



CITY OF PALO ALTO CALIFORNIA AVENUE DISTRICT PUBLIC ART PLAN

Created in cooperation with **Art Builds Community**, formerly known as **Barbara Goldstein and Associates**, and the **City of Palo Alto** staff: **Elise DeMarzo**, Public Art Program Director; **Nadya Chuprina**, Public Art Program Coordinator






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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

STAKEHOLDER AND PUBLIC MEETINGS

Cover Image:

Under the Sun, Mohamed Soumah, 2004

Photo Credit: Palo Alto Camera Club

Table of Contents Image:

Year of the Ocean, Oscar Castillo, 1998, Morgan Bricca, 2017



Jungle Jane, Fred Hunnincutt, 1998
Photo: Palo Alto Camera Club

CHAPTER ONE: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2016, the Palo Alto City Council and the Public Art Program adopted a public art plan for the entire city. One of the recommendations in that plan was to develop a specific public art plan for the California Avenue District. California Avenue has evolved over the last decade in a variety of ways that are changing its character. Streetscape changes completed in 2015 reduced vehicular traffic from four to two lanes, widened sidewalks, installed new crosswalks and pedestrian safety measures, updated lighting and street furniture, planted new street trees, and updated a beautiful plaza near the train station, including artist Michael Szabo's *Confluence* fountain. Several beloved businesses have closed, and new ones have emerged. With the challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic, there are new opportunities to think about how to stimulate greater pedestrian activity, outdoor dining, and pop-up activities along the Avenue.

The City of Palo Alto has embarked on several new initiatives in the area. A 627-space parking garage serving the commercial, retail and restaurant area has been completed at 350 Sherman Avenue. The Office of Transportation is planning pedestrian and bicycle improvements in the area, and restaurants have expanded sidewalk dining. Temporary public art was commissioned at the construction site of the parking garage, temporary artworks are planned for the Public Safety Building construction site, and three new permanent artworks will be installed at the Public Safety Building.

In early 2020, the Palo Alto Public Art Program initiated the public art plan process for California Avenue. The purpose of the California Avenue District Public Art Plan is to set a clear vision for the future of public art that will strengthen California Avenue's unique cultural identity as the vibrant "Avenue of the Arts", encourage cultural tourism by retaining and attracting Palo Alto residents and visitors, and support economic development of the California Avenue business community. For the purposes of the plan, the California Avenue District is defined as the area between El Camino Real, Oregon Expressway, California Avenue CAL train station and Cambridge Avenue.



*The California Avenue Marching Band,
Damon Belanger, 2021*

The California Avenue District Public Art Plan will articulate themes and opportunities for new permanent and temporary installations, as well as placemaking and event-based interventions appropriate for the district. The plan will address community engagement and educational opportunities to help broaden the public’s understanding of public art and encourage creative partnerships and collaborations. The plan will identify potential gateway opportunities to distinguish California Avenue as a unique cultural destination, different from, yet complimenting downtown Palo Alto.

While it was initially hoped that many community engagement events would take place in person, the pandemic stimulated different forms of creative community outreach. The consultant team Art Builds Community conducted online interviews, webinars, and focus groups and two outdoor tabling events. In addition, the planners employed CoUrbanize, an interactive mapping platform, to engage the public in conversations about the future of public art in the California Avenue District.

The following vision, mission, objectives/guiding principles and recommendations are a result of this planning effort.

VISION

Public art in the California Avenue District will embody the unique cultural identity of local businesses, residents, and artists.

MISSION

The Palo Alto Public Art Program will enliven the California Avenue District by commissioning permanent and changing artworks that reflect the historic, culturally diverse, and natural environment of the area.



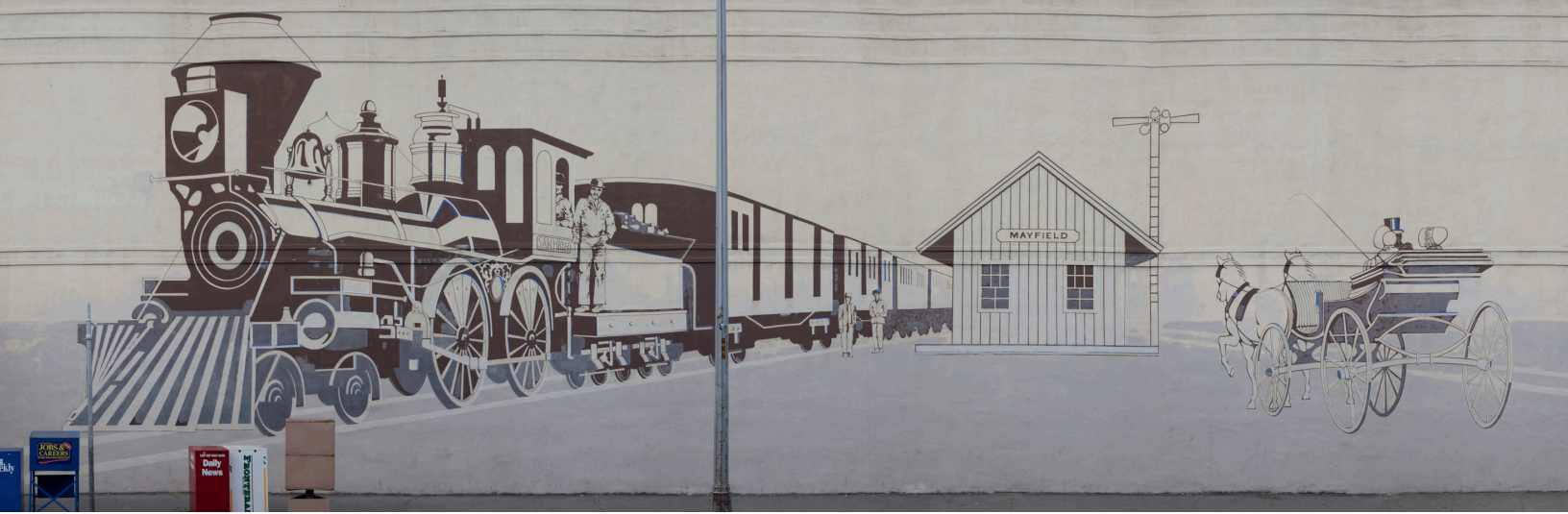
It's a Beautiful Day, Jorge Camacho, 2021

OBJECTIVES / GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. Build partnerships between local businesses, art groups, and the Palo Alto Public Art Program to commission art that attracts people to the district.
2. Enhance pedestrian experiences and engage people of all ages by installing changing and permanent artwork throughout identified locations within the district.
3. Build local pride and educate visitors with public art that explores the district's history by supporting outdoor exhibitions that highlight the work of local and regional artists.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Install changing and permanent artworks that enhance wayfinding and the pedestrian experience.
2. Commission iconic art that attracts people to the district.
3. Support changing outdoor exhibitions.
4. Commission public art that explores diversity, racial justice, local history, culture, and environment.
5. Highlight the work of local and regional artists.
6. Build in-kind and financial partnerships between local businesses, arts organizations, City Departments and the Palo Alto Public Art Program.



Mayfield Train Station, Noel Consigny, 1979
Photo: Palo Alto Camera Club

CHAPTER TWO: INTRODUCTION

HISTORY

California Avenue began as the Mayfield community, established in 1853 by James Otterson, who built a roadhouse on the road between San Francisco and San Jose. The community became an epicenter for saloons and, by its incorporation in 1905, business owners and residents became frustrated with the activity that saloons attracted. In 1905, the district banned saloons and in 1925, Mayfield was incorporated into Palo Alto. In 1941, both Main Street, Lincoln Street, and the Mayfield train station were renamed California Avenue.

The Avenue has always been the main street for the surrounding residential area and known for its “mom and pop” businesses, restaurants, movie house, and music venues. Performers including the Grateful Dead, Joan Baez, and Miles Davis entertained in the area during the 1960s and ‘70s. Beginning in 1997, Palo Alto’s Public Art Program in partnership with the California Avenue Area Development Association (CAADA) began commissioning artworks along the Avenue, which became known informally as Avenue of the Arts. The street and surrounding area now includes a significant number of artworks.

Over time, the character of the neighborhood changed. The movie house and music venues have closed, and the area has lost some of its retail. In 2015, a significant streetscape project was completed on California Avenue, improving sidewalks, crosswalks, landscaping, and bicycle parking. Buildings sold, commercial rents increased, some legacy businesses closed, and new businesses and development including Michelin star restaurants, transit-oriented housing and multi-use development began. In 2020, a new parking garage on Birch Street between Jacaranda Lane and Sherman was completed, and development of a new Public Safety Building is currently underway.

MAP INFO MASTER PLAN GOALS UPDATES 6 TIMELINE FEEDBACK 106 FAQs Share

ART BUILDS COMMUNITY

PALO ALTO, CA

Map comments are now closed

Share

Keith Pelczarski Aug 14, 2020

Good spot for a mural

Chitra Ramanathan Aug 12, 2020

Purchasing existing artwork both 2D for interiors and 3D that would be

Screen capture of mapping campaign on CoUrbanize platform

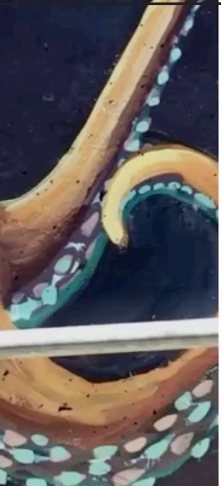
OUTREACH

In 2020, the Public Art Program initiated a public art planning process to “set clear vision for the future of public art that will strengthen California Avenue’s unique cultural identity as the vibrant ‘Avenue of the Arts’, encourage cultural tourism by retaining and attracting Palo Alto residents and visitors, and support economic development of the California Avenue business community.” The plan was also intended to “distinguish Cal Ave as a unique cultural destination, different from downtown Palo Alto.”

Planning began in March 2020 for comprehensive community outreach and engagement with businesses, residents, local artists, and visitors to the area to provide input for the plan. Due to the restrictions created by the COVID-19 pandemic, most community outreach was conducted remotely via CoUrbanize, an online community engagement platform. Over a course of six weeks, the public participated in surveys, interacted with the virtual map of the district, and added their voices to the California Avenue District Public Art Plan. Additionally, signs prompting the public to engage with the planning process and text their thoughts and comments about public art were posted throughout the district. CoUrbanize included survey questions about artwork and a map showing existing artworks. Participants were invited to comment on artworks they liked, and place virtual pins on the map suggesting artwork locations and types. The CoUrbanize page remains up for public view to allow access to the input gathered through the community engagement platform. Additionally, two in-person socially distant tabling events were conducted by the planners on California Avenue. The Public Art Program led a social media campaign promoting the project and boosting public participation. Social media provided a space to ask questions and share images with a rapid response rate from the community members to provide feedback both publicly and privately.



Community tabling on California Avenue June 2020



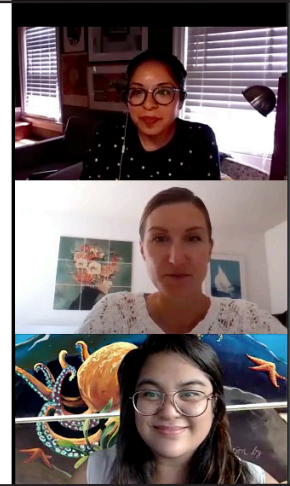
Share Your Thoughts!

- What do you see is the character of Cal Ave?
- How can art reinforce and enhance that?
- What are some partnerships that can help with that vision?

Background Image: "Year of the Ocean," Oscar Castillo, 1998. Repaired by Morgan Bricca in 2017

Join the conversation!

courb.co/calaveartplan



Screen capture of online community engagement session

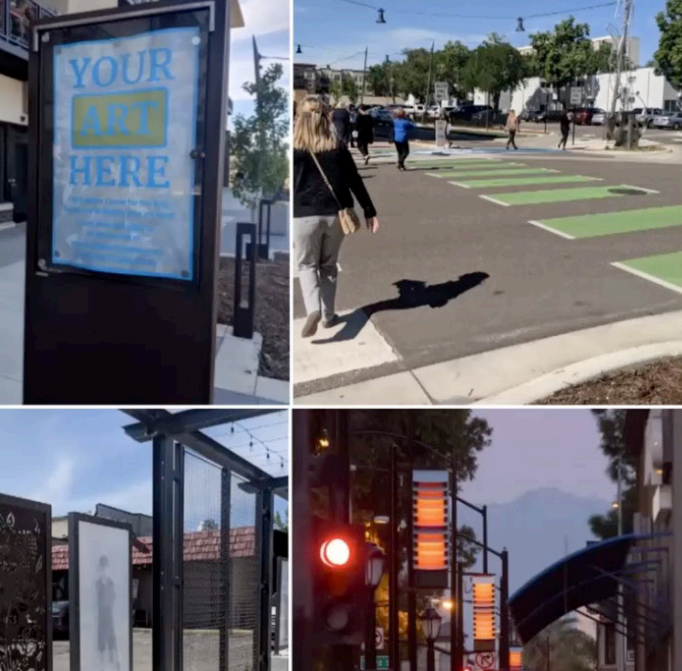
The planners engaged with 381 participants, and conducted a series of interviews, focus groups, webinars and online meetings with City staff, artists, business owners, and the interested public. During the meetings people were invited to describe the types of art they want to see and experience, identify potential sites and locations, as well as discuss creative partnerships, collaborations and artist engagements to strengthen the unique character of California Avenue and support economic development of the district.

The Public Art Commissioners participated in the community engagement events and provided input to the consultants during two of their regular meetings.

Internal Focus Groups

City staff members described opportunities and strategies:

- Focus on the pedestrian experience and potential for public art as a placemaking element.
- Support efforts of pandemic vehicular street closures for the use of the public and merchants.
- Compassion and consideration are key to building relationships between the City, merchants and community members.



What other ways can art enliven the California Avenue District as we emerge from the current pandemic?



Screen capture of online artist focus group

External Focus Groups

The following ideas were promoted by external focus groups:

1. Artist Focus Group:

- Identify blank walls for placement of murals.
- Create temporary lighting projects.
- Collaborate with other City programs including the Palo Alto Art Center and Cubberley Artist Studio Program.
- Create temporary exhibition space for local artists/crafts people in open areas in between retail and restaurants.

2. Business Focus Group:

- Commission art that helps bring people to the district.
- Commission art that celebrates the music history of the area.

3. Interested Public Focus Group

- Support local artists.
- Commission artworks in a variety of media.



*Lost in My Abstract Garden,
Carrie Lederer, 2021*

CHAPTER THREE: THEMES AND LOCATIONS

There was substantial agreement on the themes that artists could address in the California Avenue District related to neighborhood character, Palo Alto’s people, and history. California Avenue is embraced as a neighborhood district with a small-town feel. To the extent that some businesses have closed, and the Avenue has changed, the community input reflects a sense of nostalgia and a desire to preserve the unique character of California Avenue. Given the need to rebuild retail districts during pandemic recovery, this is a good time to revitalize the character of California Avenue.

THEMES

Below are descriptions of opportunities and strategies from community members and City staff:

- **History:** The district has an architectural history that is more than 150 years old, featuring a variety of building types and styles. It has a fascinating civic history as the town of Mayfield, and a Native American history as the land of the Puichon Ohlone who lived in the Palo Alto area prior to the arrival of Europeans.
- **Nature:** Both Palo Alto and the California District are graced with beautiful trees. The district has several streets named for trees and with generous tree canopies; and there is great appreciation for Palo Alto’s redwood-filled parks and native plants.
- **Diversity:** Palo Altans are proud of the area’s cultural, ethnic, gender and artistic diversity.
- **Hyper-Local:** California Avenue has been called the Avenue of the Arts for its music and visual arts history. It is also celebrated for its unique, family-owned businesses and small-town character.
- **Support for local artists:** Include diverse artists from Palo Alto and the region when commissioning new work.



California Avenue closed for outdoor dining during the pandemic, 2020.
Photo: Quynh-Mai Nguyen

LOCATIONS

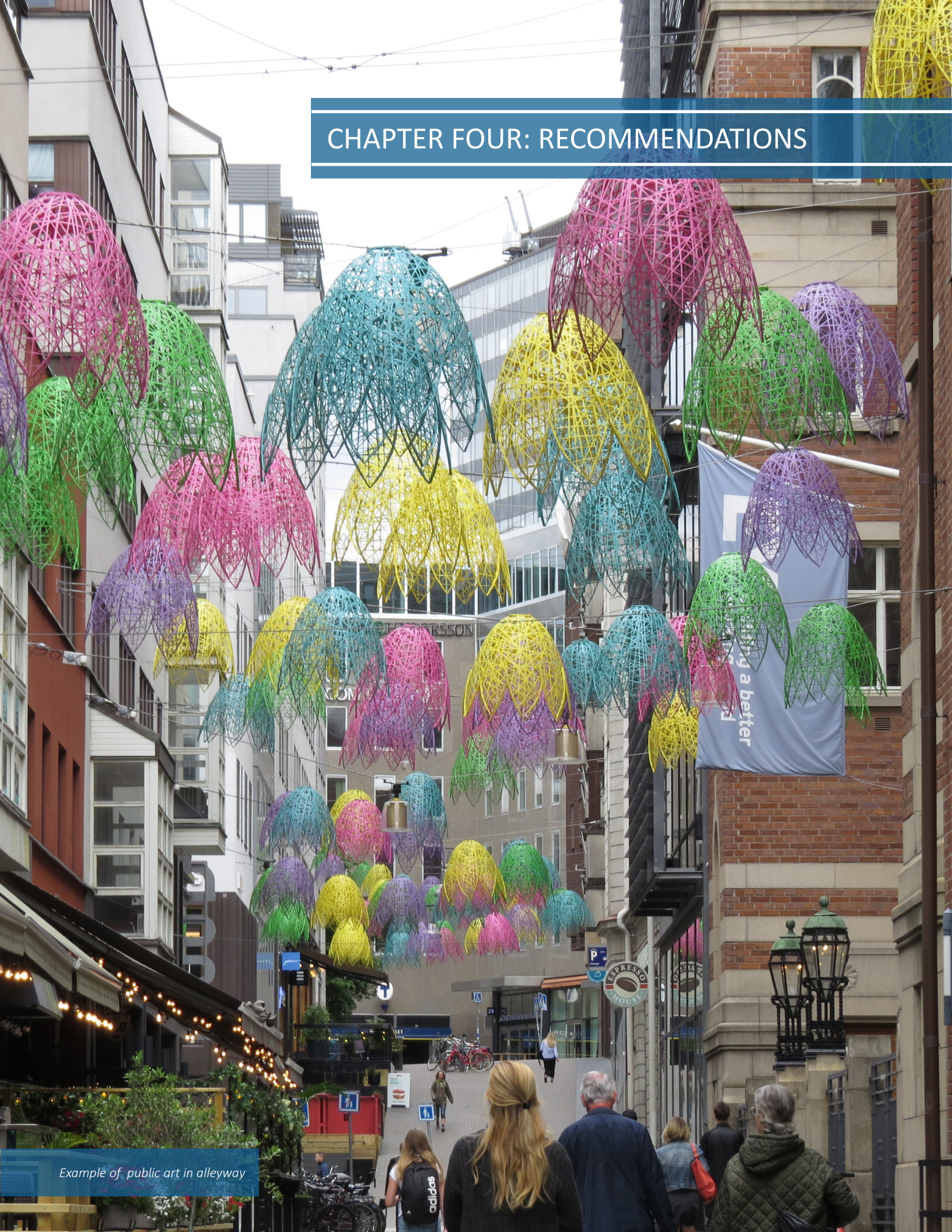
There are many potential locations for art placement; many of them suggested by stakeholders, community members, local artists, Public Art Commissioners, and Palo Alto staff. Most of these were focused on the retail area including:

- Streets and sidewalks
- Alleys
- Art in unexpected places
- Enhancements to existing buildings
- Entrance to California Avenue from El Camino Real and from Oregon Expressway
- California Avenue Train Station
- Blank Walls
- Parking Garages
- Corridors with heavy foot traffic
- Park Boulevard
- Light Poles



Opportunity for art in unexpected places off California Avenue

CHAPTER FOUR: RECOMMENDATIONS



Example of public art in alleyway



Creative pathways to local businesses on California Avenue

RECOMMENDATION ONE

Install changing and permanent artworks that enhance wayfinding and the pedestrian experience.

Although it is a popular neighborhood shopping district, California Avenue's entrances could benefit from increased visibility – El Camino Real, Alma Street, and the Caltrain station. Street-oriented, artistic enhancements will make the district more visible to drivers in automobiles and will improve pedestrian and bicycle navigation. The following recommendations provide long and short-term guidance.

SHORT TERM: ONE TO THREE YEARS

A. Commission an artist team to create a visual strategy from the California Avenue train station to Park Boulevard, creating a more vibrant entrance to the district.

The blocks leading from the Caltrain Station to both sides of Park Boulevard do not reflect the vibrant active California Avenue district beyond. These can be easily and inexpensively enlivened with color and pattern. Adding artistic flair to these blocks will signal the entrance to a lively district.

- Engage property owners in conversation with the artists and encourage their participation in planning the project.
- Hire artist/team to create and implement a visual strategy for walls facing California Avenue from Caltrain parking lot to Park Avenue.



An example of artist-designed crosswalk

B. Collaborate with the Office of Transportation to include art in pedestrian and traffic improvements.

The City of Palo Alto Office of Transportation is embarking on a series of pedestrian improvements in the California Avenue District. These improvements provide an opportunity to reinforce the unique identity of the district.

- Commission artist-designed crosswalks at the intersection of El Camino Real and California Avenue, bringing attention to the entrance to the district.
- Include artist-designed street murals, banners and bike lanes in the district.
- Add artistic enhancements to the row of bike racks adjacent to California Avenue Plaza.



Alleyway between Jacaranda Lane and California Avenue

C. Commission a series of artworks in the alleys that lead people from parking structures and parking lots to California Avenue.

There are seven alleys leading from parking lots and structures on streets parallel to California Avenue. Commissioning a series of bold, interconnected artworks on the alley walls and lighting them adequately will make the alleys more welcoming, assist with pedestrian navigation, and improve the feeling of safety.

- Award a commission to one artist/artist team to think of the alleys as a sequence of connected experiences.



Opportunity for bike rack enhancements



Benches by California Ave train station



Example of artist-designed parklet



Los Trompos installation by Esrawe + Cadena



*Opportunity for artist-designed enhancements
Ted Thompson Parking Garage*

MID-TERM: THREE TO FIVE YEARS

A. Place functional, placemaking art in unexpected places.

There are ‘leftover’ spaces around the district that can become welcoming with the help of artists.

- Commission artist-designed parklets that include seating, shade, planters, or plinths for changing sculpture.
- Pilot a creative seating area on the Public Safety Building plaza.

B. Employ an artist or artist team to enliven the façade of the Ted Thompson 275 Cambridge Avenue parking garage.

This parking garage offers multiple opportunities for artwork to be integrated into the site visible from Cambridge Avenue and California Avenue.

- Commission an artist/designer team to develop a project that refreshes the appearance of the structure, to better compliment the tree canopy on Cambridge Avenue, the street-side planters, and lighting.
- Commission temporary public art installations in the window cutouts visible from California Avenue.



*Entrance to California Avenue District
from El Camino Real*

RECOMMENDATION TWO

Commission iconic art that leads people to the district.

The entrances to California Avenue from El Camino Real, Birch Street and Oregon Expressway could benefit from increased visibility. Well designed, visible public art can call greater attention to the district.

SHORT TERM: ONE TO THREE YEARS

A. Develop a strategy that makes the entrance to the district more visible from Oregon Expressway.

The entrance to the California Avenue District from Oregon Expressway at Birch Street is easy to miss. It is marked by a small, white sign, written in 1950s style script and does little to announce the district.

- Initiate a conversation between the City of Palo Alto Public Art Program and the Office of Transportation and the Public Works Department to create a more visible entrance to the district from Oregon Expressway.
- Commission an artist to work with community members, Public Works, and OOT to develop permanent ‘gateway elements’ to the district working with existing infrastructure such as light poles, curbs or retaining walls leading from Oregon Expressway and Birch Street.



MID-TERM: THREE TO FIVE YEARS

The intersection of California Avenue and El Camino Real is busy and the entrance to the retail district is difficult to see. The existing monument sign and surrounding area would benefit from an artistic update for higher visibility.

A. Remove California Ave monument sign and remaining elements of the deaccessioned artwork at El Camino Real and California Avenue.

- Commission an artist to rethink the entrance to California Avenue as a sculptural gateway that is adequately tall and illuminated, visible day and night.

*Images:
Threshold, Susan Zoccola, 2018, Ashland,
Oregon (top left)*

*Oregon Expressway entrance into California
Avenue Business District (top right)*

*Opportunity for art on empty wall on
California Avenue (bottom right)*

RECOMMENDATION THREE

Support changing outdoor exhibitions and events.

While there is an active gallery behind the Printers Cafe and the street boasts a storied history of music performances, there is little remaining presence of artmaking activity on the street.

A. Install permanent exhibition structures to accommodate changing digitally printed exhibits at the plaza corner at the southeast side of California and Park Avenues.

- Build a series of uniform, robust structures that can accommodate digitally printed copies of original art in all media including photography and poetry.



Example of temporary outdoor art galleries in Montreal



B. Install a structure that can accommodate pop-up art events at the northeast side of the fountain plaza adjacent to the Caltrain parking lot.

While the California Avenue Plaza is attractive and welcoming, it is a passive space at an active train commuter entrance to the district. Adding a small, pop-up arts venue will create a livelier welcome to the district and encourage people to gather after hours.

- Commission an artist-designed shipping container-type structure to accommodate a gallery, performance space, popup art/craft shop or classroom.

Images:

Example of performance shipping container at Gro Wynwood (top left)

Example of a pop-up shop opportunity (top right)

Confluence fountain, Michael Szabo., 2015, California Avenue Plaza (bottom left)

Opportunity for temporary event space and programming at California Avenue Plaza (bottom right)



Images:

Sarah Wallis Park (top)

Herring Box School (middle)

350 Garage (bottom)

RECOMMENDATION FOUR

Commission public art that explores diversity, racial justice and explores local history, culture, and environment.

Community members and artists described specific themes that can be used as inspiration for artwork in the district.

A. Commission artwork that promotes diversity and racial justice.

B. Encourage artists to focus on history, nature, cultural diversity in developing their work.

- Consider historical and cultural themes for permanent murals facing parking lots.
- Focus on environmental theme at the Ted Thompson parking garage.

C. Include small scale artworks at historic sites.

- Commission art that pays tribute to Sarah Wallis at the park that bears her name.



Palo Alto Dog Row, Samuel Price, 2019

RECOMMENDATION FIVE

Highlight the work of local and regional artists.

There is a wealth of artistic talent in Palo Alto and the surrounding communities. Some of these artists are part of the Cubberley Artist Studio Program, some have exhibited, taught and participated in classes at the Palo Alto Art Center, some teach at Stanford University, or show their work in local galleries.

A. Affirmatively seek out Palo Alto and regional artists of diverse backgrounds to apply for public art commissions.

- Highlight the work of Palo Alto and regional artists at events that introduce them to the community.
- Commission regional artists to create projects that invite interaction including “selfie spots” and artworks that invite people to add their own words or visual elements.
- Animate empty storefronts with commissioned temporary artworks, light-based, and digital art.
- Create outdoor exhibits featuring the work of Palo Alto and regional artists.
- Seek out emerging artists who are currently working in the service industry to showcase the talents of under-represented regional artists.



Opportunity for art on empty storefront on California Avenue



Example of commissioned art on storefronts



Art/Craft Mobile Art Gallery, San Antonio, Texas

RECOMMENDATION SIX

Build in-kind and financial partnerships between local businesses, arts organizations, City Departments and the Palo Alto Public Art Program.

The key to the success of the projects recommended above is to create partnerships with businesses, community groups, or other government entities to employ art to address a mutual interest. These partnerships will be particularly important as California Avenue emerges from the shutdowns created by the COVID-19 pandemic. There are several potential partnerships and funding opportunities that will support other plan recommendations.

A. Partnerships

- Use the Percent for Art in Private Development as an incentive match for partnership projects.
- Approach a local paint company to be an in-kind partner in transforming the walls from the Caltrain station to Park Boulevard.
- Collaborate with local arts organizations and the City’s Cubberley Artist Studio Program (CASP) to commission and curate temporary exhibitions, conduct workshops and classes, host arts retail opportunities, and performances in the popup gallery space at California Avenue Plaza.

- Partner with Office of Transportation on pedestrian and bike improvements to integrate artist-designed street murals or crosswalks, banners, and artist-designed bike lanes, helping to direct bicycle and foot traffic to stores and restaurants.
- Partner with businesses, restaurants and shops to sponsor and maintain long-term wall mural projects and artistic displays in empty storefronts.
- Approach neighborhood associations to co-sponsor changing wall-based artworks.
- Encourage business owners and community members to serve on artist selection panels, participate in community conversations about art, and volunteer as public art docents.

B. Funding

The Public Art Program can seek additional funding to realize the ambitions of this public art plan.

- Projects with historic themes, whether related to Mayfield history, architecture, music or art history, will be eligible for California Humanities grants if their scope is planned and the work includes humanities scholars.
- There is \$15 billion dollars in the new COVID-19 recovery act set aside for the arts. Palo Alto Public Art can explore the guidelines for these grants once they are made available.

The background of the page is a photograph of a public art sculpture titled 'Sun Flowers' by Jennifer Madden and Jeffrey Reed, created in 2002. The sculpture consists of several large, stylized flower heads made of dark, reflective material, mounted on tall, slender metal poles. Each flower head is illuminated from within, casting a warm, golden glow. The scene is set at dusk, with a deep blue sky and some distant lights visible. The sculpture is located outdoors, and a building is partially visible in the background on the right side.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The California Avenue District Public Art Plan was created by the Art Builds Community consultants **Barbara Goldstein**, **Amanda Rawson** and **Quynh-Mai Nguyen** in collaboration with the City of Palo Alto Public Art Program staff **Elise DeMarzo**, Public Art Program Director; **Nadya Chuprina**, Public Art Program Coordinator; and **Denise Laxen di Zazzo**, Communications and Artist Studio Program Coordinator. Thank you to the members of the City of Palo Alto Public Art Commission: **Loren Gordon**; **Ian Klaus**; **Ben Miyaji**; **Hsinya Shen**; **Nia Taylor**; **Jim Migdal**; and **Amanda Ross**. And City of Palo Alto staff, including **Kristen O'Kane**, Community Service Department Director; **Heather Dauler**, Senior Resources Planner, Utilities; **Brad Eggleston**, Director Public Works Director; **Michelle Flaherty**, Deputy City Manager; **Amy French**, Chief Planning Official; **Robert George**, Business Liaison; **Jodie Gerhardt**, Current Planning Manager; **Philip Kamhi**, Chief Transportation Officer; **Sylvia Star-Lack**, Safe Routes to Schools Manager; **Rachael Tanner**, Assistant Director for Planning and Community Environment, as well as members of Palo Alto and Bay Area communities who contributed their time and input.



Untitled, Christopher Johanson, 2006

STAKEHOLDER AND PUBLIC MEETINGS

May 7, 2020 City of Palo Alto Staff and Stakeholders

May 22, 2020 Artist Focus Group

June 2, 2020 Public Works Meeting

June 18, 2020 Public Art Commission Meeting

June 26, 2020 Business Merchant Focus Group

July 13, 2020 General Public Webinar

California Avenue public art plan presentation by Art Builds Community to the public.

Art Builds Community introduced the CoUrbanize platform to the public to provide feedback.

July 23, 2020 Community Tabling on California Avenue

August 1, 2020 Community Tabling on California Avenue

September 19, 2020 Public Art Commission Meeting