2. DOWNTOWN ASSETS

Do No Harm.

Downtown San Jose boasts numerous features and resources that afford a high quality urban experience, unique to the city. Many of these characteristics can be capitalized on to reinforce and expand an engaging urban experience throughout the city center.

Most significantly, the existing qualities that are unique to San Jose’s public realm must be valued and protected. These assets in aggregation are the basis of a Downtown public realm that is inviting, of high quality, and represents and supports a social and cultural milieu that is authentic to San Jose.
Downtown San Jose is the urban center of Silicon Valley.

San Jose is positioned as the cultural capital of Silicon Valley by its wide range of complimentary offerings for recreational, intellectual and educational pursuits, and its deep rooted economic and arts communities. Downtown currently offers something for everyone, a reflection of the diverse communities in greater San Jose and the public and private investment in Downtown as the city has matured from agricultural town to the 10th largest city by population in the United States.

The city’s proximity to Silicon Valley and shared attributes such as weather, and vehicular and transit access are leveraged with the multitude of economic and cultural activities available in and unique to the City’s Downtown. A city’s identity typically emerges from active communities and the public. This urban character is highly valued today, understood as distinct from ubiquitous contemporary residential and commercial environments and institutional facilities. Downtown San Jose has attributes understood as essential to an interesting city—a food culture, varied arts communities, and, uniquely by proximity, relationships with the technology communities of the Bay Area—all set within a diverse collection of land uses.
Neighborhood Identity

San Jose has several distinct neighborhoods within Downtown.

The Downtown PBID is bounded by Fourth Street and the City Hall complex to the east, St. James and Devine Streets to the north, Highway 87 and the SAP Center to the west, and Market and First Streets south to Reed Street. Within this definition of Downtown San Jose are numerous sub-Districts, or neighborhoods, defined principally by the quality of their streets and buildings and the activities that occur within each distinct environment.
District Anchors

Landmarks and destinations anchor Downtown San Jose.

Downtown San Jose uniquely benefits from a multitude of civic and institutional anchors that are conceptual and real landmarks within the urban fabric. Most significantly landmark anchors exist at key points at the PBID boundary where visitors enter Downtown San Jose—City Hall at the east, Saint James Park at the north, The Shark Tank at the west and Gore Park at the south. While not marking every entrance to Downtown, these landmarks speak to the variety of destinations in Downtown and should be improved to contribute to their threshold and landmark status.
San Jose has a remarkable canopy of trees.

Unlike other Bay edge cities, and unique to San Jose, are the mature trees throughout the District. The urban forest contributes considerably to the identity and quality of life in Downtown from reducing the heat island effect, providing habitat, cooling the pedestrian environment and providing additional texture and grain to the city’s streets to make them more walkable. While the trees are notable and contribute to many of Downtown’s streets, they play a critical role on reducing the width of wide streets and afford a more pleasant pedestrian experience on the major roads that dominate Downtown. In addition, the number of existing street trees and large mature specimens in the parks is unique. No other Bay Area city has such an extensive and thriving urban forest Downtown.

Street trees improve an urban neighborhood by making streets more attractive and providing shade that makes some sidewalks more comfortable. They have ecological value and, collectively, can contribute to the identity of a place. The image of large trees make Downtown streets memorable and plays an important role in the developing image and identity of the city center. The presence of large canopy trees also goes hand in hand with the city’s weather—typically over 300 days of sunshine a year. San Jose stands apart from other Bay Area cities of note as a warm and welcoming environment. The urban forest visually represents the ideal growing conditions while providing shade to the public realm.
CHAPTER 2
Downtown Assets
Urban Forest

**Downtown San Jose tree inventory**

**PBID Trees (2,443 total)**

**Tree Species**
- Other Species (184)

**Common Name**
- Raywood Ash (93)
- Callery Pear (117)
- Crape Myrtle (44)
- Chinese Hackberry (34)
- Jacaranda (57)
- Honey Locust (178)
- Southern Magnolia (47)
- Coast Live Oak (6)
- California Fan Palm (200)
- Chinese Palms (145)
- Chinese Pistache (58)
- Sycamore (1,280)

PBID boundaries
Parks and Open Space

San Jose Downtown boasts a large amount and variety of open space.

Downtown San Jose boasts a large amount and variety of types of open space unlike any other Bay Area city. While many of these open space resources do not fulfill their potential. Complimented by the excellent weather—300 sunny days a year—the Downtown can be a remarkably pleasant place with ample areas that provide opportunity for rest from the city's streets and traffic. These include parks, plazas, and several paseo linkages through blocks, each with distinct potential to become vibrant resources to the city.

While San Jose has grown rapidly from a farm town to one of the USA's largest cities, the general success of trees and plants Downtown, and the preservation of the open waterways Guadalupe River and Los Gatos Creek speak to the native landscape and agrarian roots of Downtown, the city and the South Bay.
Public Passage and Promenade

A network of pedestrian passages offers counterpoint to the streets and avenues.

San Jose is, by a measure, a sprawling city, most readily traversed by car. Downtown provides broad boulevards and wide streets that generously accommodate vehicular traffic. A budding pedestrian network, comprised of smaller streets and alleys, paseos and passages, and even parking lot short-cuts, is a tremendous compliment to the main streets of Downtown. It provides a web of access suited to pedestrians, valuable for its human scale and quality, and the convenient, direct options it provides.

Inner block pedestrian routes can be traced from one district to another, and even tie a neighborhood together as seen in the San Pedro Square District where formal and informal paths make a compelling environment to walk through. Even the identity of private developments can be understood in terms of the inner-block pedestrian passage they afford, such as City View Plaza abutted by the broad boulevards Park and Almaden.

Larger streets also contribute to this pedestrian framework with interesting and / or high quality experiences such as South First, and the transit malls of North First and Second.
pedestrian routes: paseos, paths, and surface parking lots
The public activates Downtown San Jose.

A variety of positive public realm activities are present in Downtown. The diversity of these activities and uses directly reflects the different character and qualities of each neighborhood, and are enhanced by formal programming by the Downtown Association and other groups.

Much of this activity should be noted and reinforced. Examples include the promenade of Shark Tank visitors from San Pedro Square north along San Carlos; the stream of students along the Paseo de San Antonio. More modest activities that can be supported include the cafes in Circle of Palms Plaza, the consistent passage of pedestrians across the parking lots, and bus stops.

Neighborhoods such as SoFA, San Pedro District, and civic anchors such as City Hall each contribute their own brand of public life that can be enhanced with public realm improvement.

Social Activity Centers
Downtown Assets

Social Activity Centers

- Friday Farmers Market
- Patio - Lunch Destination

- Lunch Time Destination
- Free Outdoor Movie

- Kids Playing in Fountain
  On Hot Days
- Lunch Time Destination

- Picnic Destination
- Volleyball Games

- Active Corridor During
  Game/Concert at SAP Pavilion
  People Hang Out in San Pedro Sq.,
  Little Italy, Along Santa Clara St.

- Summer Concerts
- Movies in the Park

- SoFA First Friday
- Food Trucks Every Thurs
  in Gore Park
- Zero One Garage

- Patrick De San Antonio
- San Jose State Students

- Patrick De San Carlos
- San Carlos St.

- Patrick De San Salvador
- San Salvador St.

- Patrick De Williams
- Williams St.
Downtown San Jose contains a variety of memorable and distinctive buildings and environments.

A distinguished variety of building resources unique to San Jose and its Downtown are both key to the definition of individual neighborhoods as well as an experientially rich and varied public realm across the District. Downtown possesses a variety of unique historic structures and also aggregations of early 20th century buildings that provide a sense of history, distinctive character, visual interest and variety of scale to the public realm.

The 1920s modest mid-rise office buildings of Downtown with street level commercial frontages feel quintessentially urban and are numerous enough to set the tone of the public realm around First and Second Streets, San Carlos and San Fernando. These sensible buildings compliment the refined transit streets of First and Second. The transit streets are of high quality, unique to San Jose, and present memorable public realm experiences dedicated to transit and the pedestrians.

Also notable are the intact low-rise facades of the commercial properties along South First and Market that, in sum, are an essential feature of the neighborhood’s identity and street life experience.
Ongoing improvement efforts by the PBID elevate the quality of Downtown San Jose’s environment.

The past and ongoing efforts of the San Jose Downtown Association and the PBID include many successes to be sustained, expanded and capitalized on. The focus on SoFA with programming, parklets and planters has contributed to what appears to the visitor as an intriguing, pedestrian friendly neighborhood unique to San Jose.

Similarly, planters installed along First and Second on the transit corridors reinforce the high quality of these streets. Key to substantive impact of the planters and hanging basket programs is the excellent horticultural design, installation and maintenance provided by the PBID and SJDA.

The murals program at its outset was modest, but effective in improving sidewalks blighted by blank walls and vacant storefronts. The program demonstrated a level of attention to the public realm, visual richness and variety and an opportunity to showcase local artists.