



San Francisco



# Technical Assistance Panel

St. Helena, California  
March 13-14, 2023

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*Cover Image: Downtown St. Helena Main Street<sup>A</sup>*

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## About ULI

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The Urban Land Institute (ULI) is a global, member-driven organization comprising more than 45,000 real estate and land use professionals dedicated to advancing ULI's mission of shaping the future of the built environment for transformative impact in communities worldwide.

ULI's interdisciplinary membership of professionals from private enterprise and the public sector representing all

aspects of the industry, including developers, property owners, investors, architects, urban planners, public officials, real estate brokers, appraisers, attorneys, engineers, financiers, and academics. Established in 1936, ULI has a presence in the Americas, Europe, and Asia Pacific regions, including over 2,100 members in ULI San Francisco ([sf.uli.org](https://sf.uli.org)).

## About ULI TAPs

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The ULI San Francisco Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) program is an extension of the national ULI Advisory Services program. ULI's advisory services panels provide strategic advice to clients (public agencies, nonprofit organizations, or nonprofit developers) on complex land use and real estate development issues. The program links clients to the knowledge and experience of ULI and its membership.

Since 1947, ULI has harnessed the technical expertise of its members to help communities solve difficult land use, development, and redevelopment challenges. Since 1982, ULI San Francisco has adapted this model for use at the local level, delivering 51 TAPs.

TAPs include extensive preliminary briefings followed by an intensive two-day, in-person working session in the client's community. A detailed briefing package and guided discussion are provided by the client to each TAP panelist in advance of each working session. In these sessions, ULI's expert panelists tour the study area, interview stakeholders, and address a set of questions proposed by the client about a specific development issue or policy barrier within a defined geographic area. The product of these sessions is a final presentation and report, which presents highlights of the panel's responses to the client's questions, as well as a diverse set of ideas and suggestions. Learn more at:

[sf.uli.org/get-involved/technical-assistance-panels](https://sf.uli.org/get-involved/technical-assistance-panels).



# St. Helena Technical Assistance Panel

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# ULI San Francisco

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- Frank Fuller, Co-Chair
- Kara Gross, Co-Chair
- Mariana Ricker, Vice Chair

## ULI Staff

- Joy Woo, Senior Director
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Panelists during work sessions.



# City of St. Helena Acknowledgments

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## Lead City Staff

- Anil Comelo, City Manager
- Maya DeRosa, Community Development Director

## Public Officials Engaged

- Paul Dohring, Mayor
- Eric Hall, Vice Mayor
- Anna Chouteau, Council member
- Lester Hardy, Council member
- Billy Summers, Council member
- Joe Leach, Public Works Director
- Dave Jahns, Parks and Recreation Director

## Site Tour Guides

- Aaron Hecock, Senior Planner
- Stephanie Smithers, St. Helena Chamber of Commerce



*Panelists, city staff, and ULI staff on the site tour.*



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## Executive Summary and Key Takeaways

The City of St. Helena engaged ULI San Francisco to convene a Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) of multidisciplinary experts from around the Bay Area to advise on the revitalization of the city's downtown. The city provided four questions to the panel about the town's identity, placemaking opportunities, and the development of a decision-making framework to support economic growth. The questions were as follows:

1. *What are downtown St. Helena's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT analysis) that should be incorporated into placemaking?*
2. *What should St. Helena's distinctive brand be? How should St. Helena differentiate itself as a distinctive destination city in the wine country region?*
3. *How can the placemaking effort interact with the city's current plan and land use regulations?*
4. *What is a potential decision-making framework that can guide city officials in implementing the placemaking, place-branding and urban design perspectives? How can existing city tools and measures be leveraged, modified, or updated to support implementation?*

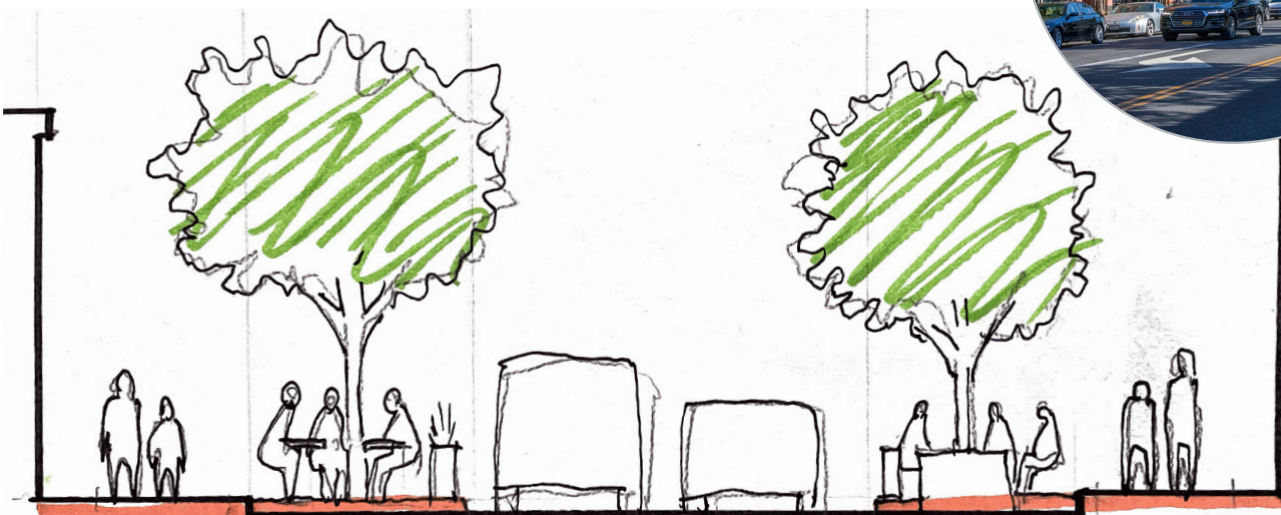
The two-day workshop included a day of exploration in St. Helena's historic downtown, as well as interviews with key stakeholders, both of which provided background on the city's business environment, community sentiment, past planning efforts, and institutional challenges impeding progress. The panelists spent the remaining time discussing potential solutions and forming recommendations that were presented at the end of the workshop.

The problem the panel considered was how could Downtown St. Helena re-energize its economy to be more vital, better serve locals and tourists, and develop a unique place brand within the regional competitive context.

St. Helena has extraordinary character and wealth of resources, but is currently performing below its full potential. The panelists applied their diverse professional expertise to analyze the opportunities and constraints facing the city and to identify a set of strategies and recommendations for St. Helena to accomplish its goals.



Image of Main Street today ©



Panelist sketch of a reimagined Main Street.

**First, the panel looked at St. Helena’s identity within the Napa Valley region and as perceived by its own residents.** The panel observed that St. Helena’s existing brand identity is not fully aligned with the authentic identity as recognized and lived by the community. The panel recommends that the city work directly with members of the community to define who they are as a collective, what they want to be in the future, and how to best share St. Helena’s unique culture and historic roots with the rest of the world. See ‘Identity’ for more ([page 18](#)).

### KEY TAKEAWAY: Build the Brand Together

- Ensure St. Helena’s brand is an authentic representation of its [distinctive character](#) and the diversity of the community.
- Recognize a [user experience](#) that is good for residents is good for visitors.
- Support [culture-building](#) events that celebrate local arts and encourage inclusivity.
- Engage residents to collectively participate in St. Helena’s [vision setting](#) for the future.

**Second, the panel discussed the power of placemaking to transform Main Street and the greater downtown district.** The panel observed that there is more to St. Helena’s downtown than just a “Main Street” and suggested that future improvements should build toward creating a legible, connected network of streets with an emphasis on generating a pedestrian fabric of interconnected spaces, destinations, and “discovery ways.” This concept relies on celebrating connectivity through laneways to parallel streets and rethinking the proposed Main Street sidewalk project to be more focused as a public realm development project; providing more space for social interaction,



circulation, and visible economic activity in the public realm; and generating improved brand vitality along with a unique guest experience.

The panelists also considered the balance of land uses throughout the district and recommended catalytic development concepts to be undertaken on readily available opportunity sites that would add vibrancy and serve the needs of St. Helena’s residents and visitors alike. See ‘Placemaking’ for more ([page 22](#)).

### KEY TAKEAWAY: More than just Main Street

- Place the existing sidewalk improvement project on hold and [reimagine Main Street](#).
  - Allocate more space to pedestrians.
  - Explore the implementation of a flexible zone in the parking lane.
  - Revisit the Vine Trail bike route to potentially go down Main Street.
- Think beyond Main Street, and consider the entire [downtown network](#) of streets.
  - Reconsider the closure and pedestrianization of Hunt Avenue.
  - Activate parallel streets, alleys, and laneways with simple, low-cost strategies.
- Strategically develop key [opportunity sites](#) to increase the vitality of St. Helena’s downtown and expand the following land uses:
  - [New boutique hotels](#)
  - [Mixed use and affordable housing](#)
  - [Creative pop-up partnerships](#)

**Third, the panel considered the economic strategy that could yield the greatest success in revitalizing the city’s downtown.** The panelists noted that far more projects exist than the city has capacity to execute at this time. The lack of human resources and “bench depth” has created a perception, and reality, of inaction that has been detrimental to public trust in city leadership. The panelists observed, however, that there is an emerging political alignment and will to implement as much as possible of the existing plans. Using their experience from other cities, the panelists recommended tools to help the city make decisions about which downtown revitalization projects to prioritize and how to build long-term economic sustainability. See ‘Decision Making’ for more ([page 36](#)).

### KEY TAKEAWAY: Any Action is Better than Inaction

- Establish a [project evaluation process](#) to determine which projects to pursue and prioritize.
- Separate projects into two categories for those that are [“big deals”](#) versus [“small wonders.”](#)
  - “Big deals” include large infrastructure improvements and opportunity site development
  - “Small wonders” include public art, lighting, planters, temporary installations, etc.
- Develop a unified economic development strategy, and [process tools](#) to measure progress.
- [Leverage existing funding sources](#) that are under the [city’s control](#).
- Explore more complex [financing strategies](#) that [require voter approval](#), only after demonstrating clear progress to the community.
- [Take a red pen to the zoning code update](#) to ensure that it supports the city’s economic strategy and stated long-term goals.

St. Helena is a town with a storied past, incredible setting, and many historic structures. However, it has resisted changes that would have been necessary to help it maintain its relevance and economic sustainability in the region. St. Helena’s state of arrested development was highlighted by the region’s post-pandemic recovery. The panel observed that with all its intrinsic assets, St. Helena can look forward to a more vibrant future if the community can forge a shared vision for what it should be and commit to enacting constructive improvements quickly and with momentum. The recommendations from this ULI TAP are, in essence, a guide to finding that “north star”: a shared vision, along with the incremental steps needed to reach it.



City landmarks—the St. Helena Hotel and the Culinary Institute of America. <sup>D</sup>



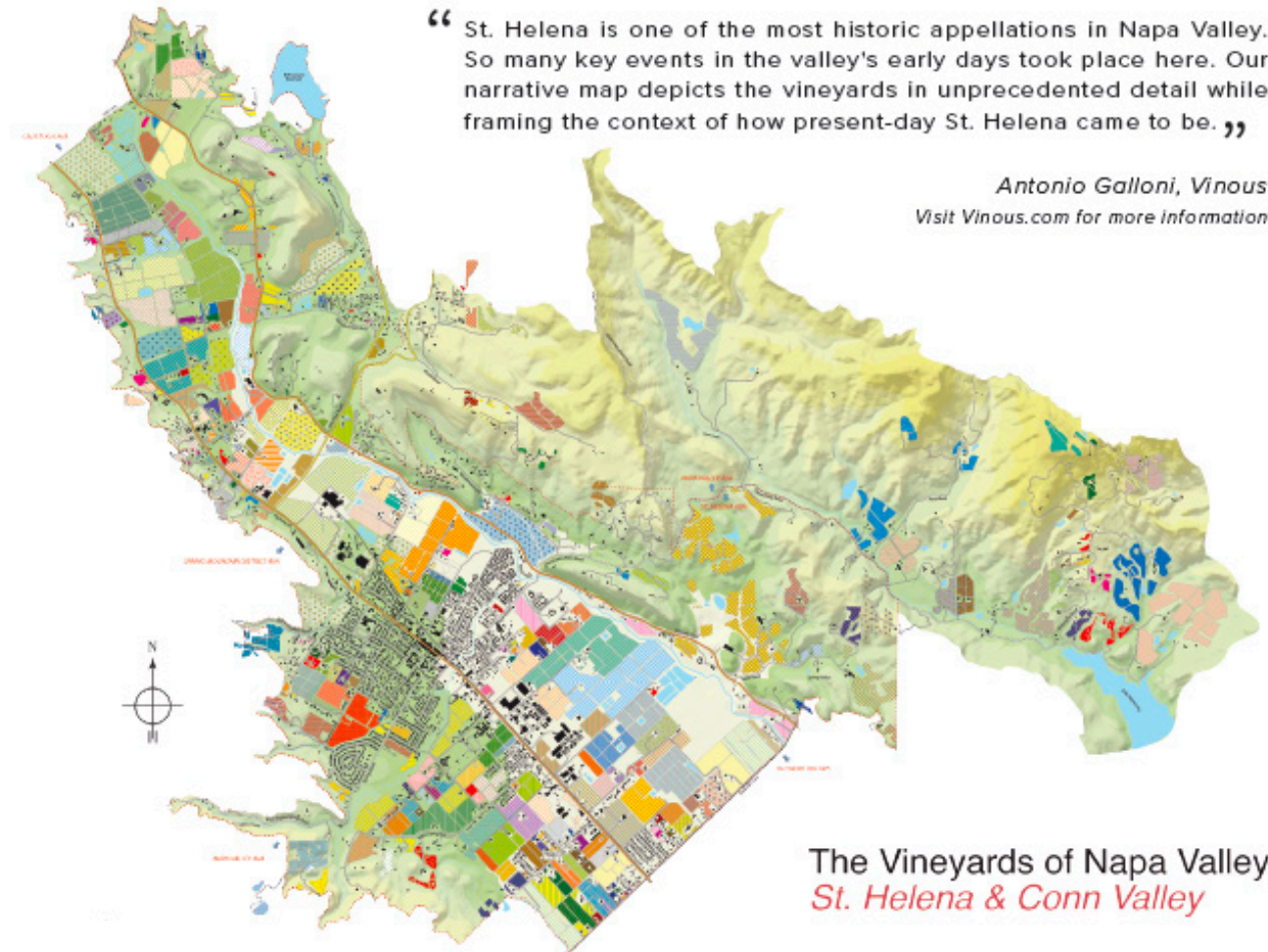
# Context

The City of St. Helena is one of several appellations within the world-renowned food and wine destination of the Napa Valley. With its historic small-town charm, boutique shopping, and numerous wineries, St. Helena attracts both local and international visitors. It is also the home of the prestigious Culinary Institute of America, numerous historically significant buildings, and a community of 5,386 residents.<sup>1</sup>

## History of the Site Area

The land around St. Helena was historically the home to the Wappo people, a Yukiian-speaking group whose village was located where Sulphur Creek meets the Napa River. With initial development dating back to the mid-1800s, the City of St. Helena was incorporated in 1876 and reincorporated in 1889.<sup>2</sup>

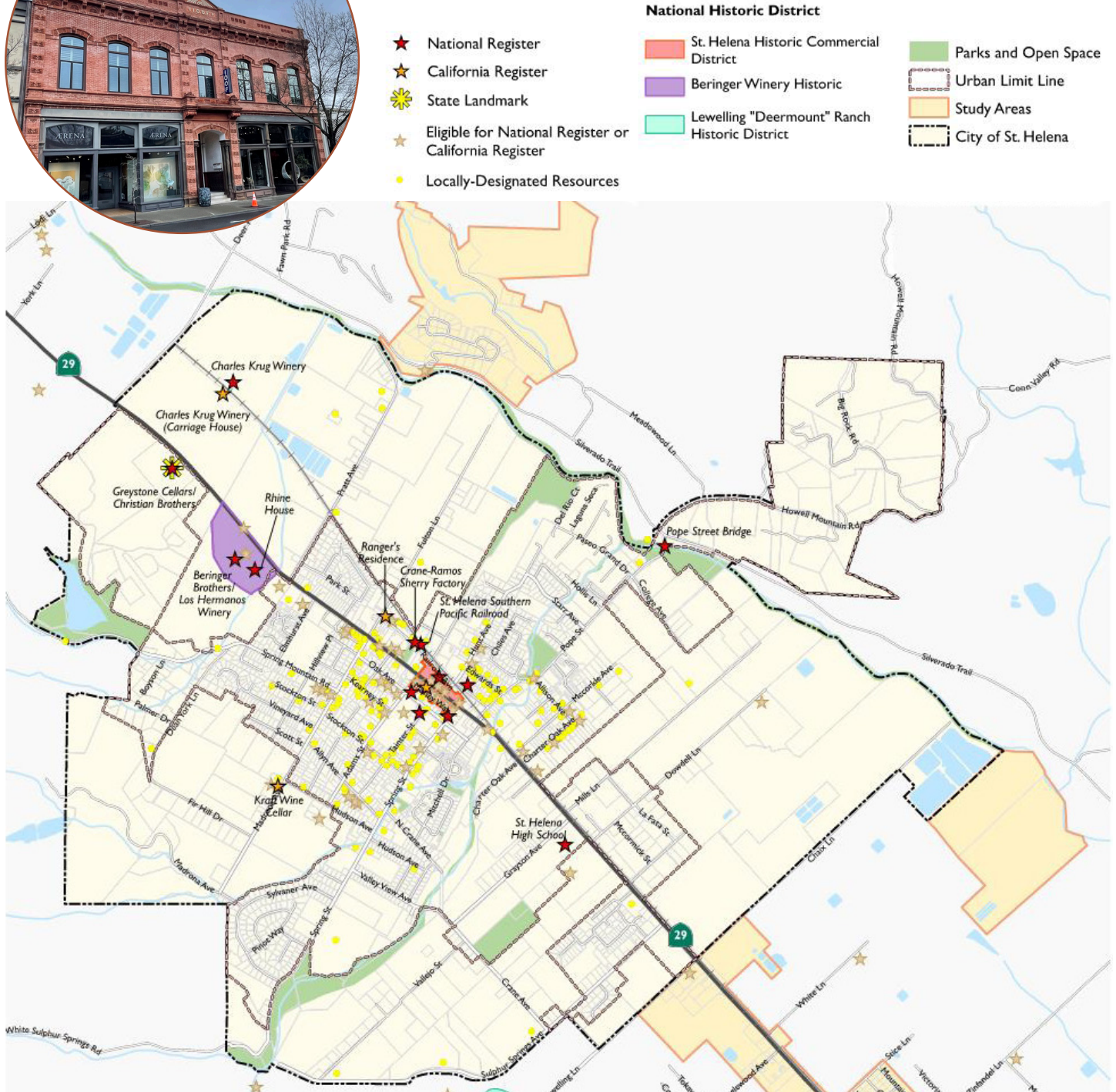
At the center of the growing California wine industry, St. Helena's Main Street became a vibrant commercial core to support the expansive agricultural operations of the surrounding vineyards. Many of these buildings, constructed in the late 19th century, still exist today and define the historic character for which St. Helena is known. Three blocks of St. Helena's downtown district, around Main Street, were placed on the National Register of Historic Places and were designated a Historic Commercial District in 1998.<sup>3</sup> A number of unique historic buildings are individually registered as well, and many of the single-family neighborhoods surrounding the downtown have maintained their original architectural styles.



Map of the Napa Valley appellations and vineyards. <sup>E</sup>



Site tour image of one of St. Helena's signature historic buildings on Main Street.



City of St. Helena Historic Resources (excerpt from General Plan Update).<sup>F</sup>

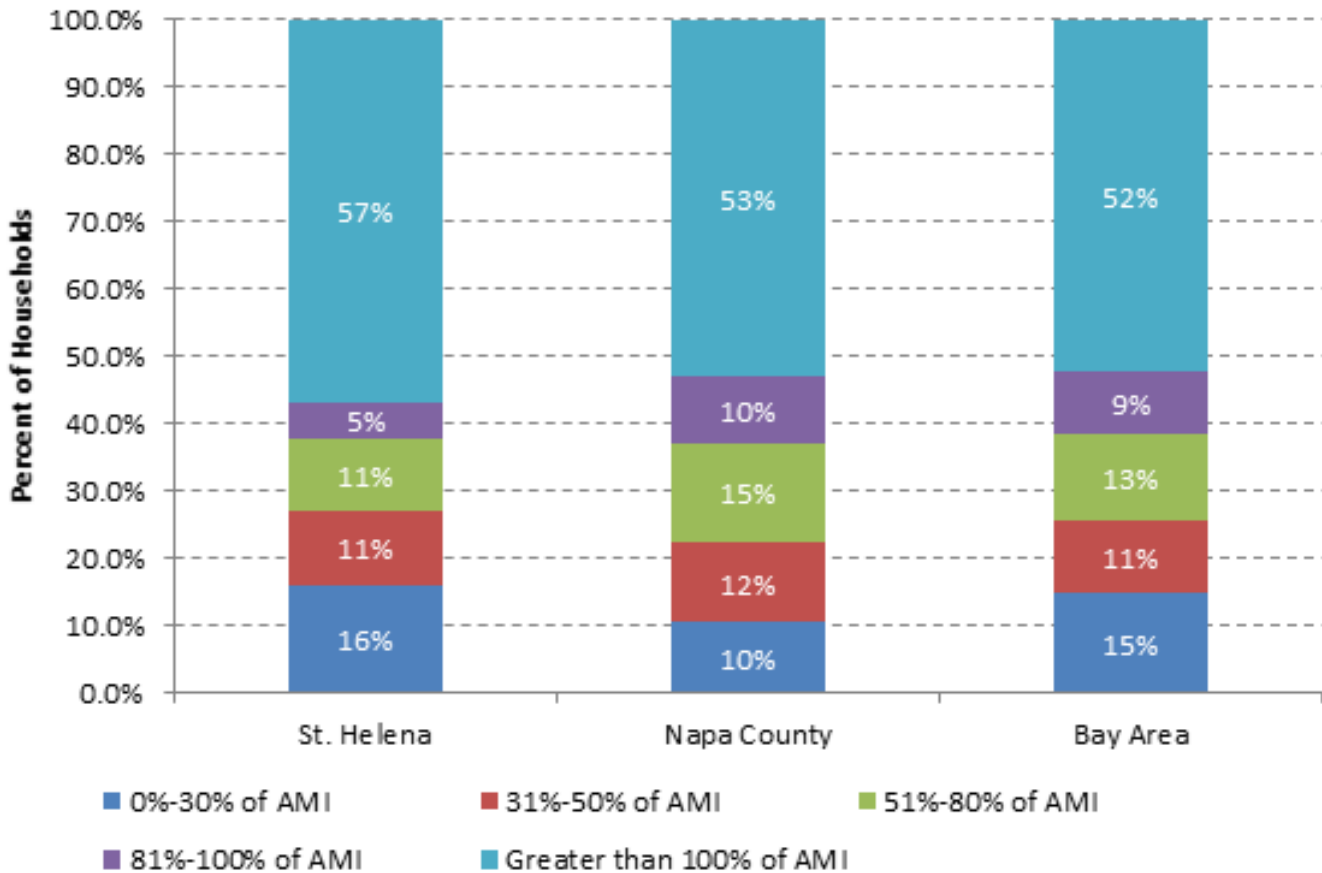


### Demographics and Economics

St. Helena’s population growth has slowed over the past couple of decades as the proportion of younger families has declined and home prices have increased. The majority of the resident community makes more than the area median income (AMI),<sup>4</sup> is middle-aged, and lives in single-family homes that are more often owned than rented.<sup>5</sup> These demographic trends suggest that St. Helena’s housing market has grown stagnant compared with the market in some of the neighboring Valley towns and Napa itself, the impacts of which are felt most strongly by younger families, lower-wage earners, and renters of all ages.

At the same time, St. Helena has seen a lack of significant growth in the commercial sector. While the city continues

to have a robust retail market, with an estimated \$48,000 in retail sales per capita per year—more than double that of both Calistoga and Napa<sup>6</sup>—it has also developed a reputation for being anti-growth when it comes to new development, and particularly with regard to new hotels. This sentiment, born of residents’ opposition, has been reflected in the city’s policies and priorities to date. Both of these slowing growth patterns have placed St. Helena out of sync with its neighboring towns and competitors. Calistoga, for example, has recently opened several new hotels; Yountville continues to make a name for itself with world-class dining; and Napa has made significant investments in its downtown.



Households by household income level, based on AMI. <sup>6</sup>



### Summary of Stated Challenges

The city recognizes that these trends will continue to negatively affect St. Helena’s long-term fiscal health and the vitality of its downtown. As it continues to recover from COVID-19, the city needs to develop new sources of funding to address some of the outstanding issues that its residents and visitors are facing.

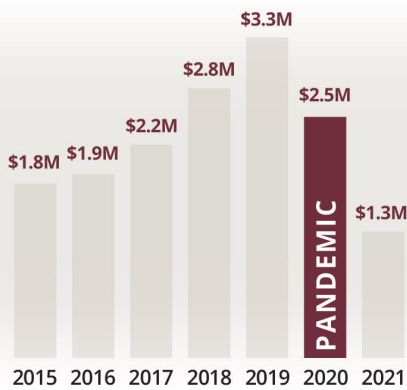
Many of St. Helena’s challenges are related to the physical environment and the lack of any recent investment in the public realm. The sidewalk disrepair on Main Street

is an ongoing problem with legal implications; there is a perception that downtown has a parking problem; and the existing public open space is underused and insufficient as far as providing a permanent place for the community to gather. Along the heavily retail-dominated Main Street, stores close early, contributing to a lack of activation and vitality in the evenings.

Numerous planning efforts over the past several years, as well as those currently underway, have attempted to address these challenges.

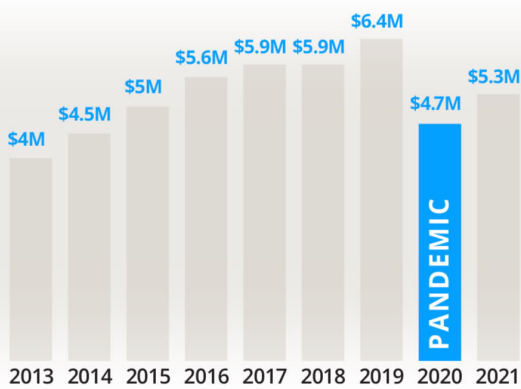
#### St. Helena TOT totals

Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT): a levy visitors pay on each hotel room night



#### Calistoga TOT totals

Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT): a levy visitors pay on each hotel room night



TOT income comparison between St. Helena and Calistoga. <sup>H</sup>



Site photo showing disrepair of sidewalks (top) and vacant storefront (bottom) on Main Street.

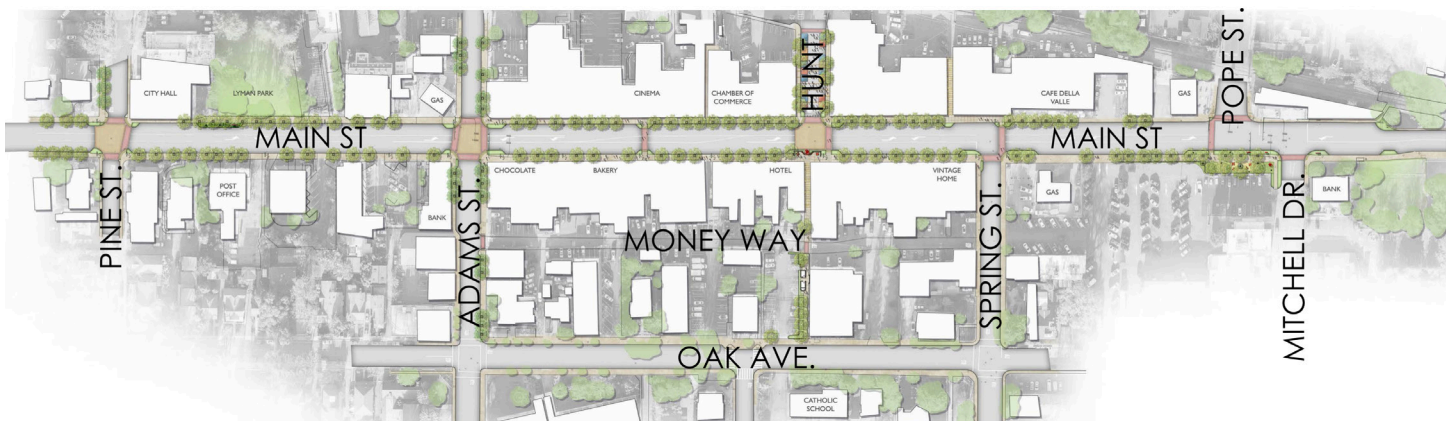
### Overview of Planning Efforts

The General Plan was adopted in 2019 to provide a blueprint for future growth, and the city is currently undergoing a Comprehensive Zoning Code Update. The effort has involved input from stakeholders, with a draft issued for public review last fall and anticipated adoption in the fall of 2023.<sup>7</sup>

In addition, the city underwent a visioning and placemaking effort in 2019 called “Cultivate St. Helena”.<sup>8</sup>

A key component of this endeavor was the Downtown Streetscape Plan, which focused on the repair and replacement of the damaged Main Street sidewalks. Specific studies have also been conducted to consider the expansion of the Vine Trail and the potential redevelopment of certain city-owned properties.

In spite of these varied planning efforts, there continues to be a lack of a unified plan for the revitalization of downtown St. Helena as a whole.



“Cultivate St. Helena” planning process infographic and preferred plan for Main Street.<sup>1</sup>



## TAP Assignment and Process

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This ULI TAP was convened to assist the City of St. Helena with the challenges it is facing and provide input on branding, placemaking, fiscal strengthening, and decision-making strategies that will support necessary reinvestment in the city's downtown.

The panel was composed of real estate professionals with expertise in urban design, development, the public sector, and finance. As background, the panelists were provided with a comprehensive briefing booklet to inform and assist with addressing the following questions asked by the city:

- 1. What are downtown St. Helena's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT analysis) that should be incorporated into placemaking?**
- 2. What should St. Helena's distinctive brand be? How should St. Helena differentiate itself as a distinctive destination city in the wine country region?**
- 3. How can the placemaking effort interact with the city's current plan and land use regulations?**
- 4. What is a potential decision-making framework that can guide city officials in implementing the placemaking, place-branding and urban design perspectives? How can existing city tools and measures be leveraged, modified, or updated to support implementation?**



City briefing presentation.

The two-day workshop began with a briefing by the City Manager and Community Development Director, followed by a tour of St. Helena's downtown with city staff and a representative from the Chamber of Commerce. The tour highlighted key opportunity sites in and around downtown, and provided the panelists with firsthand experience of walking St. Helena's historic Main Street to gain a better understanding of its condition and feel.

For the remainder of the first morning, the panelists paired up to interview a number of key stakeholders from the city and community. The insight gained from the interviews fed directly into a SWOT analysis exercise to assess St. Helena's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. This discussion established the framework upon which the panelists would formulate responses to the questions.

The second day of the workshop was dedicated to further refinement and synthesis of the panelists' responses, as each drew from their own professional experience, to provide a comprehensive set of recommendations. At the conclusion of the second day, the panelists presented their findings to a group that included the Mayor, Vice Mayor, Council members, city staff, and the stakeholders who had been interviewed the previous day.







The panelists on the site tour and in work sessions.



## Stakeholder Input

To better understand the political, business, and social context of downtown St. Helena, the TAP panelists conducted interviews in small breakout rooms with key stakeholders invited by city staff. The full list of stakeholder participants can be found [here](#).

The participants in these conversations ranged from members of the local business community to elected officials and represented a range of backgrounds with unique insights on land use, the public realm, user experience, and the city's implementation process. Across all interviews, some common themes emerged:

### History and Authenticity

Among the stakeholders, and particularly those who call St. Helena home, pride in its history and its role as “the birthplace of wine country” was evident. Due in part to the preservation of Main Street’s historic buildings, there is a sentiment that St. Helena has an authenticity and richness of character that might be lacking in some of its newer, neighboring towns throughout Napa Valley. Past community engagement efforts revealed that the town’s historic character, or “brand,” was something that the majority of residents agreed upon, along with a desire to recognize the agricultural tradition that continues today.



Site tour image of historic building plaque.

While historic character is a critical aspect of St. Helena’s identity, some stakeholders also shared that the historic designation on Main Street can present additional hurdles to implementation and change.

### Institutional Stagnation

Regardless of the sector they represented, the vast majority of stakeholders interviewed spoke to the feeling that St. Helena, and its downtown in particular, had become stagnant, with buildings that appear tired and a lack of any new energy. Several stakeholders voiced concerns that St. Helena is missing out on opportunities and could fall too far behind neighboring towns in the Napa Valley region. They expressed concerns regarding limits to the valley’s shared resources and capacity for growth.

The city has struggled with staff retention over the years and seen a loss of permanent positions in public-serving departments, such as maintenance. Frustration is growing at the lack of tangible progress despite many past planning efforts, as well as concern that the city is unable to get things done or partner with those who can.

TRAVEL INSPIRATION > FOOD + DRINK

By J'nai Gaither • March 14, 2023

## Napa Valley’s Most Exciting New Hotels, Restaurants, and Tastings

*Napa Valley has long been known for great food and drink, but several new offerings elevate this California wine region even higher.*



Article describing new hotels and restaurants around Napa Valley in neighboring cities such as Downtown Napa and Calistoga. <sup>1</sup>



### Engaged Community and Entrepreneurs

In spite of these challenges, a number of the stakeholders interviewed represented St. Helena's engaged citizenry and proactive local entrepreneurs. These community members demonstrated a clear commitment to continued investment and were confident about the capacity of the market to support new development, including at least 150 new hotel rooms.

The community members are educated and engaged in the future of St. Helena. A vocal subset of longtime residents continues to oppose growth of any kind, but another stakeholder suggested that they have begun to see a shift—with the majority of St. Helena's residents now acknowledging that something needs to be done to revitalize downtown.



Site tour images of Orin Swift tasting room renovation (left) and Wydown Hotel at the north end of Main Street. (right).

### Visitors or Residents

While it is encouraging that a growing portion of the community may be ready to see some type of change, many of the conversations alluded to, or directly referenced, a tension between change that benefits the residents of St. Helena versus the visitors who come there. Hotels are the proposed land use that has the most support from the city, but hotels primarily serve visitors and have been contentious with the community due to that fact. Residents see a loss of community-serving businesses and a need for affordable housing, and they fear that new development will exacerbate existing disparities in investment.

Finding the balance between these two groups is an ongoing challenge for the city, as it continues to rely heavily on retail sales taxes generated through tourism, while also needing support from residents to enact real, long-lasting change.





## SWOT Analysis: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats

Based on background information provided by the City, the site tour, stakeholder interviews, and independent research, the TAP panelists performed a SWOT analysis to summarize the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats facing St. Helena. This strategic planning exercise considers both internal and external factors, and lays the groundwork for the recommendations to come.

### Strengths

St. Helena's biggest strengths come from its character-defining sense of place. It is known for its historic buildings, small-town charm, natural beauty, food, and wine. This is the basis of the strong business environment that exists here.

A number of local entrepreneurs are invested in and dedicated to St. Helena, with established successful businesses, access to capital, and an appetite for more. A handful of exciting projects are in the pipeline that promise to breathe new life into Main Street and keep the retail market strong.

St. Helena has an actively involved community, with good public participation throughout past planning efforts. Small-town neighborhood events are well executed and attended, bringing together this engaged, talented, and passionate citizenry.



Rendering of the new restaurant 'NOMA House' under construction at the north end of Main Street. <sup>K</sup>



**Weaknesses**

The most visible weakness of St. Helena is the poor condition of its public realm. Limited investment has allowed public spaces, such as Lyman Park, to fall into disrepair. Main Street struggles to function as both the center of town and as a highway. It is challenged by noise pollution, aging streetscape infrastructure, and the cost of upkeep. The public realm provides a weak pedestrian and bike network and lacks identifiable gathering space and clear gateways to downtown.

While some of these issues have been considered previously, past efforts have been disconnected and demonstrate a lack of clear vision. There has been an inability to secure funding and establish key partnerships to produce results; this is partially caused by the city's lack of institutional capacity and staffing. In addition, the anti-development sentiment present in the community has manifested as prescriptive and restrictive zoning that creates unnecessary hurdles for progress.



Site tour images of neglected public realm at Lyman Park (left) and on Main Street. (right).



### Opportunities

Given that the public realm is something the city can improve, a number of opportunities exist for better placemaking. Greater investment can be made with physical improvements to activate downtown and better serve residents and visitors alike. Suggested opportunities include raising ambition for the public realm through an expanded, walkable network that engages laneways and side streets; the extension of the Vine Trail; and an increase of public art.

Several opportunities for new development on vacant or underused sites also exist. St. Helena has the market capacity to support and embrace land uses other than

hotels. Suggestions to be considered include mixed-use with affordable housing, and creative commercial endeavors. These types of land uses have the potential to make St. Helena more “livable, walkable, and workable”.

The city is also at a unique inflection point politically, with new staff members and an aligned City Council. This presents a fresh opportunity to address the need for improvements and rethink strategies for the city’s long-term sustainability. Suggestions included strategies for securing more funding sources, and building advocacy within an increasingly diverse community.



SWOT analysis working photos of the panelists.



**Threats**

A number of factors threaten the entire Napa Valley, including environmental challenges such as fire, limited water resources, and the impact of climate change on agriculture, as well as macro-economic challenges like inflation and loss of workforce availability.

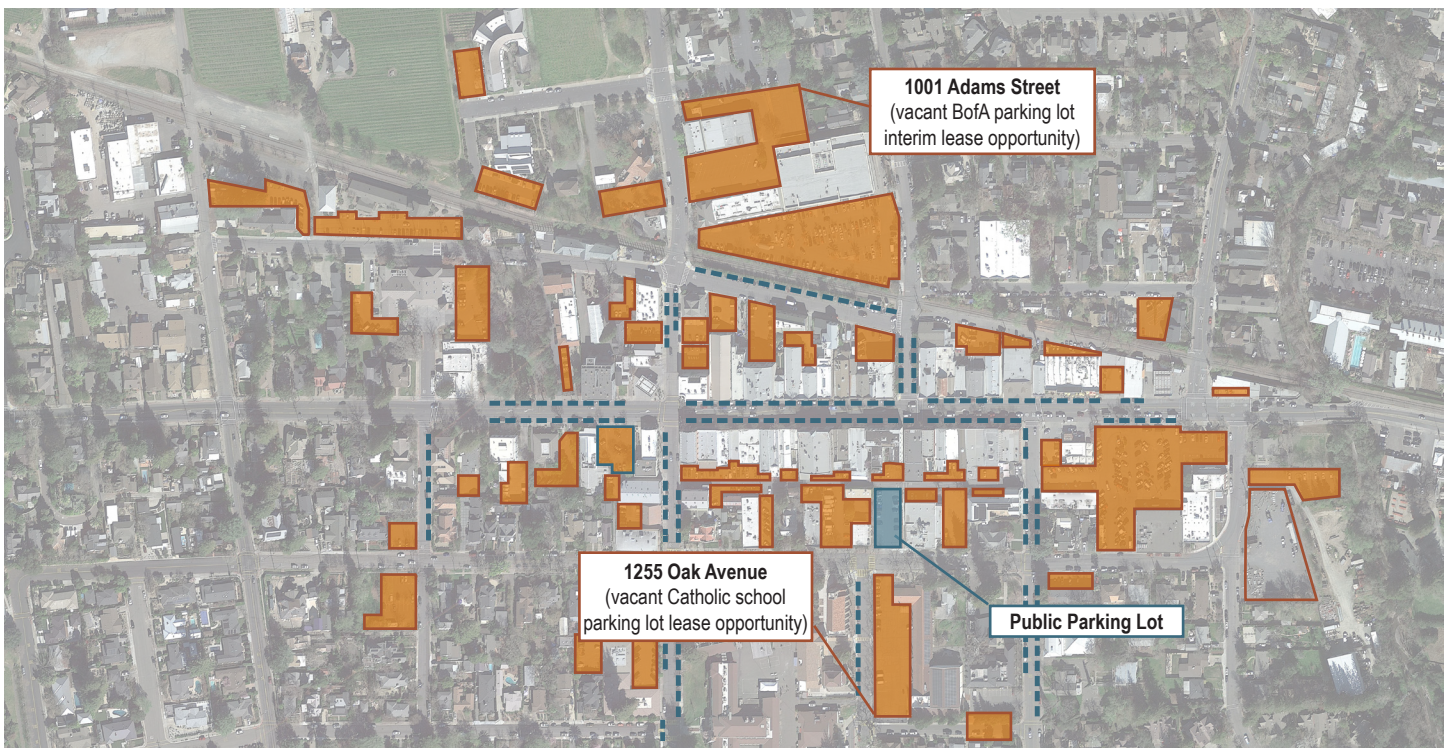
Lack of workforce housing results in difficulty for local businesses to attract talent, and a burdensome commute for many service workers, exacerbating the existing traffic congestion on Main Street.

St. Helena also faces a series of specific threats to its community, downtown, and economy. Some empty storefronts on Main Street give the impression of a weak retail market. However, the per capita taxable retail sales here are vastly higher than in any other neighboring district.<sup>9</sup> St. Helena is also a place with more compact development than that of the rural landscape around it, which leads to the impression that parking is difficult. The issue is perceived to be a lack of space for parking, but in reality there is a lack of clear signage and management

of existing parking. Nonetheless, these false perceptions pose very real difficulties, particularly when they are used to support arguments by a particular subset of the community against progress.

Implicitly, there are tensions that hinder consensus-building within St. Helena. The most obvious tensions are between visitors and the local residents and workforce, but tensions also exist between younger and older members of the community, and between retailers and hotels. These types of conflicts can deter economic development, and without acknowledgment and resolution, the city will continue to struggle to find widespread community support for policies and progress on key projects.

The largest threat facing St. Helena is that of inaction. A lack of staffing and funding capacity has hindered the city's progress to date, and if not corrected, it risks the continued loss of market relevance and an inability to compete with neighboring towns.



*A quick aerial survey of surface parking lots revealed a potential abundance of parking areas within a five-minute walk of the downtown core—privately owned lots in orange and publicly owned lots in blue, as well as available public street parking.*

# Identity: Brand, Aspirations, and Vision

The Napa Valley region is a world-class destination, but it comprises several unique towns that each offer a distinct experience. The panel emphasized that to differentiate itself from neighboring competitors, St. Helena must build an identity that is truly authentic: a character that can only originate from and be built together with its residents. Identity is about more than St. Helena’s “brand,” it is also about the community’s vision for its future.

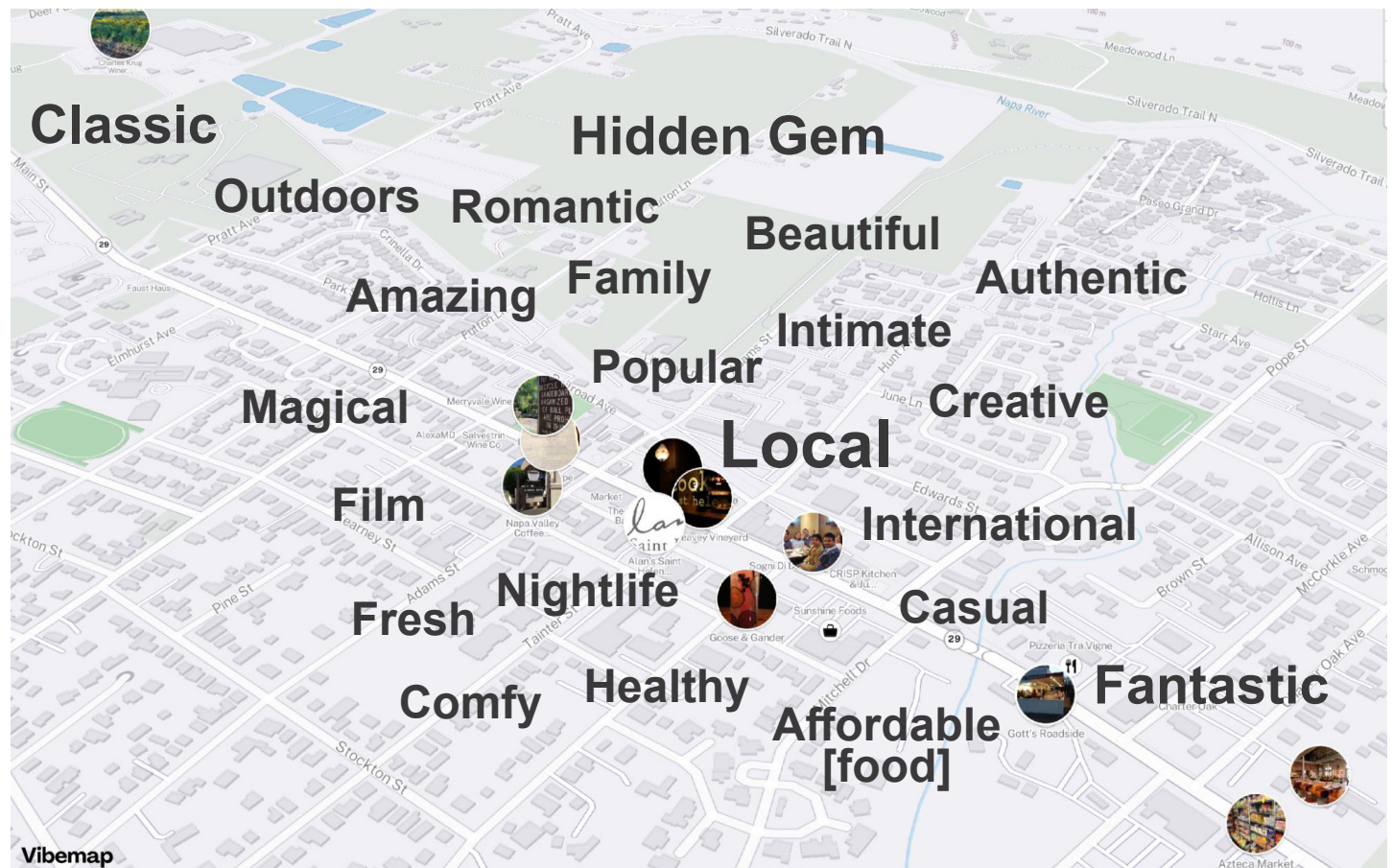


St. Helena Chamber of Commerce logo. <sup>L</sup>

## St. Helena’s Distinctive Character

With its historic legacy as the center of Napa Valley wine culture, St. Helena already has global reach and an international presence. At the same time, it has maintained its historic small-town feel with the preservation of classic buildings and the surrounding neighborhoods that are within walking distance of downtown.

St. Helena is more than a tourist town—and more than Main Street. It has a growing Latinx community, as almost 25 percent of St. Helena’s residents identify as Hispanic or Latino.<sup>10</sup> In addition to residents, a workforce population supports the tourism industry, with many of the low-wage workers (under \$25,000 annual salary) commuting here for work.<sup>11</sup> St. Helena functions as a real town with a robust school district, family-owned establishments, and community organizations. This distinctive community character reaches far beyond Main Street.



Vibemap generated from adjectives people are using online to describe specific places (examples: “affordable” food at Sunshine Foods or “nightlife” at Ana’s Cantina).



**User Experience**

Downtown St. Helena is the heart of the community. It should be the local destination for shopping and other daily needs, as well as the place where everyone comes together to socialize and gather. The user experience of residents spans all days of the week, and all times of the day and night.

In contrast, those who come to visit St. Helena have a more succinct experience. They come to the heart of Napa Valley to eat and drink, to shop, and possibly to stay. But they primarily activate the downtown on weekends and during the day. Many of St. Helena’s businesses cater

specifically to visitors’ experience during a condensed time frame, closing early and leaving downtown St. Helena without activity during off-peak times. This has led to tensions within the local community and a perception that visitor- and resident-serving uses are mutually exclusive.

Trends in tourism today, however, increasingly show that visitors want to go where they are able to live as the locals do. Therefore, what is good for the resident experience should also improve the visitor experience—and attract tourism.

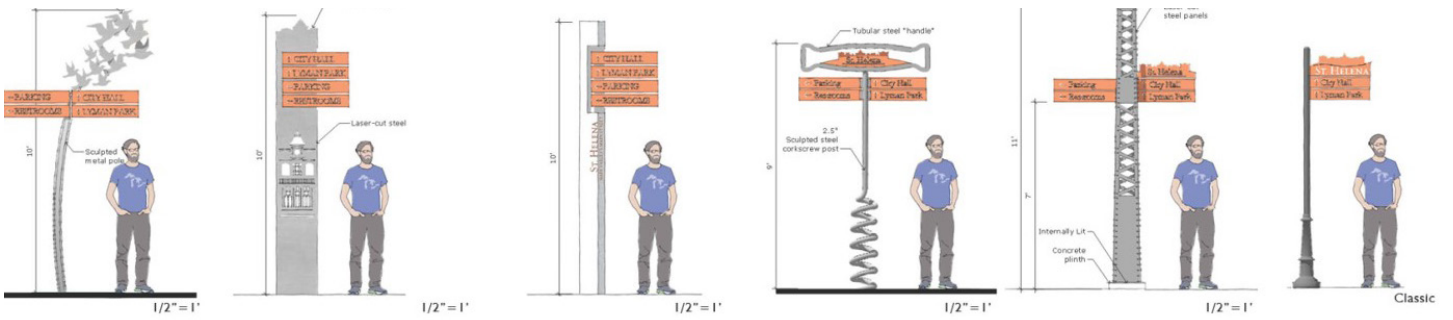


Site tour images of both local and visitor serving storefronts including a bar, gallery, shops, and theater. <sup>M</sup>









Differently themed wayfinding concepts developed as part of Cultivate St. Helena. <sup>Q</sup>



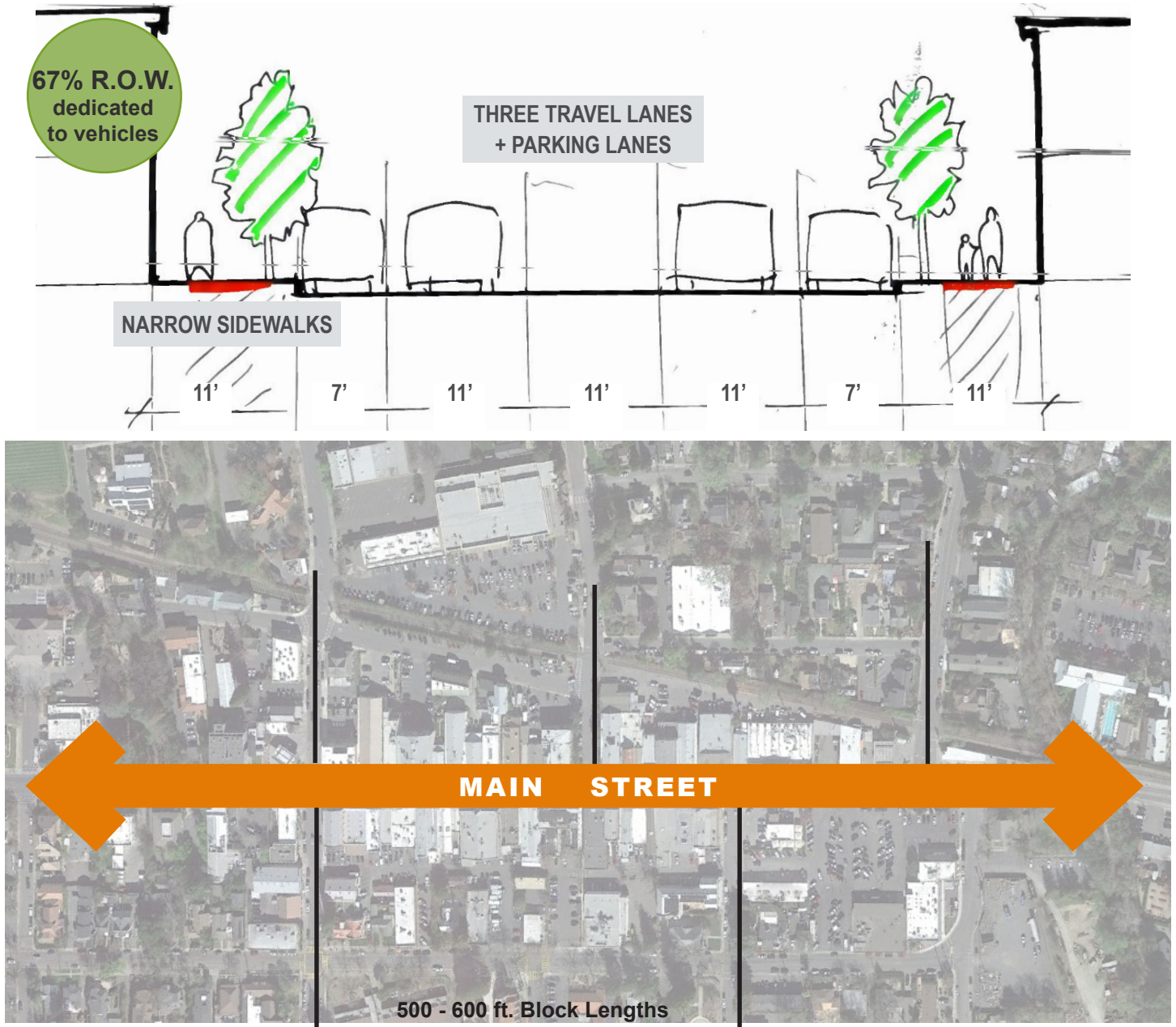
Examples of community events within St. Helena: the Holiday Wine Barrel Tree <sup>R</sup>, the farmers market, and trivia nights. <sup>S</sup>



# Placemaking: Concentrate, Connect, and Catalyze

The panel observed that St. Helena’s image of itself is too one-dimensional. St. Helena is much more than just its Main Street: it has considerable potential to express itself as a larger district and multi-layered downtown. Considering the town’s core as a larger district would create a stronger sense of place, with a wide variety of economic opportunities. Expanding the perception of downtown to include not only Main Street, but also the side

streets of Railroad Avenue and Oak Avenue, creates a rich neighborhood fabric while simultaneously strengthening Main Street’s role. Instead of a single corridor, downtown St. Helena would become a robust network of pedestrian-oriented streets and destinations, organized into loops that connect to an enhanced Main Street and focused activation at key opportunity sites.



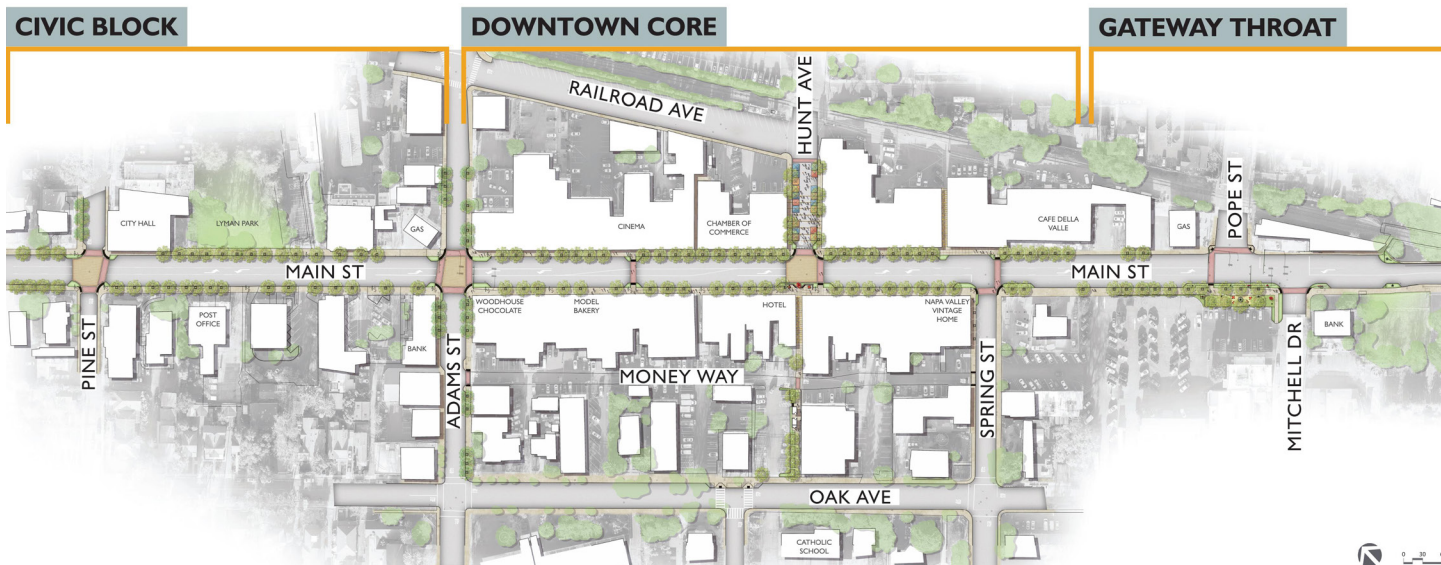
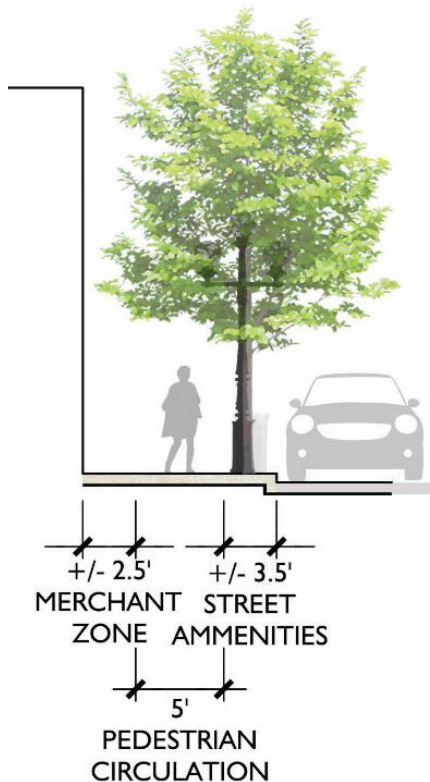
(Top) Panelist sketch of existing Main Street section with the majority of the R.O.W. dedicated to vehicular uses.

(Bottom) How the city sees its Main Street: as a corridor.

**Existing Main Street**

St. Helena’s Main Street remains the centerpiece of the downtown fabric; however, it also has a number of inherent challenges. Most significantly, it is a Caltrans highway and therefore experiences higher traffic volumes. These result in air and noise pollution, which diminish its “linger factor.” The pedestrian experience is confined to narrow sidewalks and is further challenged by long block lengths (500 to 600 feet), which are double what a comfortable pedestrian retail environment would seek to establish.

While the panel held high hopes for planned investment in Main Street, the proposed streetscape project is not much more than a sidewalk replacement project. The panel saw both an opportunity—and a considerable need—to address Main Street in a more holistic way, with sidewalk improvements, traffic calming, and an enhanced public realm as integral parts of this significant undertaking and investment. The panel recommends that the improvements project as proposed be reimagined, with a focus on making a bigger impact to Main Street’s public realm and quality of pedestrian experience.



Excerpts from the Cultivate St. Helena Downtown Streetscape plans. <sup>T</sup>  
 (Top right) Sidewalk replacement with same street section and narrow area for pedestrian circulation.  
 (Bottom) Overall streetscape plan scope area.

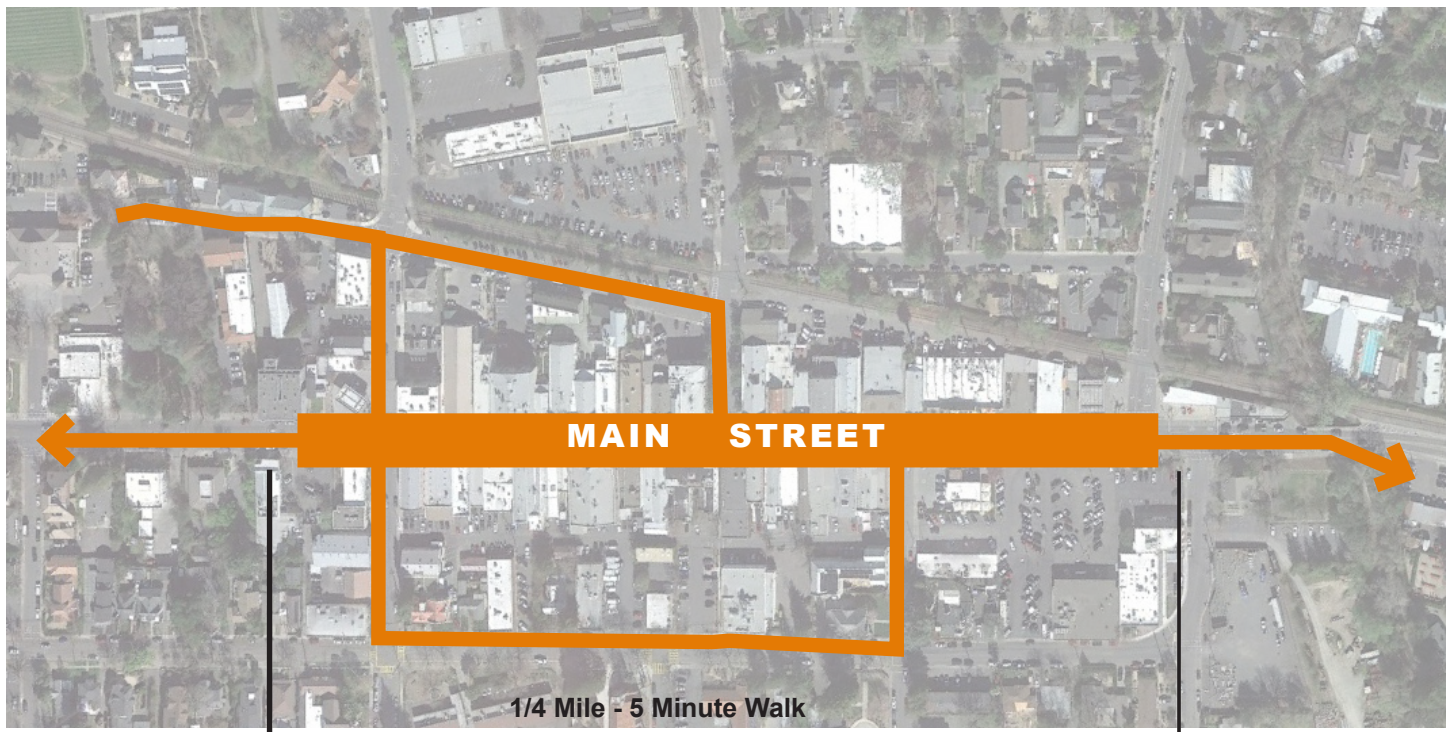
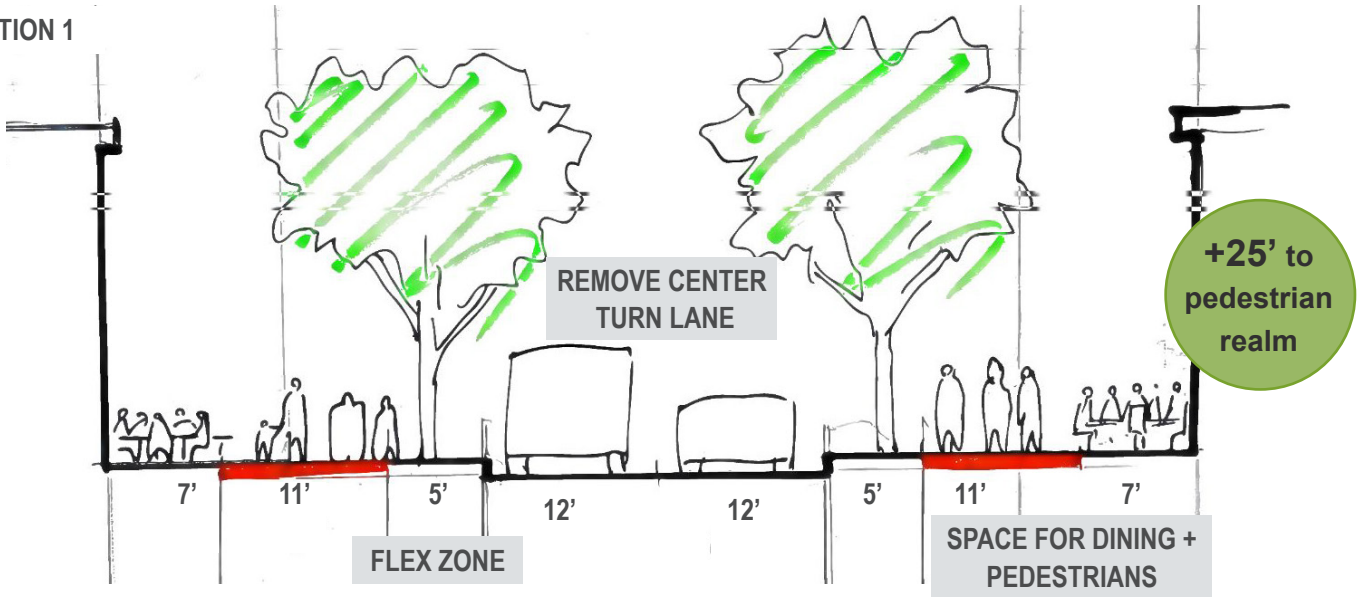


### Reimagining Main Street

There are certain constraints to working within the existing Caltrans right-of-way (R.O.W.), but the lanes and sidewalks could be reconfigured to allocate more space to the pedestrian realm within the quarter-mile between Adams and Spring streets (the blocks that comprise

the primary pedestrian core). In this segment, if the city pursues the closure and pedestrianization of Hunt Avenue from Main Street to Railroad Avenue, the center turn lane could potentially be removed to allow wider sidewalks on either side.

#### OPTION 1

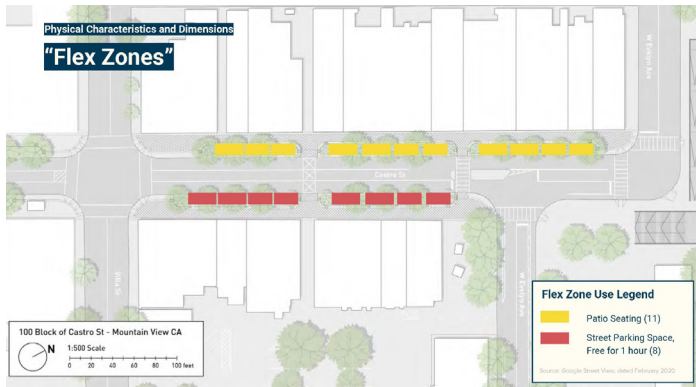


(Top) Conceptual street section of a reimagined Main Street with space reallocated to the sidewalks and flex zone.

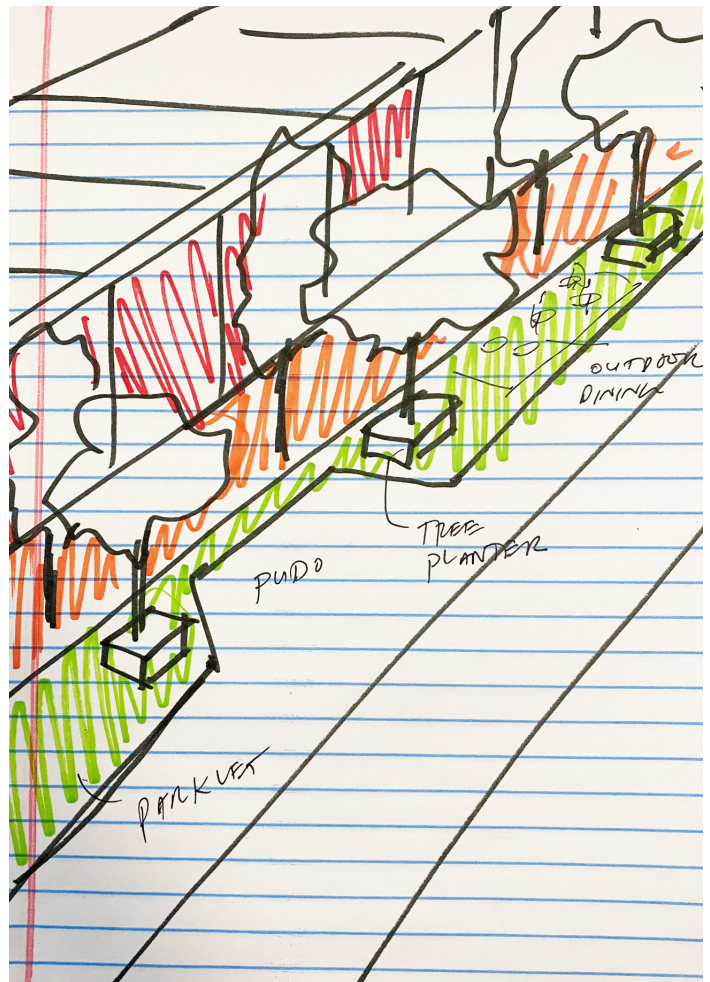
(Bottom) How the panelists see Main Street: with interconnected pedestrian prioritized loops.

In addition, solving the perception of parking scarcity will be key to unlocking opportunities for rethinking of the ROW allocation and alleviating the demand for parking space on Main Street. The parking lanes along the entirety of Main Street could then be converted to flexible zones. Flex zones take various forms, depending on their adjacencies and community-determined needs. In some areas, parking stalls may remain, particularly for ADA accessibility; elsewhere, they could accommodate service, loading, and pickup/dropoff areas, planting buffers, bike lanes, outdoor dining and retail, or a combination of amenities for pedestrians.

A case study using this strategy is the successful transformation of Castro Street in Mountain View.



Example of flex zone designations on Castro Street, Mountain View. <sup>U</sup>



Conceptual sketch of Main Street flex zone with a combination of parklets, planters, and PUDO (pick-up and drop-off) areas.



Castro Street Redesign <sup>U</sup>

**FLEX ZONE CASE STUDY:** Castro Street, Mountain View, California

*In the 1980s, Mountain View recognized that the lack of a good quality pedestrian experience was detrimental to its downtown main street—Castro Street. By expanding opportunities for parking off Castro Street, the city was able to reimagine the curb lane, planting trees 30 feet apart to either retain parking in between or provide businesses with the opportunity to occupy this “flexible zone” with dining and seating.*

*A flex zone could be an interesting solution for St. Helena’s Main Street, which could be tested using temporary measures such as parklets.*

*Today, the City is exploring further modifications to Castro Street post pandemic. Learn more about this project at: [Castro Street 100 Block Feasibility Study](#)*

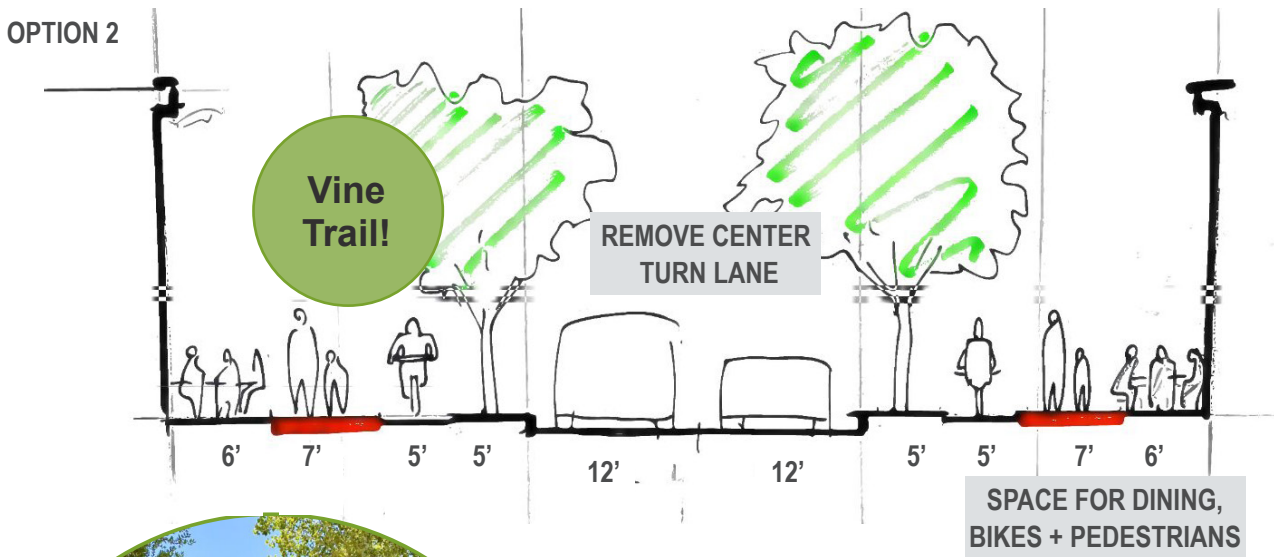


Converting Main Street into a more pedestrian-friendly street would help calm traffic in downtown St. Helena and provide a more multi-modal environment for pedestrians and cyclists. The Vine Trail alignment could also be reconsidered as part of this effort, with the opportunity to form a connection directly down Main Street.

The panel also suggested tactical improvements as a short-term way to demonstrate activation or change before committing to permanent changes. Parklets and other temporary curb lane extension strategies provide a lower-cost way of exploring modifications to the parking

lane. This type of installation could be as simple as the introduction of tree planters or a complete patio buffered from the adjacent vehicular lane.

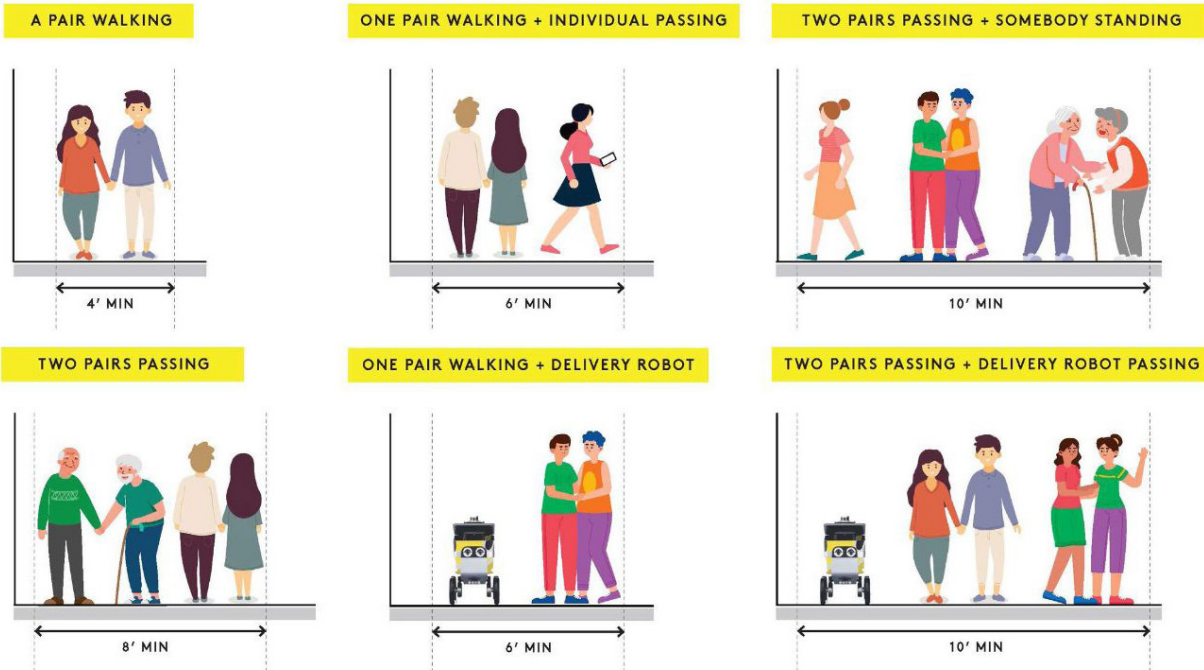
By requesting a grant extension for the One Bay Area Grant (OBAG) funds currently slated for the sidewalk replacement project and waiting for additional funding capacity, the city will ensure the best possible outcome for the public realm, making the impacts to businesses and investment of resources more worthwhile. Reimagining Main Street will create the space to support the spontaneous gathering and activation that it lacks today.



(Top) Conceptual street section of a reimagined Main Street with Vine Trail bike lane.

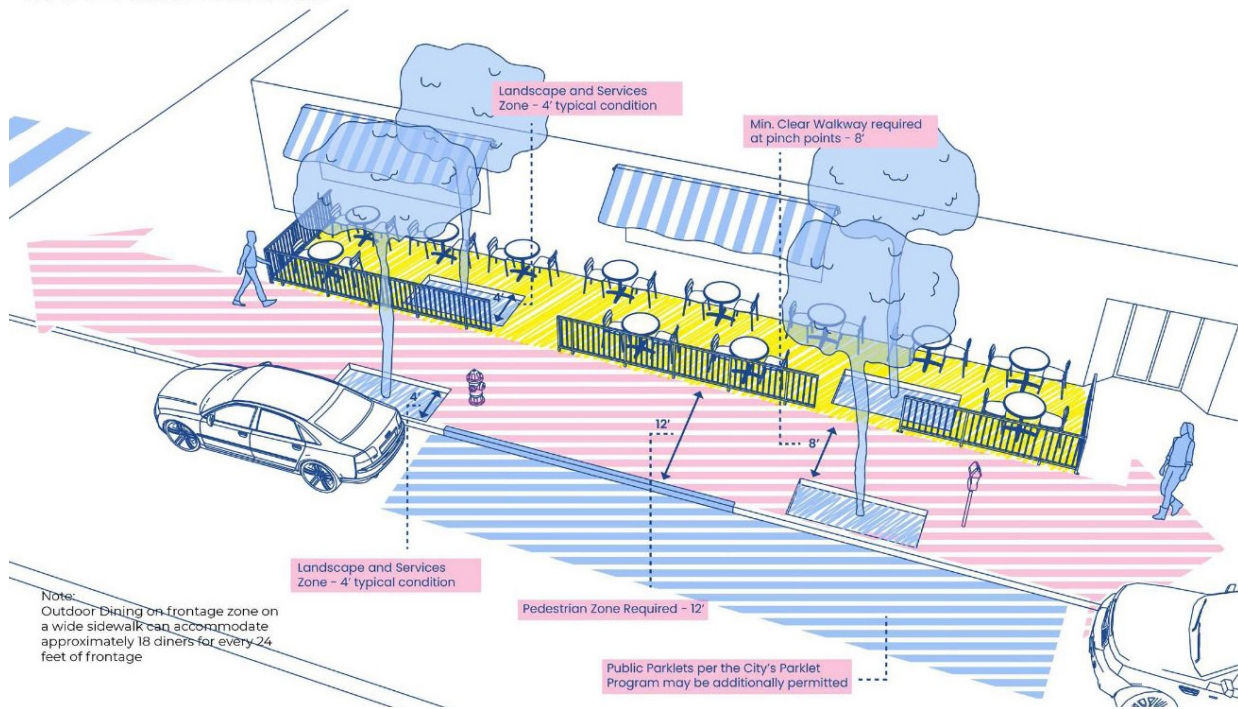
(Bottom) Precedent imagery of the Vine Trail <sup>v</sup> and sidewalk space for dining. <sup>w</sup>

## OUTZONES FRAMEWORK - PEDESTRIAN CLEARANCES



Merchandising Plan

## WIDE SIDEWALKS



Guidelines for sidewalk width and clearances to optimize the pedestrian experience. <sup>x</sup>



### The Downtown Network

Downtown St. Helena includes a network of streets that support the entire district. Main Street has several parallel streets and alleys, including Railroad Avenue, Money Way, and Oak Avenue, which are mixed use and present less traffic-intensive alternatives for pedestrians and cyclists.

With Main Street as the primary attraction in downtown, current patterns show pedestrians moving back and forth along the thoroughfare. This could be expanded to a series of walking routes or loops that include complementary side streets, alleys, and midblock laneways, bringing life and energy to existing businesses.

These supporting parallel streets also provide alternative routes that allow occasional partial street closures. Hunt Avenue was partially closed to vehicular traffic during the Hunt Avenue Hub pilot project, which provided outdoor dining opportunities during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although this intervention caused push back by some business owners, the panel encourages St. Helena to continue to consider parallel streets as opportunities for future activation to strengthen the concept of a “Downtown” (and by extension, “Main Street”), either permanently, or through more regular temporary initiatives.

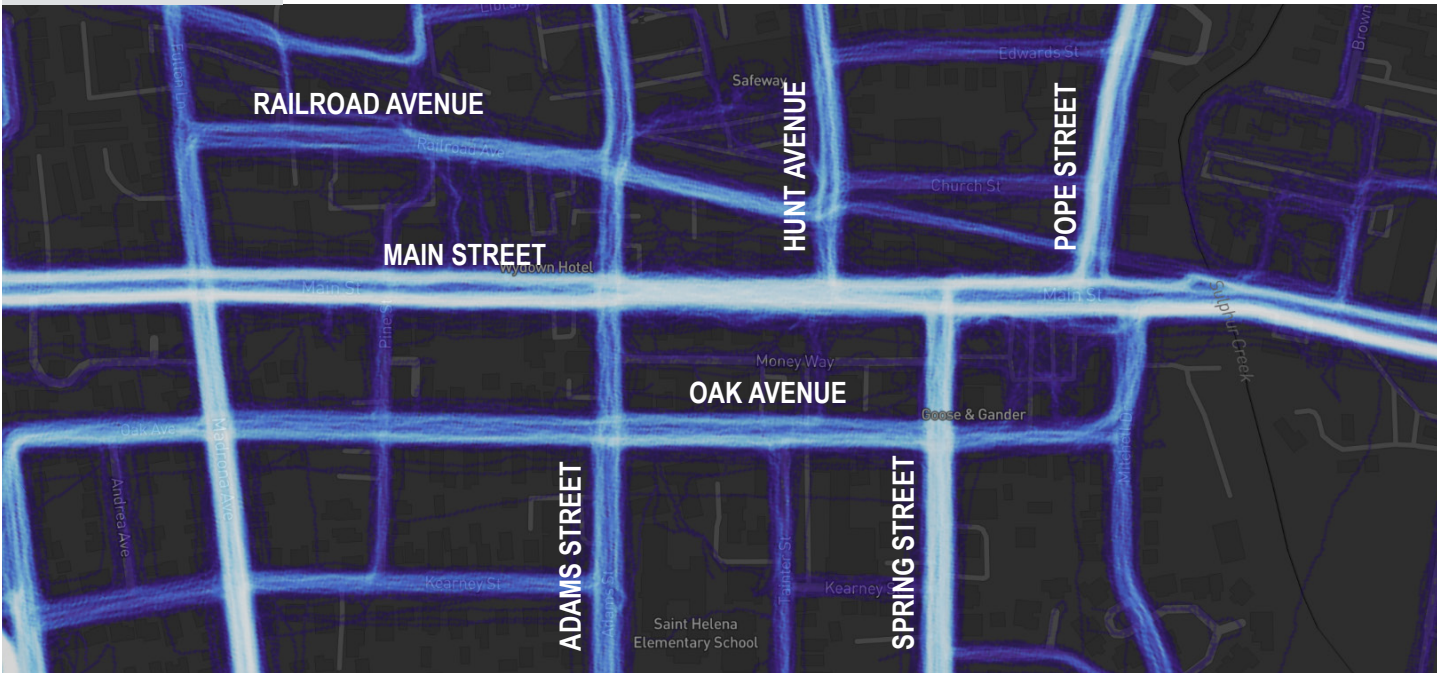
Images show pop-up dining on Money Way (left) and the Hunt Avenue Hub (right).<sup>Y</sup>



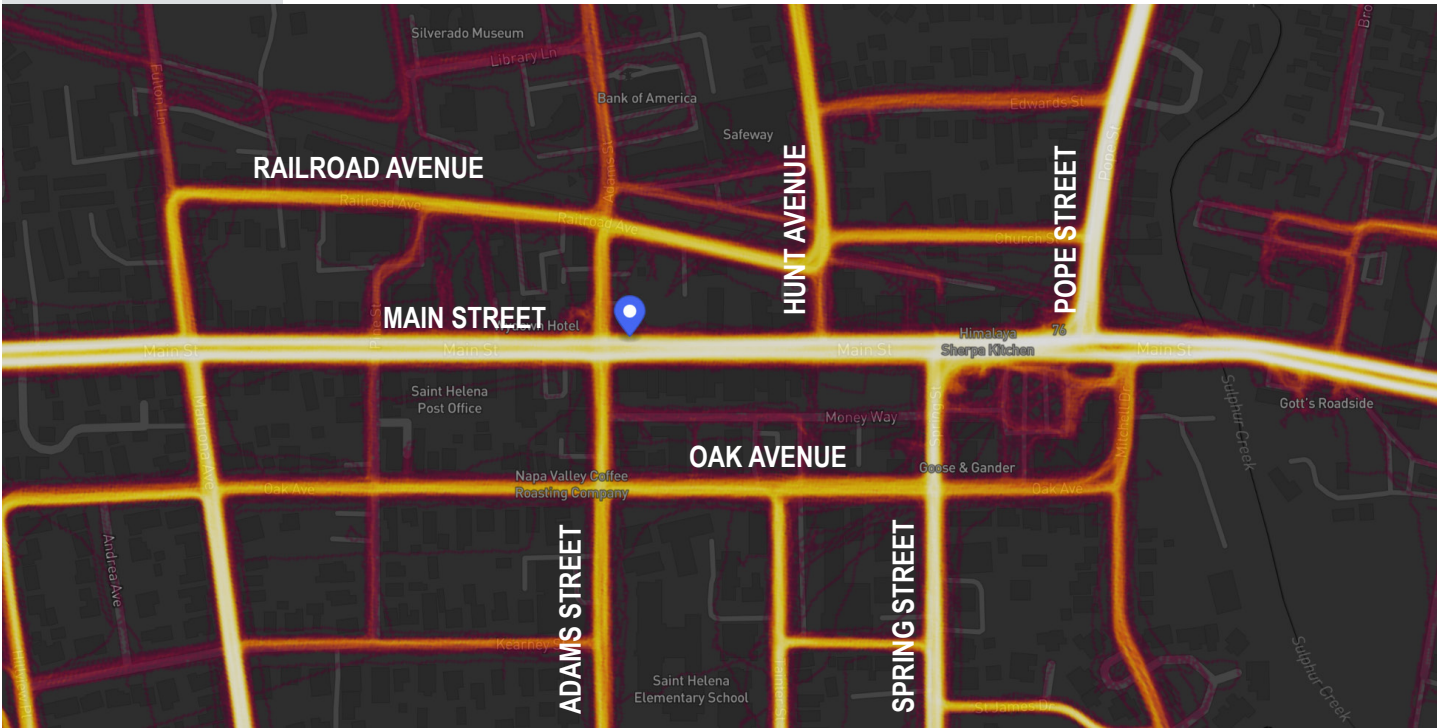
How the panelists envision a multi-modal network of streets with gateways at either end of the Main Street's core.



WALKING ROUTES



CYCLIST ROUTES



Heat map data from STRAVA demonstrates how people have already created a functional network through their use patterns.<sup>2</sup>



The panel also recommended improvements to St. Helena’s existing laneways as connections from Main Street to the parallel streets, and a strategy for creating a finer-grained, more interesting, diverse, and layered network of 300- to 400-foot blocks. In places like Melbourne, Australia, and Seattle, Washington, these narrow spaces are prime candidates for public art, intimate dining, and other forms of activation and place branding. Although once overlooked, in many cities, spaces such as these have increasingly become compelling signatures within the urban fabric for their uniquely local character and their ability to provide a variety of experiences.

“Cultivate St. Helena” examined Telegraph Alley, and a citizen-led group has already come up with several ideas for its connection to an activated Money Way. The panelists support these community-driven initiatives as a complement to larger city-led projects. However, given the

somewhat “gritty,” unconventional, and evolving nature of these spaces, the panel recommends that the city, and sponsors of projects to activate these lanes, treat them as “temporary experimental spaces.” Use simple, low-cost strategies to learn what works, what resonates, and what provides a ready point of identity for the community. The roles of these places should be “rapid prototyping” to try new ideas and create constant energy through innovation, not a long, drawn-out process that seeks perfection, risking entanglement in laborious code and design reviews.

Through investments in its alley/laneway networks and by inviting pedestrian traffic through either design interventions or simply better wayfinding, St. Helena can guide people on foot to Railroad Avenue, Money Way, and Oak Avenue, thereby creating a walking district that brings life, commerce, and energy to the greater downtown.

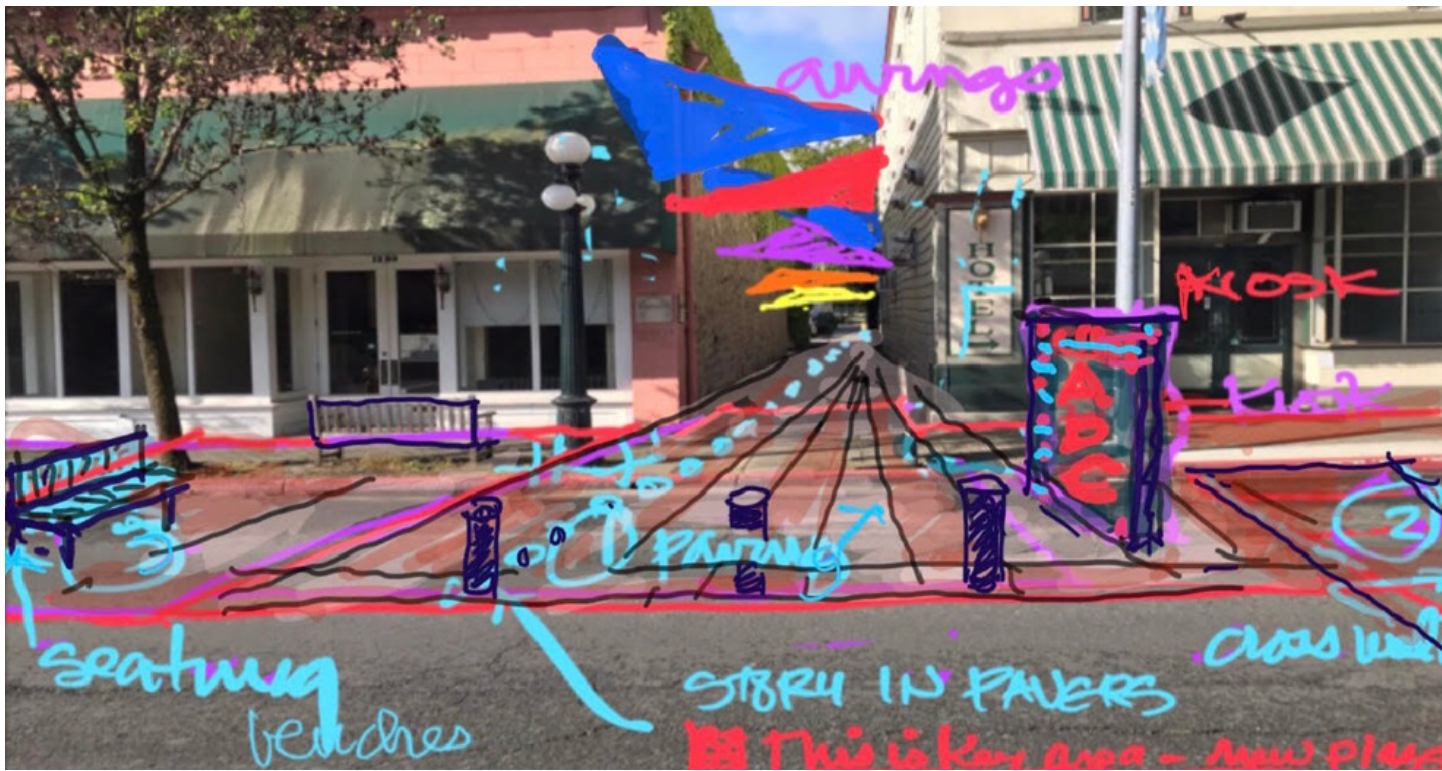


Precedent imagery of “greening” Guildford Lane in Melbourne, Australia. <sup>AA</sup>



Precedent imagery of an activated Clear Alleys in Seattle, Washington. <sup>BB</sup>





(Top) Site tour image of Telegraph Alley.  
(Bottom) Citizen-led group vision for Telegraph Alley connection to Money Way. <sup>CC</sup>



### Opportunity Catalyst Sites

In St. Helena’s downtown, a number of underused sites hold considerable potential for enhanced place branding and economic value generation through creative new development and/or activation. Some of these catalyst sites are publicly owned, whereas others are privately owned.

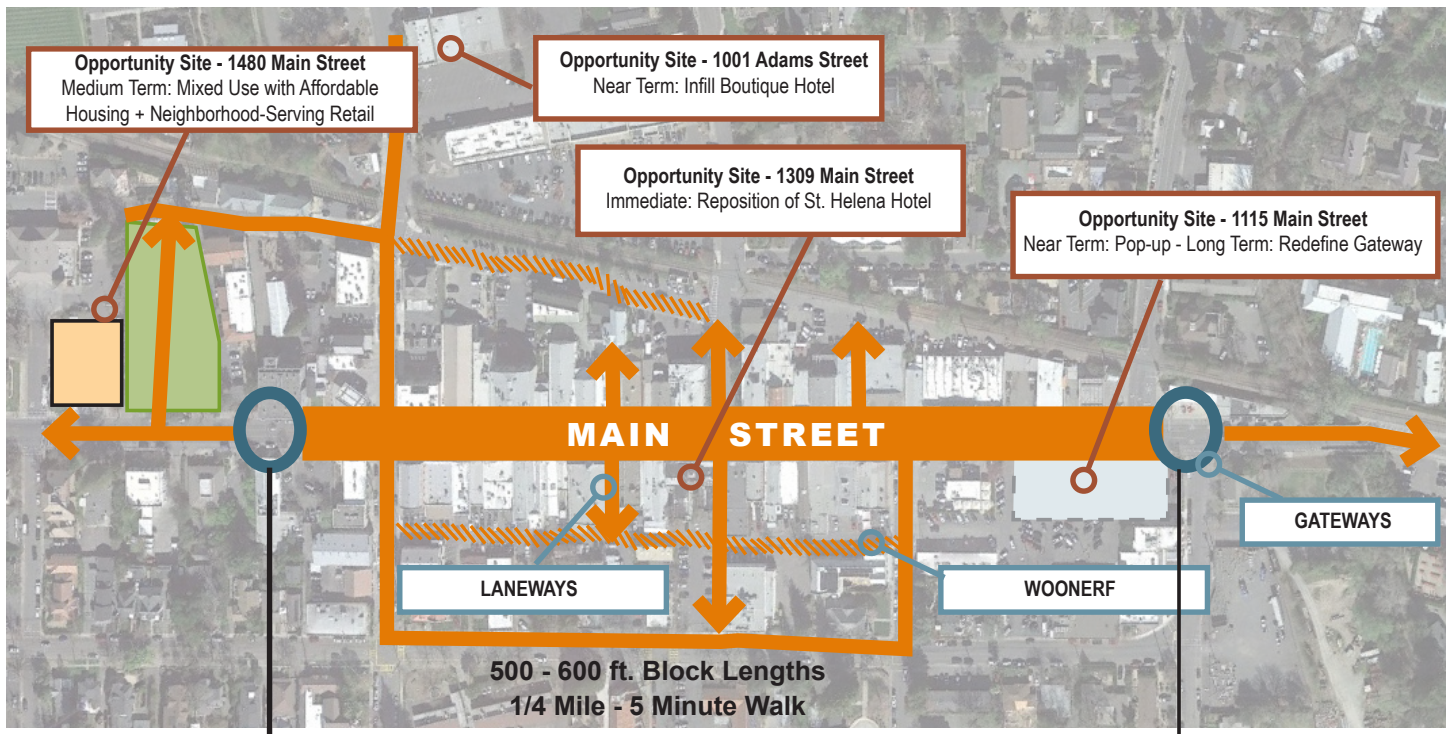
Publicly owned sites have the potential for the city to drive catalytic projects by way of strong leadership and more economic flexibility via lower land basis. Privately owned sites may require more market-driven investment strategies, but the city can be a supportive partner through aligned visioning, streamlined approvals, and (where appropriate) supportive financial incentives. The panelists considered land uses and public/private partnership strategies for these sites with a long-term economic view and a balance between visitor and resident priorities.

#### Hotel Uses: 1309 Main Street & 1001 Adams Street

The panel strongly recommended development of several new boutique hotels, beginning with the restoration of

the historic St. Helena Hotel and also considering an opportunity site such as 1001 Adams Street. The recently entitled Farmstead Hotel, at the southern edge of city limits, is approved for 65 new rooms.<sup>12</sup> However, the market can support far more rooms, and the city would benefit from the increased transient occupancy tax (TOT) that such development would generate. Local St. Helena residents may have a contentious history with opposing hotels, but neighboring towns in the region have successfully managed new hotel growth and benefited from the resulting TOT to help fund important resident quality-of-life investments such as park maintenance, multi-generational programming, and affordable housing.

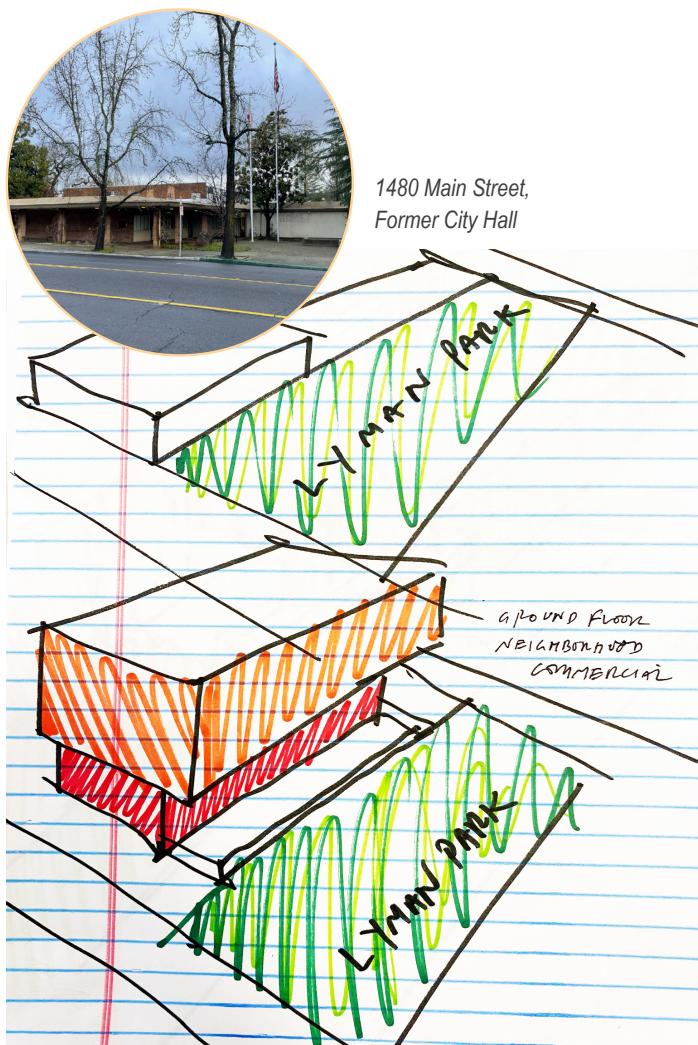
Hotels located downtown bring overnight guests who would directly improve the vitality after 5 p.m. The issue of lack of evening activity was raised time and again during stakeholder interviews. The hotels should include active ground-floor uses, such as bars and/or dining, that engage the street and have the potential to become places for local residents as much as for tourists.



Opportunity sites on and off of Main Street would serve to activate the entire Downtown network. See next spread for specific recommendations by site.

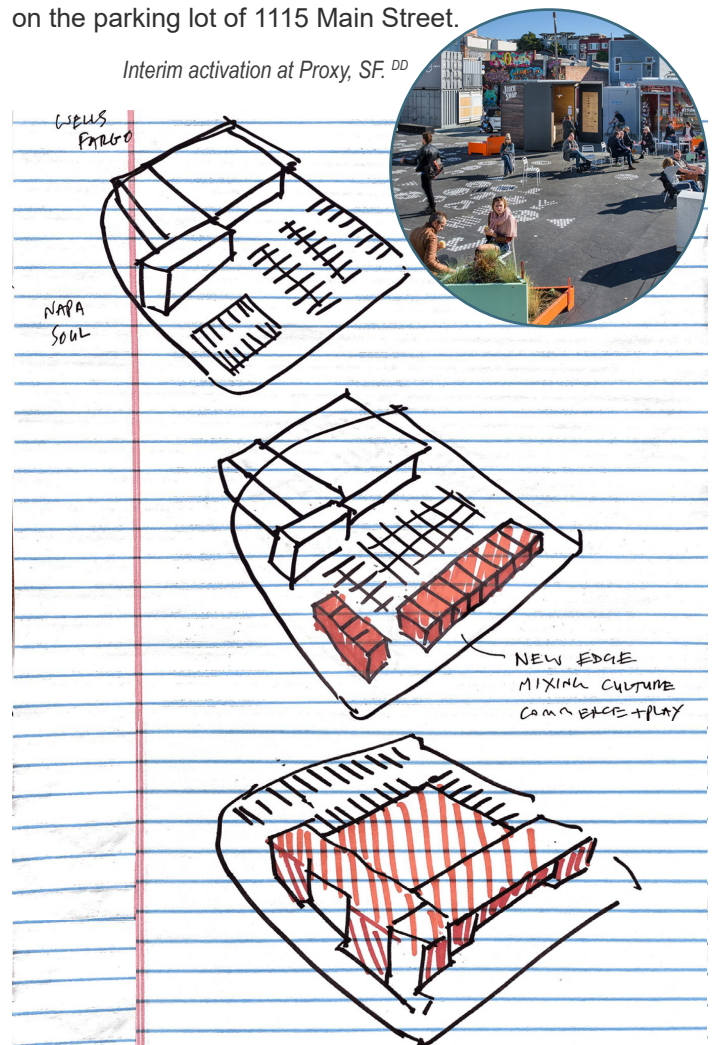
**Mixed Uses & Housing: 1480 Main Street**

The panelists also supported housing for the residents of St. Helena, particularly as part of mixed use projects with affordable options that serve the more economically vulnerable members of the community: families, seniors, and the workforce. Affordable housing should be considered on publicly owned sites, such as 1480 Main Street, so that the city can unlock state grant funding for infrastructure and transportation linked to affordable projects. The city could maintain a higher level of design control through a partnership with an affordable housing developer, and ensure a mixed use environment with ground-floor, neighborhood-serving uses.



**Pop-Up Uses: 1115 Main Street**

Another creative public/private partnership could be sponsorship and development of an incubator kitchen. This growing trend relies on smaller footprints to provide a lower barrier to entry for people new to the restaurant profession and has been demonstrated to support job creation. Such kitchens would also encourage longer-term investment in the city after a restaurateur becomes more established. Building on the legacy of the Culinary Institute of America, and the “foodie” culture of St. Helena, this is a great economic development tool and program addition for infill development at any number of opportunity sites in the re-envisioned downtown, including the panel-identified site on the parking lot of 1115 Main Street.



Conceptual sketches of the redevelopment potential at the 1480 Main Street site (left) and 1115 Main Street (Sunshine Foods) site (right). See next spread for specific recommendations.



HOTELS: Site Recommendations	IMMEDIATE	NEAR TERM	MEDIUM TERM	LONG TERM
<b>1309 Main Street: St. Helena Hotel</b> <i>Refresh and reposition</i>	●			
<b>1001 Adams Street</b> <i>Hospitality infill hotel with groundfloor dining</i>		●		

**HOTEL REPOSITION CASE STUDY:** The Madrona Hotel, Healdsburg, California

Originally built in 1881, the Madrona is a 24-room boutique hotel in Healdsburg, California. Co-owned and restored by renowned interior designer Jay Jeffers, this historic mansion was respectfully restored while still bringing a modern, eclectic, and energetic style to the space. The site restaurant caters to both hotel guests and Healdsburg residents, and has become an important part of the community fabric since reopening.

The repositioning of the historic St. Helena Hotel could similarly breathe new life into Main Street and become an important hub for the community.

Learn more about this project at [themadronahotel.com](http://themadronahotel.com)



The Madrona Hotel Restoration <sup>EE</sup>

**HOTEL INFILL CASE STUDY:** Hotel Healdsburg, Healdsburg California

Learn more about this project at [hotelhealdsburg.com](http://hotelhealdsburg.com)

MIXED USE & HOUSING: Site Recommendations	IMMEDIATE	NEAR TERM	MEDIUM TERM	LONG TERM
<b>1480 Main Street: Former City Hall</b> <i>Mixed use with an affordable housing component, groundfloor neighborhood-serving retail and Lyman Park improvements</i>			●	



Parc on Powell Multi-Family

**MIXED USE CASE STUDY:** Parc on Powell, Emeryville, California

Completed in 2015, this mixed-use project consists of multifamily apartments over ground-floor retail space and is adjacent to an off-site public park. The mixture of rental unit types attracts diverse tenants, and the project is a “complementary addition to the surrounding mix of residential and commercial developments.”

The mixture of uses and the mid-rise scale are appropriate to St. Helena’s context and could be a good template for the 1480 Main Street site and adjacent Lyman Park.

Learn more about this project at: [architectmagazine.com/project-gallery/parc-on-powell](http://architectmagazine.com/project-gallery/parc-on-powell)

POP-UP: Site Recommendations	IMMEDIATE	NEAR TERM	MEDIUM TERM	LONG TERM
<b>1115 Main Street: Sunshine Foods Parking</b> <i>Incubator kitchen, Retail, Public Art, Events</i>  <i>(long term consider comprehensive redesign to define gateway)</i>		●		●
<b>Additional Future Opportunity Sites</b> <i>Incubator kitchen</i>			●	

**POP-UP CASE STUDY:** The Wash, East Nashville, Tennessee

Through an adaptive reuse of a former self-serve car wash, “The Wash” converted each of its six bays to create affordable, 400-square-foot spaces for chefs to test new food concepts and develop their business skills. This innovative low-cost offering provides a path for emerging chefs to get a foothold in the local market, refine their menus, and develop a local following before investing in a permanent space. The Wash has attracted a diverse array of talented young chefs and provides a range of moderately priced food options, creating an attractive anchor for locals in this East Nashville neighborhood.

With the Culinary Institute of America nearby for potential support, an incubator kitchen could create a unique St. Helena signature with opportunities for new chefs and constantly changing (and affordable) food options to residents.

Learn more about this project at: [eatwash.com](http://eatwash.com)



The Wash, Adaptive Reuse Incubator Kitchens<sup>FF</sup>

With all of these opportunities, the city will need a clear economic development framework, and a heightened sense of urban design to ensure that the overall vision for downtown is upheld. There are a number of excellent examples on Main Street, where historic architecture has been renovated with care to preserve the storefront authenticity while modernizing its use. This emphasis

on historic character should serve as a template for how the architecture of new developments can both create gateways to downtown and reinforce the identity of St. Helena. Additional opportunity sites not included in the TAP study area could also be considered for these projects and other types of land uses.



# Decision Making: Process, Choices, and Actions

St. Helena has a robust retail market and significant resources, but it is also facing mounting costs associated with aging infrastructure and lacks funding and staffing resources to meet projected demands. These are challenges that all cities face, and there are strategies to build a path forward. The final focus area for the panelists was to identify a decision-making framework to ensure that the city does not remain stuck and that projects are prioritized to deliver long-term economic sustainability.

## How to Evaluate Projects

As stated in St. Helena's General Plan Update 2040, "creating a sustainable community and stable economy requires meeting basic needs and providing opportunities for current and future residents."<sup>13</sup> The city has identified a number of projects, many of which require significant

resources. While the city clearly needs to advance projects that will generate revenue, the community is concerned about prioritization of visitors over residents. The city would benefit by focusing on enhancing quality of life for residents while supporting tourism, and recognizing that the latter is a critical component of the city's long-term economic stability, as the engine that will ultimately fund the services that will sustain the local community.

The city seems to be grappling with a wide range of issues and potential projects. The scope of some of these projects is significant and will require dedicated staff resources. Adopting a list of decision-making criteria will assist the city in establishing priorities and ranking projects based on their ability to meet key goals. With each potential project, the city should ask itself the following questions:

### PROJECT EVALUATION CHECKLIST:

- Does it address a real or perceived problem?
- Does it support the residents?
- Does it generate revenue? What is the return on investment (ROI)?
- Does it leverage outside resources?
- Do we have the capacity (budget and staff) today to implement it?
- Is it sustainable—can we maintain it in the long run?

In addition, projects should be separated by the level of effort required to implement them. Some are **"big deals"** that will have long-term impacts for St. Helena but will require more upfront investment to execute and bring to fruition. These include the large-scale infrastructure improvements on Main Street and infill development projects at various opportunity sites.

Meanwhile, other, smaller projects could be low-hanging fruit, such as improved signage, lighting, public art, and the temporary installation of parklets or planters. These **"small wonders"** have immediate impact for residents and demonstrate movement forward, while more intensive city resources can be dedicated to the mid- to long-term "big deals."



Precedent examples of "small wonders": mural programs (left)<sup>GG</sup> or twinkle lights at Larimer Square (right).<sup>HH</sup>

**Process Tools**

More broadly, the city would benefit from establishing an overall economic development strategy. The example outlined here is borrowed from Morgan Hill’s Economic

Blueprint,<sup>14</sup> a unifying vision that serves as the “North Star” for all future growth in a city that has overcome many of the same challenges currently facing St. Helena.

**PROCESS: Attract Investment through Land Use and Policy Decisions**

- **Identify Opportunities:**  
*What sectors have potential for growth*
- **Have Clear Intentions:**  
*What are the long-term goals*
- **Develop Implementation Action Plan:**  
*What is each specific step - Who is responsible*
  - Identify Strategies
  - Develop Clear Actions
  - Establish Timeline
  - Assign Responsibility
- **Foster Partnerships:**  
*Where can partners support the city*
- **Use Economic Indicators to Evaluate Progress:**  
*How can success be demonstrated*
- **Remove Unnecessary Barriers:**  
*How can the city get out of the way*

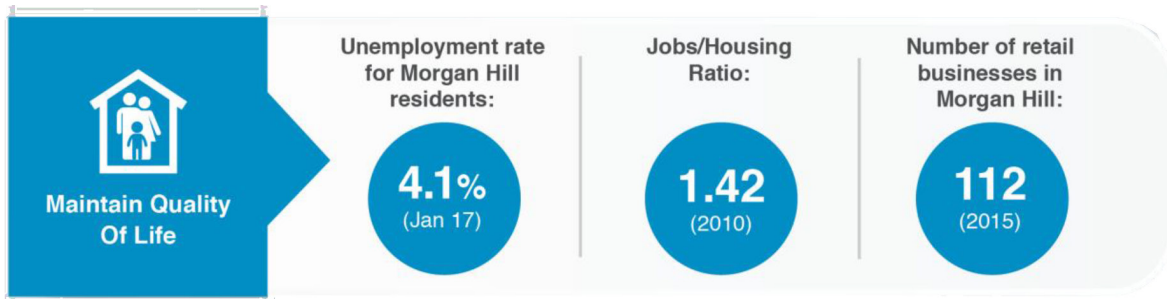


*Excerpt from the Morgan Hill Economic Blueprint identifies the primary sectors with potential for growth. "*



As projects begin to come online, it is important to be able to quantify their success. This will validate the framework internally and demonstrate positive progress to the community. Some economic indicators to consider

are those used in the Morgan Hill Economic Blueprint that demonstrate increased quality of life for residents, fiscal sustainability, job and housing growth, and the vitality of the tourism industry.



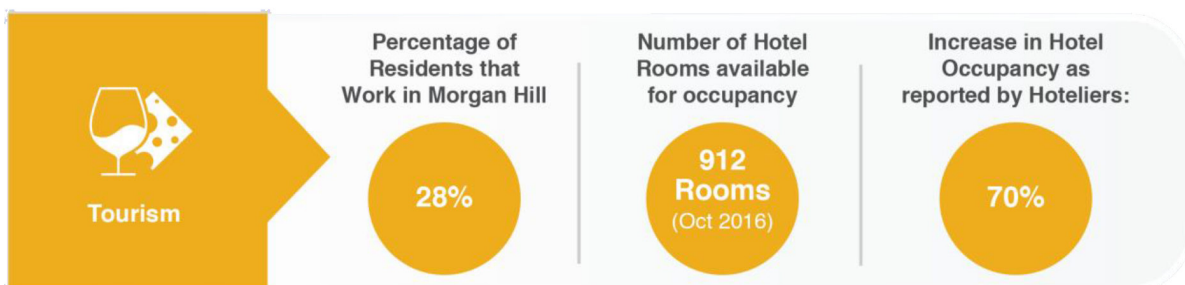
Sources: State of California Employment Development Department. California Department of Education. Census Bureau



Sources: Santa Clara County Assessor's Office. State of California Board of Equalization. Colliers International



Sources: State of California Employment Development Department. U.S. Census



Excerpt from the Morgan Hill Economic Blueprint identifies the economic indicators to measure growth and positive feedback for the community. "

## Financial Tools

Hand in hand with this economic development strategy is the set of financial tools and funding sources available to support it. To begin with, it is best to focus on leveraging funding sources that the city can control.

The city could also explore a number of powerful revenue sources that would require some level of voter approval, depending on the type of tax or fee proposed. Detailed

descriptions of some of these revenue enhancement strategies are included in the report prepared for the city by Baker Tilly<sup>15</sup> and presented to Council in February and May 2023. In these instances, it is important to have earned the trust of the community through quick wins before placing a measure on the ballot to maximize the potential for it to pass.

## FINANCE: Leverage Existing Funding Sources and Expand Financing Potential

### Under City Control:

- **Update development, impact, and user fees:**
  - Ensure new projects pay their fair share.
  - Maximize revenue for the city without deterring development.
- **Apply for grants:**
  - Develop a strategy for grant applications and reinforce it as a matter of habit to become more competitive.
  - Apply at the local, state, and federal levels.
- **Seek private-sector support:**
  - Reach out to business community for donations.
  - Have a naming policy to acknowledge donors.
  - Establish public/private partnerships for larger scale projects.
  - Engage community volunteers: create an active and involved citizenry.
- **Review leases of city-owned properties:**
  - Ensure they are aligned with today's priorities and modify as needed.

### Require Voter Approval:

- **Raise Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT):**
  - Approach to increase local revenue paid by visitors without direct impact to local residents.
  - Rate should be appropriate to regional context and comparable to neighboring jurisdictions.
- **Implement New Local Sales Tax Measure:**
  - Requires clear consensus on what tax revenue should be spent on, such as new public amenities (parks, recreation facilities, affordable housing, or other resident-serving uses).
  - Consider only after having built trust with local resident community.
- **Assess a Business License Tax:**
  - Reassess the way that businesses are taxed and consider the application of gross receipts model to increase revenues.
  - Use funds for essential services like fire, police, and street maintenance.
- **Propose General Obligation Bonds:**
  - Likely not politically feasible at this time.
  - Should be considered only in the future when the financial situation is approved, as they pledge community's general fund revenues for repayment.



Special financing districts are also a powerful tool for local communities to raise funds for capital infrastructure costs in designated areas. They require buy-in and approval from affected property or business owners and should be evaluated carefully for both costs and benefits as implementation of these districts can require significant upfront and ongoing resources. Examples of common districts used in California communities include the following:

**Community Facilities Districts (CFDs)**

CFDs are a financing tool, based on a parcel tax, that can be implemented by local governmental agencies including cities, counties, special districts, and joint power authorities to pay for a wide range of public facilities, or for certain public services. They require a vote of affected property owners.

**Enhanced Infrastructure Financing Districts (EIFDs)**

EIFDs are public entities that can finance the construction or rehabilitation of specific types of community infrastructure, including public realm improvements, housing, transportation and other infrastructure items. Also requiring voter or landowner approval, EIFDs have the authority to use tax increment financing, in addition to other more conventional funding sources such as fees or assessments.<sup>16</sup>

**Property Based Improvement Districts (PBIDs)**

PBIDs require a vote of property owners within a planned district. Their vote on a district management plan would establish a scope of work for the district and the amount of taxation to pay for it, which would be collected through property tax bills. This is a powerful tool for commercial districts that can fund operating programs like ambassadors, but also ensure sufficient steady revenue to bond against to invest in larger infrastructure programs. If there are several major landowners in downtown that are receptive and can help champion this initiative, it may be possible to create a PBID at a relatively low cost (\$100,000 to \$200,000 in consultant and staff time).

**Land Use and Zoning Tools**

The last piece of this framework is to more closely examine zoning codes and plans through an economic development lens. St. Helena is preparing to adopt a comprehensive zoning code update<sup>17</sup>, so this is the time to thoroughly scrutinize it and ensure that the code is supporting the city’s established economic development strategy and long-term goals.

**CHECKLIST: Take a Red Pen to the Zoning Code**

- Make zoning less prescriptive.**
- Allow spaces to be flexibly programmed.**
- Allow more uses by right.**
- Do not be afraid of density; control character through objective design standards (form).**
- Make it performance-based zoning.**
- Invite your colleagues from other neighboring jurisdictions to give honest feedback.**

Lastly, be strategic about when a specific plan or a precise plan with an EIR can be conducted in lieu of a master plan. For example, with the Downtown Specific Plan, this approach could facilitate the development process by streamlining the community engagement process, building consensus once, and making it easier for individual projects to move forward in the future.





## Concluding Recommendations for Implementation

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The tools and strategies outlined throughout this report are broad-reaching and will take time to come to fruition. The intention of the TAP is to establish a direction for a long-range trajectory for building a real downtown in St. Helena and then to provide actionable steps that can begin immediately.

### ***The first step is to invest in and grow the city team.***

The panelists identified a considerable lack of “bench depth”—capacity and skills needed to achieve St. Helena’s potential. This does not necessarily require hiring more permanent staff positions. The same outcome could be achieved using a combination of permanent and temporary staff; interns and fellows; and consultants and contractors to address issues of urban design, tactical urbanism, economic development, and new business procurement. However, a critical role will need to be filled by someone within the city with the experience, entrepreneurial sensibilities, and authority to advance St. Helena’s economic agenda, negotiate on the city’s behalf, and work directly with the City Manager. Together this team needs to start with a clear focus on “how do we get to ‘YES.’”

#### **PERMANENT STAFF:**

*Address deficiencies that impact resident quality of life*

#### **TEMPORARY STAFF:**

*Internal champion to work on a few heavy lifts*

#### **INTERNS & FELLOWS:**

*Partner with local business community to sponsor*

#### **CONSULTANTS & CONTRACTORS:**

*Hire experts for specific tasks needed to realize goals*

### ***The second step is to shake the metaphorical “money tree” and tap into funding and financing sources identified in this report.***

St. Helena is not starting from scratch when it comes to building out its financial capacity; there is already a robust existing business community with capital to tap into. A sustainable financial strategy will include a combination of ongoing and one-time funding sources, as well as financing tools that build on partnerships and community support.

### ***The third step is to focus on the short-term wins and actions that have a district-wide impact.***

The community of St. Helena is fatigued from planning efforts with no identifiable progress forward. One of the most impactful actions would be to catalyze regeneration of the St. Helena Hotel: getting it back online as a crown jewel of Main Street. The city needs to champion the effort to get a high-quality operator who is willing to invest in bringing the property back to life as a high-end boutique hotel. This reinvestment would demonstrate what Main Street can be and how it can attract new investment.

The city should use its additional staffing capacity to better articulate the value proposition of other existing assets by creating a marketing map of all downtown properties. A similar effort could be applied to parking by conducting a comprehensive parking inventory, identifying opportunities for shared parking on underused private lots, and implementing a signage and wayfinding program to direct people to the available spaces within the broader downtown street network.

Interim activation of the public realm is another easy, visible way to build community support and test the limits of what is possible in downtown St. Helena. Main Street, the laneways, and the broader street network all present opportunities for temporary tactical improvements and creative activation through public art and programming.

With increased staffing and funding capacity, as well as buy-in from the community, the city can then begin to tackle the longer-term “big deal” projects. Use the decision-making framework to prioritize the following projects and establish an implementation action plan:

- **Infill Development of Opportunity Sites**
  - Identify the desired positioning, desired community benefits, and market differentiation between two or three new hotels.
  - Identify experienced partners who can execute, define the most critical needs, and establish required design parameters, and then work to capitalize and build affordable housing (family, senior, workforce).
  - Create a mechanism for public/private partnerships.
- **Reimagined Main Street Improvements**
- **Gateway, Identity, and Wayfinding Strategy**

St. Helena is a town with a great deal of potential. By building an authentic brand together with the community, the city will remain true to its historic identity and ensure that it is inclusive and representative of its residents. Placemaking strategies that support the brand, improve quality of life for visitors and residents alike, and look beyond just Main Street highlight opportunities for tactical urbanism as well as permanent infill development to activate the entire downtown fabric. With the outlined decision-making framework, the city will have the tools necessary to overcome its current institutional stagnation, build increased staffing and funding capacity, and get projects done.

This combination of community partnerships, intentional investment, and a clear strategy for growth will enable St. Helena to regain its position as the heart of Napa Valley, operating as a complete “small town” that fulfills the needs of current and future residents while sharing its authentic wine-country lifestyle with its visitors.



*Panelists at the final presentation.*



## About the Panel

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**Jane Lin, AIA, Founding Partner, Urban Field Studio (TAP Panel Chair)**

Jane is a licensed architect and urban designer that wants to make the communities we live in more vibrant, memorable, and enduring. Jane holds a BA in Architecture, MS in Architecture, and a Master's in City Planning from UC Berkeley and is currently a lecturer in the Master of City Planning and Masters of Real Estate Development + Design programs. Jane was the co-founder of Urban Field Studio and has worked with her partners for many years prior to founding Urban Field Studio in 2014.

Her work includes urban design for transit area planning, revitalizing mixed-use districts, campus planning, and housing policy planning with local agencies throughout the western United States. Jane is particularly concerned about the public outreach process and the way we visually communicate with our communities and neighborhoods. She knows the conceptual strategies that she puts forward can only be successful when they are economically viable, community supported, and physically compelling in design.



**Nell Selander, Director of Economic & Community Development, City of South San Francisco (TAP Panel Co-Chair)**

Nell serves as the Director of the Economic & Community Development Department with the City of South San Francisco. In this role, she oversees four divisions critical to development throughout South City: Planning, Building, Economic Development, and Housing. Prior to this role, Nell served as Deputy Director of Economic & Community Development with the City of South San Francisco, managing winding down the former South San Francisco Redevelopment Agency, overseeing the City's affordable housing programs and Community Development Block Grant, and supporting the City's vibrant and growing business community. Before joining the City of South San Francisco, Nell served as the Economic Development Coordinator and then Economic Development & Housing Manager with the City of San Carlos. Prior to that, she worked on various, large capital projects for the Columbus Downtown Development Corporation in Columbus, Ohio. Nell received her Bachelor of Arts in American Studies from Stanford University and a Master of Urban Planning degree from New York University's Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service.



**John Bela, Principal and Founder, Bela Urbanism + Design**

John is an urban designer and landscape architect based in the Bay Area. A former partner at Gehl, the Copenhagen-based design consultancy, and co-founder of the Rebar Art and Design Studio - the creators of Park(ing) Day. John launched Bela Urbanism + Design in 2021, an urban design consulting practice. John's passion is to create human-scale neighborhoods, great streets, and a diverse, resilient public realm. John is a pioneer in user-generated urbanism and iterative placemaking and is skilled at applying human scale design from the scale of the neighborhood to the eye-level experience of everyday life. He holds degrees in landscape architecture and environmental design from UC Berkeley, biochemistry from UMass, Amherst, and Sculpture from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.



**Noah Friedman, CEO/Co-Founder, Vibemap**

Ever since Noah was a kid, he has used his passion and enthusiasm to bring people together. Noah is currently using his skills to help strengthen human connection and increase social consciousness as the CEO and one of the co-founders of Vibemap.

Born and raised in Berkeley, social justice and environmental sustainability are the lenses that inform everything Noah does. He has spent over 20 years in architecture, urban design, planning, and real estate development. At the same time, Noah also has a lifetime of success in real estate and technology investments. Noah is dedicated to his family and friends, and he is committed to making the world a better place for as many people as possible.





**Jim Heid, Founding Partner, UrbanGreen Advisors & CraftWork Development**

Jim is an infill developer and strategic real estate advisor focused on the tools and techniques that lead to a more sustainable built environment. Jim founded CRAFT DnA, a real estate development company focused on incremental development and intentional place-building as a successor to his consultancy UrbanGreen.

A resident of nearby Healdsburg, CA for over 20 years, Jim sits on the community's *Housing Element Update Working Group*, and is a recently elected Board member of the *Healdsburg Chamber of Commerce*. He founded, developed and operates a downtown coworking and business incubator- **CraftWork** - and designed and developed an awarded high density infill housing project – **RiverHouse** - amidst the City's challenging growth management and archaic zoning codes.

An active member of the Urban Land Institute (ULI), Jim has participated in over 16 Advisory Service Panels, most recently Chairing a deep dive into Napa's Oxbow District (2018) and a panel looking at Tower Renewal in Toronto, Canada (2019). He writes and speaks regularly on sustainable design, resilience, and the value of small scale, incremental development. His new book – **Building Small: A Handbook for Real Estate Entrepreneurs, Civic Leaders and Great Communities** was published by ULI in 2021 and has received national acclaim as the best resource for communities seeking alternative approaches to infill and regenerate their community fabric. Based upon research gained through 18 Small Developer Forums which Jim organizes and runs, Building Small articulates the what, why and how of small scale development, and how it results in more economically resilient and socially positive outcomes than institutional development models.

Trained as a landscape architect at the University of Idaho, Jim went on to receive a Master's degree in Real Estate Development from MIT as a way to more effectively integrate economics, development and design thinking.



**Paul Peninger, Principal, BAE Urban Economics**

Paul is an urban economist and planner specializing in the policy and planning intersections between financial feasibility, planning and sustainable development.

Throughout his 25-year career as a consultant, teacher, and community development finance professional, Paul has maintained a strong commitment to affordable housing as the cornerstone of equitable and sustainable communities and has successfully led or participated in hundreds of affordable housing plans, strategies, policy studies, and implementation projects in diverse communities across the country. In addition to housing, Paul has a deep background in real estate feasibility analysis and finance spanning the full range of land use and development types.

Paul is a Principal with BAE. He has led planning and economics projects relating to sustainability and resilience across the United States, Latin America and Australia. He has been an appointed lecturer in land economics for the Master of Urban Design program at the University of California, Berkeley since 2002, and currently teaches the core course on real estate economics and market analysis for Berkeley's graduate program in Real Estate Development and Design (MRED+D).

A native of California, Paul has lived and worked in Latin America and is fluent in Spanish.



**Edith Ramirez, Assistant City Manager for Development Services,  
City of Morgan Hill**

Edith is the Assistant City Manager for Development Services in Morgan Hill, California (Population ~45,000). She supports the areas of Planning, Building, Code Compliance, Housing and Economic Development as well as the City's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion efforts. Edith has 28 years of community, business, and local government experience. Edith is passionate about improving communities by bringing people together to develop tactical plans that result in economic vibrancy, placemaking and long-term sustainability.

Edith started her career in local government as a policy advisor and community relations manager for a Council District 6 in San Jose, CA (Population ~100,000). Later, she spent eleven years with the San Jose Redevelopment Agency and worked in Downtown Development, Project Management, and Industrial Development. For the last twelve years,

Edith has led the City of Morgan Hill's Economic Development program and through extensive community and business engagement championed the revitalization of Downtown and the development of over 2 million square feet of new commercial and industrial investments in a community that had not seen any commercial or industrial development in nearly 3 decades.

Edith is active with the Silicon Valley Economic Development Alliance, the Urban Land Institute (ULI) and International Council of Shopping Centers (ICSC). Edith is on the Boards of Visit Morgan Hill and the Santa Clara County Fairgrounds. Edith holds a bachelor's degree in Political Science and a Master's in Public Administration from San Jose State University. Edith was born in Mexico City and immigrated to the Bay Area as a young adult. She is a mother of two young children, and lives in Morgan Hill.



**Mariana Ricker, Associate, SWA San Francisco  
(TAP Report Writer)**

Mariana, a Bay Area native, has a passion for California landscapes and emphasizes the importance of site specific, sustainable landscape design. She enjoys working in urban settings that engage diverse user groups and activate the spaces that are most important to civic life.

As a landscape architect, Mariana seeks to create memorable experiences, connect people to the environment, and provide elegant solutions to programmatic needs. At SWA, she works on a wide range of projects from community parks to large-scale urban development and planning around the Bay Area and beyond.

Mariana holds a degree in landscape architecture from the University of California, Berkeley and is professionally licensed.

Mariana has been a member of ULI since 2018 and has previously been the writer on two TAPs: City of San Jose American Cities Climate Challenge and Parking Management, as well as City of Dublin SCS Property. Currently the vice chair of the TA4C Committee with the ULI SF District Council, Mariana is also involved nationally as a newly appointed member of the Sustainable Development Council.



# Appendixes & Sources

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**Complete List of Stakeholders**

- Cynthia Ariosta, Managing Partner, Tra Vigne Pizzeria and Restaurant
- Guneet Bajwa, Owner, Alila Hotel Napa Valley
- Oliver Caldwell, Owner, Caldwell Snyder Gallery
- Amy Carabba-Salazar, CEO, St. Helena Chamber of Commerce
- Antonio Castellucci, Real Estate Developer
- Paul Dohring, Mayor
- Jeff Feeney, Coldwell Banker broker
- David Gates, President Emeritus, Gates + Associates
- Linda Gates, Vice President, Gates + Associates
- Sarah Gillihan, Visit Napa Valley
- Joel Gott, food and wine entrepreneur
- Eric Hall, Vice Mayor
- Lester Hardy, City Council member
- Mark Hoffmeister, Owner-Operator, Wydown Hotel
- Dave Jahns, Parks and Recreation Director, City of St. Helena
- David Knudsen, Community Leader/Formal City Council member
- Joe Leach, Public Works Director, City of St. Helena
- Joaquin Razo, Executive Director, Blue Zones Project - Upper Napa Valley
- Patrick Rue, Erosion Wine
- Dan Schaefer, Principal and Vice President, BKF Engineers
- Glenn Smith, Commissioner, Active Transportation and Sustainability Committee
- Loraine Stuart, Board President, St. Helena Family Center
- David Walker, President, Engine Real Estate

**Linked Reference Materials**

- [Cultivate St. Helena Staff Report](#)
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