



SAVING OUR HISTORIC DOWNTOWN WITH AN SB79 LOCAL ALTERNATIVE PLAN

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Key Concepts

- Why we Value Mountain View's Downtown Historic Retail District
- SB79 Could Eliminate Our Historic Downtown
- SB79 Local Alternative Plan As A Solution
- Obstacles that must be overcome to create an effective SB79 Local Alternative Plan



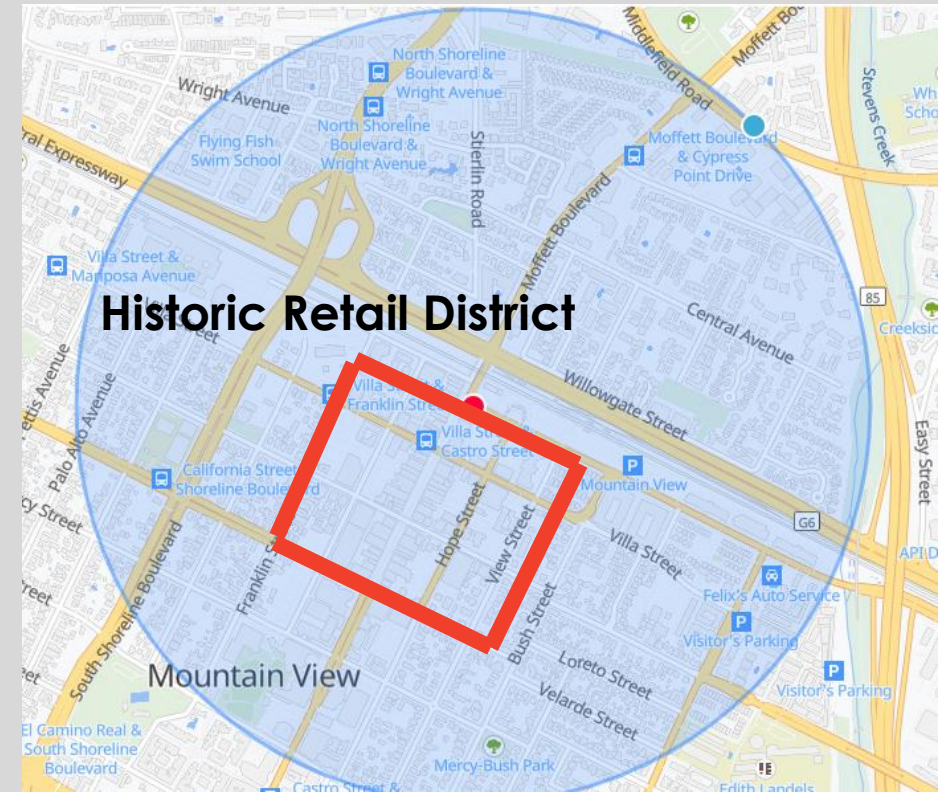
Why we Value Mountain View's Downtown Historic Retail District

- **“Downtown Mountain View is the historic center and focus of the community, and the “heartbeat” of the city.”** Downtown Precise Plan, p. 4.
- **“Mountain View’s living room”**
- **Contains key historic buildings**, connecting the residents of the city with the city’s past
- **A key center of Mountain View retail and restaurant activity**
 - About 75% of those visiting come from out of town
 - Major generator of sales tax revenue



SB79 Could Eliminate Our Historic Downtown

- Downtown Mountain View transit center is an **SB79 Tier 1 transit stop**
- **SB79 permits**
 - 7 story (75 ft) residential buildings within 1/4 mile of Tier 1 transit stop
 - 6 story (65 ft) residential buildings within 1/2 mile of a Tier1 transit stop
- Provides **a strong financial incentive** for property owners to assemble their properties and redevelop them as housing
- Our downtown will no longer be a **retail and restaurant destination**



Downtown Caltrain **Transit-Oriented Development Zone**
(Extends to the Right)

Senator Wiener says SB79 Local Alternative Plans are the answer

- “Why did you draft a state mandate to have every city upzone without any sensitivities to individual characters of each city, so that the state remedies would almost certainly destroy local uniqueness?” one person asked, to a smattering of applause throughout the room.
- “That’s like the ‘when did you start beating your spouse’ question,” Wiener shot back. “I completely dispute the premise of that question.”
- “Oh wow...” people in the crowd scoffed.
- **“Cities have the ability to craft their own alternative option that implements the goals of the bill, but does it in a way that works for that city,” Wiener said, returning to the dry, policy-focused responses that made up the majority of his answers.**
- Mission Local website, “*Lurie warns Sunset: Upzone, or S.F. could see ‘towers everywhere’*” October 7, 2025



Mountain View Council Members on SB79 Local Alternative Plans

- “I expect that Mountain View will likely work on a **local alternative** to protect historic resources to find a more palatable community-supported approach to upzoning around the transit stations,” --- Councilmember Lucas Ramirez (MV Voice 8/26/2025)
- “The law itself allows for **alternative plans** and so because we’re being proactive, we’re already kind of ahead of this ball.”– Vice Mayor Emily Ramos (MV Voice 8/26/2025)



Wouldn't new high buildings be better?

- Our downtown could turn into another San Antonio with empty ground floor retail and apartment lobbies.
- Residents will not be living downtown, they will just be living next to the tracks



Planning Commissioners Demand Action Development Staff Pushes Back

- Several commissioners expressed concern that the legislation could lead to the demolition of historically significant buildings on Castro Street that are near the Mountain View Transit Center – a major train, light rail and bus hub.
- “I think that would be such a big loss,” Commissioner Joyce Yin said. “So, the sooner we act to prepare, the better.”
- “I’ve tried to subtly indicate it, but maybe I’m being more forthright at this point that the message is clear,” he said. “We will do what we can, but I’m not able to commit to us having a particular agenda item or update at this time given the myriad competing workload demands on staff,” stated Director Christian Murdock

Mountain View Voice (11/10/2025)



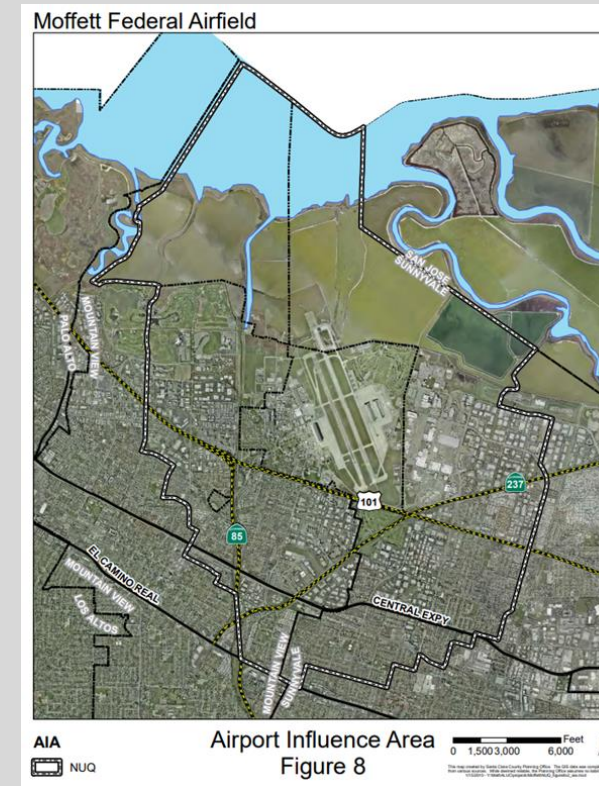
Other Cities Are Already Working On SB79 Local Alternative Plans

- Palo Alto had a council study session and authorized work on October 22
- Sunnyvale has begun working on a plan to save the Murphy Street historic district
- Los Angeles intends to submit their plan to California HCD by February 15
- **Mountain View should not wait until 2026 Q1 to get started.**



Obstacles to Saving Our Historic Retail District with an SB79 Local Alternative Plan

- **Actions for SB79 local alternative plan review**
 - **Creation of maps of transit-oriented development zones** by “metropolitan planning organization” (SB79 Section 1)
 - SB79 has no mandated deadline.
 - **Height limits must be reviewed** by Airport Land Use Commission (ALUC) within the Moffett Federal Airfield Airport Influence Area
 - Unclear how to obtain viable height limits to use them in a proposed SB79 local alternative plan.
 - **All deadlines** for California HCD review of SB79 local alternative plans are **tight and unclear**.
- **Staff must be proactive to move quickly and seek clarity while there is still time**



Livable Mountain View's Recommended SB79 Local Alternative Plan

- **Define a preservation area** which includes the downtown historic retail district and vicinity
- **Transfer density** from the preservation area to the East Whisman and Ferry Morse Way Precise Plan areas around the 3 Light Rail transit-oriented development zones
- Establish the preservation area as an **official historic district** on our local historic register

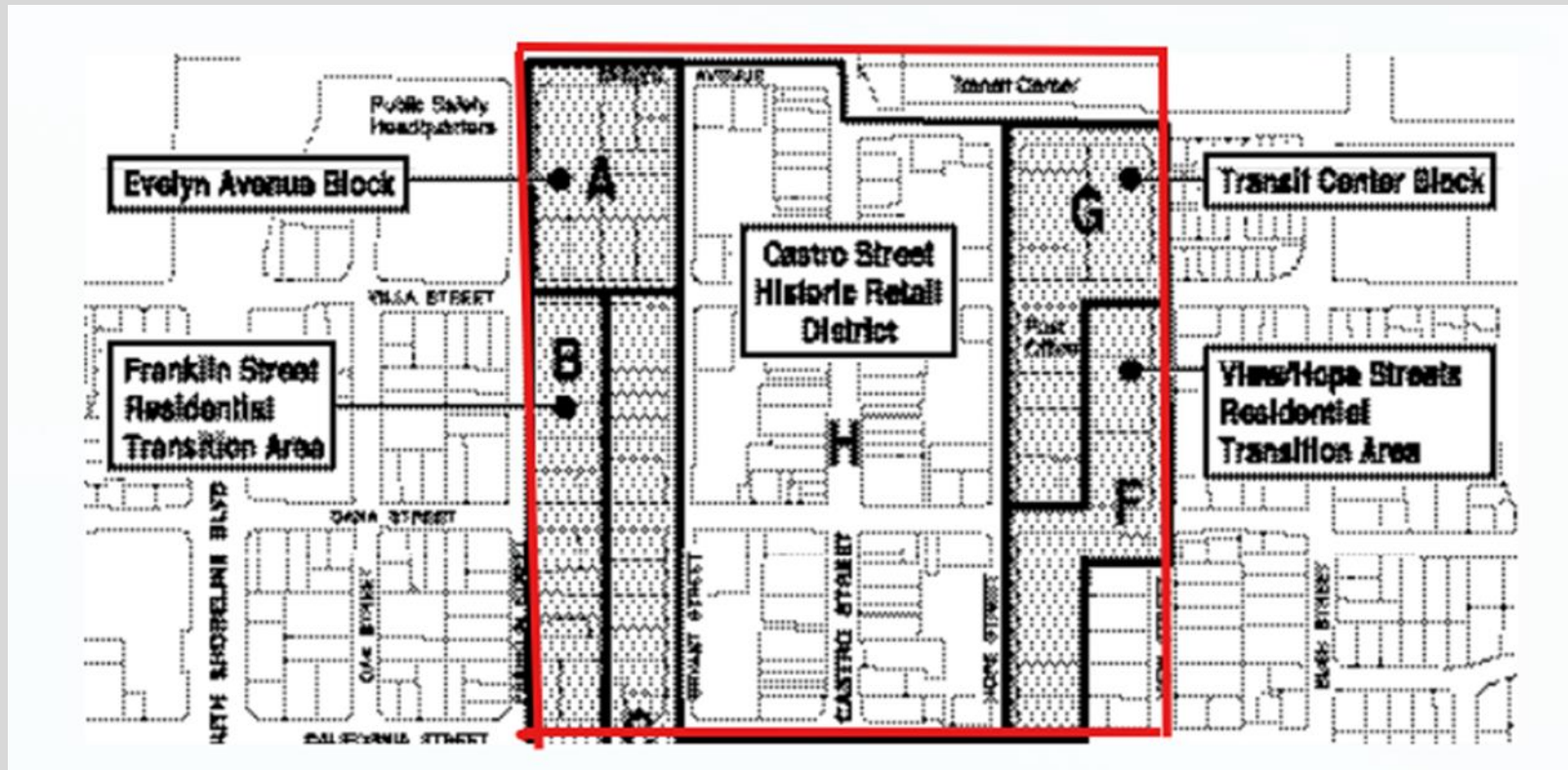


SB79 Local Alternative Plan Rules

- **SB79 permits a local jurisdiction (e.g. city government) to propose a “local alternative plan” as a substitute for the default requirements**
 - **Density removed** from one transit-oriented development zone must be replaced in that zone or another
 - **Density reduction** in a general area can be reduced at most 50% from the default
 - Special considerations for **historic resources**
 - Must be listed on local historic register by the time the SB79 local alternative plan is submitted (which must be before July 1, 2026).
 - Can be at most 10% of a transit-oriented development zone.
 - **Density increase** can be at most 200% of default

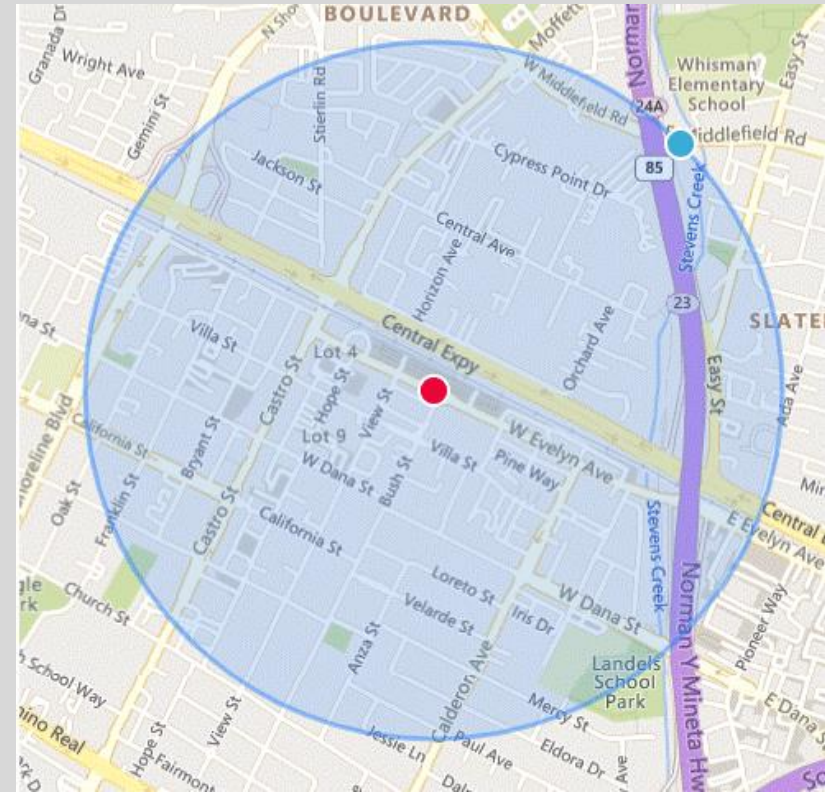


Proposed Preservation Area (within the Downtown Precise Plan)



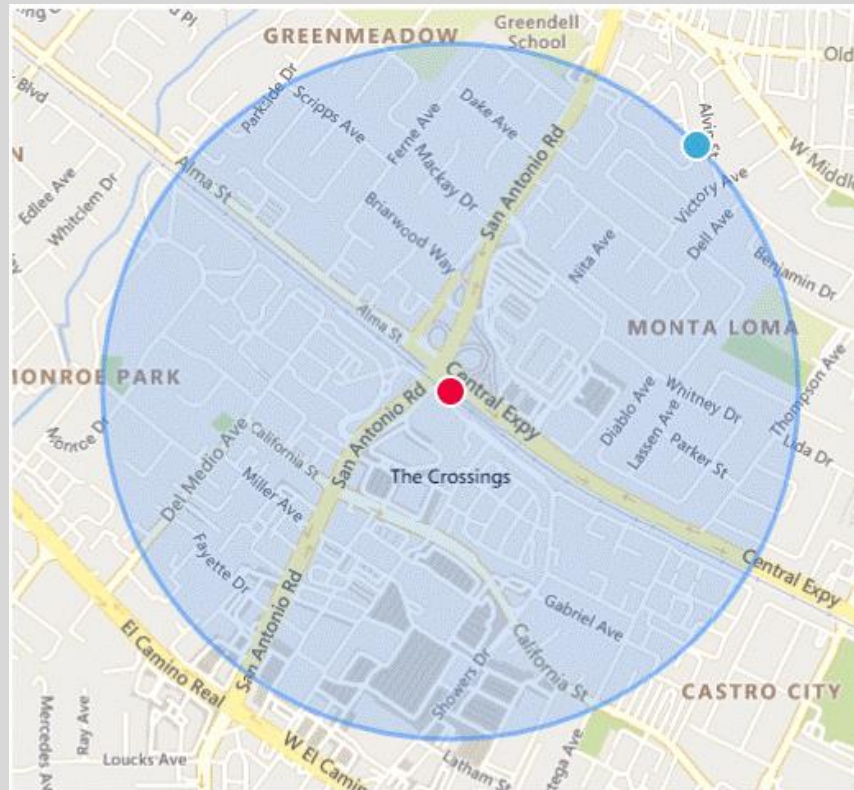
Mountain View Transit-Oriented Development Zones

- **Mountain View has 5 SB79 transit-oriented development zones**
 - Caltrain Downtown Mountain View
 - Caltrain San Antonio
 - Whisman Station Light Rail
 - Middlefield Station Light Rail
 - NASA/Bayshore Light Rail
- **Caltrain stations are SB79 Tier 1**
 - 7 stories (75 ft) within 1/4 mile
 - 6 story (65 ft) within 1/2 mile
- **Light Rail stations are SB79 Tier 2**
 - 6 stories (65 ft) within 1/4 mile
 - 5 story (55 ft) within 1/2 mile
- **NOTE:** Zones are shown as circles, but are actually ovals (multiple pedestrian entrances)



**Caltrain Downtown Mountain View
Tier 1 (6-7 stories)**

Mountain View Transit-Oriented Development Zones



**Caltrain San Antonio
Tier 1 (6-7 stories)**

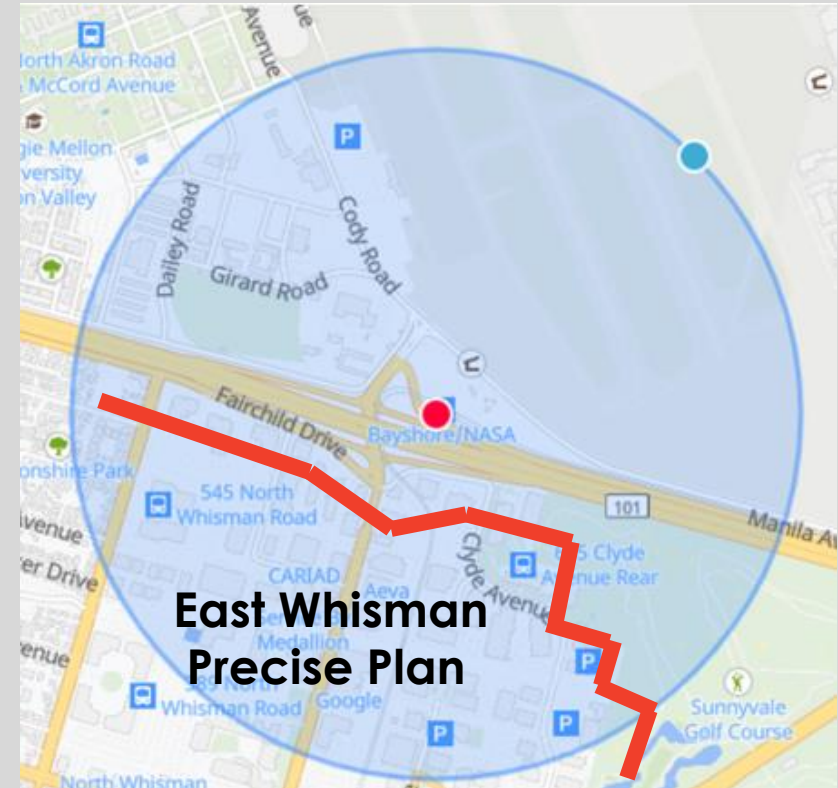


**Whisman Station Light Rail
Tier 2 (5-6 stories)**

Mountain View Transit-Oriented Development Zones



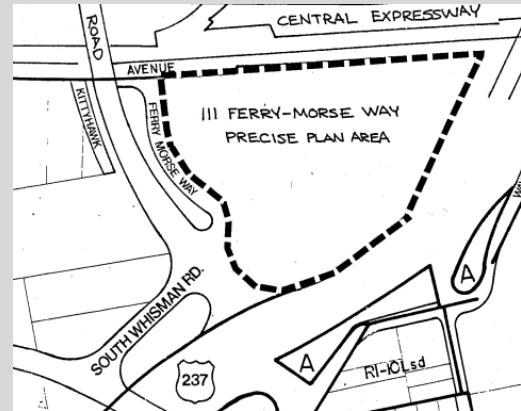
**Middlefield Light Rail
Tier 2 (5-6 stories)**



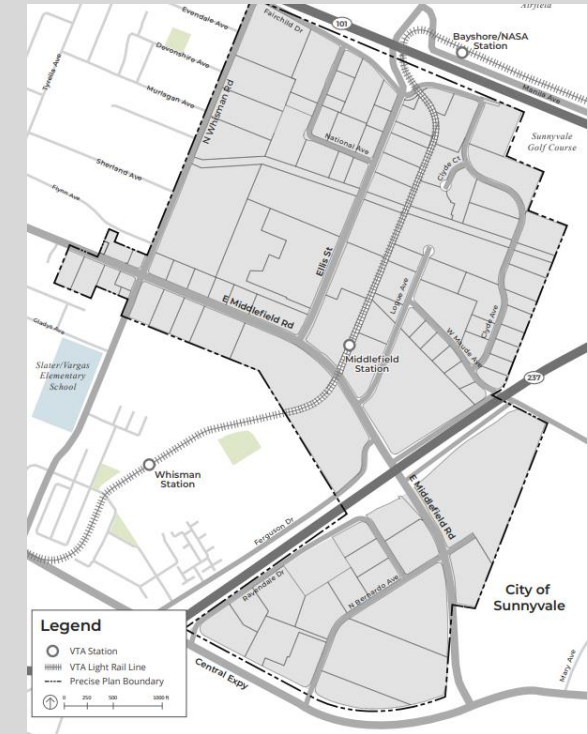
**NASA/Bayshore Light Rail
Tier 2 (5-6 stories)**

SB79 Density Transfer

- We DO recommend transfer TO Light Rail zones
 - East Whisman and Ferry Morse Way Precise Plans cover a lot of these zones
 - Development in these precise plan areas is mostly commercial office
- We do NOT recommend transfer TO Caltrain zones
 - Default height is 7 stories
 - Already contain residential development



Ferry Morse Way
Precise Plan Area



East Whisman
Precise Plan Area

SB79 Specific Language on Historic Resources

- **Section 65912.161** (a)(2) The (local alternative) plan shall not reduce the maximum allowed density for any individual site on which the plan allows residential use by more than 50 percent below that permitted under this chapter, except for sites meeting any of the following criteria:
 - (C) Sites with a historic resource designated on a local register, so long as sites excluded from the density requirements of this paragraph on that basis do not cumulatively exceed 10 percent of the eligible area of any transit-oriented development zone.
- **Section 65912.161** (b)(1) Prior to one year following the adoption of the seventh revision of the housing element, Section 65912.157 (default SB79 rule) shall not apply to any of the following for which the local government has adopted an ordinance in accordance with Section 65912.160 (SB79 compliance rules) indicating the site's exclusion
 - (F) Sites with a historic resource designated as of January 1, 2025, on a local register.



Adobe Building was on the Mountain View local historic register as of January 1, 2025

Mountain View Historic Considerations

- Can Mountain View declare our “downtown historic retail district” and the vicinity an official historic district and place it on our local historic register?
 - Buildings and places can be certified as historic based on **events, persons, design, and information potential** (not just design)
 - **No required number or age for buildings as part of a historic district.**
 - 12 California cities have **certified local historic districts** including Redwood City, San Francisco, and Santa Cruz



Redwood City's Expanded Main Street Historic District

- **Rationale**

- “Many prominent pioneer and early-day residents and organizations are associated with the buildings in the proposed expanded district. The boundaries of the proposed expanded district were chosen because this is a pioneer commercial area of contiguous, historically contributing commercial structures.”

- **Characteristics**

- Includes multiple blocks around Main Street
 - Contains both architecturally significant and ordinary buildings
 - District considerations include persons and events that occurred there as well as architectural design of buildings

- **In Mountain View, Castro Street was created in 1864 as a commercial district when the Southern Pacific Railroad was built.**



District
Boundaries

Tight (and Unclear) Deadlines

Alternative Plan Adoption Deadline is July 1, 2026, but ...

- Section 65912.60 (d) If a local government adopts an ordinance to come into compliance with this section, the following provisions shall apply:
 - (1) (A) At least **14 days** prior to adoption of an ordinance pursuant to this section, the local government shall **submit a draft ordinance** to the department.
 - (B) The department may **review** the draft and report its written findings to the planning agency.
 - (2) A local government shall **submit** a copy of any **ordinance** enacted pursuant to this section to the department within 60 days of enactment.
 - (3) (A) The department shall, within **90 days**, **review** the enacted ordinance, make a finding as to whether the enacted ordinance is in substantial compliance with this section, and report that finding to the local government.
 - (B) If needed, the department may request an additional **30 days** to make a finding as to whether the enacted ordinance is in **substantial compliance** with this section, and report that finding to the local government.
 - (C) If the department does not provide written **findings** to the local government within the review period provided for in this paragraph, the ordinance shall be deemed compliant for the purposes of assessing penalties, including those pursuant to subdivision (m) of Section 65912.157.
 - (4) If at any time the department determines that the ordinance does not comply with this section, the department shall **notify the local government** in writing. The department shall provide the local government a reasonable time, not to exceed **60 days**, to respond before taking further action as authorized by this section.

Call To Action

- Livable Mountain View recommends the council submit an SB79 local alternative plan
- Density be transferred from the downtown historic retail district and the vicinity in the downtown Caltrain transit-oriented development zone to the Ferry Morse Way and East Whisman Precise Plan areas in the three Light Rail transit-oriented development zones.
- A historic district encompassing the downtown historic retail district and the vicinity should be defined and placed on the city's local historic register to take advantage of SB79 historic protections.
- Staff should begin work on SB79 local alternative plan as quickly as a council vote can be taken to authorize it, so the city does not miss any SB79 deadlines.
- Staff should seek information on when maps for transit-oriented development zones will be available and when review of the SB79 local alternative plan will take place by the Airport Land Use Commission.
- Staff should find out if not having an SB79 local alternative plan APPROVED by July 1, 2026 puts the city at risk of losing our downtown historic retail district.