

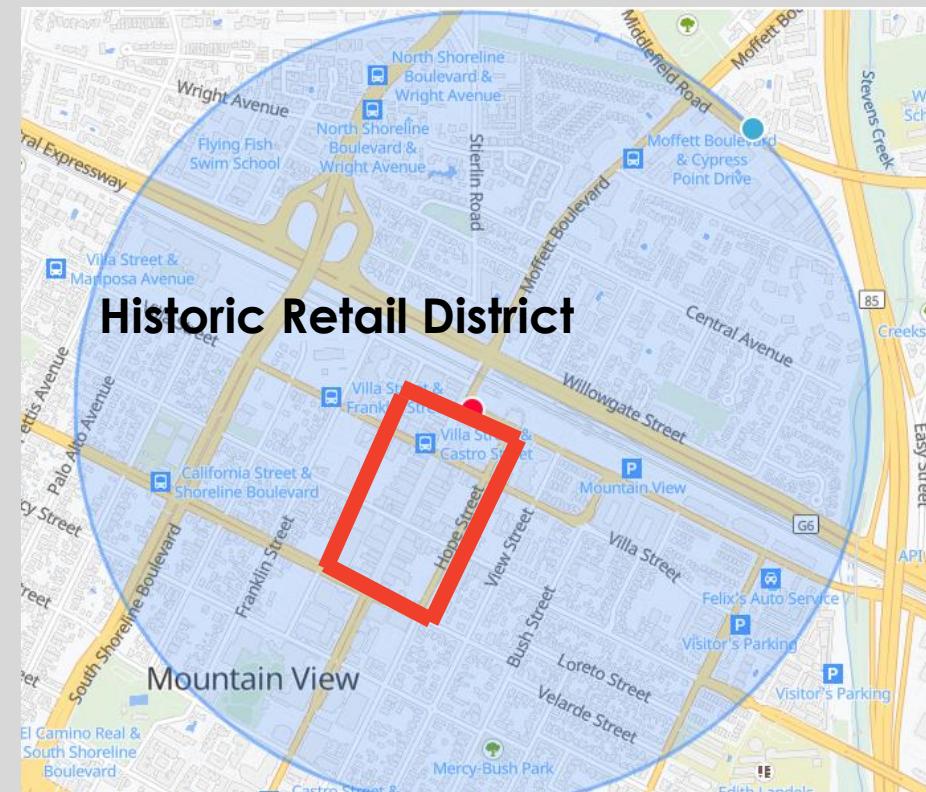


# WHY WE NEED A DOWNTOWN HISTORIC DISTRICT NOW

Robert Cox, Livable Mountain View  
Tuesday, December 9, 2025  
[robert.cox.cit@gmail.com](mailto:robert.cox.cit@gmail.com)

# Senate Bill 79 (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 for the enjoyment of the whole city**



## 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

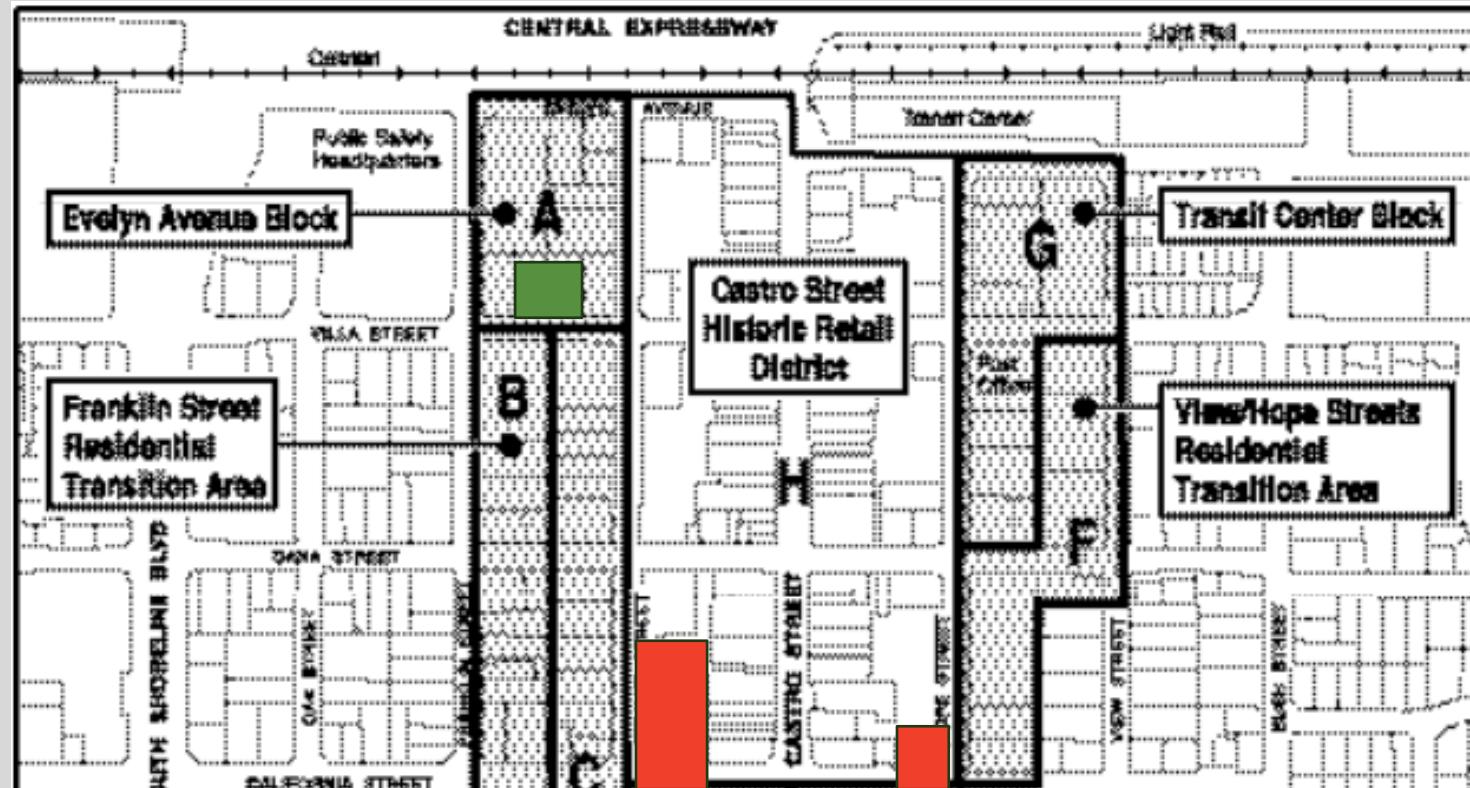


# Using Senator Wiener's SB79 Local Alternative Plan

- **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



# Proposed Preservation Area (within Mountain View's Downtown Precise Plan)



Include: Historic Retail District H and Green Area (Tied & Weilheimer Houses)

Optionally exclude District H Red Areas (Large Modern and Noncontributing Buildings)

Optionally include or exclude District H parking lots and structures



Redwood  
City's  
Expanded  
Main Street  
Historic District

# Tight Deadlines

Alternative Plan Adoption Deadline is July 1, 2026  
Review Process can take 6.5 months!

- 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.

# Other Cities Are Already Working On SB79 Local Alternative Plans

- SB79 Local Alternative Plans must be submitted and approved before SB79 goes into effect on **July 1, 2026**
  - Cities such as Palo Alto, Sunnyvale, and Los Angeles are already working on their SB79 local alternative plans.
- Unless we act now, **the historical core of our pioneer-founded city could be lost.**



Sunnyvale's Historic Murphy Avenue

# Redwood City's Expanded Main Street Historic District Is a Model for Mountain View

- **The Rationale for Redwood City Historic District**
  - “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.”
- **In Mountain View, Castro Street was created in 1864 as a commercial district when the Southern Pacific Railroad was built.**
  - Acknowledging the contribution of minority populations is an important criterion when determining historic districts.
  - The Castro area includes contributions from a uniquely diverse population of immigrants, many from minority groups.
- **Similar characteristics for the two districts**
  - Contains both architecturally significant and ordinary buildings
  - District considerations include persons and events that occurred there as well as architectural design of buildings



# Each city controls what is on its Local Historic Register

- SB79 requires that a historic district receiving an exemption be added to the city's LOCAL historic register.
- State and federal guidelines for historic districts are useful but are NOT requirements for local districts.
- Our city has the final say.



# What is a Historic District?

- A significant concentration, linkage, or continuity of sites, buildings, structures, or objects, unified by past events or aesthetically by plan or physical developments. (National Park Service)
- A historic district is a formally designated group of buildings, structures, site and spaces that relate to one another historically, architecturally, and/or culturally. Individual buildings within a district don't need to be highly significant on their own. The area's overall cohesiveness, uniqueness, and architectural integrity are what matters.“ (San Mateo Heritage Alliance)



# Our Downtown Historic District

- Castro Street remains as it was laid out in 1864 and has been continuous in its use as a commercial retail district.
- Therefore, Castro Street and its vicinity itself is a historic site.
  - Buildings **need not retain their original architecture** to contribute to the historic district
  - No requirements on the number, age, or architectural merit of buildings in the district
    - Some will be contributing, some not.
- A **proposed historic district should be judged as a whole**, rather than by critiquing each building individually.



Historic Redwood City Courthouse Today

Only the metal dome remains from the Redwood City courthouse re-constructed after the 1906 earthquake. This courthouse has gone through multiple design iterations.

# Who can nominate a historic district?

By law:

- City council
- City development staff
- Citizens' organizations and individuals can make nominations for a historic district
- **Quick action is needed** to meet SB79 local alternative plan deadlines.



# Call to Action

- 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.
- This must be completed before SB79 takes effect on July 1, 2026.
- Staff should defer less urgent land use work for six months to get an SB79 local alternative plan submitted and approved.

