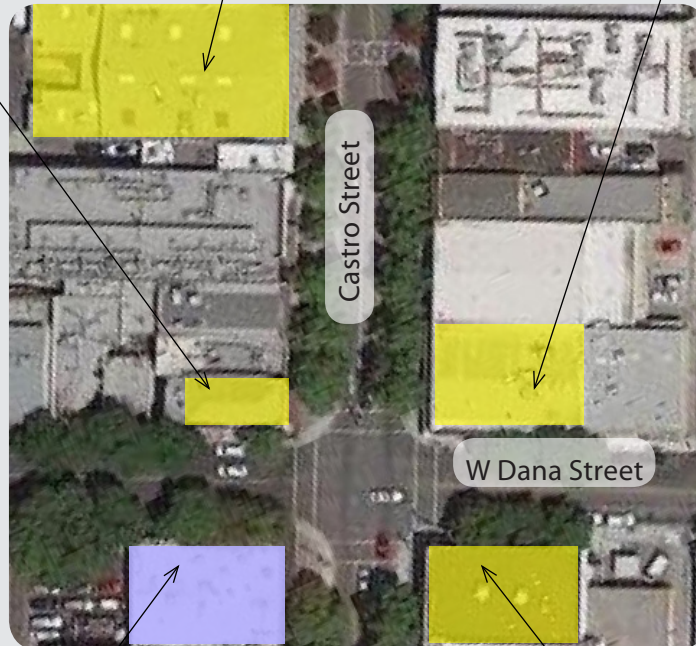
298 Castro Street. Generic storefront and door hardware lack character. Recommend new paint and new doors and windows.



228 Castro Street. As primarily a nighttime establishment, feels unwelcoming during day. Recommend stronger street-level signage and marquee.



299 Castro Street. Good scale from canopy and strong visual connection to the interior. Recommend new paint.



Strong Contributor

300 Castro Street. Deep overhang at outdoor seating is welcoming with strong connection to street, further helped by good visual connection to interior. This building should be used as a reference for successful contribution.



Opportunity for Stronger Contribution

301 Castro Street. Building itself has solid architectural presence, especially for a corner site. However, allowing it to remain vacant detracts from street vitality. Recommend creating economic incentives to lease this otherwise strong contributor.

## Opportunity Sites: Intersection of Castro Street and California Street

### Opportunity for Stronger Contribution:

360 Castro Street. Vacant storefront, especially at this size, detracts from vitality of streetscape, only brought further down with views to uninhabited interior. Recommend develop economic incentive to promote leasing of this space.



### Opportunity for Stronger Contribution:

383 Castro Street. Trellis and outdoor area at sidewalk potentially strong contributor. Vacancy detracts from street vibrancy. Recommend provide economic incentive to lease this space.



## Opportunity Sites: Intersection of Castro Street and Mercy Street

### Opportunity for Stronger Contribution:

475 & 485 Castro Street. Restaurants lack visual connection to streetscape. Recommend encourage opening windows to street or provide exterior furnishings.



### Opportunity for Stronger Contribution:

495 Castro Street. Canopies help bring pedestrian scale to an otherwise unremarkable building with little street-side presence. Recommend blade signage for stronger connection to pedestrian zone.



### Strong Contributor

500 Castro Street. Iconic building form is a memorable landmark and building scale balanced by set back from street on far side of public plaza.



### Opportunity for Stronger Contribution

501 Castro Street. Mid-20th century building detailing contributes to Castro Street's eclecticism, but building feels closed off from pedestrian zone. Recommend blade signage for stronger connection to pedestrian zone.

## PUBLIC REALM

**Recommendation 3:** Ensure an appealing, accessible and safe environment that encourages active use by all demographic groups.

The public realm consists of all spaces external to buildings and any other areas that are publicly accessible. It is generally thought of as a connected system for nature, human movement and interaction. A thriving public realm is supported by many elements already in place in Downtown Mountain View, such as street furniture, a continuous tree canopy, wide sidewalks, and streets designed for slower automobile traffic. With plazas at the Transit Center and the Civic Center, the Downtown public realm also supports large events like the Farmers' Market and festivals. The panel recommends building upon Downtown Mountain View's existing public realm by considering the following suggestions.



Example of strong public realm along Castro Street, reinforced by pedestrian circulation interweaving with restaurant seating in a space well-defined by storefront and overhead tree canopy. (By Runner1928 - Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=33066322>)



Where outdoor seating is only accessible via steps, the panel recommends raising these areas to the same level as adjacent sidewalk.

### 3a. Keep restaurant seating street-side with pedestrian walkways adjacent to storefronts.

This relationship creates an integrated warp and weft of street life with customers and servers, while also protecting the critical relationship between pedestrians and storefronts.

**3b. Make outdoor seating areas accessible.** Some areas of outdoor seating have steps as the only connection to the sidewalk. The panel recommends raising seating areas where this condition applies to align with the adjacent sidewalk as shown in the "Castro Street public realm cross-section diagram" on the following page. In addition to being an opportunity for upgrades, this will allow safe and convenient access to sidewalk seating for everyone, including people with a range of physical abilities and people pushing strollers or hand carts.

**3c. Upgrade dated fixtures.** The panel observed instances of street furniture and fixtures that were in need of repair or replacement. Updated fixtures that are well maintained will keep Downtown feeling fresh and current, signaling that the City and stakeholders truly care about the area and are willing to make appropriate investments.

**3d. Enforce the Downtown Sidewalk and Café standards.<sup>6</sup>** For example, the Standards prohibit bolting tables to the ground or otherwise securing loose furniture to fixed elements. The panel observed instances of this type of transgression and suggests stronger enforcement to maintain an environment that feels safe and inviting.

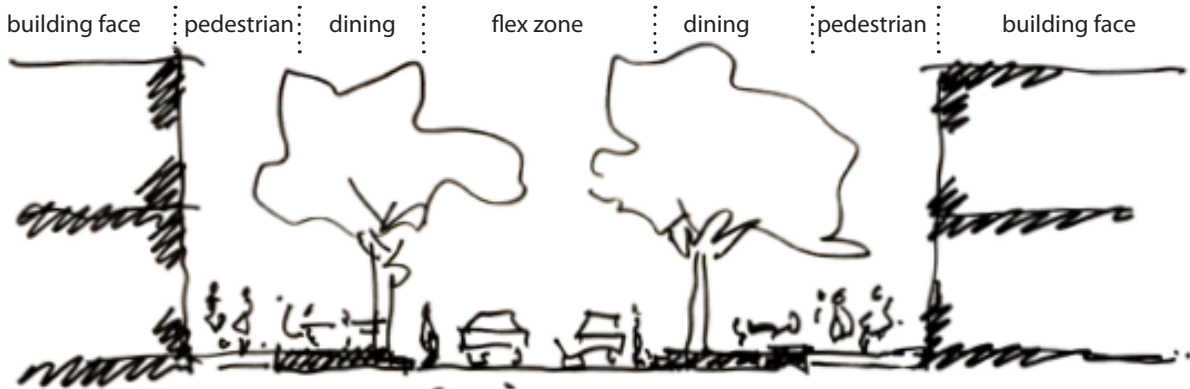


The public realm is enhanced with well-maintained street furnishings compliant with the local Downtown Sidewalk and Café Standards.

## Castro Street Public Realm Cross-Section Diagrams

These sketches were developed to illustrate the various relationships among elements in the public realm. These relationships include:

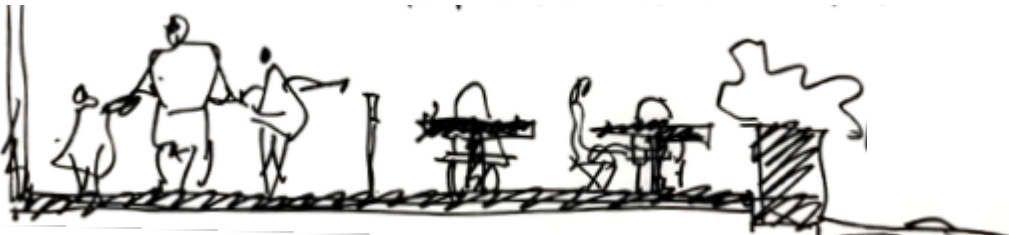
- *Spatial relationships*: Relative horizontal and vertical distances and dimensions.
- *Program (use) relationships*: Identification of the various functions and activities.
- *Scale relationships*: Relative sizes of physical elements.



Castro Street cross-section sketch.



Current condition stepping down to dining.



Proposed condition with dining area raised to same level as sidewalk. Grade change occurs across planters.

**3e. Make vehicular right-of-way a flex-zone for all modes of movement, modeled on European examples.** As is typical throughout the United States, the vehicular right-of-way is designed primarily for private automobile traffic. The panel suggests implementation of markings and zones to encourage multiple modes of movement, including bicycles and other low-velocity wheeled methods. The right-of-way should include safe and convenient stopping zones for ride shares, shuttles, and buses.

**3f. Encourage forms of mobility that are alternatives to private automobiles.** The ongoing and seemingly accelerating evolution of how people move through urban places seems particularly relevant to Downtown Mountain View given commuting patterns for workers. The panel observed pedestrians, bicycles, skateboarders, private automobiles, shuttles, City buses, trains, ride-share autos and electric scooters. This led to considerations about automobile parking, spaces designated for drop-off and pick-up, as well as delivery. The panel recommends the City actively encourage forms of mobility that are alternatives to private automobiles. This will reduce perceptions of a parking shortage and increase street life vitality.

Providing opportunities for movement through Downtown further supports the idea of a healthy social and economic ecosystem. Appropriately designed and detailed roads and sidewalks allow for slow strolling with friends or brisk biking back to the office. Encouraging multiple modes of transportation does not banish the private automobile, it simply reduces the car's dominance over the public realm.

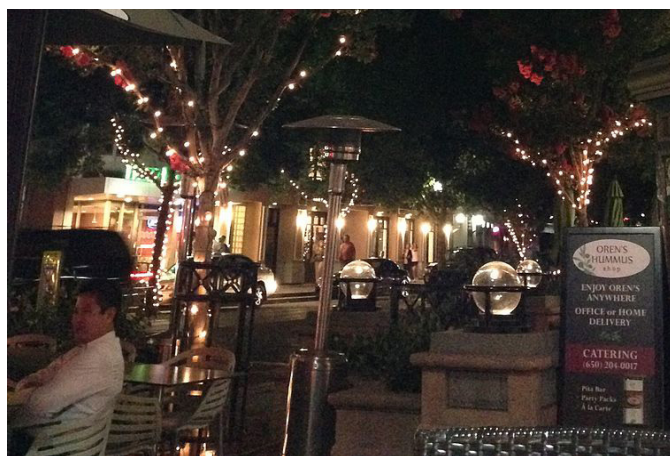
**3g. Enhance tree canopy by increasing its coverage area and adding lighting.** The historic center of Downtown has a rich and well-established tree canopy, creating visual interest throughout the year, providing shade in the summer and access to daylight in the winter. The panel recommends the City extend the street tree canopy into cross streets that intersect with Castro Street. This connective landscape should turn the corner from Castro Street and extend from one quarter to one-third of the length of these first blocks of cross streets.



Micro-mobility rental scooters are one example of the ever-evolving ways people can move through the public realm.

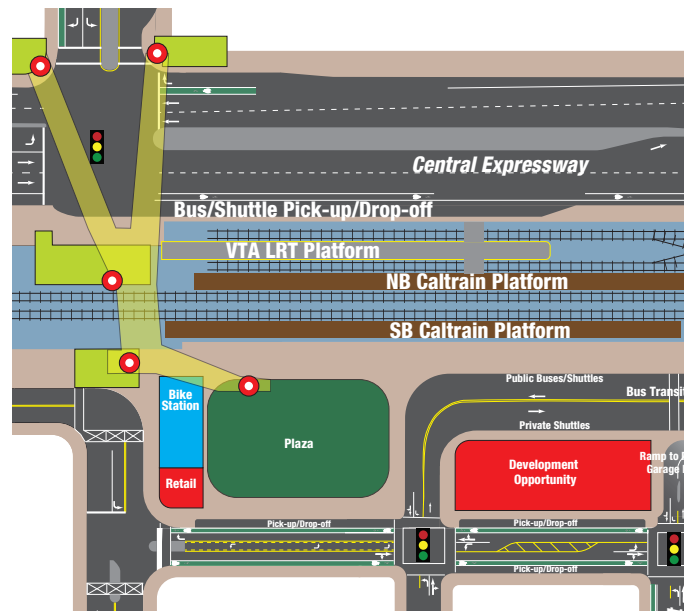


Castro Street's existing tree canopy is an asset to the public realm. (By Runner1928 - Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=33713362>)



Tree canopy lighting provides further spatial definition to the public realm and creates positive variety between the day and evening experience. (By Runner1928 - Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=34556977>)

**3h. Make the new transit center a memorable point of arrival for multiple modes of transportation including pedestrians and automobiles, in addition to trains.** The panel recommends investment in this zone to make a memorable and welcoming statement to the hundreds of commuters who arrive and depart each workday, and encourage them to stroll along Castro Street. To this end, the panel recommends this area incorporate some verticality in built form to not only be a landmark, but to also be a visual terminus for Castro Street. The spaces around the transit center should incorporate areas for public gatherings, including public art installations and streetscape furnishing open to interpretation for use (seating, dining, perching, etc). An opportunity also exists to introduce some whimsy along with the practical (children’s slides at stairs and fountains shallow enough for play). An array of these elements will animate and celebrate Downtown Mountain View and Castro Street’s place in the region. The design for this area should be sensitive to the character of the existing public realm along Castro Street.



The panel reviewed the development proposals for the proposed transit center at the intersection of Castro Street and Evelyn Street. The panel believes the proposal is strong in concept and both the grand stair and entry plaza have tremendous potential. These design elements can act as gateway and gathering area all at once.

### Case Study: “Birmingham The Magic City” sign, Birmingham, Alabama

From 1926 to 1952, “Birmingham The Magic City” welcomed travels arriving at Terminal Station. Not only was it memorable and placemaking, it also marked the location where the roadway dove under the station, an otherwise important but hard-to-see urban landmark. This is a similar condition to the proposed underpass in the Mountain View Transit Center plan.



Similar to the Transit Center development proposal with an underpass, vehicles coming up from a similar roadway in Birmingham were greeted with this welcoming sign. Note: Image, as found, has been reversed; the sign was installed to be read while emerging from the underpass in the background.

## PARKING

**Recommendation 4:** Manage parking for efficiency and user convenience.

Although the private auto should not dominate the public realm, it is still very much a part of contemporary life in Mountain View. As such, parking should be provided and managed so that Downtown remains an attractive destination for those who choose to drive and parking does not diminish the quality of life in the surrounding residential neighborhoods.

Parking as an issue came up repeatedly. The panel reviewed the City-sponsored parking study in the briefing book and heard concerns expressed in a number of stakeholder interviews. On basis of anecdotal observation only, the panel feels that the perceived parking shortage may be related to drivers not knowing where, or if, parking exists. This perceived parking shortage for both locals and visitors may discourage people from coming to Downtown, which in turn may be a drag on economic growth generally and retail growth in particular.

From review of the City-provided parking study,<sup>6</sup> the use of public parking appears uneven, both from lot to lot and during different times of day. This finding further supports the panel's observation that efficient use of existing parking will be key in strengthening Downtown's ongoing economic development.

Some specific recommended ways to drive more efficient use of the City's 11 parking lots and structures include, but are not limited to the following:

**4a. Direction/availability signage.** Wayfinding signage with integrated availability indication would make parking use easier and may better distribute the supply and demand for parking.



Parking wayfinding and availability signage along the Embarcadero in San Francisco.

**4b. App-based real time availability information and reservations.** Use of personal devices is ever increasing. As such, a mobile phone application may be an effective way for drivers to obtain current and updated information about parking space availability. The panel suggests parking space reservations could be incorporated into the application.

**4c. Provide valet pick up and return to multiple corners near restaurant core and have cars shuttled to less-used sites.** The panel understands that some valet parking has been tested in Downtown with mixed results. A possible upgrade is implementing a system where cars are picked up and returned to where people naturally want to be. This convenience is in contrast to people needing to go where parking spaces happen to be. Another alternative is a mobile device app-based service.

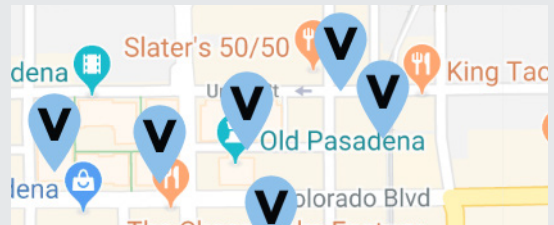
**4d. Investments in lighting and safety.** The panel also suggests implementation of upgraded lighting throughout Downtown and on circulation routes to and from public parking lots. People naturally gravitate to areas where they feel safe and naturally avoid areas with a perceived lack of safety.

The panel also discussed possibly increasing paid parking. However, the panel only advises this option if taken very carefully. In a dense urban context, drivers may often expect to pay for parking. However, in suburban California, drivers may have an expectation of free parking. While Downtown Mountain View has some urban density, many drivers to Downtown are coming from the surrounding suburbs. If the City considers paid parking, the panel recommends this be implemented only in the highest-use lots and to also offer some free parking, perhaps at lots farther away.

Some other possible recommendations include paid parking with advance reservations as well as a gradient of valet parking (free and paid) depending on use patterns and time of day. In addition, Redwood City has implemented techniques for downtown parking management, see adjacent case study. Lessons learned from that experience could be very helpful to Mountain View.

### Case Study: Valet parking in Old Town Pasadena, California

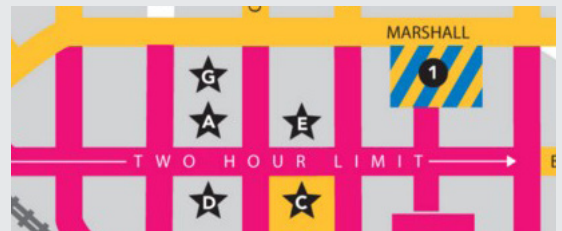
Old Town Pasadena is a historic shopping and business district. In addition to public and private garages, surface lots and on-street parking facilities, Old Town Pasadena offers a universal valet service with eight stations distributed around an approximately 22 block area. These stations use a “universal” parking concept where a customer may drop off their car in one location but pick it up from another station. This convenience adds to the appeal of visiting for shopping, dining, or entertainment.



Map showing distribution of valet parking in Old Town Pasadena.

### Case Study: Downtown Parking in Redwood City, California

Redwood City has a mix of parking options, including street space, lots, and garages. Street parking is metered between 10am and 6p.m. Monday through Saturday and is otherwise free. A range of location, convenience and fee options have been developed specifically for commuters, downtown event and dinner visitors and lunchtime and daytime visitors.



Map showing parking options in Redwood City.

# Notes

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1. "City of Mountain View ULI Technical Assistance Panel Downtown Mountain View Briefing Book", February 2019.
2. "City of Mountain View ULI Technical Assistance Panel Downtown Mountain View Briefing Book", February 2019.
3. U.S. Census Bureau News Quarterly Retail E-Commerce Sales 1st Quarter 2019, U.S. Department of Commerce, Washington, D.C.
4. City of Mountain View, Downtown Precise Plan, June 2019, AREA H. HISTORIC RETAIL DISTRICT
5. These designations were based on the walking site tours only. It is possible that some of these sites may already be identified by the City, owners, or developers for future changes.
6. "Downtown Sidewalk Café Standards", City of Mountain View, Community Development Department, Ref: SH-19, FC-46, revised 7/23/2010.



# About the Panel

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## **Amy Neches, Partner, TMG Partners; Panel Chair**

Amy Neches, partner, joined TMG in 2012 with over 30 years of experience in real estate and finance. She had previously spent 17 years with the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency, where she served as the agency's senior real estate negotiator and manager for developments ranging from complex public/private partnerships to public facilities and retail leases. Neches served as one of the City's lead negotiators and managers for the 303-acre master-planned Mission Bay redevelopment. She has completed complex mixed-use projects in the Yerba Buena district and was instrumental in the development of AT&T Ballpark and the surrounding areas.

In addition to her work with the Redevelopment Agency, Neches' prior experience includes positions in real estate lending and affordable housing development in San Francisco and six years in investment banking in New York, concentrating in mortgage and asset-backed securities.

She holds a bachelor's degree in political science and a master's degree in business administration from Yale University.

## **Jim Randolph, Executive Vice President, Newmark Knight Frank**

Jim Randolph joined the company in February 1999 to head up a new division of real estate services. He is an executive vice president with over 30 years of experience in the leasing and selling of retail real estate. Before joining the company, Randolph was the regional director of retail services for CBRE, managing the entire Bay Area.

Randolph has been instrumental in increasing the company's presence within the San Francisco Bay Area and is a member of the International Council of Shopping Centers, Urban Land Institute, and Association of Silicon Valley Brokers (ASVB). He received the ASVB Broker of the Year award in 1986, 1988, 1994, 1995, and 2006 and was inducted into the ASVB Hall of Fame in 1989. Randolph graduated from Washington State University.

## **Dena Belzer, Founder and President, Strategic Economics**

Dena Belzer is the founder and president of Strategic Economics. She has over 30 years of experience working on economic and real estate issues ranging in scale from regional growth management to individual development projects. Her work has helped position Strategic Economics as a national leader in innovative urban economics research techniques that guide local public policy decisions based on sound market principles, while fostering sustainable communities and creating places with lasting value. This work has involved a wide range of clients, including cities, counties, transit agencies, metropolitan planning organizations, councils of governments, economic development organizations, developers, and a number of community-based organizations.

Before founding Strategic Economics, Belzer was a partner at Bay Area Economics. While there, she managed over 60 projects ranging from small fiscal and market studies to large-scale strategic development plans, including the economics portions of several military base reuse plans, a market study informing reuse decisions about the former Stapleton Airport in Denver, and multiple neighborhood revitalization and economic development strategies.

Belzer is also president of the board of directors for Community Economics Inc., a nonprofit organization specializing in affordable housing finance. She is regularly invited to serve as a featured speaker at conferences and has served on multiple Advisory Services Panels for the Urban Land Institute and as a resource team member for over ten Mayors Institutes for City Design, sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts.

She received her master's in city and regional planning from the University of California, Berkeley and a bachelor of arts in psychology from Pitzer College.

**Bill Gilchrist, Director of Planning and Building,  
City of Oakland**

Bill Gilchrist was appointed director of planning and building for the City of Oakland in 2017. His 35-year career spans both the public and private sectors, with expertise in community regeneration, place-based planning, urban design, and quality customer service through boosting permitting efficiencies.

He has most recently served as director of place-based planning for the City of New Orleans, where he has overseen the administration’s urban design and place-based development strategy across public agencies and City departments. He also served for 15 years as the director of planning, engineering and permits for the City of Birmingham, Alabama, where he oversaw development regulations, capital program, infrastructure, transportation projects, grant management, comprehensive planning, neighborhood planning, City center planning, commercial district revitalization, and City facility needs.

Gilchrist is a graduate of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology with a master of architecture degree, a master of science degree in management, and a bachelor of science degree in design. He also completed the Kennedy School of Government’s State and Local Executive Program at Harvard University. He is certified by the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards.

**Don Capobres, Principal, Harmonie Park**

Don Capobres has 25 years of real estate development experience in both the private and public sectors with a broad range of responsibilities, such as representing the U.S. real estate development interests of Grosvenor, an international property group, and project management for the City of San Francisco. He brings a unique combination of political savvy, interpersonal skills, and understanding of real estate investment fundamentals to each project he works on. As a well-respected community leader and business partner, his passion for transformative urban placemaking pairs with his expertise in rental/for-sale residential, retail, and hospitality, making him an exceptional choice for any team who strives for innovative solutions and progressive thinking.

**Jacinta McCann, Global Design Advisor, AECOM**

Jacinta McCann has worked for more than 35 years to enhance the quality of cities and communities around the globe. In the past 28 years while at AECOM, she has held both practice and management executive roles at regional and global levels. Originally from Sydney, where she worked on large-scale urban regeneration projects including the Sydney Olympics, McCann has continued to work on complex urban development projects, including Mission Bay in San Francisco, Nova Luz in São Paulo, Bonifacio Global City in Manila, and the Los Angeles Waterfront.

Her professional appointments include president of the Landscape Architecture Foundation, the San Francisco Bay Conservation Development Commission Design Review Board, and the University of New South Wales Faculty of the Built Environment Advisory Board. McCann was honored in 2014 by the San Francisco Business Times as one of the 100 most influential business women in the Bay Area. She has been member of the Urban Land Institute since 2001 and has served in various capacities, including the National Program Committee, the Global Awards for Excellence Jury, as a ULI Daniel Rose Fellow, and on technical assistance panels. She is a fellow of both the American Society of Landscape Architects and the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects.

**Jason Dries-Daffner, Director of Operations,  
Perkins+Will; TAP Writer and Report Designer**

A licensed architect with more than 20 years of experience, Dries-Daffner has led teams in the successful execution of projects in North America, Central America, and Asia. In addition to serving as director of operations for the San Francisco office of Perkins+Will, he leads the Corporate Interiors practice. His rigorous approach to project management combines his architectural training with ongoing study of clients’ business and operational needs. His experience managing complex commercial and hospitality projects enables him to work effectively with multi-stakeholder teams to drive business results and meet client goals.

Dries-Daffner holds a bachelor of arts in Asian studies as well as a master of architecture degree, both from the University of California, Berkeley.



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