

# Urban Villages to reshape San Jose

By Leila Hakimzadeh and Matthew VanOosten

San Jose's Urban Village strategy represents the City's largest ever commitment to smart growth, quality urban design, and the development of more complete communities. The Association of Bay Area Governments expects San Jose to grow by 400,000 people over the next 25 years, a number greater than San Francisco and Oakland's growth combined. Over that same time, San Jose is planning for 470,000 new jobs.

Existing development has already reached San Jose's urban growth boundary. The city chose to focus new growth inward around transit and commercial centers — places that can accommodate a greater intensity of uses in a sustainable manner. These 71 areas are called Urban Villages and are spread across the city. Through them, the city hopes to bring jobs and urban amenities to more of San Jose's residents. The Urban Village Plans are thus an important and necessary step in the city's evolution.

At its core, the Urban Village strategy is employing land use changes and urban design interventions to combat decades of car-oriented development. San Jose rapidly developed after World War II, growing from about 100,000 people in 1950 to over 600,000 by 1980. Indeed, Anthony P. (Dutch) Hamann, the city manager from 1950 to 1969, made it his goal to transform San Jose into the Los Angeles of northern California. During his time as city manager, annexation increased the city's size from 17 square miles to 149.<sup>1</sup> Tract home developments, single-story commercial uses, and regional malls characterized this rapid development. In these car-dominated environments, Urban Villages will create neighborhood centers to which residents can safely and easily walk or bike.

Planning for job growth is another key aspect of the Urban Village Plans. Since the 1970s, San Jose has served as a bedroom community for nearby job centers like Cupertino, Mountain View, and Palo Alto. But the Envision San Jose 2040 General Plan, instituted in 2011, calls for "jobs first" and for Urban Villages to promote commercial uses beyond just ground floor retail. In this way, San Jose aims to shift the ratio of jobs-to-employed-residents from the current 0.8 to 1.3 over a 20-year period. This will help transform San Jose from a bedroom community to a city of great places where people will want to live and work.

## SPUR program on Urban Villages, Nov. 6

SPUR San Jose and APA present Michael Brilliot, City of San Jose planner, in an update on the urban villages headed for approval and the areas coming up next. 12:30 pm. Free for APA and SPUR members; \$10 for non-members. More information at <http://bit.ly/1rabDzy>



Meridian at Midtown, a development under construction in the West San Carlos Urban Village. Source: Republic Urban Properties

The current real estate market favors residential construction over commercial construction. But when office commercial is built, many employers opt for insular office parks or campuses that offer the corporate culture and security they desire. These are predominantly auto-oriented developments with large surface parking lots. The many wide roads leading to the parking lots cut through the urban landscape, giving little thought to pedestrian and bicycle amenities or public spaces.

A growing number of tech companies and their workers are beginning to see value in higher densities and in placemaking, which aims to increase amenity and socialization. This is already playing out as a number of companies and their workers move north to dense and metropolitan San Francisco. As in San Francisco, great places are increasingly being recognized as keys to a city's success and to economic development. The Bay Area urban think tank SPUR stated in a recent report, "Silicon Valley, the most dynamic and innovative economic engine in the world, is not creating great places."<sup>2</sup> To remain viable and modern, Silicon Valley must do so. San Jose's Urban Villages offer an ideal solution to the problem.

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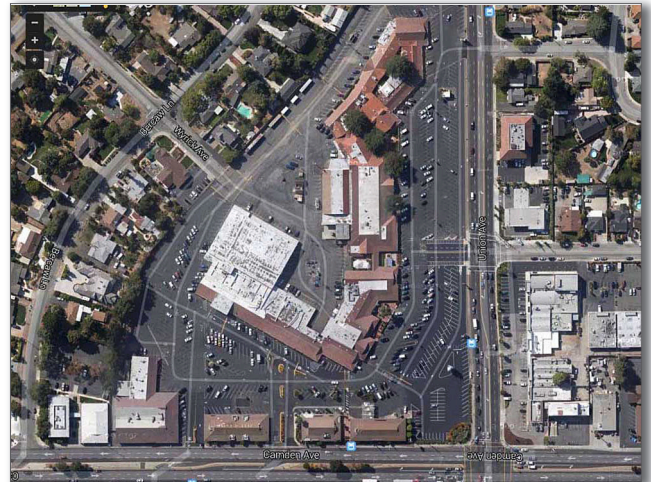
They call for development that:

- Mixes residential and employment activities,
- Establishes minimum densities to support transit use, bicycling, and walking,
- Promotes high-quality urban design,
- Engages local neighborhoods, and
- Encourages the redevelopment of underutilized properties with access to existing infrastructure.

The Urban Village strategy also meets San Jose's environmental goals by coordinating land use and transportation plans and reducing greenhouse gas emissions and vehicle miles traveled. The strategy plays an important role in helping the city conform to SB 375, the California State Sustainable Communities and Climate Protection Act of 2008, and to AB 32, the Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006.

Without redevelopment agencies, and facing declines in public funding, financing infrastructure and amenities is among the more critical challenges facing the implementation of Urban Villages. The City is pursuing an array of funding sources and financing mechanisms to implement the broad range of improvements proposed in the Urban Village Plans. Funds could come from multiple sources and several different financing tools, including impact fees, development agreements, assessment districts, and community benefits. A critical part of the ongoing Urban Village planning will be identifying which implementation tools or funding sources to use, and when.

San Jose's Urban Villages will not blossom overnight. Their implementation will instead be driven largely by market demand. The plans offer a policy framework and path for future development. Over time, they will direct San Jose's job and housing growth to walkable and bike-friendly areas with good access to public transit and other existing infrastructure and facilities. The Villages will be complete neighborhoods, thoughtfully designed, creating the "great places" San Jose wants and needs.



Cambrian Park Plaza Shopping Center. Source: Google Maps



Design study for Cambrian Park Plaza Shopping Center, courtesy of Wallace, Roberts & Todd. Aerial by Google.



Design for South Bascom Urban Village, courtesy MIG.

Silicon Valley is seeing significant changes in how and where people want to live, and where their jobs are located. Urban Villages will help reshape San Jose into a highly livable city, well suited for future job and housing growth — still mindful of cars, but with a focus on people.

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<sup>1</sup> Safford, Pat, "The legacy of Dutch Hamann plagues Cambrian residents, Annexation Background." *Campbell Express* 59 (45). p. 1. (November 17, 2010). <http://bit.ly/10gNzVh>

<sup>2</sup> "Getting to Great Places: How Better Urban Design Can Strengthen San Jose's Future," *SPUR*, December 2013, p.4. <http://bit.ly/10gNLnx>