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Parks, Plazas and Placemaking





Chapter Six

INTRODUCTION

The Parks, Plazas, and Placemaking chapter offers a menu of strategies for the creation of new publicly accessible open spaces within the existing and planned context of this area of San José. It is vital to the health of existing communities and the success of new residential and commercial development that the neighborhood has well-designed and accessible public spaces. The Stevens Creek Urban Village Plan area is currently underserved by these facilities and current land use patterns present significant challenges that must be overcome to create more recreational open space. Successful public spaces that express the community’s unique character will strengthen the sense of place within the Stevens Creek Urban Village and can reinforce the walkability and bikability of the Urban Village. The integration of public art into public spaces should also play a central role in building that sense of place through reinforcing landmarks and community identity.

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Public parks can provide space for young and old to play and engage

THE STRATEGY

This Plan is intended to ensure that the recreational and open space needs of new residents and visitors will be accommodated, while at the same time addressing the existing shortage of parkland which current residents experience. This Plan envisions an “all of the above” approach to create an interconnected network of parks, plaza, pedestrian areas, and open space that will expand recreational opportunities and “build community through fun” in the Urban Village. Within this framework, traditional parks, multi-purpose plazas, pocket parks, paseos, paths, and bikeways, are all part of a development tool kit to increase public open space and connectivity. Designed with high-quality, native and drought tolerant landscaping, as well as public art, each type of public space can provide much needed opportunities for recreation and social interaction, and enhance the identity and visual character of the Stevens Creek Urban Village.

Traditionally, parks in San José have been developed as large standalone spaces of at least one acre in area that provide the community with more traditional recreational opportunities such as ball fields, playgrounds and trails. The closest traditional park with play fields is John Mise Park located across Interstate 280 to the south and not easily accessible to the community within or adjacent to the Stevens Creek Urban Village. The Cypress Community Center located on Cypress Avenue is the only public facility within the Urban Village boundary.

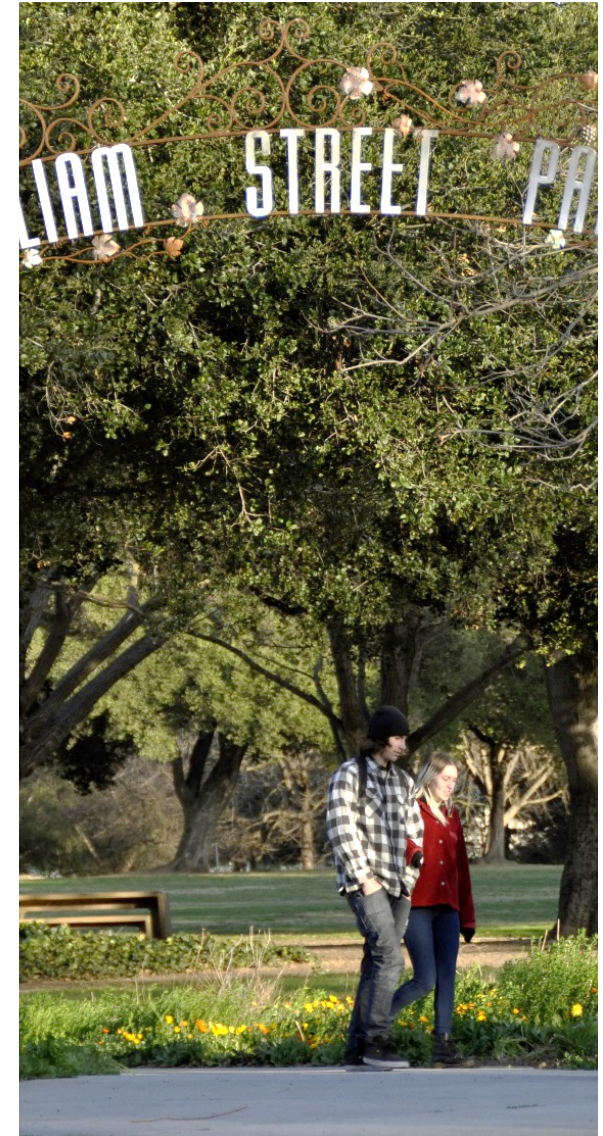
Today, as San José focuses on the design of urban villages with denser development patterns, there is a need for an adaptive recreation and open space model that reflects all opportunities including smaller, more urban public spaces. As such, this plan envisions the development of a “Green Web” or circuit circling the Stevens Creek Urban Village. The Green Web concept allows a variety of public and private open spaces linked

together to create a broad interconnected system of vibrant public spaces and iconic community interactions. In the Stevens Creek Urban Village, a mix of public and publicly accessible, but privately owned and maintained, connected open spaces would connect the Urban Village and its residents to nodes of commercial and social activity.

As new development occurs, space on each site will be dedicated to open space whether it be an Emergency Vehicle Access (EVA) that doubles as an active paseo, a large multi-purpose plaza, a small corner plaza, a passive paseo through a development, or a recreation path in the public right-of-way, these spaces should be located so as to easily and logically connect together to create a web of connected open spaces throughout the Urban Village. This strategy will work in concert with public bikeways to create a seamless automobile free transportation and recreation network stitching the community together and

providing a pleasant pedestrian environment for all ages to access their neighborhood core. Most critical to the implementation of this strategy is an emphasis on diverse experiences, continuity of place, and interconnectivity. It is essential that these spaces be located where they can easily and logically connect to create a string of connected public spaces serving the Urban Village and its surrounding neighborhood.

Other strategies supported by this Plan include the use of “reclaimed” space for pocket parks or even larger open spaces. A well-developed “Pavement to Parks” policy could facilitate the consolidation of surface parking into parking garages, while leaving ground space to be reclaimed as public parks. Large setback areas and green connections, particularly along Albany Drive, could be reclaimed and programed into a central pedestrian green space. As envisioned, the Albany Drive Greenway would create a pleasing, pedestrian oriented interface between existing neighborhoods and new development



Signage can create a welcoming gateway into a park



Community involvement to reclaim or develop a small park can create community ownership and ensure it's longevity

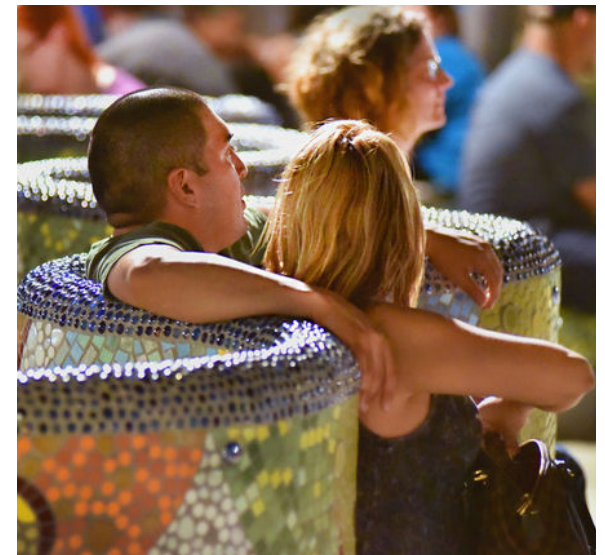
along Stevens Creek Boulevard. Albany Drive would feature traffic calming devices to allow for a shared street space where bicyclists and pedestrians feel more comfortable using this street to connect through the neighborhood. Additionally, the Parks Department will continue other, more traditional efforts to create parks through land acquisition. Land acquisitions generally involve either the dedication of parkland through compliance with the Parkland Dedication and Park Impact Ordinances, donations, or purchase of property involving site assessment, appraisal, and the appropriation of capital funding for the purchase.

PLACEMAKING

Placemaking is the cultivation of culture and shared human experience within a public space. Placemaking helps to build community through fun activities, openness, and participation in public life. It is the creation and activation of dynamic public spaces that bring us together. Placemaking is most successful when the planning, design, management, and active use of public spaces have all been coordinated with strong community ownership and input. As such, the design of public spaces within new development must consider function before form; consider how people socialize; the potential uses and activities of the space; comfort; access and connectivity; and capitalize on the community's existing assets and spirit.

Public art can help the Stevens Creek Urban Village realize its sense of place by introducing well integrated art into new commercial and residential development, and public infrastructure. Through art and creative design, bus stops and Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) stations, plazas, and even the public right-of-way can all become a canvas on which the Stevens Creek community can express its identity. Public art thrives through traditional media such as sculpture or murals, but can also be incorporated into the infrastructure and amenities of an area such as sidewalks, street furniture, wayfinding, environmental systems (e.g. stormwater), transit, and lighting. Art may be temporary or long lasting in nature. With appropriate funding sources, public art can enliven parks and plazas through “plug and play” events, recreational

gatherings, and performances. Community members are part of the creative process and can help identify opportunities for public art, as well as provide input to inform the design and programming of the art. One such opportunity for placemaking that has been highlighted by residents in public meetings is the preservation of the iconic Safeway sign at the Safeway shopping center. Preservation of this memorable sign, will enhance the unique character and sense of place of the Stevens Creek Urban Village.



Large park spaces allow for events to occur and attract more community members (above) while smaller spaces allow for everyday moments (below)



As the Stevens Creek Urban Village continues to evolve, public art will also play a significant role in engaging the community, increasing sense of place, and enhancing the quality of experience in the area. Business and property owners, as well as resident groups, could initiate public art projects or event programming, obtaining guidance from the City where needed. Artists, integrated early into the design of public infrastructure and private development, can innovate new ideas for project delivery that enhance the outcome of the public art into the public realm and private development. Successful public art implementation would contribute greatly to “branding” the Stevens Creek Urban Village, giving it a memorable identity.

Open areas can attract activities that bring the community together and are important for neighborhood growth

PARKS, PLAZAS, AND PLACEMAKING GOALS AND POLICIES

Parks and Plazas

Goal P-1

Create public parks and plazas that are attractive, vibrant, and provide places for community activities and interaction that will contribute to the livability of the Stevens Creek Urban Village.

Policy P-1.1 Provide a system of parks that serves the needs of both the existing and future residents and surrounding community.

Policy P-1.2 As new development occurs, space on each site will be dedicated to some form of publicly accessible open space. These spaces should be located so as to easily and logically connect with other open spaces in the surrounding area to work towards creating a connected web of open space throughout the Urban Village.

Policy P-1.3 For large development parcels (e.g. over 2 acres), encourage the engagement of a placemaking consultant to help design and program public spaces.

Policy P-1.4 Neighborhood parks should be designed and configured in a manner that provides secure and usable and attractive open space and maximizes accessibility to the surrounding community.

Policy P-1.5 Encourage parks and plazas to include areas of natural settings that include a stand of trees.

Policy P-1.6 Ensure that all new parks and plazas are highly visible from a public right-of-way.

Policy P-1.7 Include adequate lighting, including pedestrian scale lighting, in all parks and plazas.

Policy P-1.8 Support development of parks that benefit people of all ages.

Policy P-1.9 Encourage the development of parks with active recreation areas, such as playfields, sport fields and sport courts.



Parks and plazas can change character throughout the day to attract different groups from the community at different times



Places to sit and relax or sit and observe can invite the community in and engage with a space

Policy P-1.10 Promote the use of native and drought tolerant vegetation in new parkland development which gives identity to the Plan Area while also advancing more sustainable water conservation practices.

Policy P-1.11 New development abutting sites considered as potential park spaces should be built in such a way that the building(s) interface well with the existing or future park or plaza.

Policy P-1.12 Promote a connection from the Stevens Creek Urban Village over Highway 280 to Mise Park.

Policy P-1.13 Support the redevelopment of excess land (reclaimed space, e.g. large landscaped buffers, setback areas, extra right-of-way, etc.) into useable active or passive pocket parks through a joint use agreement with the property owner and the City of San Jose or other appropriate mechanism.

Policy P-1.14 Support and encourage the redevelopment of surface parking lots into public parks by allowing for the construction of parking garages to consolidate parking space on site, thereby leaving the remaining ground surface for park space. For example, consolidate car dealerships inventory that is located on surface parking lots into parking garages.

Policy P-1.15 To better enable safe multi-modal transportation from east to west through the urban village, utilize a combination of site design approaches in coordination with traffic calming and parking improvements, to develop an active transportation greenway along Albany Drive that parallels Stevens Creek Boulevard. This greenway should feature traffic calming devices and provide an attractive pedestrian scale connection between the existing neighborhoods and development along Stevens Creek Boulevard.

ACTION ITEM 1

Explore opportunities for the City to acquire property specifically for park development, especially properties highlighted in the Plan's Land Use Map as ideal park locations.

ACTION ITEM 2

Specifically look to acquire property for park land that can accommodate recreational activities including sport fields.

ACTION ITEM 3

Work to develop a pedestrian and bicycle overcrossing of Highway 280 from the Stevens Creek Urban Village to Mise Park.



Centralized parks can create greater opportunity for more community members to enjoy the space



Play areas that can accommodate both large and small groups of the community are more versatile

Publicly Accessible/Private Maintained Parks and Plazas

Goal P-2

Create publicly accessible, but privately owned urban plazas to provide the area with additional public spaces.

Policy P-2.1 Integrate publicly accessible, but privately owned urban plazas into new development that are attractive, vibrant and provides for community activities and space for community members to casually interact with each other.

Policy P-2.2 Privately-owned, publicly accessible plazas should generally be a minimum of 2000 square feet in area ensure that enough amenities can be included in them.

Policy P-2.3 Encourage new plazas and open spaces that are near active commercial uses to include tot lot play areas.

Policy P-2.4 Ensure that multi-use plazas have enough space for both restaurant seating and public use space.

Policy P-2.5 Encourage plazas to be placed adjacent to active ground floor uses.

ACTION ITEM 3

Explore policy or ordinance changes that would facilitate the development and maintenance of privately-owned, publicly accessible plazas within Urban Villages and other growth areas throughout the City.

Placemaking/Public Art

Goal P-3.1

Public art should play an instrumental role in the creation of successful public spaces in the Stevens Creek Urban Village.

Goal P-3.2

New development should include placemaking elements that focus on improving quality of life, investing in existing local assets and cultural expression, and creating both physical and psychological connections.

Policy P-3.1 Public art should increase the sense of place and identity of the Stevens Creek Urban Village.

Policy P-3.2 Consider the placement of public art when developing all types of areas accessible to the public, including sidewalks, streets, parks, plazas, transit stops, wayfinding systems, and stormwater management areas.

Policy P-3.3 Engage the surrounding community in the development of a public art to increase the local identity and ownership of the public art.

Policy P-3.4 Integrate artists early into the design of public infrastructure and private development to provide a sense of place, and enhance the quality of experience in the area.

Policy P-3.5 Because they are unique elements and identifiers in the Stevens Creek Urban Village, encourage the preservation of the Safeway sign located in the shopping center at Loma Linda Drive and Stevens Creek Boulevard, as well as the Garden City Sign located on the east side of Saratoga Avenue between Stevens Creek and Kiely Boulevards.

Policy P-3.6 To further create a sense of place, encourage new development to include creative architecture or architectural elements that are unique to the area and which can become iconic features in the Urban Village.



Interactive art can enhance one's experience in a meaningful and engaging way



Plazas can be designed to encourage the community to stop and linger or to pass through the space

Policy P-3.7 Locate plazas in areas that will support community events such as farmer’s markets, art fairs, live music or other periodic special programming, and near parking.

Policy P-3.8 Employ paseos as new development abuts existing neighborhoods, especially where such a feature would facilitate the continuation of an existing paseo or provide new connection to an adjacent site.

Policy P-3.9 Use placemaking as a creative economic development tool, providing opportunities for individuals and businesses to invest in the character of their community and in the Village.

Policy P-3.10 Provide opportunities for temporary placemaking which can inform and prototype more permanent placemaking installations.

ACTION ITEM 4

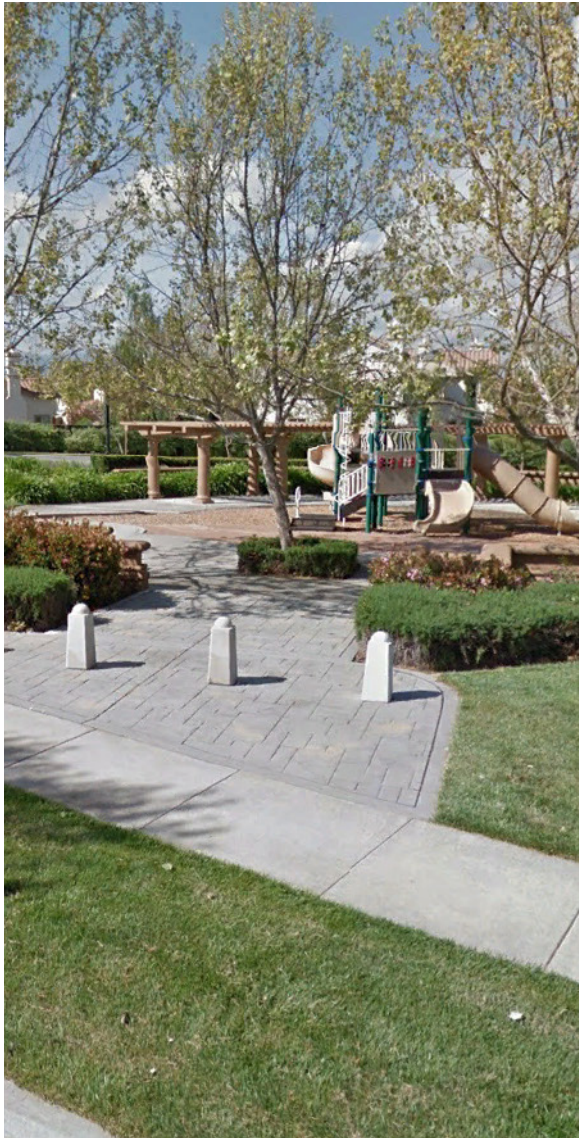
Explore strategies to allow for the continued funding of public art through fees collected from new development in Urban Village Areas.

ACTION ITEM 5

Engage a placemaking consultant to help facilitate the programming and uses of public spaces.



A mixture of play elements can attract both young and old to share the same park space



Activity that can be seen from the edge of a park can attract more community members into the park

PARKS AND PLAZAS GUIDELINES

Open spaces within this Plan are envisioned either on publicly owned (City) sites or privately owned, but publicly accessible spaces. Whether publicly or privately owned, open spaces must create a system of opportunities for public life and recreation that meet the needs of the Urban Village residents. The following are descriptive guidelines for the types of open spaces envisioned in this urban environment.

Traditional Park

Traditional parks tend to be larger parks (over 1 acre in area) that are owned and maintained by the City. In order for a parcel to be officially designated as parkland, the City must first own the property. The City finances park development through the City's Parkland Dedication Ordinance (PDO) and Park Impact Ordinance (PIO). The PDO/PIO requires that new residential or mixed-use residential

commercial development dedicate land for public parks, pay a fee in lieu of parkland dedication, construct new park facilities, or provide a combination of these. The total obligation, in land or funding, is based on the number and type of new residential units built.

Multi-Purpose Plaza (Plaza)

Plazas represent a creative way to achieve publicly accessible open space in the Stevens Creek Urban Village. Plazas will generally be spaces that are open to the public, but could be owned, developed and/or maintained privately or publicly. This Plan requires the dedication of land or construction of a privately owned and publicly accessible plaza by a residential developer to receive parkland credit as part of their obligation under the City's Park Dedication and Park Impact Ordinances (PDO/PIO).

Plaza Amenities and Programming

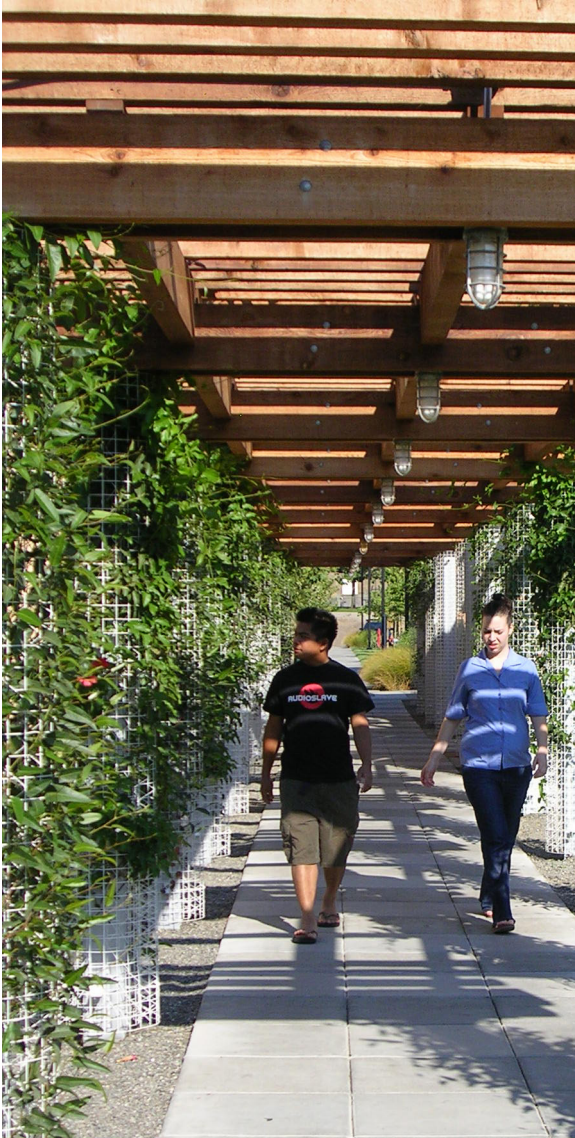
Plazas should be designed to provide visually engaging, gathering spaces for community members to socialize, as well as space for neighborhood events. Features such as art installations, fountains and unique plants would draw the eye to these lively, urban focal points. These spaces could also be used for commercial activity including outdoor seating for restaurants and cafes, and or active spaces for food carts and small farmers' markets. A plaza location should contribute towards the area's strong, positive, and unique identity.

GUIDELINES

1. The recommended size of a plaza is 15,000 to 20,000 square feet to provide more flexibility in use; however, the smaller size of some existing parcels within the Urban Village boundary could result in plazas that are smaller.
2. The minimum recommended size of private, but publicly-accessible plazas is at least 2,000 square feet, with appropriate width and length dimensions to provide sufficient street furniture, trees and landscaping, and public art.
3. The size of all plazas should be appropriate to their context and the level of anticipated use.
4. Public plazas should be completely visible from at least one street frontage and where applicable, be visible from a secondary street frontage.
5. The sidewalk frontage of a plaza should generally be free of obstructions. In addition, plazas that front on a street intersection are required to maintain a clear area within 15 feet of the intersection.



Plazas provide space that can be used in different ways throughout the day, with different sized groups



Shaded walkways can create a more pleasant experience for the community

6. Prepare plazas for pop-up retail at the time of design and construction. Include bollards, power outlets, clips on the ground, lighting, overhead infrastructure as appropriate, and plug and play for music performance.
7. Provide a variety of seating opportunities such as traditional benches as well as mobile chairs. Mobile chairs will give the users the ability to rotate the chairs for sunlight or shade.
8. Provide publicly-accessible restrooms.

Pocket Parks/Small Plazas

Pocket parks or small plazas contain landscaped areas and neighborhood-serving amenities. These spaces are typically built on single lots or irregularly shaped pieces of land and would ideally be owned and maintained by private developments. Pocket parks or small plazas may be constructed by residential developers on private property that are made publicly accessible and may be eligible for “private recreation” credit as part of their obligation under the City’s Park Land Dedication and Park Impact Ordinances (PDO/PIO), provided that the park remains publicly accessible. Pocket parks or small plazas will ideally be connected into a web of recreational amenities and are intended to have areas to socialize, play, sit and relax.

GUIDELINES

1. Pocket parks/small plazas should generally be a minimum of 2,000 square feet, but could be smaller on constrained sites as long as the space created is usable and consistent with the other guidelines in this Chapter.
2. Pocket Parks/small plazas should reflect the design and place making elements of surrounding urban character through the use of architectural styles, signage, colors, textures, materials and other elements.
3. New residential and commercial uses are encouraged to locate building entrances, windows, outdoor seating, patios, and balconies to overlook park spaces.
4. Pocket Parks/small plazas should be highly visible and accessible from adjacent streets and/or a clear pedestrian route or paseo.
5. Locate pocket Parks/small plazas in places that have direct sunlight and sufficient shade during warm months.
6. A dog park should be considered as a part of pocket parks where appropriate.
7. Pocket parks/small plazas should have movable chairs and tables where appropriate to allow people to have control over where they sit.
8. Encourage edible gardens to improve access to fresh food.
9. Provide publicly-accessible restrooms.



Moveable chairs can make a park more versatile throughout the day



Paseos can create a great experience for the community that opens on to it as well as those who travel along it

Paseos

A paseo can function as a green buffer that visually screens more intensive development from an abutting single-family neighborhood. At the same time, paseos provide safe circulation paths for bicycles and pedestrians or it can function like an alley providing access for pedestrians, bicycles, and cars, similar to the Woonerf (living street) concept that includes shared space, traffic calming, and low speed limits. A paseo can also function as an active linear public space that creates connectivity through and between neighborhoods providing opportunities for more intensive uses such as sitting, gathering, public art, and social interaction. This Plan aims to achieve a network of interconnected paseos and open spaces throughout the Urban Village. Together these features will connect with and reinforce the Albany Drive Greenway, as well as provide widespread pedestrian access and recreational interest to the transportation network.

This concept is already being showcased in other developments throughout San Jose, including The Meridian at Midtown located between Race Street and Meridian Avenue in the West San Carlos Urban Village, a connection from River Oaks Parkway around the Verona apartment homes to the Coyote Creek Trail, which is also proposed at the Great Oaks Development in South San Jose. Similarly, the former San Jose Redevelopment Agency successfully executed several paseos, such as the Paseo de San Antonio in Downtown, that was a central defining concept in the San Jose Downtown Streetscape Master Plan (2003).

Under certain criteria, including public access, active paseos constructed by residential developers and located on private property may be eligible for “private recreation” credit toward their obligation under the City’s Parkland Dedication and Park Impact Ordinances (PDO/PIO).

GUIDELINES

1. To ensure pedestrian safety, consider pedestrian lighting at eye level; no light source should be directed skyward in paseos that are adjacent to residential areas.
2. Construct paseos with low impact and permeable paving materials to efficiently manage the stormwater and minimize the heat island effect.
3. A dual use of open space and Emergency Vehicle Access (EVA) may be acceptable where necessary, but the space should be aesthetically designed for open space uses and not ancillary to its use as an emergency roadway.
4. Active paseos should contain at least one circulation path at least 8 feet in width.
5. Active paseos should have direct sunlight with a sense of openness and human scale.
6. Active paseos can be open to traffic only for loading and unloading purposes.
7. Locate building entries, active uses, or commercial space directly on paseos to improve the liveliness of paseos, as well as provide for passive policing.
8. Paseos should connect with each other as well other types of parks, plazas, destinations, and active transportation routes such as bike lanes, sidewalks and trails.



Good lighting, material choice and seasonal plantings can make a space brighter, more attractive, and safer



Crosswalks and plantings can create a more attractive street, while also slowing traffic to be safer for pedestrians and bicyclists

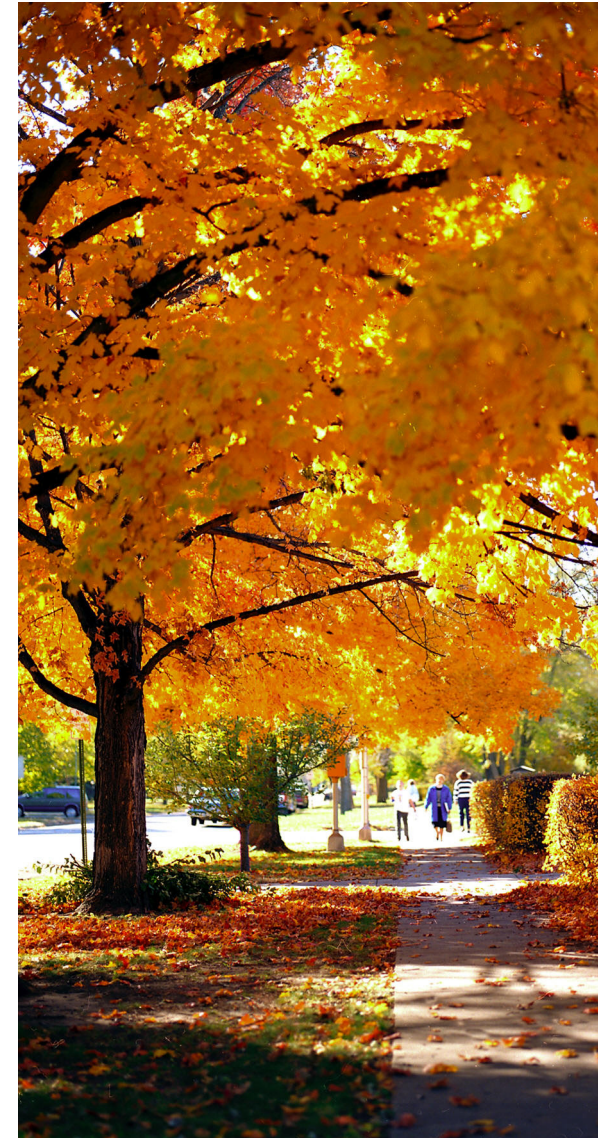
Albany Drive Greenway

Albany Drive defines the southern boundary of much of the western portion of the Stevens Creek Urban Village and abuts an existing multifamily and single-family residential neighborhood. Along its route many older developments have substantial setbacks or otherwise underutilized space. Meanwhile, residents have described challenges to using this street such as narrow drive lanes surrounded by parallel parking. Many have complained that excess car dealership stock, abandoned vehicles, or guest parking for nearby developments all have made the street nearly unusable for vehicular travel. As the Urban Village redevelops it will become increasingly necessary to address these challenges, opening the door for transformative change.

This Plan envisions building off the existing, albeit unintentional, traffic calming to direct vehicular traffic away from Albany Drive, with vehicles entering and exiting the neighborhood along the intended traffic hierarchy on Stevens Creek Boulevard, Kiely Boulevard, and Norwalk Drive. In exchange, Albany Drive, can be refocused on creating a more urban and pedestrian oriented connection from existing neighborhoods to new developments and amenities on Stevens Creek Boulevard. Utilizing the existing right-of-way and setbacks, as well as new open spaces, setbacks, reclaimed or joint use spaces, and retooled parking arrangements, the Albany Drive Greenway can provide a buffered pedestrian path or trail paralleling Stevens Creek Boulevard. Along its reach, the Plan envisions a green buffer with supplementary frontage from new developments facing the existing neighborhood. Plazas, parks, and paseos, will provide access to outdoor cafes, recreational amenities, and gathering spaces which serve both new residents, as well as in the existing community.

GUIDELINES

1. New developments should provide a minimum 20' setback or open space, as appropriate, to provide a buffered pedestrian path of at least 8-10 feet with appropriate easements and/or improvements.
2. Mixed use projects should integrate building access and attractive frontage along Albany Drive and strive to activate the greenway through plazas, cafes, and other indoor-outdoor amenities.
3. Enhanced landscaping along the Greenway should integrate green infrastructure elements as appropriate and provide ample shade and resting areas at regular intervals.
4. Where possible, other parks, pocket parks, plazas, and paseos, should connect or be located along the Greenway.
5. Public Art should interface with architecture and amenities along the Greenway to enhance the character of the active transportation corridor.
6. Open Space connections should be sought that connect Kiely Boulevard to Saratoga Boulevard and to the planned park at the Garden City redevelopment site.
7. Landmark elements should be included in the design of Greenway landscaping and path orientations.



Trees can provide shade as well as an attractive and pleasant walking experience for the community