

4.0 Streetscapes & Open Space

This chapter contains design concepts for Downtown's "public realm" of streetscapes and open spaces. The projects represent public and joint public/private investments that will enhance the experience of visiting, living in, and working in Downtown Burlingame.

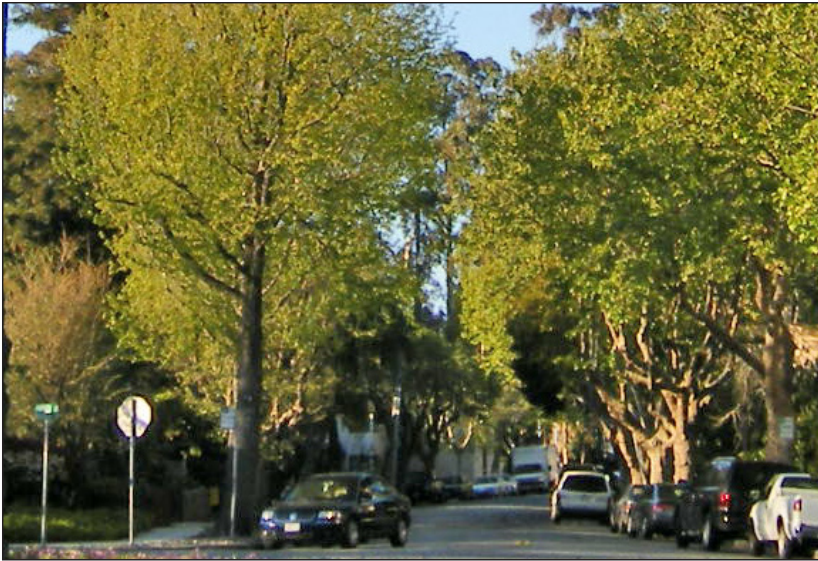
4.1 IMPORTANCE OF STREETSCAPES AND OPEN SPACES

The future of downtown Burlingame's economic vitality is directly related to the comfort and enjoyment people experience when visiting downtown. The current diversity of retailers, variety of uses, walkable streets, and attention to design detail is what differentiates Downtown Burlingame from the downtowns of other communities. To visitors and residents alike, Downtown Burlingame feels like a special place with a unique history and culture. The continued success of the downtown relies upon maintaining and enhancing those elements that contribute to the area's desirability and cachet.

A key element to the success of a downtown is the provision of an attractive and inviting public realm. Improvements to the streetscape are essential for creating an environment of tree-lined, pedestrian-oriented walking streets and outdoor plazas with frequent gathering spaces, outdoor cafes and seating areas, and unique design elements. These elements will ensure that streets are inviting public spaces that will be used by the community, and that also set the stage for new investment along its edges.

One of the most important elements that can be used to build on the special qualities of Downtown Burlingame is to pay close attention to its streetscapes and open spaces. The optimal downtown will not be viewed simply as a strip of economic opportunities, but rather as a welcoming and central community gathering point with beautiful streets and parklike settings. Increased opportunities for leisure and non-consumptive activities will promote a complementary relationship between the economic aspects of downtown and its role as a community center.





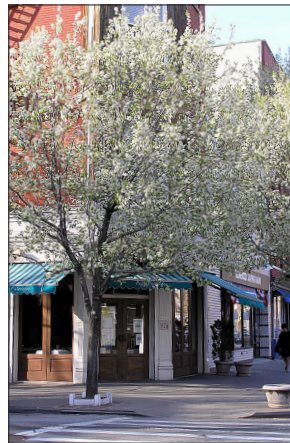
Street trees in particular are important for their role in defining the visual character of downtown streetscapes, and for providing shade for pedestrians.

4.2 STREET TREES

The City of Burlingame has a long history of proactive tree planting and proper tree care. From the late 1800's when trees were planted along El Camino Real and Easton Drive to the current day, Burlingame has enjoyed the many benefits trees provide to an urban area. Burlingame's longtime commitment to trees is evidenced by recognition as a "Tree City USA" for 30 consecutive years. This is the longest streak in the County, 5th longest in the State and one of the longest in the Country for receiving this award.

In Downtown Burlingame, trees include street trees lining sidewalks and roadways (typically within the public right-of-way), as well as trees on private property in settings such as landscaped setback areas, courtyards, and roof gardens. Trees are important for their beauty, shade and coolness, economic benefits, and role in reducing energy use, pollution, and noise. Street trees in particular are important for their role in defining the visual character of downtown streetscapes, and for providing shade for pedestrians.

The City of Burlingame has an Urban Forest Management Plan that includes policies and management practices for both city and private trees. While comprehensive downtown streetscape projects are anticipated over the long-term, in the interim the City has been looking for opportunities to plant new street trees when projects come in. Project requirements typically include provisions for irrigation of the tree wells, as well as choice of the tree type. Type of tree may be chosen based on the other trees nearby, microclimate issues, or a "theme" particular to a block or street. Chinese Pistache (*Pistacia chinensis*), Chinese Hackberry (*Celtis sinensis*), and Aristocrat Pear (*Pyrus calleryana*) are tree types that have been selected for projects in the downtown commercial areas.



Chinese Pistache (left), Chinese Hackberry (center), and Aristocrat Pear (right) are some tree types that have been selected for projects in downtown.

4.3 COMMERCIAL STREETSCAPES

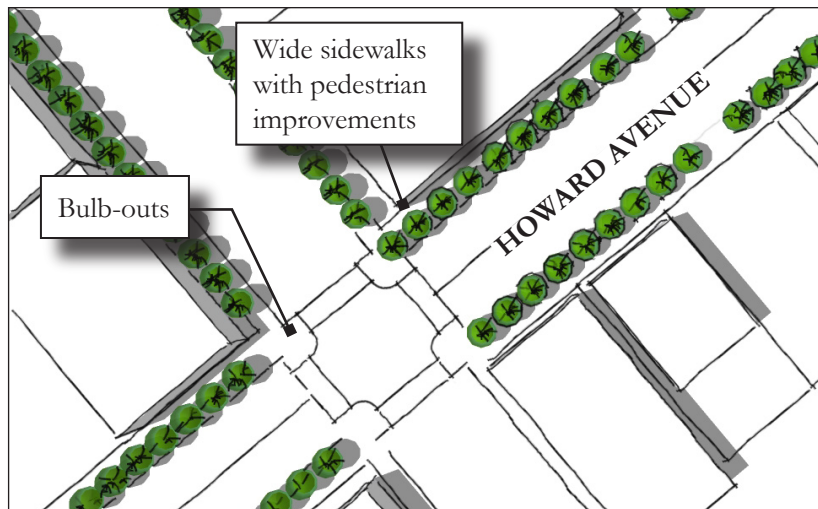
There is keen interest in improving the quality of the streetscape in Downtown Burlingame, with a preference for a relatively consistent design approach throughout the downtown commercial area. Subtle variations may be necessary to respond to specific conditions, and a few unique elements are desirable to define the character of different streets (such as different street trees), but overall the approach should feel consistent and unified. Some streets might have more landscaping or more benches, but they should all draw from the same basic set of streetscape elements. This unity of elements will not only create a unified character for downtown, but will also serve to define the downtown's boundaries and encourage continued exploration of outlying areas of the downtown by pedestrians and bicyclists.

In general, streetscape improvements are intended to enhance existing downtown assets and stimulate new investment. Where there is a high level of existing investment such as along Burlingame Avenue, streetscape improvements will enhance existing businesses and reinforce Downtown Burlingame's image as a premiere commercial destination. In areas where more investment and diversification is desired, such as Howard Avenue, improvements will create a public street environment that "sets the stage" for new investment by providing an attractive and supportive environment for the envisioned land uses and building types. The intention is to have the overall streetscape quality of Burlingame Avenue, Howard Avenue, and the connecting sidestreets be of relatively comparable quality.

The City may choose to encourage investment in underutilized areas by installing streetscape improvements in advance of new development as a means of creating a supportive environment for appropriate development in each segment, and to encourage more immediate change in the Plan Areas. In some instances, such as with larger projects, the City may also require these improvements to be provided by the developer along the property frontage as development occurs, provided that the result creates a consistent streetscape rather than a patchwork effect.



Improvements will create a public street environment that "sets the stage" for new investment by providing an attractive and supportive environment for the envisioned land uses and building types.



On Howard Avenue wide bulb-outs are recommended at each intersection to provide a more inviting and safer pedestrian experience.

Streetscape improvements should be coordinated with infrastructure improvements to minimize the amount of time any area is under construction. Both streetscape and infrastructure improvements should be scheduled and managed to minimize the impact on local merchants.

4.3.1 BURLINGAME AVENUE

Burlingame Avenue has many elements of a successful streetscape such as benches, mid-block curb extensions (often referred to as "bulb-outs"), street trees, and planters, but many of the elements are worn or dated and in need of rehabilitation. The Burlingame Avenue streetscape should be rehabilitated with many of the same types of elements that currently exist, but with more consistency in design and higher quality of materials. Sidewalks should be improved with amenities such as public art installations, street furniture, pedestrian-scaled lighting, and water hookups for irrigating planters. Corner bulb-outs should be added to reduce the crossing distance for pedestrians.

4.3.2 HOWARD AVENUE

While Howard Avenue currently has relatively wide sidewalks, a more inviting and cohesive streetscape environment is needed to support a more vibrant commercial and residential environment. The street itself is wide, so wide bulb-outs are recommended at each intersection to provide a more inviting and safer pedestrian experience. Sidewalks should be improved with amenities such as public art installations, street furniture and pedestrian-scaled lighting. Street furniture should include a range of seating options and benches along the length of the street.

4.3.3 CHAPIN AVENUE

Chapin Avenue should receive many of the same types of improvements as Howard Avenue, such as seating, consistent street trees, and bulb-outs. Frequent spacing of bulb-outs can help mitigate the wide pavement width of the street.



Sidewalks should be improved with amenities such as public art installations, street furniture and pedestrian-scaled lighting, and bulb-outs.

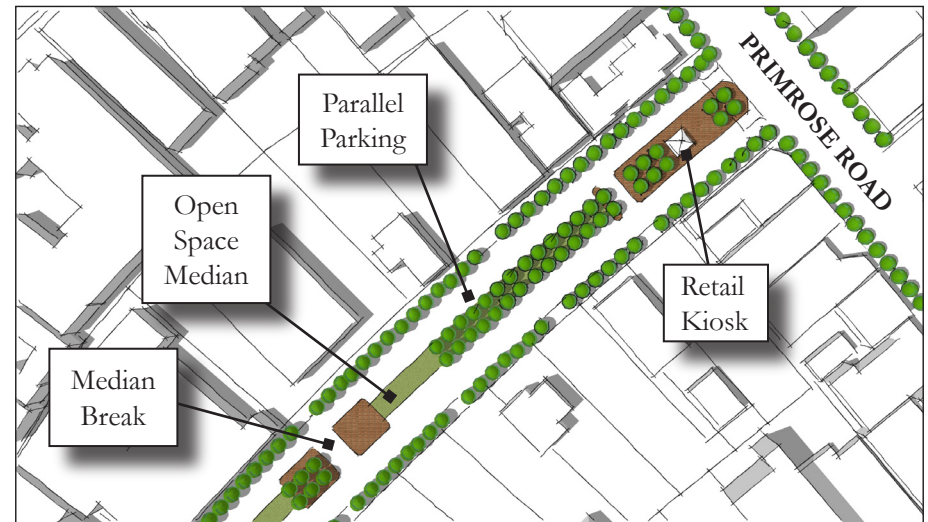
The two ends of Chapin Avenue have some differences, so a design approach should acknowledge the different types of uses and functional requirements with different design treatments. Given the very wide pavement width but also pedestrian activity at the eastern end towards Primrose Road, a potential design option would be to create a center island with either parking and/or open space. The open space could have some kiosk retail spaces that could generate revenue for the City from rents or joint development, and could create a unique element for the street. There would be periodic breaks in the median to allow vehicles to make turns.

At the western end towards El Camino Real, retaining an open pavement is important because the area is used in early morning hours for queuing delivery trucks waiting to access supermarket loading docks. This is an important functional need for the operations of the supermarket and to ensure delivery trucks do not queue in traffic lanes. A special paving treatment could differentiate the median area and break down the scale of the roadway but still retain the ability to queue delivery trucks.

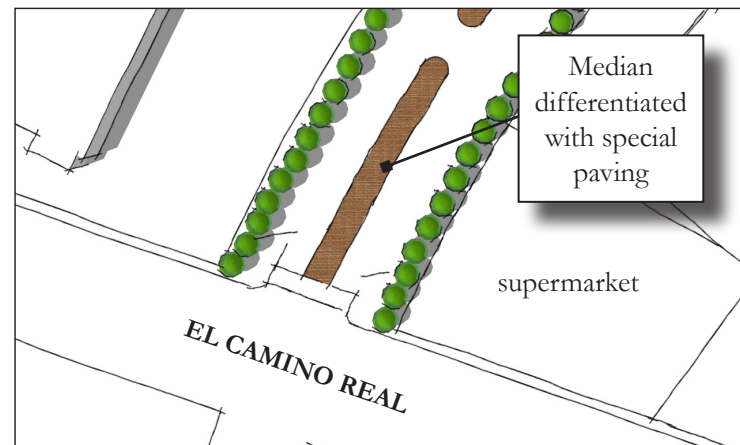
4.3.4 CALIFORNIA DRIVE/AUTO ROW

With Auto Row envisioned to be complemented by a wider mix of uses over time, there will be a need for a more inviting and cohesive streetscape environment. Like other downtown commercial streets, sidewalks should be improved with amenities such as public art installations, street furniture and pedestrian-scaled lighting, and bulb-outs are recommended at each intersection.

Streetscape improvements should be coordinated along the length of California Drive from Peninsula Avenue to Broadway, with a particular eye to improving the connection between downtown Burlingame and the Broadway commercial district. Given the width of California Drive, some additional accommodation for bicycles and pedestrians may be feasible. A concept that merits further study beyond the scope of the Downtown Specific Plan



Chapin Avenue center island concept for the eastern end of the street with either parking and/or open space.



Chapin Avenue center island concept for the western end of the street with either parking and/or open space.



Reconfigured California Drive with one travel lane in each direction, center median/turn lane, and bike lanes.



Downtown residential streetscape

would be to reconfigure the California Drive traffic lanes to better serve traffic flow and accommodate bicycles. Currently California Drive has two traffic lanes in each direction, but due to the large number of turns in center lanes, the center lanes effectively do not function for through traffic. A reconfiguration could have one clear, through traffic lane in each direction, together with a center median/turn lane to accommodate turns. The traffic lanes would remain clear of obstructions so traffic flow would be steady (but calm), while turns would be accommodated separately from the through traffic. The redesign would provide enough room for generous bicycle lanes on each side, so California Drive would become a convenient and effective bicycle route through Burlingame and to Downtown. The existing parallel parking spaces could also be accommodated in the design.

This approach, sometimes referred to as a "road diet," has been demonstrated to be very effective elsewhere in the Bay Area on streets with comparable traffic volumes and characteristics to California Drive. Further study would need to consider impacts along the length of California Drive to ensure that traffic is not diverted into adjacent neighborhoods. However, with the functional and aesthetic improvements, the expectation would be that California Drive would become a preferred access route into Downtown, as well as between Downtown and the Broadway commercial district.

4.4 RESIDENTIAL STREETSCAPES

Streetscapes in the residential neighborhoods of downtown currently benefit from an abundance of mature canopy shade trees, continuous wide sidewalks, landscaped planter strips between the curb and sidewalk, and convenient on-street parking. Improvements to the streetscapes should primarily involve maintaining the street trees and landscaping, maintaining and repairing sidewalks where needed, and ensuring lighting is sufficient but not intrusive. On-street parking should be maintained to the greatest extent possible, with curb cuts for new development minimized.

4.5 PUBLIC OPEN SPACES

There is a strong desire for open space in Downtown Burlingame, ranging from a “signature” focal point akin to a town square or green, to more modest ideas for smaller, intimate open spaces

4.5.1 SIGNATURE OPEN SPACE

Downtown Burlingame has many positive features, but is lacking a central community gathering space. Throughout the downtown planning process, the community has supported the idea of creating a large signature open space in a central location. The most feasible way to do this would be to use one of the large downtown parking lots for the new open space, while relocating the parking to a new parking structure to be constructed nearby.

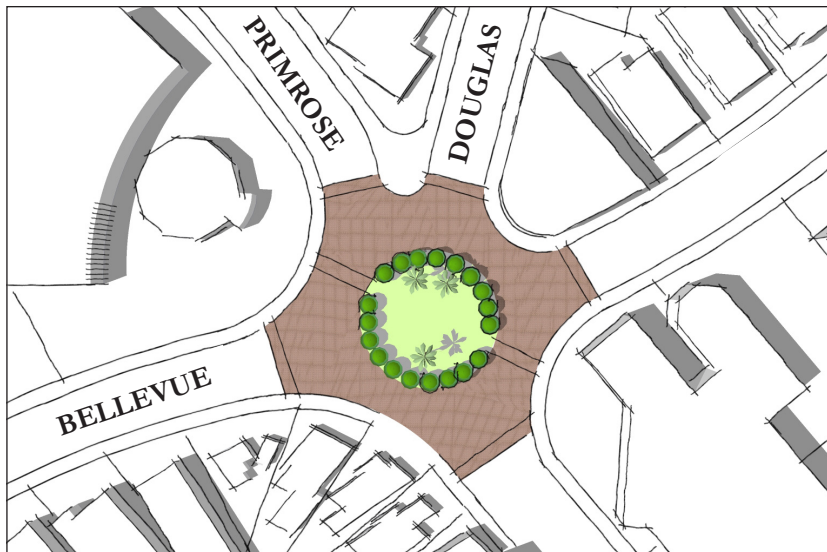
For example, Lot E (south of Burlingame Avenue between Lorton Avenue and Park Road) could become the signature open space because of its central location between Burlingame and Howard Avenues and its adjacency to the post office. The area of the park could be larger if the existing post office parking lot were able to be relocated to the grassy area in front of the post office on Lorton Avenue. This grassy area currently is not particularly functional, so if it were "swapped" with the parking and the existing parking lot were combined into the acreage for the signature open space, it would represent a better use of the land for open space and recreational purposes. In the more distant future if the post office operations were to move elsewhere, the post office building could be adaptively reused as a civic use. A parking structure could be constructed on Lot J to accommodate the parking that would be lost by turning Lot E into an open space.

4.5.2 CREEK/WATER FEATURE

There has been longstanding interest in the concept of “daylighting” portions of the existing underground Burlingame Creek culvert which runs along the alley behind Burlingame Avenue between Primrose Road and Lorton Avenue. The idea is to provide an amenity and create a more user-friendly space.



Diagrams showing concept for a significant community open space and creek/water feature.



Concept illustrating reconfiguration of Primrose/Bellevue/Douglas intersection to create Civic Center Circle.

It may not be possible to restore the undergrounded creek to a natural system. A natural system would require significant area for a meandering channel and flood plain areas for flows above the banks of the channel (about the 1.5-year storm flow). Instead, a partially lined channel or some type of bioengineering such as reinforcement geosynthetics, wood or rock structures, and vegetation might be more feasible.

The logical location for the channel beautification improvements would be in the current location of at-grade asphalt parking lots J and E. If Lot E becomes a signature open space, the creek would be a unique amenity for the park.

A potentially less complicated and less costly option would be to create a creek-like surface water feature but not actually daylight the creek itself. While this would be less authentic, it would acknowledge that the existing Burlingame Creek long ago ceased to be a natural feature when it was engineered into the underground culvert — a practice not uncommon in downtown areas at the time it was undertaken. A surface water feature could provide a similar open space amenity, could have a more regular flow of water, and be simpler and less expensive to develop as a project.

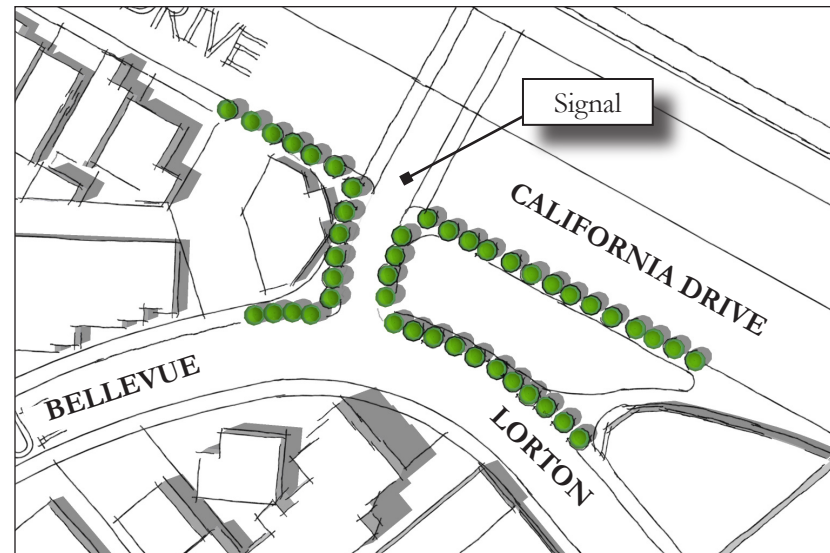
4.5.3 CIVIC CENTER CIRCLE

The existing divided traffic islands between City Hall and the Library at the intersection of Primrose Road, Bellevue Avenue, and Douglas Avenue offer the potential for a modest but highly visible open space. The existing islands would be replaced with a single traffic circle, and crosswalks would connect each corner of the streets leading to the circle. A small lawn area, bandstand, or pergola at the center of the circle could allow for small-scale recreational and ceremonial activities. A special paving pattern could surround the circle, designed to be closed off to form a plaza for special events.

4.5.4 LORTON/CALIFORNIA OPEN SPACE

The intersection of California Drive, Lorton Avenue, and Bellevue Avenue is confusing for both cars and pedestrians, and contains a small seldom-used open space area. A preferred option would be to refine the current configuration with a more straightforward connection between the streets. The intersection at California Drive would be signalized, making it easier for pedestrians to cross California Drive and for vehicles to turn left from Lorton/Bellevue onto California Drive. This would also allow the land that was not needed for the streets to be consolidated into a single area which could be devoted to open space use. The open space could be placed adjacent to the existing restaurant at the Lorton/California intersection, which would activate the open space and place it closer to the Downtown core.

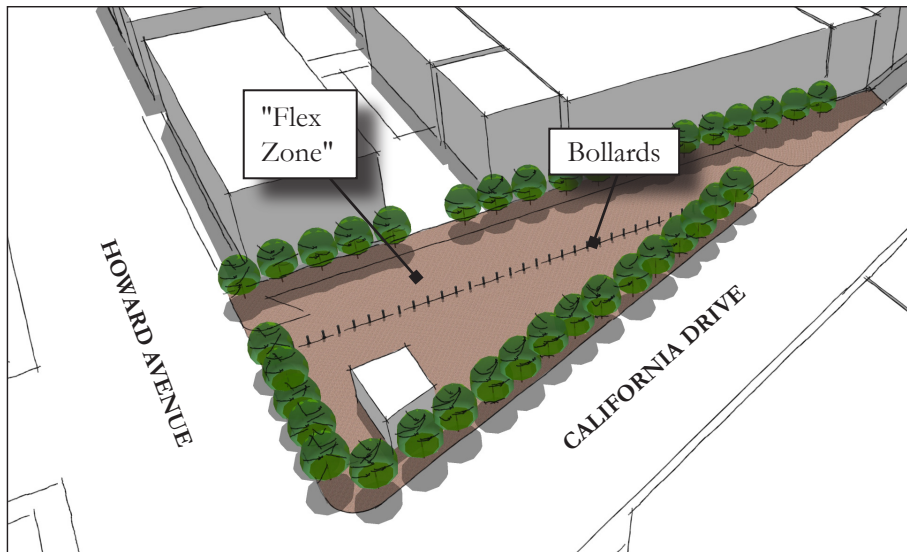
Another concept that has been studied involves a roundabout design. This would improve traffic safety and act as a traffic calming measure. In addition, the traffic circle at the center of the roundabout would have attractive landscaping and could have a prominent design element such as flowers or a monument. However, it would not provide as much usable open space as the reconfigured signalized option.



Lorton/California reconfigured intersection with traffic signal.



Lorton/California roundabout concept.



Highland open space with "flexible zone" streetscape



Example of "flexible zone" in Downtown Redwood City

4.5.5 HIGHLAND TRIANGLE

The last block of Highland Avenue between California Drive and Howard Avenue primarily serves to provide access and parking to the businesses fronting the street, and to serve as a short-cut for vehicles turning right from southbound California Avenue onto Howard Avenue. There is a triangular open space area between Highland Avenue and California Drive adjacent to the former Greyhound Depot, now used as a sandwich shop. Given the limited function of the street segment and its potential to complicate traffic patterns, there could be justification for closing the street segment and expanding the existing triangle of open space into one larger, more usable open space. Depending on the mix of businesses alongside, replacing the street and parking with open space frontage could either be an asset or be detrimental. Uses such as restaurants may appreciate frontage on an open space, but retailers may value the proximity of parking and access more than open space.

An option that may serve multiple purposes would be to redesign the street segment and triangular open space to create a more unified composition, but retain traffic circulation and parking. The street could be redesigned with a "flexible zone" where the parking area and traffic lane would be shared by pedestrians, bicyclists, and automobiles. This concept would involve special paving and flush integrated curbs, a greater number of trees, street furniture, and bicycle parking. The intention would be to create a more seamless transition between the street area and the open space area.

A defining feature of this "flexible zone" would be that parking spaces could be used either for parking cars or for expanding the area available for outdoor seating at restaurants and cafes, sidewalk vendor activities, and locations for vendors or kiosks during special events. Paving would signify the parking location as being able to accommodate a variety of different uses. The use of the parking spaces may vary over time depending on the adjoining use.

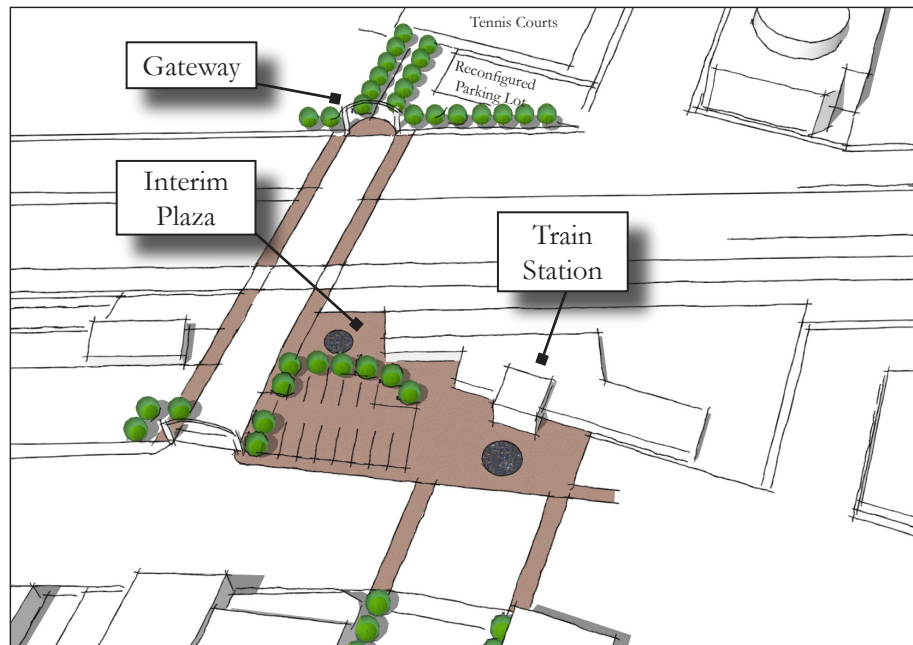
4.5.6 WASHINGTON PARK CONNECTION

Washington Park provides a complement to Downtown Burlingame as a unique, extensive open space. A stronger connection across California Drive and the railroad tracks is important for drawing Washington Park into the realm of Downtown. Likewise, having a better visual indication of the park's existence as seen looking down North Lane from California Drive would be an improvement. Currently the view across is terminated by a parking area and tennis courts.

An improved plaza in front of the train station could lead people towards the park, particularly with an "interim plaza" along the way serving as a focus to pull people along. Prominent gateways visible

from Downtown could then be positioned at the foot of North Lane at California Drive and at the park entrance to further strengthen the relationship.

Plans for this connection may need to be modified to accommodate the California High-Speed Rail (CHSR) rail line proposed to run along the existing Caltrain right-of-way. The City of Burlingame has indicated a preference for having the rail line in an underground tunnel rather than at surface or above grade. While the CHSR is beyond the scope of the Downtown Specific Plan, the project will have an important impact on Downtown Burlingame. It is essential that the CHSR planning process thoroughly investigate and mitigate impacts on Caltrain service, utilities, effects that may concern schools, residents, and businesses, and maintaining connections between Downtown and the residential neighborhood.



A stronger connection across California Drive and the railroad tracks, together with a view terminus at the park to convey its location could help draw Washington Park into the realm of Downtown.



A comprehensive wayfinding signage program should be created for reaching Downtown and its destinations.

4.6 SIGNAGE AND GATEWAYS

4.6.1 SIGNAGE

Signage is important both for providing assistance in reaching Downtown from elsewhere in the community, as well as finding specific destinations within Downtown. A comprehensive wayfinding signage program should be created for reaching Downtown and its destinations.

Signage directing visitors to Downtown (as well as the Broadway commercial district) should be situated at the principal Highway 101 vehicle entrances to Burlingame at Peninsula Avenue and Broadway, and be located along the route to provide turn-by-turn directions to reach Downtown. Within Downtown, signage can provide directions to destinations such as City Hall, the library, the principal commercial streets, the post office, and Auto Row.

4.6.2 GATEWAYS

A significant component to reinforce a distinct identity for Downtown includes gateway announcements both upon entering and leaving the area. Gateways might be considered at Peninsula Avenue (both at El Camino Real and California Drive), Howard Avenue at El Camino Real, Burlingame Avenue, Chapin Avenue, Lorton Avenue at California Drive, and Oak Grove Road at both El Camino Real and California Drive.

Gateways may include landscaped traffic circles, medians, monument walls and pillars, archways, and distinctive landscape treatments such as tree groves and allees.