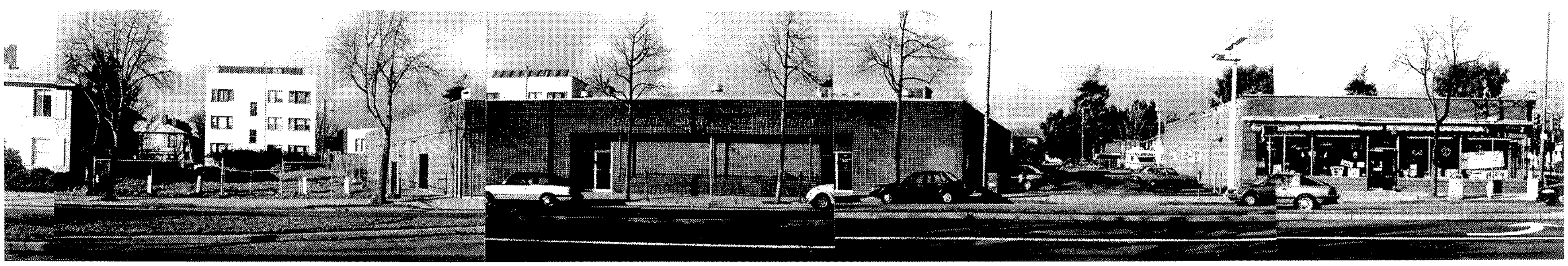
# Area-Wide Issues and Strategies

## Opportunities and Constraints

There are many positive attributes to the Avenue and its surrounding neighborhoods. For instance, residents along or near San Pablo Avenue can walk to a wide variety of small, locally-owned businesses. Residents of Downtown are close to movie theaters, restaurants, support services, job opportunities, and BART. The neighborhoods north and south of the Avenue are predominately stable and attractive, with a diversity of housing types and households.

Residents of the area are, though, affected by activities on University Avenue where an atmosphere of instability has emerged over the last few years. They have expressed an interest in modifying the policies and programs that apply to development and activities on the Avenue so that economic revitalization can occur and current spillover problems are minimized. In doing this, members of the community have identified a broad range of issues affecting the livability and economic vitality of University Avenue, including crime, dilapidated buildings, vacant storefronts, a predominance of rental housing, a high proportion of City-supported social services, numerous liquor stores, lack of neighborhood-serving retail, auto-oriented street and building design, a poor pedestrian environment, aphid-infested street trees, and a minimum of public spaces.



*Underutilized parcels scattered along the Avenue are "opportunitites" for future infill and revitalization.*

## *Key Facts*

The degree to which data is available to support community concerns varies. Although data related to each of these topics has been gathered, analyzed, and presented in this document and its companion volume, the "Opportunities and Constraints Report," there is insufficient statistical evidence to make conclusions relative to the "cause and effect" relationships between these factors and the conditions along the Avenue. Throughout this report and prior documents, data has been provided and used as only one source of information to illuminate the range of issues raised by community members, development experts, and area merchants.

Key facts related to the University Avenue study area include:[1]

### Crime[2]

- 1995 incidence of "Crimes Against Persons" and Crimes Against Property" for the Plan Area as a whole were 19% and 14% of the city-wide totals respectively. Incidence of all crime (against persons and property) ranked by Sub-Area, as a percent of the whole Plan area crimes, were: Sub-Area 4 (39%), Sub-Area 2 (23%), Sub-Area 1 (22%) and Sub-Area 3 (16%).

- When compared to other similar commercial corridors within the City, the incidence of crime in the University Avenue Plan area reflects similar levels of crime (measured by crimes per linear foot of corridor). Of the five corridors analyzed, Shattuck had the highest ratio of crime on the Avenue (3.88), followed by Telegraph (3.78) and University Avenue (3.37). For the surrounding Neighborhoods, Telegraph had the highest ratio (6.68), followed by University Avenue (5.96), and Shattuck (5.29). Combined ratios of Avenue and Neighborhoods (entire study areas) rank Telegraph with the highest (10.46), followed by University Avenue (9.33), and Shattuck (9.17).

### Buildings

- Over 75 buildings within the study area have been seismically damaged or need repairs to bring them up to current seismic standards. Additional buildings need basic maintenance, facade renovation, and modernization.

- Seismically damaged buildings are clustered east of MLK Way in the Downtown, where older, mid-rise building-types predominate. Two vacant SRO's, containing 55 units, are among those most severely affected by seismic damage. The U.C. Theater has also been damaged.

### Businesses

- Though at the time this plan was prepared there were over 25 vacant storefronts on University Avenue, the number of new businesses along the Avenue has grown at a faster rate than the city as a whole.[3]

- Several liquor stores are located within the area and packaged alcohol is also available at grocery stores and some gas stations. The city's other major streets, particularly those within a mile of the UC campus, also have clusters of establishments with liquor licenses. Data is not available to correlate incidents of crime to liquor store locations.

### Incomes

- Median incomes of households in the census tracts encompassing University Avenue for 1980 was 80% of the city-wide median, by 1990 it had increased to 81%.[4]

- Median incomes of all households in the study area census tracts in 1990 were $24,000 or 64% of county-wide median incomes. However, the median incomes of households in the census tract area were only 54% of county incomes for 2-person families and 48% of county median incomes for 3-person families.[5]

*New investments such as this mixed-use building, which harmonizes with its older neighbors, are bringing new activity and liveliness to University Avenue.*

### Housing

- Roughly 80% of the study area's housing stock are rental units. This represents approximately 12% of the city's rental housing.
- Ownership housing in the study area has increased at a faster rate than in the city as a whole.[6]
- Though several condominium apartment buildings have recently been constructed along the city's other "Avenues," none have been located along University Avenue.
- Median rents in the study area are comparable to the city as a whole.[7]
- Median home values and median contract rents within the Census Tract Area have increased at a similar rate to the rest of the city.[8]
- The study area includes approximately 51% of the city's units/beds targeted for the homeless population and 74% of the city's non-subsidized Single Room Occupancy units.[9]

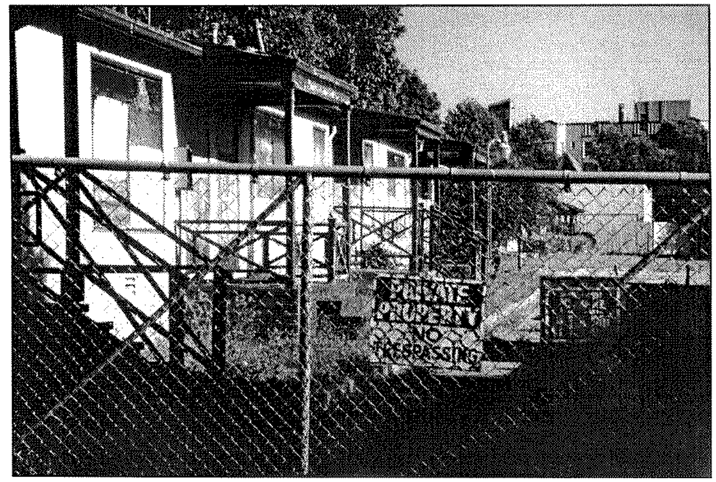
### Community Services

- There are 32 community service providers located in the study area. They provide a range of Enrichment, Prevention/Advancement, Safety Net, and Crisis services.
- The greatest number of the area's community service providers (13 or 41%) are located in the Downtown.

### Streetscape

- University Avenue carries up to 53,000 cars per day between the freeway and San Pablo Avenue. However, between San Pablo and MLK Way traffic volumes decrease and speeding traffic increases. Streetlights are timed above the posted 30 mph speed limit.
- Most sidewalks along University are narrow, have broken pavement, and the trees on either side of the street are heavily infested with aphids, which secrete a sticky substance onto them.
- Crosswalks are not highly visible to drivers and push-button light activators are not working properly.
- Bus shelters and other pedestrian amenities are being removed without replacement.
- Primary walking and bicycling connections to BART and other important local destinations are not well lit or signed.

It is a delicate balance that the University Avenue Strategic Plan must strike – promoting change and safety, without losing the best qualities of the area. How we achieve these goals, though, is the most challenging aspect of this planning effort. Community members have different concerns about the emphasis of the plan that are, in the long run, not mutually exclusive but do have short-term implications that could be contradictory, such as how to invest City resources in housing developments or how to plan for future social services. Factoring into this discussion is the fact that many of the Avenue's problems are related to regional or even national trends that are neither created nor solved at the local level. The recent recession, the changing retail environment where more large off-price stores are moving into the East Bay trade area, increasing homelessness, and poverty are all affecting the conditions we see on University Avenue. This Strategic Plan will not be able to solve all of these issues, but can provide a strong context to lessen their impact, while maintaining quality of life.



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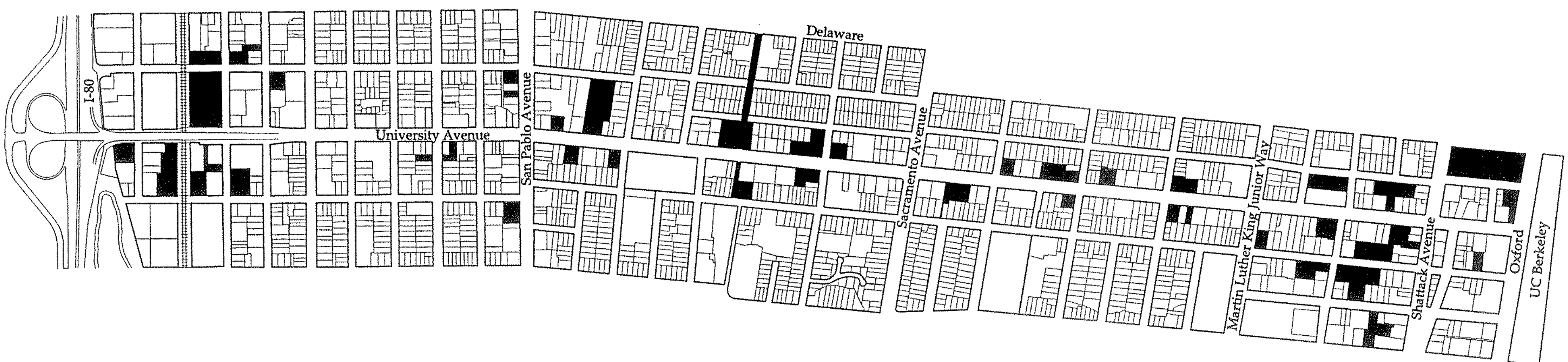
## *Opportunity Sites*

As part of the planning for University Avenue, "opportunity sites" were identified. These sites represent locations where significant renovations or new construction may occur over the lifetime of the Strategic Plan. The sites were selected based on a number of land use, urban design, and economic criteria, and include:

- Sites with Planned or In-Process Projects
- Vacant Parcels
- For-Sale Properties
- Abandoned Properties
- Significantly Blighted Buildings
- Underutilized Properties
- Sites with Uses that are Inconsistent with the Intent of the Strategic Plan.

As illustrated in the Opportunity Sites Map below, the parcels where significant change is expected to occur over the next 5 to 10 years, tend to be clustered into nodes or groupings of parcels. While this trend may represent pockets of decline today, these sites are locations where carefully planned and managed development can be catalysts for future investment and long term revitalization.




Opportunity Sites

## *Economic and Market Conditions*

The following discussion reflects a snapshot look at market conditions at a specific point in time. Its intent is to assist in making policy decisions that are grounded in fact, with the understanding that conditions will change over time and this plan must be flexible enough to accommodate those changes.

Although the City of Berkeley's population remained more or less stable between 1980 and 1990 changing from 103,350 to 102,724, the population in the census tracts analyzed (see census tract map) increased from 25,989 in 1980 to 26,227 in 1990. The household size in the census tract area also increased from 1.98 in 1980 to 2.02 in 1990, which is still smaller than the household size city-wide which decreased from 2.11 in 1980 to 2.10 in 1990. Median income in the census tract area in 1980 was 80 percent of the city-wide median income and in 1990 had increased slightly to 81 percent. Median incomes of all households in the study area census tracts in 1990 were $24,000 or 64% of Alameda County area median incomes (AMI). However, the median incomes of households in the census tract area were only 54% of county incomes for 2-person families and 48% of county median incomes for 3-person families. Although home values and median contract rents are lower in the census tract area than city-wide, between 1980 and 1990 they increased at a similar rate to the rest of the city. The income and home value data indicate that the Census Tract Area is not in distress, but is rather a relatively stable neighborhood. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that conditions in the study area may not be as positive as in the larger Census Tracts area. Unfortunately, income and home value data is not maintained for the study area.

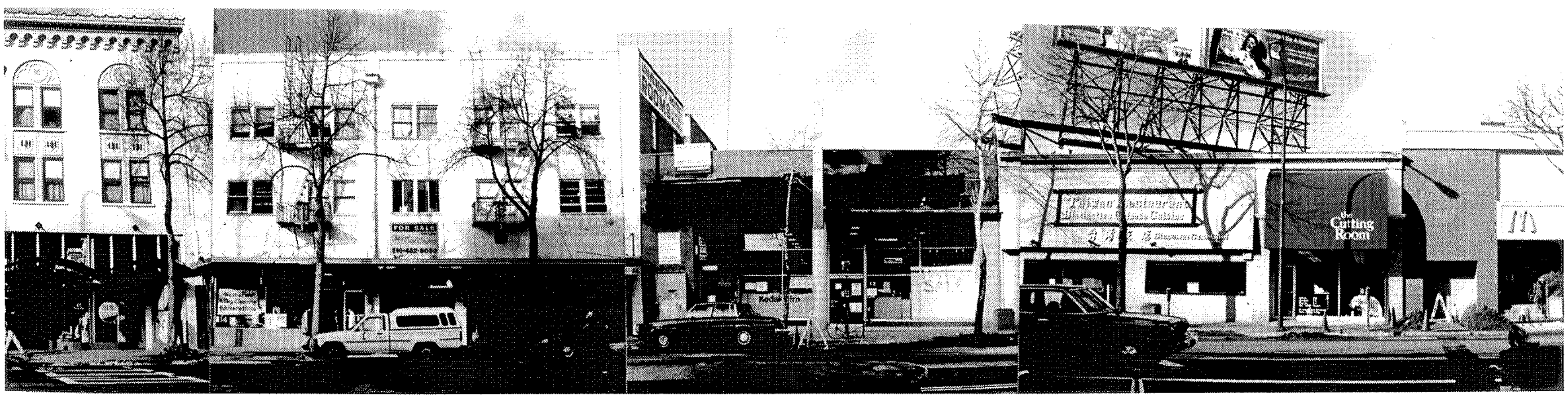
An assessment of the residential, hotel/motel, retail, and office real estate market was prepared based on qualitative information gathered from key informants, including real estate brokers, developers, merchants, landowners, and residents in the area.

The ***residential*** market in the study area varies according to product type. The overlap in prices between single-family sales (resale) and new condominium units suggests that planned condominium units within the area face a competitive disadvantage with respect to their pricing. In 1994, for example, the median single-family sales price within the study area was $174,000 for two and three bedroom units, compared to condominium sales prices city-wide which range from $179,000 to $220,000 for two bedroom units. There is no clear consensus regarding the state of the market for new, for-sale, moderately priced live/work units. However, performance of the most recently constructed project, near the study area, at prices ranging from $127,000 to $185,000, has been sluggish. Proforma analysis of typical residential and mixed-use building types indicate, though, that with careful design, new multistory condominiums that fit within this price range could be built within the study area. Therefore, if the market improves for competitively priced condominiums, the University Avenue area could attract this kind of development.

***Hotel/Motel*** uses on University Avenue receive much of their business due to location and recognition. Occupancy rates for 1994 vary substantially from 33 percent to 95 percent. Many of these businesses have owned their property for quite some time and are unlikely to leave the area in the near term.

Demand for ***retail*** space in Berkeley stems largely from tenants who are already doing business in, or are familiar with Berkeley. However, University Avenue, unlike the rest of the city, attracts interest from more regionally-oriented businesses as well as national franchises. Although there is a substantial amount of vacant retail space on University Avenue, much of it is small (1,000 to 5,000 square feet), constrained by outdated configurations, and/or within buildings that need substantial maintenance and repairs. With the exceptions of the Fourth Street and San Pablo Avenue districts, most of the retail space along University Avenue is spread out, rather than concentrated in easily identifiable destinations. Existing retail space on University Avenue commands between $0.70 and $1.40 gross, which is less than the downtown or Fourth Street area, which range from $1.60 to $2.90 triple net. However, new space at the corner of San Pablo and University Avenue will command between $1.90 and $2.10 triple net.

Recent demand for retail space has been strongest in the San Pablo/University Avenue node, where most of the new stores have been regional or national chains. Sluggish leasing activity in other parts of the University Avenue corridor indicate that retail demand is soft. Although much of the existing retail space being activity marketed now will lease up over time, it is likely that changing retail conditions within the entire East Bay trade area will continue to create strong competition for this location. Given Berkeley's success at supporting small businesses, an opportunity exists along University Avenue to create a retail environment that is distinctly different

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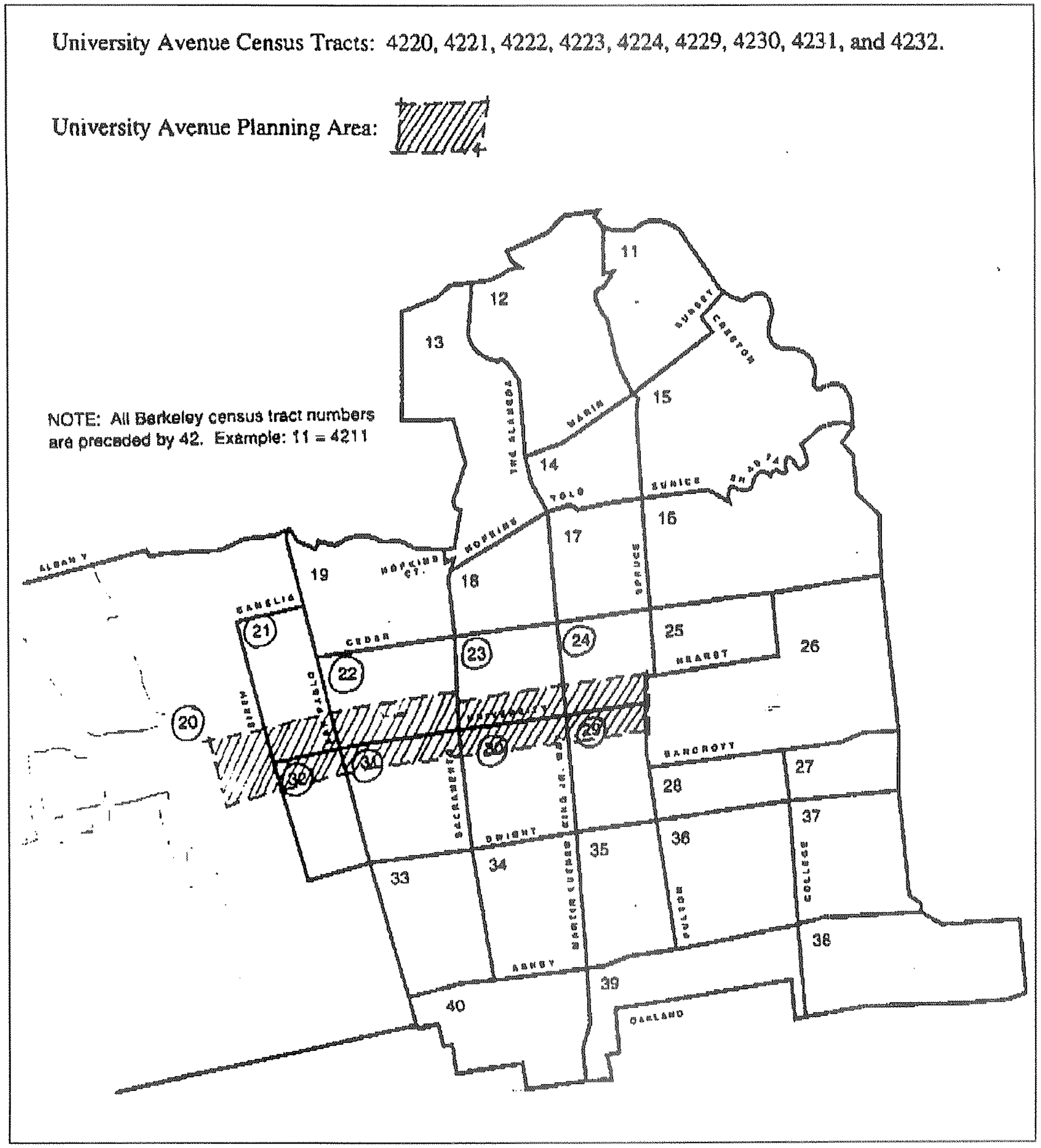
from auto-oriented malls and superstores. Clustering retail into easily identifiable nodes, that allow shoppers to frequent several businesses at one time, would be an important component to this strategy.

Based on the characteristics of the *office* market in Berkeley, which is concentrated in three major nodes in Downtown, West Berkeley, and the Alta Bates neighborhood, there appears to be limited immediate potential for office space on University Avenue west of MLK Way in the near term. However, if retail along the Avenue coalesced into activity nodes, then small-scale professional office space may become more viable, particularly within walking distance of either the Downtown or North Berkeley BART station.




*Source: City of Berkeley*
*Prepared by Bay Area Economics*