

## Urban Design

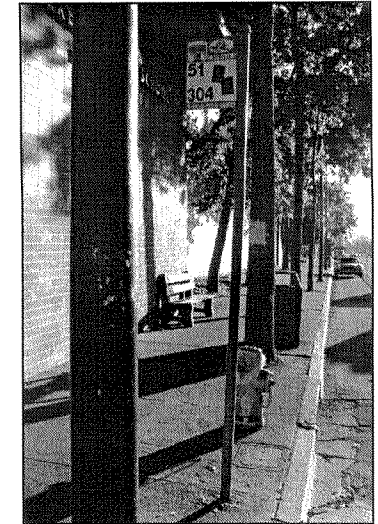
### *Setting and Issues*

The urban design issues affecting University Avenue encompass a broad variety of topics: improving the functional and visual appearance of the street, appropriate approaches to infill, ensuring that disinvested properties are improved over time, calming traffic, providing pedestrian amenities, designing for personal safety, design and maintenance of public open spaces, and public art. Both the street and its buildings must be considered in order to create healthy and safe public spaces. Issues specific to the University Avenue Area include:

*Lack of Gateway Markers* – University Avenue is an important gateway to the city and the Downtown that deserves a statement of civic pride and community identity. This special symbol might include a structure, public art, and/or distinctive landscaping.

*Aphid-Infested Street Trees* - The Tulip Poplar trees that are currently planted along the length of University Avenue are infested with aphids. During warm weather the aphids produce a sticky substance that drips onto the sidewalk and parked cars. Local merchants are concerned that their businesses are affected by this problem and residents say that they don't like to walk under the trees on the sticky sidewalks. The problem could be treated by spraying pesticides annually, but the City has an ordinance which prohibits the use of pesticides. It might be possible to inject the trees with pesticides, but again this would be an annual process that would eventually severely damage the trees.

*Poor Lighting* - The existing lighting along the full length of University Avenue is designed for optimum performance of the automobile and for that it serves its purpose. But for the people who live and shop there it is too bright, high and unattractive. The City Council has also recently supported the concept of seasonal lighting, such as at the Indian New Year and Christmas time, to add a new level of festivity to University Avenue.



*Many places lack the amenities that should be found on a pedestrian-oriented street. Buildings should frame streets and provide pleasant places to walk.*

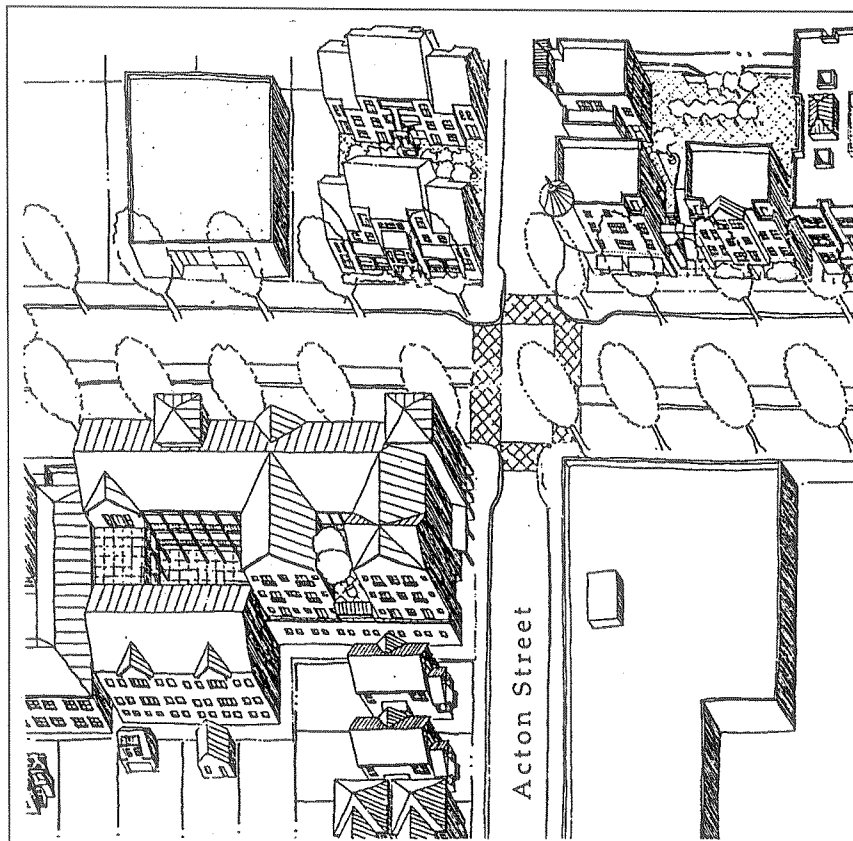


*Cluttered Signage* - Contributing to the unfriendly pedestrian environment is the lack of coherence among building signage along the Avenue. Many residents complained that the Sign Ordinance is either not effective enough or that it is not being enforced.

*Billboards and Banners* - While most residents feel that the existing billboards are intrusive and should be phased out, they do represent a

thriving commercial venture that may take considerable effort to remove. One form of signage, though, that all residents agreed would have a positive impact to the Avenue would be the hanging of banners on the existing flagpoles with greetings and information about Berkeley.

*Disinvested and Seismically Damaged Buildings* - While some of the buildings along University and San Pablo Avenues are of historical value



#### ACTON NODE

The State-owned health facility at the southwest corner of University and Acton will soon be offered as surplus property to the City. This site presents a tremendous opportunity to make the Acton node a reality. City control of this property is key to making this catalyst project a financial success. Key features of a new mixed-use development at this site include:

- Land Use: Mixed Income Housing  
Ground Floor Retail
- Site Area: 24,000 s.f.
- Residential: 40 to 45 units  
Mix of 1 and 2 bedrooms
- Retail: 4,000 to 5,000 s.f.
- Parking: 40 to 50 spaces  
1 space/unit + min. retail parking
- Open Space: 5,250 to 5,850 s.f. on-site  
Will meet or exceed 125 s.f./unit

Acton Node Illustrative

and contribute to the overall fine-grained character of the Avenues, many facades are rundown and need to be repaired and painted. Others are either seismically damaged or are unable to meet current seismic building codes. Disinvested commercial, motel, and housing properties create an impression that the University Avenue corridor is a dying commercial strip. Encouraging improvement, rehabilitation, and continued maintenance of all buildings in the study area is one of the most important concerns expressed by the community. However, there is also a clear desire expressed by the community, that the area's character and variety be maintained. Specifically, a facade improvement program should not result in a homogeneous, uninteresting environment. Improvements should focus on enhancing the pedestrian environment by providing amenities such as awnings, signage, and lighting. In addition, the "Downtown Berkeley Design Guidelines" specifically address how to modify existing buildings and construct new ones in a manner which furthers the goals, objectives, and policies of the Historic Preservation and Urban Design Element of the "Downtown Plan."

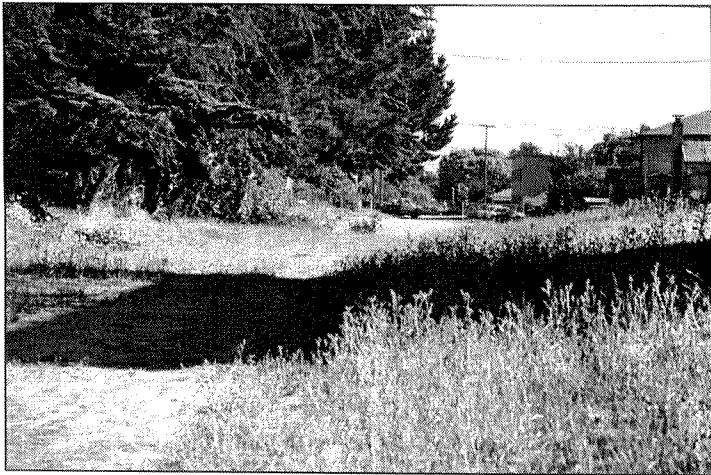
*Outdated Building Layouts* – Many of the area's stores are located in older buildings not designed to accommodate modern methods of displaying merchandise. The outdated layout of older buildings could result in a variety of problems, including not enough display space and poor visibility for display windows. The City has two existing programs which could assist merchants to meet some of their needs, the City-wide Loan Fund (CFL) and the Facade Grant Program. Neither of the existing programs seem to fit the specific needs of University Avenue merchants. There is a need for a low-interest loan fund that would be effective in assisting existing small businesses to improve a store's layout, facade, signage, and accessibility to persons with disabilities without requiring that they generate new employment base for the city.

*Traffic* - The lack of a safe and pleasant pedestrian experience along the entire length of University Avenue is an issue that has come up over and over again in conversations with the community. Speeding cars and trucks, congestion at critical intersections, inconsistent left turn lanes, and the dominance of auto-oriented establishments that have large expanses of parking lots and numerous curb cuts are common criticisms.

*Lack of Pedestrian Amenities* - Most sidewalks along University are narrow, have broken pavement, and are inaccessible to many persons with disabilities. Primary walking and bicycling connections to BART and other important local destinations are not well lit or signed. In addition, crosswalks are not highly visible to drivers, push-button light activators are not working properly, and bus shelters and other pedestrian amenities are being removed without replacement.



*Some facades that are run-down and need to be repaired and painted create an impression that the University Avenue Corridor is a dying commercial strip.*



*The University Avenue Study Area has several open spaces which are under-utilized and not maintained.*



*Residents feel that the existing billboards are intrusive and should be phased out.*

**Crime** – The design of new buildings and public spaces places a key role in making an area safer. The University Avenue area already has been affected by fluctuating crime rates and, in some locations, vacant lots and unmaintained setbacks have become garbage dumping grounds and sleeping sites. (See also Public Safety, Policy 5.)

**Poorly Maintained Open Space**- The University Avenue Study Area has several parks along or adjacent to it including Aquatic Park, Columbus Park, Strawberry Creek Park, Berkeley Way Park, and Ohlone Park, but residents of the neighboring areas have said that the parks are in need of better maintenance and surveillance.

**Need for Public Art**- It has been suggested that more opportunities should be provided to create and display art along the Avenue.

The strategy for revitalizing University Avenue is grounded in several basic principles:

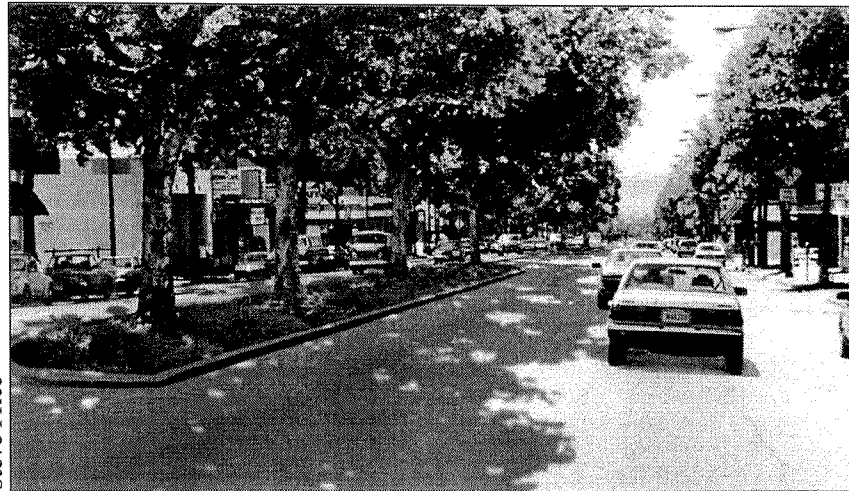
- Create mixed-use “nodes” that are within walking distance of nearby residential areas and provide local-serving goods and services.
- Design with pedestrians in mind. Buildings, storefronts, sidewalks, street lighting, trees, and amenities, must be improved and designed to provide a safer and more attractive place for people, including those with disabilities.
- Knit the two sides of the street together to the best extent possible with streetscape enhancements.
- Reinforce the connections between neighborhoods and commercial areas.
- Reinforce the distinct identifies of different nodes.
- Reinforce the fact that University Avenue is an important gateway to Berkeley and the Downtown.

Steve Price



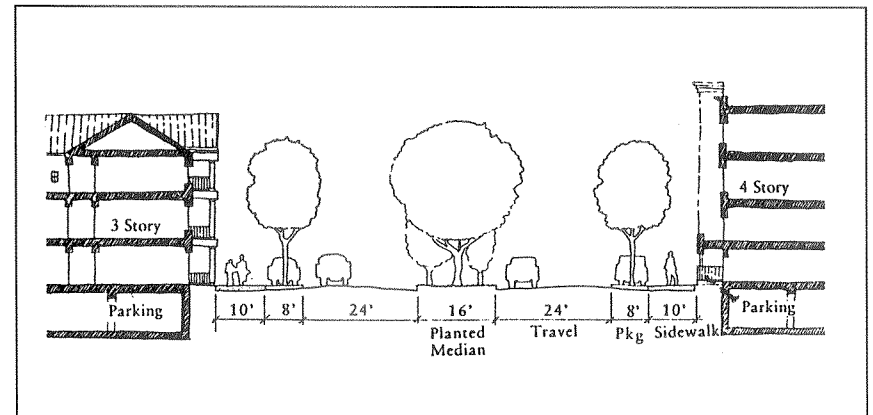
Previous Condition

Steve Price



With Median Trees

The City has recently received a Small Business Administration grant to plant trees along University Avenue. This grant is being used to plant trees in the median, allowing a canopy to form and frame the street. Native and drought-tolerant plants are being used with a theme called "The Ecological Staircase," whereby each of University Avenue's sub-areas is represented by trees from the ecosystems extending from the Pacific Coast to the Berkeley Hills.



A second phase of the effort would be to plant trees within the parking lanes every 30 to 50 feet. Since a tree-well needs to be only five or six feet wide, it would remove only one or two parking stalls per block. By planting trees within the parking lane, the sidewalks on either side of the street would effectively be widened to their full ten foot width which could provide the space to put bicycle parking, a bus shelter and/or a newspaper kiosk. The crossing distance of the street would also be greatly reduced since the sidewalks would also bulb-out at the intersections. This strategy would eventually allow for slowly phasing out the Tulip Poplar Trees.

Interstate 80



Sub-Area 1

Sub-Area 2



*Aesculus californica*  
(California Buckeye)



*Quercus agrifolia*  
(Coast Live Oak)



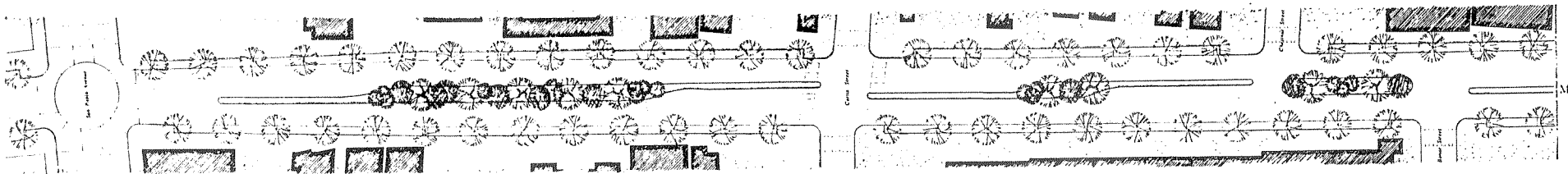
*Garrya elliptica*  
(Coast Silkbasslet)



*Platanus racemosa*  
(California Sycamore)



*Quercus agrifolia*  
(Coast Live Oak)





Sub-Area 3

Sub-Area 4



*Cranothus 'Ray Hartman'*  
(Wild Lilac, Tree Form)



*Acer macrophyllum*  
(Big Leaf Maple)



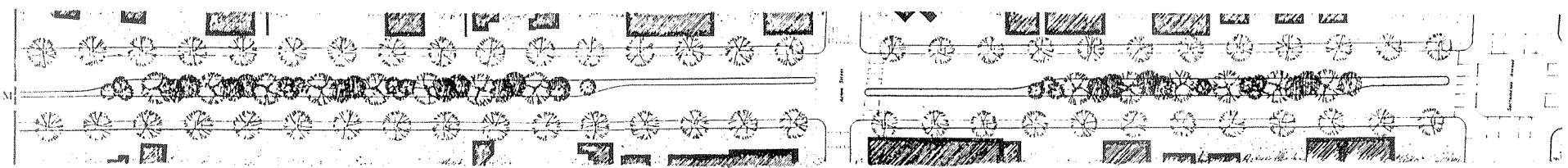
*Quercus agrifolia*  
(Coast Live Oak)



*Cercis occidentalis*  
(Western Redbud)



*Quercus agrifolia*  
(Coast Live Oak)



## *Urban Design Policies and Strategies*

### **POLICY 7: USE STREETScape ENHANCEMENTS TO HELP IMPROVE THE SAFETY, ECONOMIC VITALITY, AND PEDESTRIAN ACTIVITY OF THE AVENUE.**

Strategy 7A: Conduct a competition to design an appropriate gateway symbol for University Avenue. Scope of the project should be limited to modest construction/planting costs.

Strategy 7B: Implement, over time, a comprehensive Streetscape Enhancement Project that includes:

- new street tree plantings (both in the median and in the parking lanes);
- maintenance of the views to the Bay and Hills from Downtown on University Avenue through appropriate pruning of the median trees;



*Enhanced streetscapes will help improve the safety and economic vitality of the Avenue and enliven pedestrian activity.*

- gradual removal of the aphid infested trees and recovery of sidewalks where tree-wells are currently located (see typical street section);
- raised, paved, or specially painted crosswalks at key intersections, making sure these are safe and useable to persons with disabilities;
- sidewalk “bulb-outs” at intersections and key mid-block crossings (see Plan preceding page) to narrow the crossing distance for pedestrians (except where right turns are encouraged);
- curb ramps at intersections that are consistent with ADA and Title 24 standards;
- consider the use of “talking” traffic signals;
- new human-scale street lights;
- electrical conduit for festival lighting in the median;
- irrigation for the median landscaping;
- improved, permanent, and economically self-sufficient transit shelters with easy access to telephones;
- pedestrian amenities, such as benches, drinking fountains, bike racks, self-cleaning public toilets, emergency telephones, and newsracks, ensuring that such amenities are accessible to all;
- public sign program designed to provide direction, general information, and emergency assistance; and
- banners to welcome visitors or advertise events.

Strategy 7C: Vary elements of the streetscape program by sub-area in ways that draw out the subtle differences between neighborhoods. Implement the “Ecological Staircase” concept in the planting of trees in the median. Select a single tree species for planting in the parking lane for each sub-area. Work with local merchants to incorporate art and banners that identify each of the Avenue sub-areas.



Strategy 7D: Institute a process to work with developers to fund and implement streetscape improvements along property frontages.

Strategy 7E: Create a public arts program specifically for University Avenue as one mechanism to draw the two sides of University Avenue together. Encourage merchants and residents to work cooperatively to identify appropriate sites, hold design competitions, and identify funding sources.

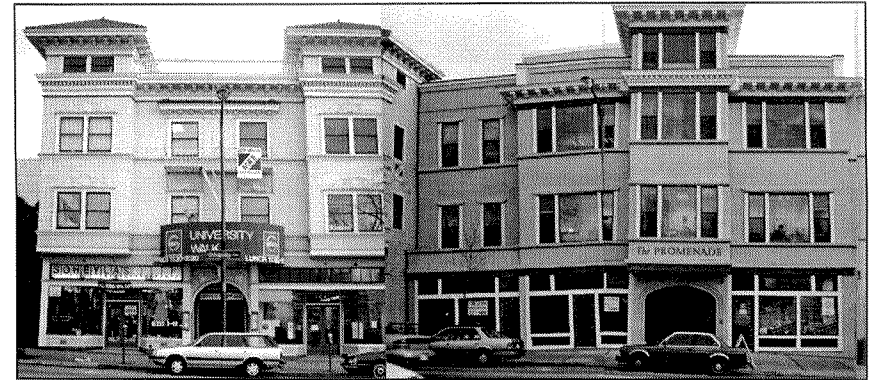
Strategy 7F: Initiate a Billboard Amortization Program along University Avenue to gradually phase out existing billboards over a limited period of time. If necessary, amend the Sign Ordinance to prohibit placement of new billboards in the area.

**POLICY 8: NEW AND RENOVATED BUILDINGS SHOULD BE DESIGNED WITH PEDESTRIANS AND SAFETY IN MIND. BUILDING IMPROVEMENTS SHOULD HELP TO REINFORCE BOTH THE CONCEPT OF “NODAL DEVELOPMENT” AND THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN NEIGHBORHOODS.**

Strategy 8A: Apply the University Avenue Strategic Plan Design Guidelines to all new and renovated buildings along the University Avenue Corridor. East of MLK Way, the “Downtown Berkeley Design Guidelines” should apply. These Design Guidelines are intended to encourage street-edge buildings, with active and interesting ground floor uses, upper story housing, as well as varied and articulated architecture.

Strategy 8B: Expand Design Review authority to include all new and renovated buildings (except single-family homes) along University Avenue.

Strategy 8C: Require all new buildings along University Avenue to be at least 2 stories in height. Within Avenue Nodes allow new buildings to be a maximum of 4 stories, provided all solar access, design, parking, and privacy standards are met (see Land Use Policy 6A and the Design Guidelines). Within areas designated Avenue Mixed-Use allow new buildings to be a maximum of 3 stories, provided all solar access, design, parking, and privacy standards are met (see Design Guidelines).

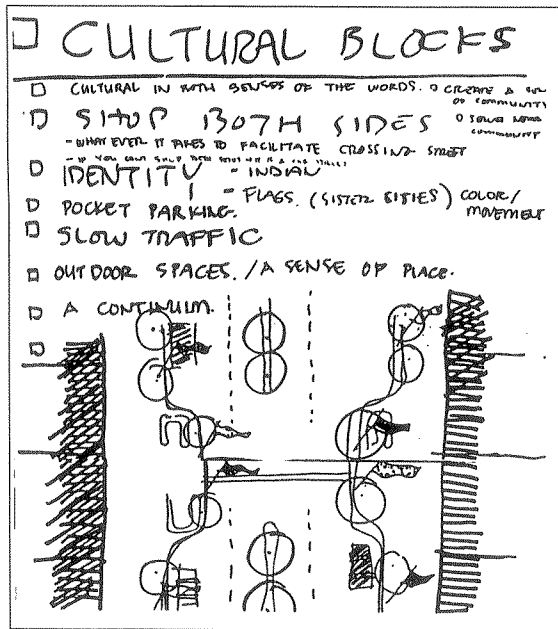


*The design of new and renovated buildings along University Avenue should consider public safety by placing active uses at the ground floor level and lining streets with upper story housing or offices.*

Strategy 8D: Where a parcel or development project extends through from University Avenue to the next parallel street, its scale should harmonize with that of adjacent properties, respect solar access, and maintain privacy. Buildings should step down and the use should be primarily residential on the adjoining street.

**POLICY 9: ENCOURAGE PROPERTY OWNERS TO REHABILITATE, RESTORE, AND MAINTAIN EXISTING COMMERCIAL AND RESIDENTIAL PROPERTIES IN THE UNIVERSITY AVENUE STUDY AREA. PROVIDE INCENTIVES FOR MERCHANTS AND PROPERTY OWNERS TO MAKE APPROPRIATE IMPROVEMENTS TO BUILDING FACADES AND TO ENHANCE PEDESTRIAN AMENITIES SUCH AS AWNINGS, SIGNAGE, AND LIGHTING.**

Strategy 9A: Conduct an inventory of all properties and structures in the study area to assess physical condition, develop preliminary costs for rehabilitation and improvements and identify appropriate mechanisms for making improvements, such as code enforcement, grants, revolving loan funds, Business Improvement Districts, etc.



*Workshop participants suggested a number of ways of improving University Avenue.*

Strategy 9B: Actively enforce building codes in the University Avenue Study Area and, if necessary, take what ever steps are necessary to contact and encourage absentee owners to maintain their property. If necessary, strengthen the Anti-Blight Ordinance.

Strategy 9C: Actively enforce the existing Sign Ordinance and take steps to remove building signs that are not consistent with the regulations.

Strategy 9D: Actively enforce anti-graffiti codes and fund youth programs to remove graffiti on an on-going basis within the University Avenue Study Area.

Strategy 9E: Utilize residential rehab loan programs to include low and moderate income levels, which provide low interest loans to property owners to renovate existing rental and ownership housing, including single family. The application of these funds should ensure that moderate as well as low income residents are not displaced. (See also Housing section.)

Strategy 9F: Initiate a pilot commercial facade renovation program and continue to implement the seismic repair revolving loan fund. Test on the block between Milvia and Shattuck. If successful, extend to other areas along the Avenue. (See also Immediate Action Item #4.)

Strategy 9G: Restore the facade of the West Berkeley Branch library to its original architectural character.

**POLICY 10: ENCOURAGE THE CREATION OF NEW PUBLIC OPEN SPACES WITHIN THE UNIVERSITY AVENUE STUDY AREA AND MAINTAIN THOSE OPEN SPACES THAT ALREADY EXIST.**

Strategy 10A: Create a greenway along the West Street (former Santa Fe Railroad) right-of-way that connects Strawberry Creek Park with Berkeley Way Park. Active uses, such as community gardens, basketball courts, tennis courts, tot-lots, an outdoor cafe, and a community center must be encouraged to provide “eyes” on the park. If feasible, incorporate this route into the city-wide bicycle path network and provide a safe pedestrian connection where the greenway crosses University Ave.

Strategy 10B: Encourage new developments to provide outdoor plazas and small urban open spaces at the street to bring activity to the area and additional security.

Strategy 10C: Review parks maintenance programs and provide a strategy for on-going maintenance and police presence in local parks.