after: Downtown Elements bring human scale, comfort, and a social character to the Plaza.
Focus Area: Paseo de San Antonio

One of the most remarkable existing public spaces of the District is the four block stretch of Paseo de San Antonio. The Paseo runs mid-block from Chavez Park to 4th street and terminates at the entrance to San Jose State University (SJSU). Few Bay Area cities offer a comparable pedestrian urban passage activated along its edges with commercial activity. This passage is also enlivened by the throngs of students passing between the light-rail at First and Second and the University’s campus entry. However, one notices that the quality of the passage’s spaces and experiences changes dramatically, for the worse, block to block moving east from the park to the University. Like much of the District’s urban fabric, “good bones” exist that frame significant public spaces. Thoughtful and specific improvements can transition awkward, underutilized and marginal spaces into places that leave a lasting impression on the visitor and where the public will want to spend time.

The two blocks between Plaza de Cesar Chavez and Second Street (Blocks 1 and 2) are sufficiently developed and active. The blocks between Second and Third, and between Third and Fourth Streets (Blocks 3 and 4) offer very different experiences from one another, but both are underperforming.

The block from Second to Third is in many respects an urban curiosity, characterized by the sculptural buildings—the blue theater and glassy retail kiosks—and distinct plazas at each end. The plazas will benefit from enhanced definition of space with addition of planting, and/or seating, and elements to support activation with cultural and commercial programs, organized by others. The southern edge of the passage that includes the glassy kiosks can benefit from a redefinition of the edge with planting, to mitigate the inhospitable facade of the State Building; the building is successful in framing the corridor of the passage, but in no way contributes to the pedestrian level experience in a positive way.

The block from Third to Fourth is very well framed as a corridor—a distinct pedestrian space—by existing buildings. This passage is relatively narrow, unlike the others, and reasonably enlivened by existing commercial activity at the ground level. Generally the passage is a successful space in that it has a clear urban identity, and functions well, accommodating outdoor dining and pedestrian promenade. However, the quality of experience might be elevated to be equivalent with Blocks 1 and 2. Strategic improvements can provide a more cohesive, urban pedestrian experience to allow visitors to appreciate the Paseo as one related experience end to end, while acknowledging inherent differences between each block. The Paseo will benefit from addition of shade and planting within the passage. Low-quality areas such as the open space where the Paseo meets Fourth Street, the post office façade, and other blank walls should be addressed specifically to improve the visual quality and experiences they afford. Strategic improvements would elevate the block’s image and identity as a District destination and support social and commercial life along the entire Paseo.
Paseo Improvements: Second to Third

Discrete improvements invite more people to use the Paseo and encourage them to stay.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Paseo de San Antonio between Second and Third Streets is a major pedestrian conduit that offers a variety of open space experiences. However, currently there are limited invitations to stop and linger; and without reasons for people to slow down in its spaces, the paseo’s existing seating areas are underused or misused. As a result, the paseo lacks the kind of appeal and value that it should have as one of the District’s important and unique public realm spaces.

Paseo Improvements for the block between Second and Third Streets enhance the pedestrian experience, leveraging new retail uses and cultural program to increase demand for places for people to linger. Large planting areas—both in-ground planting areas and amassed Downtown Planters—reduce the apparent expanse of hard surfaces and provide a buffer between the Paseo and the adjacent office building. Temporary movable elements and programs like Downtown Stages and micro-retail (ie shipping containers or stands) or food trucks, can activate the Paseo’s terraces and open spaces to draw and keep people throughout the day and year.

GOALS

- Activate the Paseo to build its success and image as one of the District’s primary public spaces.
- Enhance its physical character and comfort.
- Promote the District’s Garden City identity.

DESIGN CONCEPTS

- A sidewalk garden runs the length of the Paseo’s south side, to provide a buffer to the building façade and reduce the apparent width of the passage.
- Downtown Planters provide additional opportunities for planting, to enhance the spaces.
- Activate the peripheral open areas with retail and cultural program, food, and temporary, human-scale elements.
Paseo Improvements: site diagram

Program Area
Downtown Stages
Light Canopy
Garden
Illuminating Downtown
Downtown Shades
Micro Retail
Expanded Crosswalk
Dining Terrace
## Paseo Improvements: Third to Fourth

Discrete improvements create better places for people to stop and stay.

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Paseo between Third and Fourth Streets continues the mid-block pedestrian passage to the front door of SJSU. At this point, the most narrow and contained of the Paseo’s four blocks, students converge on the school, in the largest volumes seen on the Paseo. As a result, despite active retail on both sides this block feels most like a corridor—a place for movement instead of lingering.

To capitalize on that compressed space and sense of social energy, Paseo Improvements on this block focus on creating small, inviting pockets for people to stop and stay. Downtown Shades, Planters, Stages, and Seating are arranged along the flow of travel, complimenting the existing patio spaces associated with active storefronts. Strings of lights across the Paseo suggest a canopy to the passage day and night; they define spaces—rooms—within the Paseo. These improvements nurture the activity already present, and entice more people to linger and enjoy existing retail and people watching.

### GOALS

- Expand the Paseo’s potential on a daily basis; elevate it from a corridor to place.
- Support existing businesses with improvements that encourage pedestrians to linger.
- Enhance the physical image of the Paseo and promote the District’s Garden City identity.

### DESIGN CONCEPTS

- Enhance patio areas and open spaces outside of the main path of travel with Downtown Elements to improve visual interest and physical comfort for lingering.
- Provide a human scale canopy to the space with string lights perpendicular to buildings and Downtown Shades.
- Add Downtown Planters with vines and trees to soften and enhance the hard space.

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**PBID ROLE**

- Lead
- Initiate / Assist
- Advocate

**COST**

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**IMPLEMENTATION**

<table>
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<td>Coordination &amp; Partnerships</td>
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- SJ City departments
- Adjacent buildings and tenants
Downtown Shades, Planters, Stages, and lighting foster a more comfortable, generous place for people passing through the Paseo.
Focus Area: Woz Way & Balbach Street

The Woz Way and Balbach area includes a variety of significant District features including Guadalupe River Park, Discovery Green, the wide sidewalks and ample public space on Almaden Boulevard, a Downtown Gateway at I-280, and direct pedestrian connection east to SoFA. This muddle of existing resources can be leveraged to define a public realm framework to support urban development and establish distinct neighborhood identity by providing clear access and circulation between destinations and amenities.

Pedestrian and bike access throughout the area should be improved, with specific attention to street crossings and formalization of paths and walks. Areas of note for street crossing and sidewalk improvements that might realize great immediate benefit include: access and circulation from the Discovery Museum parking lot and San Carlos Ave to Discovery Green; bike and pedestrian connection at street level to the GRP trail-ramp that currently terminates at Woz Way; formalization of a trail on the east side of the river at the Almaden Ave parking lot, to connect to the GRP trail-ramp and existing bridge; recast and design Balbach as a delightful pedestrian and bike connection between Almaden Avenue and SoFA.

In sum these critical improvements to the area’s access can highlight existing amenities, provide a public realm framework for future improvements and development, and establish an distinct sub-area or neighborhood within the District. The focus on access and circulation should be complimented with Street Life Plan projects that reinforce and support the pedestrian experience of the area and provide relief from the large streets and buildings.
1-4 site photos
Balbach Garden Path

An appealing pedestrian route links SoFA to Guadalupe River Park and the Children’s Discovery Museum.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Balbach Street connects SoFA to the Oracle office building, Guadalupe River Park and Children’s Discovery Museum area. It is a designated bike route and endowed with large shade trees and quiet setting; it has potential to be an appealing pedestrian short cut across the south end of Downtown. However, the view of the adjacent Convention Center South Hall and parking lot compromises the physical image of the street, and the road is wide, inviting vehicles to rush down the block.

The Balbach Garden Path is a simple redesign to enhance the street to encourage the use of the Balbach as a primary pedestrian route. The project is comprised of two main elements. First, a substantial, rich border of trees and flowering shrubs along the north sidewalk screens views into the parking lot; this fosters an appealing sense of enclosure and separation from the Convention Center. Second, traffic-calming chicanes—in-ground planting areas that extend past the parking aisle slightly into the travel lanes—nurture lush gardens with trees and visually divide the block into shorter, slower segments. These may include small seating niches and have potential to capture and slow storm water. Additional garden elements like lighting, Birdhouses, and Wind Chimes, may be incorporated to make the Path as inviting and unique as possible. Balbach Garden Path becomes a truly special and exemplary pedestrian street for Downtown.

GOALS

- Foster an inviting and unique environment to make Balbach Street a primary pedestrian route across the south end of the District.
- Slow vehicles and promote considerate driving; set a positive example for pedestrian streets in the District.

DESIGN CONCEPTS

- Planting designs should be rich, distinct, and sustainable.
- Chicane designs should accommodate significant planting areas with trees and seating niches, and protrude into the street to visually divide the block and slow traffic; they should not compromise the functions or safety of the street for pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicles.
- Consider other garden elements to give Balbach Street a unique, memorable image and identity.

### Implementation

**DIFFICULTY**
- EASY
- MEDIUM
- HARD

**COORDINATION & PARTNERSHIPS**
- SJ City departments
- San Jose Convention Center
- Adjacent property owners
A strong planted edge, new street gardens, and seating niches make Balbach a comfortable, distinct pedestrian route.