



STAFF REPORT

City Council

Meeting Date:

7/8/2025

Staff Report Number:

25-103-CC

Study Session:

Provide direction on design and improvements for public plaza in closed portion of Santa Cruz Avenue along the 600 block

Recommendation

Staff recommends that the City Council consider design concepts and options to activate and improve space for a public plaza in the closed portion of Santa Cruz Ave along the 600 block and provide direction on next steps for the project.

Policy Issues

Resolution No. 6860 (Attachment A) created a street closure on Santa Cruz Avenue, for an approximately 40-foot long portion between Curtis Street and Doyle Street, to eastbound vehicle traffic.

The City Council identified “downtown vibrancy” as one of the top five priorities for fiscal year 2025-26 (Attachment B). Activation of public space in downtown supports this priority.

Background

On Aug. 29, 2023, City Council adopted the Streetary outdoor dining ordinance and associated Streetary design standards (Attachment C). Additionally on Aug. 29, 2023, City Council adopted Resolution No. 6860 to close a portion of Santa Cruz Avenue to allow for enhanced outdoor communal space and outdoor dining opportunities for restaurants adjacent to the street closure (Attachment A). On March 22, City Council discussed downtown street closures including Santa Cruz Avenue and directed staff to return with agenda items for determinations on street closures (Attachment D). On June 10, City Council maintained the street closure on Santa Cruz Avenue and directed staff to return with options for the public space in a study session (Attachment E).

For the July 8 City Council agenda item, staff provided notice to the owners and managers of adjacent businesses on the 600 block of Santa Cruz Avenue at the beginning of July and conducted additional digital outreach.

Analysis

Staff produced a basic map indicating the Streetary area and potential space for programming (Attachment F). The Streetary area will occupy parking spaces, but not the closed vehicle travel lane, and extend along restaurant frontage only. A previously installed bicycle lane is indicated on the map and will

remain. Approximately 2,500 square feet of additional public space is available for programming, and approximately 1,200 square feet of space is available between the Streetary area and the bike lane which is recommended as a pedestrian walkway.

An interdepartmental team with staff from the city manager's office, community development, library and community services, public works, as well as M-Group, identified the following design elements for City Council consideration as a launching point for discussion.

1. Allow multiple uses: Design elements could create changeable configurations of the public space. The City could provide and maintain outdoor seating that could be moved and stored for special events. Creative, painted roadway treatments could help delineate space such as walkways, seating areas, and stages. The space could also feature light recreational activities, such as hopscotch or dance steps painted on the street.
2. Enhance safety: The bicycle lane requires delineation potentially with planters and aesthetic metal panels. A platform compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) could provide level access from the sidewalk/curb, correct uneven grades in the street, and improve accessibility. The City may also consider changes to facilitate easy access to the public space, including a street crossing that follows the natural flow of pedestrian traffic from the other side of Santa Cruz Avenue and delineated walkways through the plaza to create better flow of public space users.
3. Design for welcoming space and aesthetic appeal:
 - a. Outdoor furniture could provide varied and interesting seating options.
 - b. Increased bicycle parking, pending the results of a survey with the Complete Streets Commission, could create easier and more convenient access.
 - c. Roadway treatment could introduce artistic elements.
 - d. Shade structures could provide a more comfortable communal area.
 - e. Lighting could help with placemaking as a public space.
 - f. Well-designed planters and other landscaping could soften the streetscape and make it more inviting.
4. Activate the space with events: The City could partner with an event management consultant to work directly with businesses and organizations that want to hold events, such as farmers' markets, outdoor music events, and more. City staff would process special events permits as needed. The City would need to establish a rental and use policy and associated fees. Configuration of the space could allow rented stages, lighting, tents, and other equipment to be used on site.
5. Other considerations: Increased use of the space by the public would require additional recycling and garbage receptacles that are aesthetically appealing, easy to access, potentially incorporate public art, and located throughout the space. Additional signage on Santa Cruz Avenue could alert drivers heading eastbound that there is no through traffic to El Camino Real.

The City has partnered with M-Group to help envision a range of uses for the space and prepare a presentation to highlight potential design concepts, including high-level designs of the public plaza for illustrative purposes (Attachment G).

Next steps

Public outreach would include a mix of on-site pop-up events at the current space, tabling at events downtown, dedicated webpage, online form, and both print and digital communications. Outreach would encourage the public to identify and prioritize recommended improvements and suggest preferred uses for the public space. Results of outreach would inform proposed designs for the public plaza.

Based on feedback from the study session, staff will design a public outreach strategy to launch with the start of the school year. Staff will also continue to work directly with restaurants to achieve compliance with Streetary guidelines and remove equipment from the closed vehicle lane and in areas beyond immediate restaurant frontage.

Impact on City Resources

Initially, the City will need to accommodate any costs for public outreach and consultant support to provide more comprehensive design options for the space. Pending City Council direction, future costs could include costs for equipment purchases, installation of improvements, potential contracts with an event management consultant, and more. The Capital Improvement Plan currently includes the Downtown Streetscape Improvement project with approximately \$477,515 in available funding that may be appropriated by the City Council for future improvements for the public plaza.

Environmental Review

The street closure of a portion of Santa Cruz Avenue is categorically exempt under Class 1 (§15301, "Existing Facilities") of the current California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines, because the currently closed portion of Santa Cruz Avenue involves negligible or no expansion of the former use of a street. No additional vehicle miles traveled or roadway capacity will be added as a result of the street closure.

Public Notice

Public notification was also achieved by posting the agenda, with the agenda items being listed, at least 72 hours prior to the meeting.

Attachments

- A. Hyperlink – Aug. 29, 2023, Staff Report #23-194-CC: menlopark.gov/files/sharedassets/public/v/2/agendas-and-minutes/city-council/2023-meetings/agendas/20230829-city-council-regular-agenda-packet-w-pres.pdf#page=205
- B. Hyperlink – April 15 Staff Report #25-056-CC: menlopark.gov/files/sharedassets/public/v/1/agendas-and-minutes/city-council/2025-meetings/20250415/n2-20250415-cc-annual-city-council-priority-setting-workshop-final-report.pdf
- C. Hyperlink – Aug. 29, 2023, Staff Report #23-192-CC: menlopark.gov/files/sharedassets/public/v/2/agendas-and-minutes/city-council/2023-meetings/agendas/20230829-city-council-regular-agenda-packet-w-pres.pdf#page=135
- D. Hyperlink – March 22 Staff Report #25-043-CC: menlopark.gov/files/sharedassets/public/v/1/agendas-and-minutes/city-council/2025-meetings/20250322/c1-20250322-cc-priority-setting.pdf
- E. Hyperlink – June 10 Staff Report #25-090-CC: menlopark.gov/files/sharedassets/public/v/1/agendas-and-minutes/city-council/2025-meetings/20250610/h1-20250610-cc-santa-cruz-reopening.pdf
- F. Map of 600 block of Santa Cruz Avenue
- G. M-Group presentation of design elements and concepts

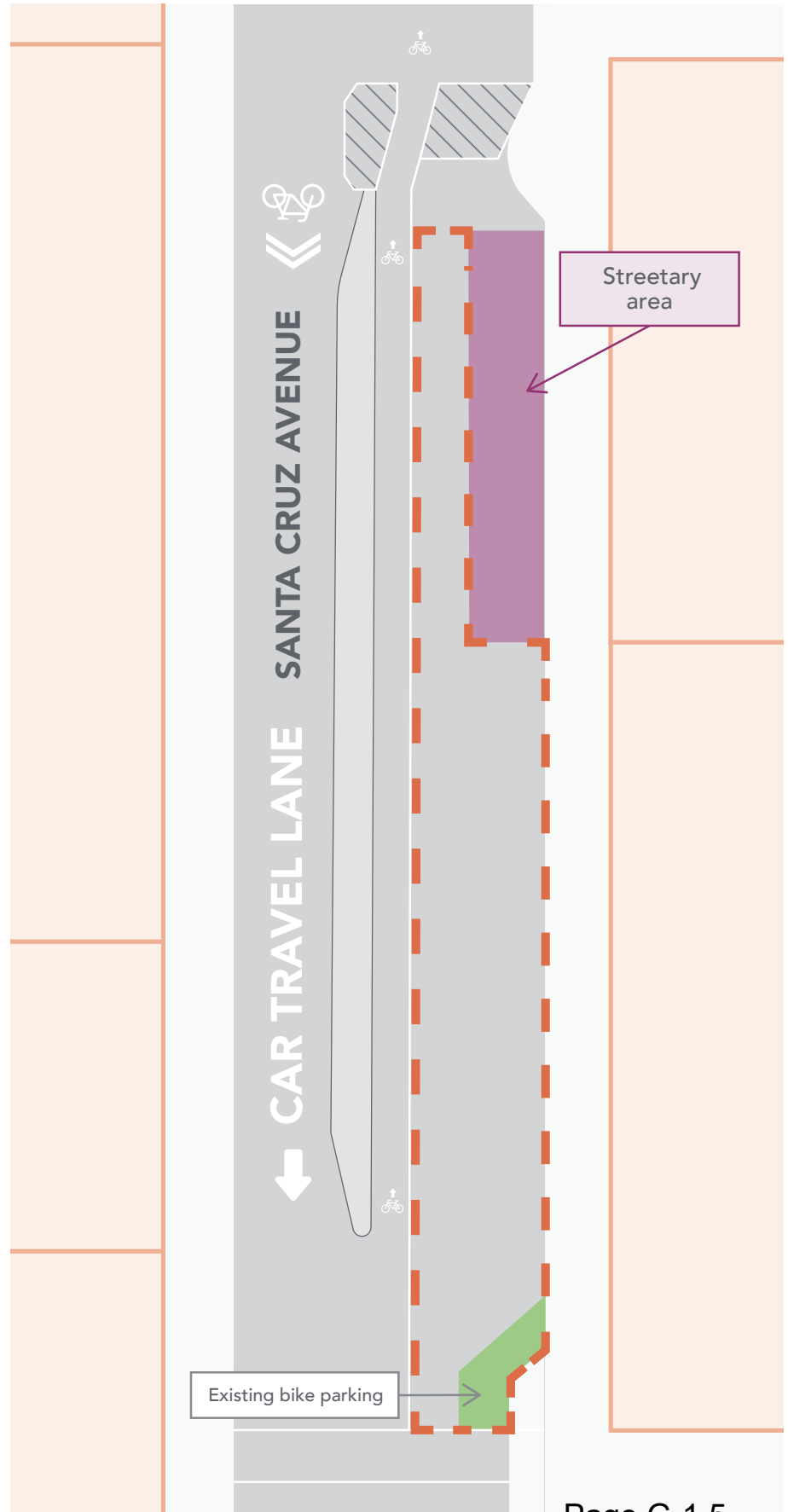
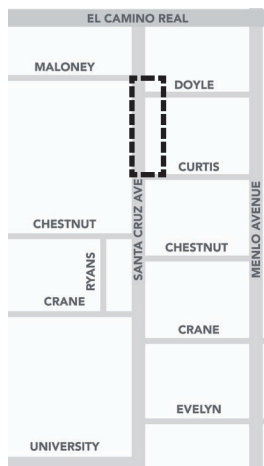
Report prepared by:
Stephen Stolte, Assistant City Manager

SANTA CRUZ AVENUE 600 BLOCK CLOSURE



KEY

- ■ ■ ■ Potential space for programming

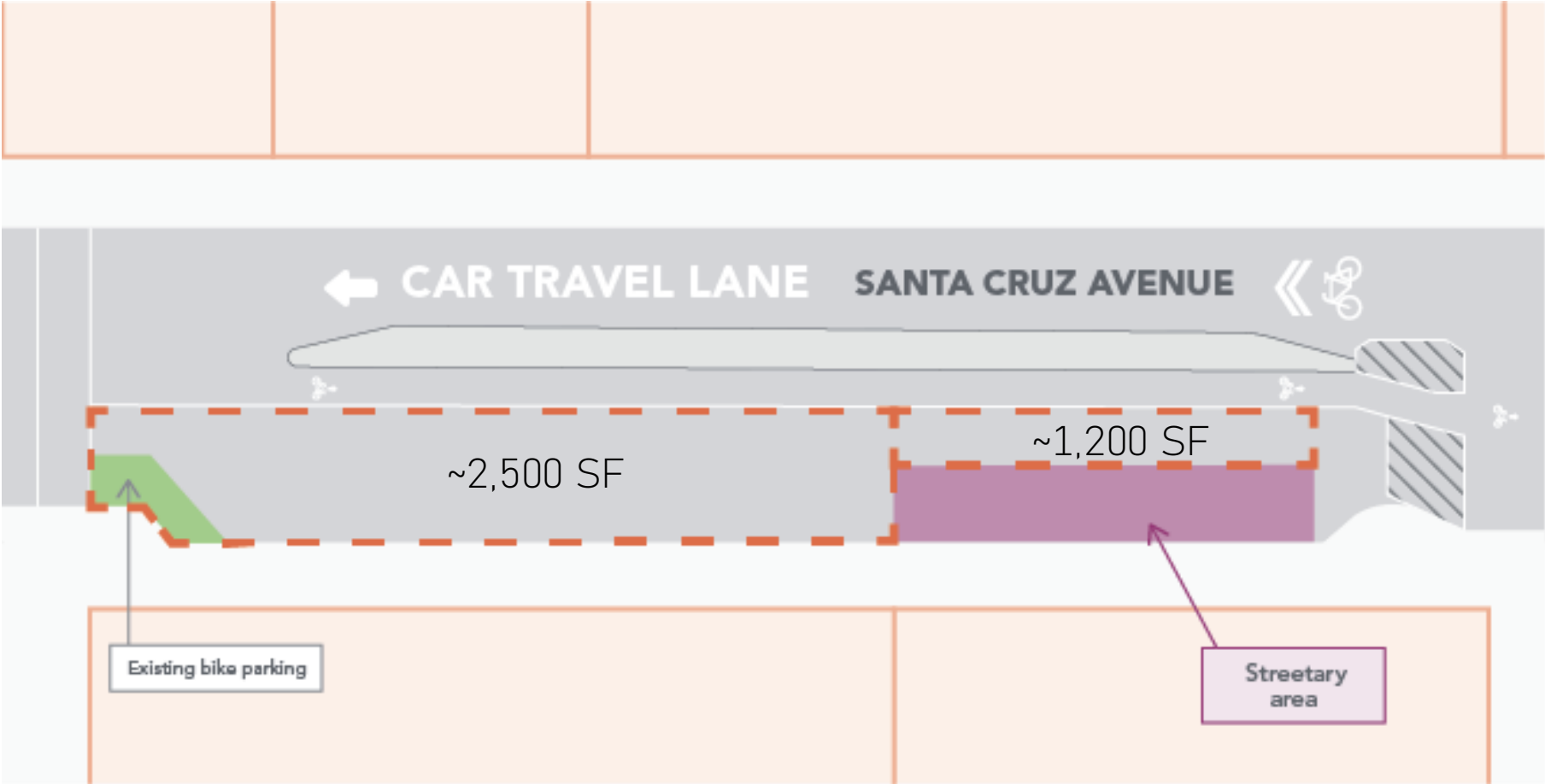


The **600**
BLOCK

Menlo Park Public Plaza Concepts

JULY 8TH, 2025 CITY COUNCIL
MEETING

The Site



Design Goals

- Safety
- Creative, artistic design
- Contributing to a sense of place
- Sustainability & Cost Effectiveness
- Welcoming space for all users & all ages
- Low maintenance furnishings, finishes & landscaping
- Increased activation of the space, add to the vitality of downtown
- Sense of permanence but fairly easy to remove, if necessary, in the future

Public Plaza Uses (program)

- Outdoor public open space
- Variety of sitting areas
- Eating/Drinking
- Meet-up/gathering space
- Children's play area
- Area for live music
- People watching
- Farmers' market annex



Design Elements

- Protective barriers to define the space
- Moveable/stackable chairs
- Shared tables for eating
- Fixed benches
- Shade sails for comfort on hot days
- Overhead string patio lights for ambience
- Entry gateways
- Painted asphalt
- Play/public art objects
- Bike Racks
- Decorative fencing
- Trash/Recycle Containers



800 Block Santa Cruz Avenue

Design Elements – Protective barricade planters



Design Elements

- Moveable/stackable seating
- Communal tables



Design Elements

- Fixed benches from reclaimed wood



Design Elements

- Shade Sails
- Overhead string patio lights



Design Elements

- Painted asphalt
- (see asphaltart.bloomberg.org for more examples)



Design Elements

- Play/Public Art objects





Design Elements

- Bike Racks
- Decorative Fencing located between concrete planters



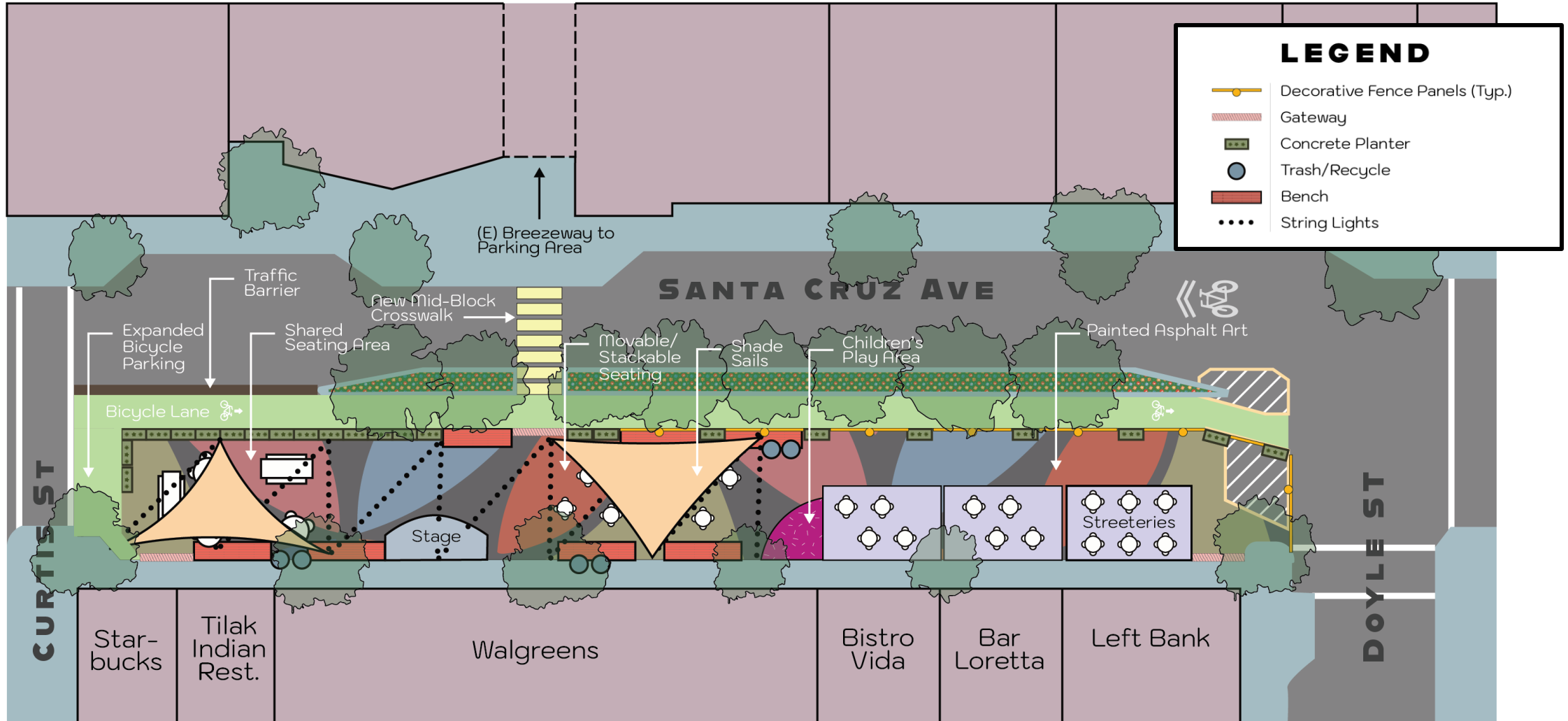
Design Elements

- Trash/Recycling Containers



Concept Plan for Illustrative Purposes

The **600**
BLOCK



Cross Section

Santa Cruz Avenue
(Facing Curtis Street)

The **600**
BLOCK

