



STAFF REPORT

City Council

Meeting Date:

10/13/2026

Staff Report Number:

26-170-CC

Study Session:

**Provide direction on the 600 Block Plaza
configuration or closure**

Recommendation

Staff recommend that the City Council provide feedback on the 600 Block Plaza and a determination to maintain the current plaza footprint and road closure, reduce the plaza size and reopen the vehicle travel lane, or remove the plaza and reopen the vehicle travel lane and parking spaces.

Policy Issues

On Aug. 29, 2023, City Council adopted Resolution No. 6860 (Attachment A), which 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 resolution gives City Council the discretion to revisit the street closure in the future.

City Council identified downtown vibrancy as one of the top five priorities for fiscal year 2025-26 and fiscal year 2026-27. Activation of public space downtown supports this priority.

Background

In the closed section of Santa Cruz Avenue, the City installed a dedicated bike lane and has continued to build out a public plaza with new furniture and programming with the goal of creating enhanced outdoor communal space.

City Council held a study session June 10, 2025, to consider and adopt a resolution to repeal Resolution No. 6860. Staff were directed to hold a subsequent study session which was held July 8, 2025, for the review of an initial design concept with options to activate and improve the plaza space. Direction was given to further refine the design and to conduct public outreach for feedback. A final study session was held Nov. 18, 2025, presenting the results from community outreach and a refined design concept.

The City partnered with M-Group to develop the initial and final concept plans (Attachment B).

Community outreach

A City team across the city manager's office, community development, library and community services, and public works partnered with M-Group to envision a range of uses for public space and prepare recommendations for street furniture and accessibility improvements consistent with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The project team conducted both digital and in-person outreach through multiple

methods and events to gather input on the initial design concept that allows multiple uses, enhances safety, and creates a welcoming, aesthetically pleasing, active space that engages a variety of users with diverse ages, needs, and interests. Feedback from the community outreach is noted in Attachment C.

Solicitation of proposals

Based on City Council direction from the Nov. 18, 2025, meeting, City staff developed a scope of work outlining requirements for design and construction plans and distributed to the City's on-call list. A solicitation of proposals was issued to architects and landscape architects to create construction plans.

Analysis

Build-out of the plaza is to occur in the following phases:

- Phase 1 – Site furnishings, refined design concept. *Completed May 2026.*
- Phase 2 – Major design elements and ADA improvements, including plaza lighting, stage, landscaping and public art. *Current phase with issuance of solicitation for proposals in July 2026.*
- Phase 3 – Accessibility improvements with the potential for a mid-block crosswalk connecting the parking lot behind the Chase Bank (parking plaza 1). Timeline is to be determined.

The 600 Block Plaza currently includes picnic tables and bistro-style café tables, with seating capacity for approximately 70 people, as well as space for City and community programming. Library and community services (LCS) will use the space as needed to coincide with and supplement their existing downtown events. Other businesses and organizations, such as Downtown Menlo Fund are using the plaza for a broad range of events, and City staff are also working with event planning agencies for pop-up activations.

Public works hired an additional maintenance worker, starting this month, who will provide extra focus on needs downtown. Their duties will include ensuring cleanliness in the plaza, maintaining furniture, and addressing overflowing trash.

Lastly, signage is being deployed to "keep Menlo Park beautiful", encouraging community upkeep and directing public use of the plaza. Information will provide guidance on trash and recyclables disposal, leash requirements for dogs, management of noise levels, and encouragement to respect the area as public space.

Based on City Council direction, City staff created a scope of work for architectural services to further develop the concept plan established by M-Group for bidding and construction. The scope of work specifies that the final design should incorporate all elements of the concept plan except the mid-block crosswalk, the proposed children's play area, and ensure emergency vehicle access when needed.

The scope of work also notes that the design plans must ensure cohesion with surroundings, as well as consistency with the concept plan, City Council input from November 2025, and applicable guidelines from the City's Downtown Specific Plan. Given the option to reopen the Santa Cruz Avenue travel lane while keeping the parking spaces closed at any time in the future as noted in the resolution, the scope of work also noted that the final design must allow for movable, removable, or semi-permanent structures. Lastly, the firms were asked to include a plant palette for the plaza and for Santa Cruz Avenue, creating cohesion from the plaza and into the broader downtown area.

Staff evaluated responses from consultants based on the following criteria:

- Ability to perform specific tasks
- Qualifications of the specific individuals who will work on the project
- The specific methods or techniques to be used
- Reasonableness of the schedule to complete each task element
- Overall cost of the proposal

The consultants detailed considerable experience with plaza development or similar efforts. City staff are ready to contract with the selected consultant, Callander Associates. The design process would conclude in spring 2027. Construction would begin with bidding in summer 2027, followed by plaza construction in fall 2027.

Recent community feedback

Most recently, the City received feedback from the business community requesting the re-opening of the eastbound vehicle travel lane on Santa Cruz Avenue. Before proceeding with final design for bidding and construction, the City Council may wish to consider the following options for the 600 Block Plaza and street closure, which are detailed in diagrams in Attachment D. In all three options, the adjacent existing restaurant Streetaries would remain.

Option 1 – Existing plaza configuration (closed vehicle lane)

- Eastbound vehicle travel line remains closed
- City-purchased picnic and bistro tables remain
- Continue Phase 2 development of plaza structures including stage, lighting, accessibility improvements, planters, etc.
- Proceed with activation and programming including opportunities with LCS, local businesses and nonprofits, and event planning agencies
- Proceed with plant palette development
- Maintain dedicated bike lane

Option 2 – Smaller, reduced-size community space (open vehicle lane)

- Re-open eastbound vehicle travel lane as shared travel lane available to bikes, consistent with the existing layout on the rest of Santa Cruz Avenue downtown
- Adjust planters and barriers to accommodate reduced size community space equivalent to Streetary depth
- Change seating to accommodate bistro tables and chairs (no picnic tables due to limited space)
- Repurpose current picnic tables to other areas of the city
- Limited programming due to size
- Revisit options for plant palette development given reduced size

Option 3 – No plaza (open vehicle lane and restore street parking)

- Re-open eastbound vehicle travel lane as shared travel lane available to bikes, consistent with the existing layout on the rest of Santa Cruz Avenue downtown
 - Requires a resolution to rescind Resolution No. 6860, removal of planters and barriers, and removal of dedicated bike lane
- Make nine parking spaces available

- May require re-striping of spaces
- Repurpose current bistro and picnic tables to other areas of the city
- Revisit Santa Cruz Avenue plant palette development

Impact on City Resources

The Capital Improvement Plan currently includes the Downtown Streetscape Improvement project with approximately \$300,000 available for the design and construction of the plaza as proposed at the Nov. 18 meeting (consistent with Option 1). The consultant proposal is within city manager signing authority. Remaining funds may be used for construction.

Existing resources will be re-allocated to reconfigure the space for Options 2 or 3. Under Option 2, the design options would be revisited with the consultant, with anticipated reduction in construction costs. Under Option 3, no design work is required but would use city resources for removal of structures and likely restriping of parking spaces.

Environmental Review

The public plaza improvements anticipated in the proposed plan are categorically exempt under Class 1 (Sections 15301, Existing Facilities) of the California Environmental Quality Act Guidelines, because the currently closed portion of Santa Cruz Avenue involves negligible or no expansion of the former use of the street.

Public Notice

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

Attachments

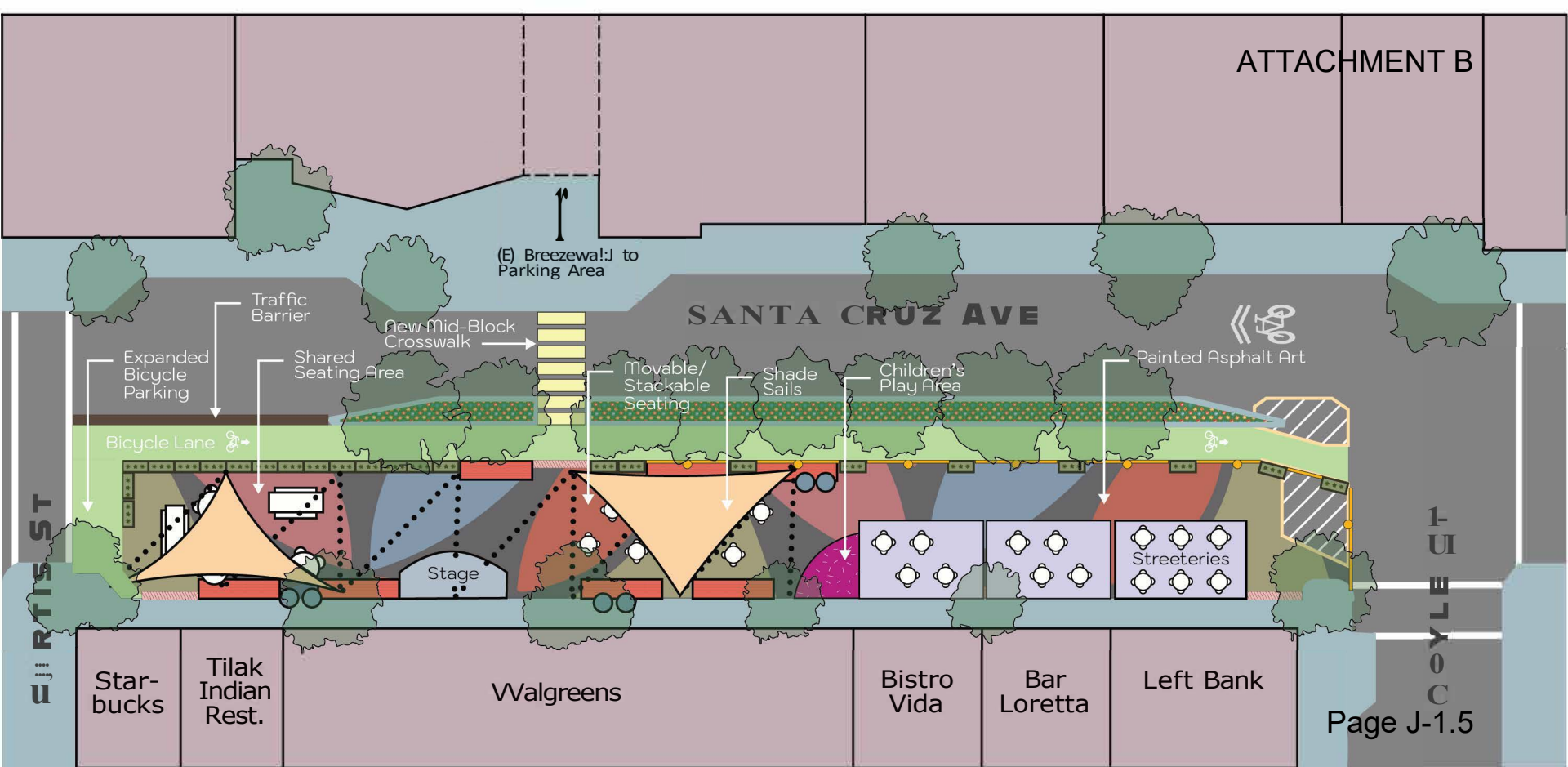
- A. Hyperlink – Aug. 29, 2023, Staff Report #25-194-CC:
www.menlopark.gov/files/sharedassets/public/v/2/agendas-and-minutes/city-council/2023-meetings/agendas/20230829-city-council-regular-agenda-packet-w-pres.pdf#page=205
- B. Downtown Streetscape Improvements – Conceptual plan
- C. Hyperlink – Nov. 18, 2025, Staff Report #25-175-CC:
www.menlopark.gov/files/sharedassets/public/v/1/agendas-and-minutes/city-council/2025-meetings/20251118/g1-20251118-cc-santa-cruz-600-block-public-plaza-direction.pdf
- D. Plaza options diagrams

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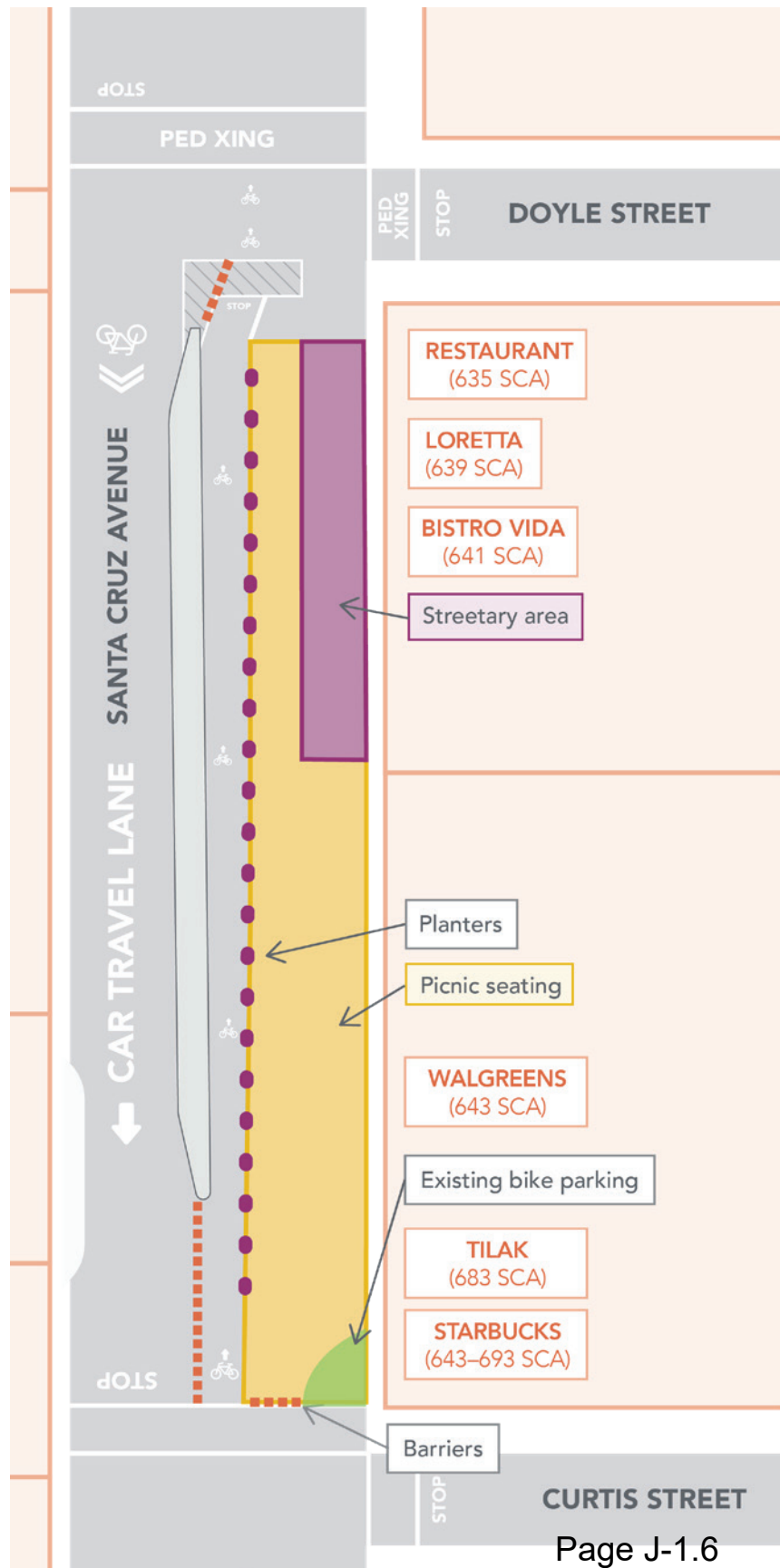
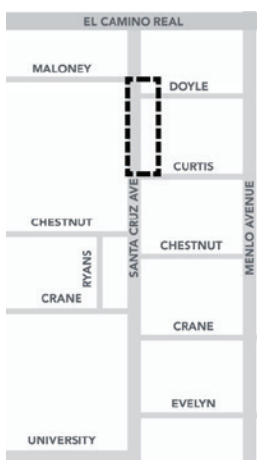




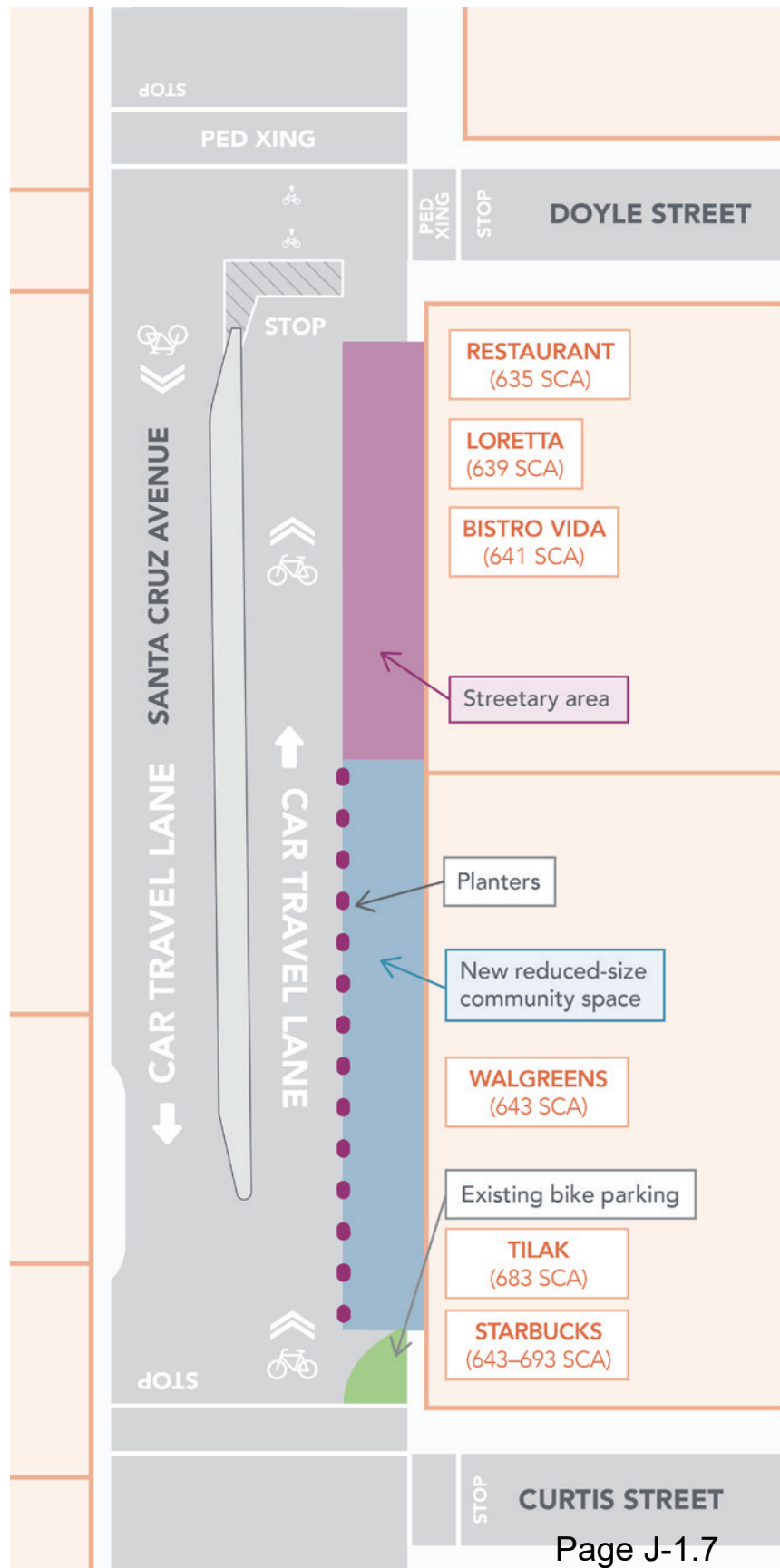
SANTA CRUZ AVENUE

600 BLOCK OPTION 1

- Continue with Phase 2 development of plaza structures including stage, lighting, accessibility improvements, planters, etc.
- Proceed with contract execution with landscape architect/consultant
- Maintain dedicated bike lane



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600 BLOCK OPTION 3



- Open eastbound vehicle travel lane with shared bike lane
- Repurpose current bistro and picnic tables to other areas of the City

