



Office of the City Manager

INFORMATION CALENDAR

September 29, 2015

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From:  Dee Williams-Ridley, Interim City Manager

Submitted by: Phil Harrington, Acting Director, Public Works

Subject: University Avenue Improvements in Downtown Streets and Open Space Improvement Plan

INTRODUCTION

This report provides a briefing on pending roadway and sidewalk improvements on University Avenue between Shattuck Avenue and Oxford Street, an area included in the [Downtown Streets and Open Space Improvement Plan](#) (SOSIP)[↓] [adopted by Council in 2013](#).

While the proposed improvements for this segment of University Avenue vary from SOSIP's conceptual design drawings, the improvements are consistent with SOSIP's stated goal of improving the pedestrian environment, as well as maintaining adequate capacity for emergency vehicles, transit vehicles, trucks, and recurring special event traffic. (see Attachment 1 for original SOSIP conceptual drawings)

CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS

A building permit has been requested for the [Acheson Commons](#) mixed-use development at 2133 University Avenue (north-east corner at Shattuck). Because the project is required to construct public improvements on University Avenue consistent with SOSIP, staff has been reviewing SOSIP's concept drawings to determine their feasibility and provide direction to the project developer for detailed design. The SOSIP drawings reflect narrowing University Avenue to two lanes between Shattuck and Oxford, to provide either wider sidewalks and no median, or bike lanes and angled parking while retaining the existing median. Upon further review of SOSIP's conceptual designs and discussion with the Fire Marshal, staff has determined that it is not advisable to remove any travel lanes or the median on this segment of University. While typical weekday traffic volumes are lower on this segment than west of Shattuck, they are often quite heavy during special events on the UC campus, such as football games, concerts and graduations. In addition, this segment is an important route for emergency access/evacuation and trucks to campus and the Berkeley hills. Additionally, bike lanes are not advised for this segment because they were not included in the 2005 Bike Plan update, and there is currently no community interest in having bike lanes on other portions of University Avenue.

[↓] See Related Links on last page.

Based on this information, staff will pursue a modified design that maintains most of the existing curb lines and traffic lanes; adds curb extensions to shorten crosswalks and provide bike parking and restaurant seating; creates ADA-compliant pedestrian refuge space where the crosswalk intersects the 8-foot median; adds additional trees, landscaping, and/or street lights within the existing median; and enhances the crosswalk with high visibility markings and advance yield lines. The resulting design would shorten the crosswalks and provide visual cues to slow traffic, enhance the pedestrian realm, and improve the visual quality of this gateway section of University Avenue, consistent with SOSIP's design objectives.

Staff will provide direction to the developer of Acheson Commons to implement these improvements along their frontage (north side of University from Shattuck to Walnut). Improvements to the remainder of University Avenue east of Shattuck would occur as other properties are redeveloped, or as SOSIP Impact Fees (paid by downtown development projects) become available to provide funding for City implementation.

BACKGROUND

Council adopted the Downtown Streets and Open Space Improvement Plan (SOSIP) in January 2013. SOSIP contains goals, policies and projects intended to enhance Downtown Berkeley's pedestrian environment, calm traffic, improve access for all modes of transportation, and reduce environmental impacts. Another major SOSIP project is the "Shattuck Square & University Avenue" Project (see [SOSIP](#) pages 28-36), which includes both Shattuck Reconfiguration and Pedestrian Safety (currently in detailed design and planned for construction in 2017), and the proposed improvements on University Avenue. As previously mentioned, those would narrow University Avenue to two lanes between Shattuck and Oxford to provide wider sidewalks or bike lanes and angled parking. SOSIP identifies the combined Shattuck/University improvements as a top-tier priority for implementation and funding. The final details of these plans will be reviewed and adopted as projects arise.

SOSIP includes two conceptual designs for the University Avenue segment: 1) with wider sidewalks and no median; and 2) with angled parking, bike lanes, and retention of the median. SOSIP also identifies the following "design objectives" for these improvements:

- a. Widen sidewalks, increase trees and landscaping, and add green infrastructure (like bio-retention "rain gardens") by eliminating unnecessary traffic lanes.
- b. Consider using diagonal parking to increase the supply of on-street parking.
- c. Maintain 20-foot clearance for emergency vehicles by: eliminating the median, using an acceptable mountable curb along the median, or by widening only the north side and keeping two lanes of eastbound traffic.
- d. Consider the creation of outdoor dining, retail and information kiosks.
- e. Coordinate with abutting property owners during design development, so that new improvements will complement anticipated uses.
- f. Encourage the University to locate facilities for visitors to the University and Downtown along University Avenue.
- g. Announce arrival to Downtown and the UC Campus with a highly visible focal point.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

The changes proposed by staff would improve pedestrian crossing of University at Walnut; provide for bike parking, sidewalk café seating, pedestrian scale lighting, increased landscaping, and other features to make the area more attractive to pedestrians; and encourage less reliance on use of automobiles to visit downtown Berkeley.

POSSIBLE FUTURE ACTION

Staff will submit reports for Council approval of any City construction contracts for improvements adjacent to the Acheson Commons project. No other Council action is anticipated.

FISCAL IMPACTS OF POSSIBLE FUTURE ACTION

Future construction contracts would likely be funded by a combination of grant funds, UC Long Range Development Plan (LRDP) funds, and SOSIP impact fees. The general scope of improvements proposed by staff is similar to, or less extensive than, the scope contemplated by SOSIP, and therefore should have comparable costs for improvements, as compared to the conceptual designs in SOSIP.

CONTACT PERSON

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Attachments:

1: SOSIP Excerpts Related to University Avenue Improvements (note: these reflect previous designs, not the current proposal)

Related Links:

- 1: Downtown Streets and Open Space Improvement Plan (SOSIP):
www.cityofberkeley.info/uploadedFiles/Planning_and_Development/Level_3_-_DAP/2013%20SOSIP.pdf
- 2: SOSIP Council Report, January 29, 2013:
www.cityofberkeley.info/Clerk/City_Council/2013/01Jan/Documents/2013-01-29_Item_13_Downtown_Streets.aspx
- 3: Acheson Commons Report, March 26, 2013:
www.ci.berkeley.ca.us/Clerk/City_Council/2013/03Mar/Documents/2013-03-26_Item_01_ZAB_Appeal_University.aspx

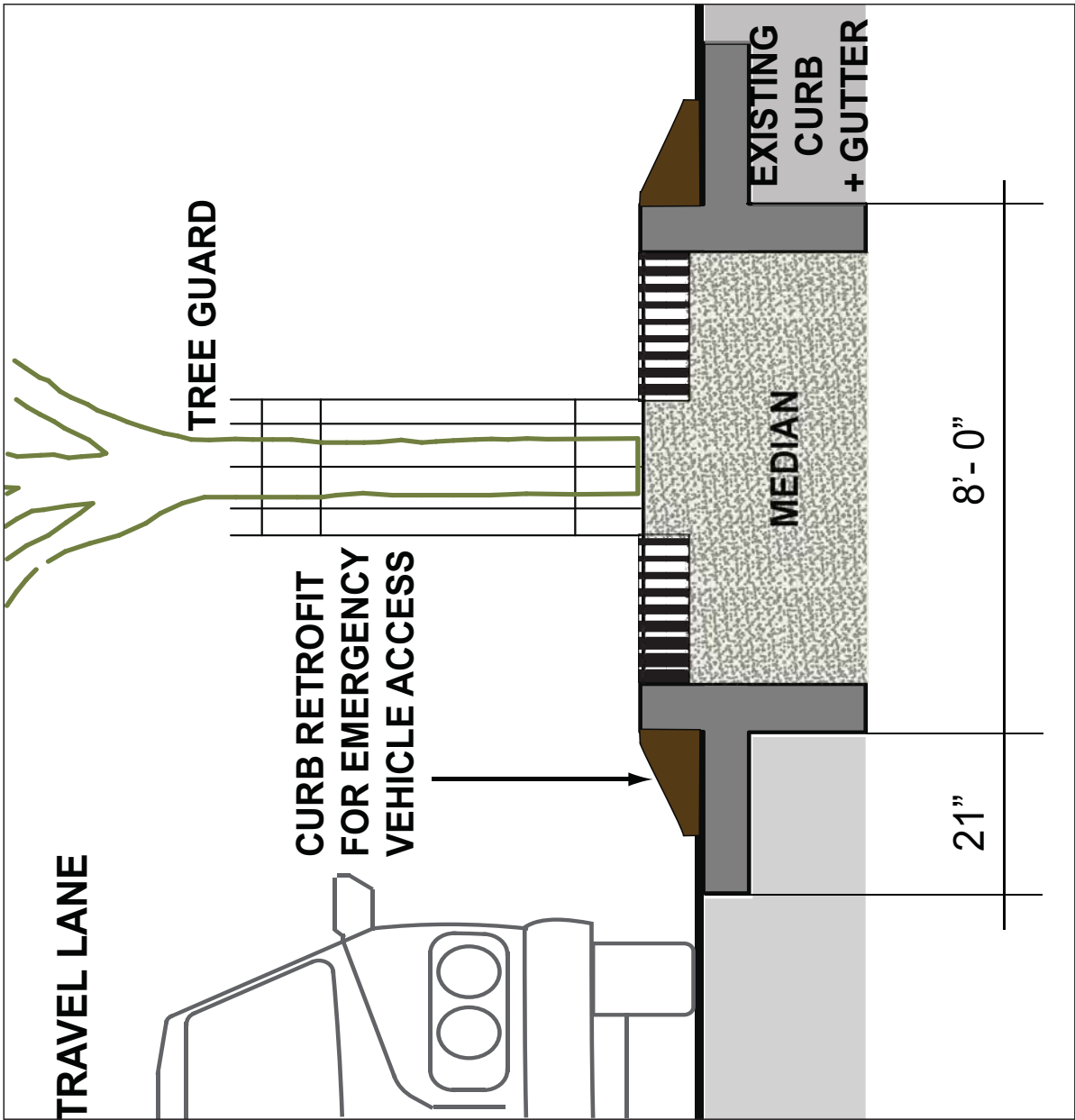


Figure d.24. University Avenue Median. For the option where the center median is retained, it may be necessary to make curbs mountable for use by emergency vehicles.

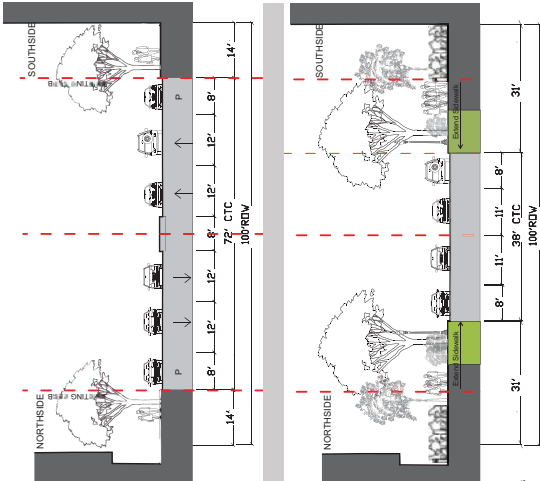


Figure d.22. University Avenue (Shattuck to Oxford). At the end of University Avenue, traffic volumes drop and two traffic lanes might be eliminated to widen sidewalks, add amenities, and introduce green infrastructure. To maintain emergency vehicle access, the existing median above could be eliminated or could be made mountable by installing vertical deflection features (below).

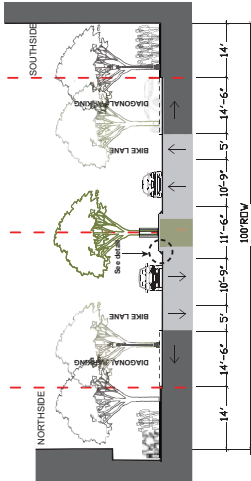


Figure d.23. University Avenue showing median with mountable curbs.

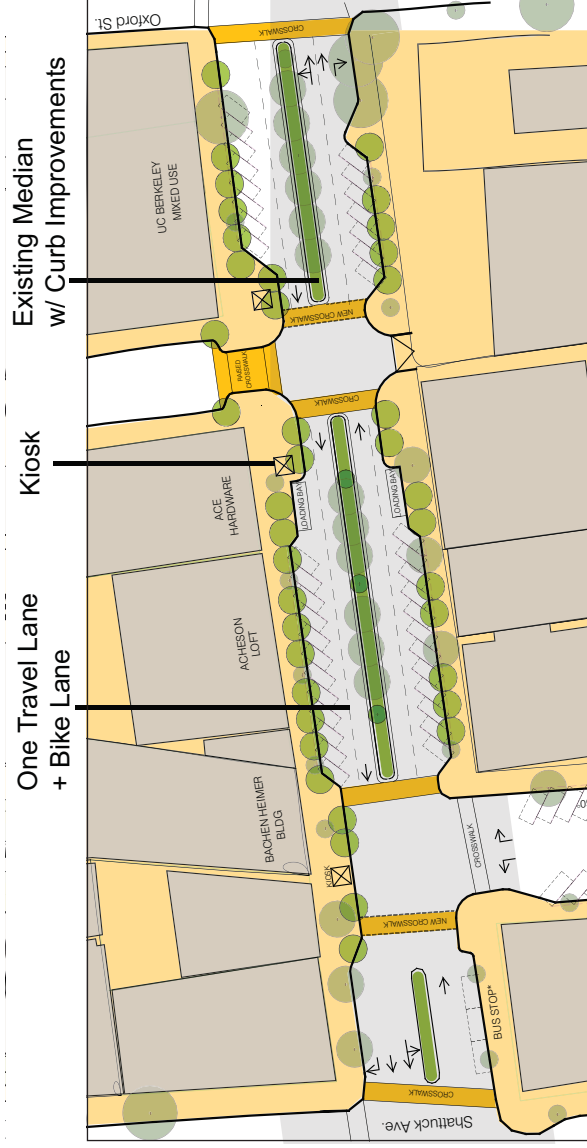
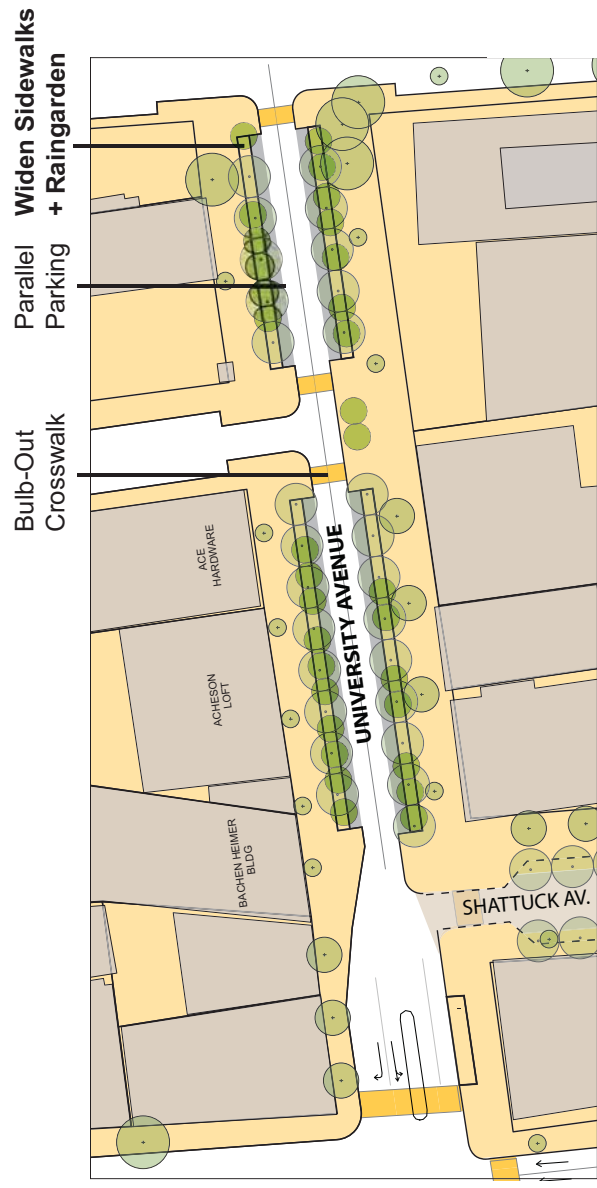


Figure d.25. University Avenue Improvements. East of Shattuck, travel lanes on University Avenue can be eliminated to create wider sidewalks, bike lanes, green infrastructure, and pedestrian amenities. A cost-effective option would be limited curb extensions accompanied by bike lanes and diagonal parking (at top). By eliminating the existing center median (lower image), sidewalks can be made even wider and crosswalk distances shorter.

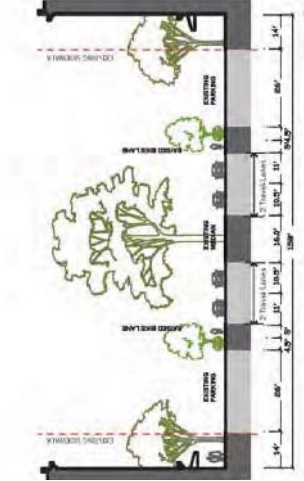
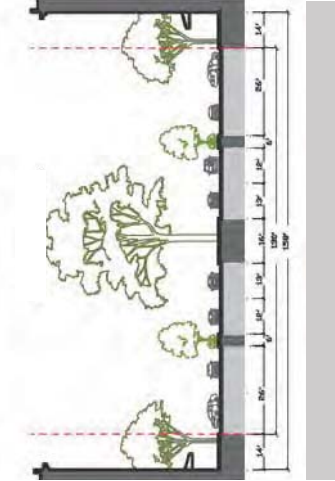
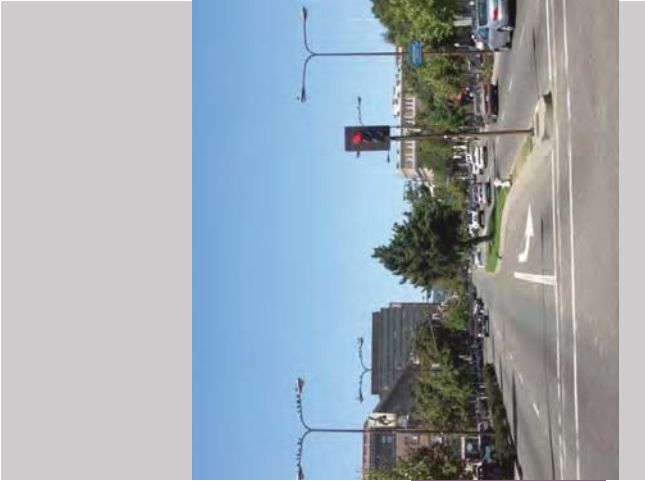


Figure d.26. Shattuck Avenue. Bike lanes are proposed on Shattuck (photo & 1st section). Where parking access lanes are maintained, bike lanes would run just outside of traffic through lanes (2nd section).

Reconfiguring Shattuck Square will require the realignment of bus routes. AC Transit and shuttle bus operators should be engaged as design development commences to determine how convenient, reliable, and reasonably fast transit service should be maintained.

University Avenue. The east end of University Avenue has the potential to become a recognizable "gateway" accentuating one's arrival to the Downtown and University. Sidewalk widening and other major improvements are possible. From Shattuck Square to Oxford Street, University Avenue has relatively low traffic volumes so two travel lanes can be eliminated. This project area is also notable in that it is lined by major development and historic rehabilitation opportunities that would benefit from and add pedestrian activity to streetscape enhancements.

Design objectives include:

- Widen sidewalks, increase trees and landscaping, and add green infrastructure (like bio-retention "rain gardens") by eliminating unnecessary traffic lanes.
- Consider using diagonal parking to increase the supply of on-street parking.
- Maintain 20-feet clear for emergency vehicles, such as by: eliminating the median, using an acceptable mountable curb along the median, or by widening only the north side and keeping two lanes of eastbound traffic.
- Consider the creation of outdoor dining, retail and information kiosks.

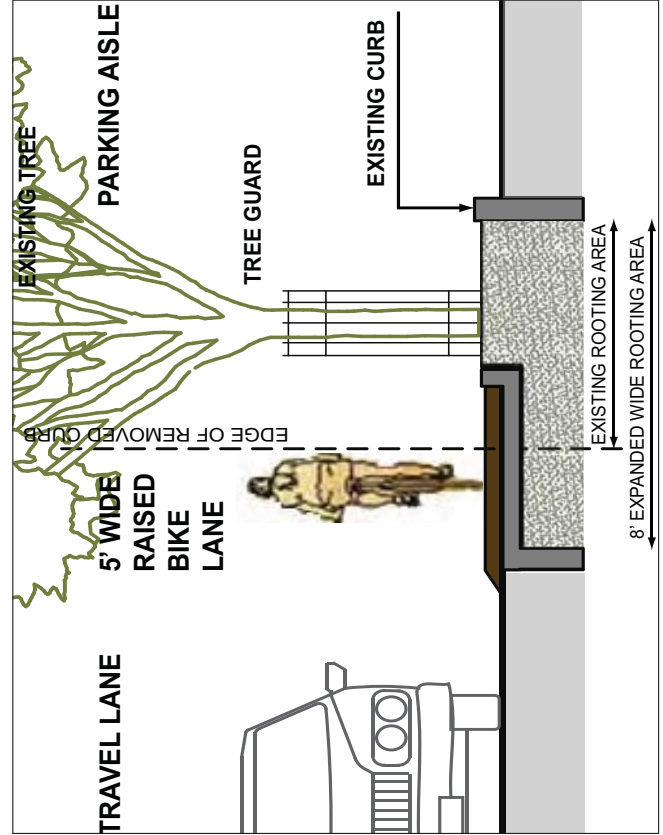


Figure d.27. Cross Section Of Potential Grade-Separated. Bike Lane On Shattuck Boulevard.

- e. Coordinate with abutting property owners during design development, so that new improvements will complement anticipated uses.
- f. Encourage the University to locate facilities for visitors to the University and Downtown along University Avenue.
- g. Announce arrival to Downtown and the UC Campus with a highly visible focal point.

Policy 1.8, Shattuck Boulevard. Shattuck can be transformed into a world-class boulevard and a memorable aspect of Berkeley's identity. Shattuck is also Berkeley's commercial "main street" that grew up around its rail stations. Two rail lines (four tracks) used Shattuck which has a sizable 158-foot right-of-way. After rail service ended and when BART was constructed in Berkeley in the 1970s, Shattuck was redesigned to maximize parking. At that time, conventional wisdom deemed parking to be the principal disadvantage that downtowns had when competing with drive-to shopping centers. By the time of this writing, however, the proliferation of shopping centers and improved freeway access to them has made it impossible for Downtown to compete based on drive-to convenience alone. To succeed in the regional economy, Downtown – and especially Shattuck Avenue – must offer a distinct and attractive sense of place.

Two basic configurations are recommended for 158-foot portions of Shattuck. Shattuck is wide enough to contain a 60-foot wide linear park on some blocks. These "Park Blocks" are discussed in the next policy. The other configuration maintains the existing parking aisles but widens sidewalks, increases trees and landscaping, and adds bicycle lanes – design objectives for which follow. Bike lanes would

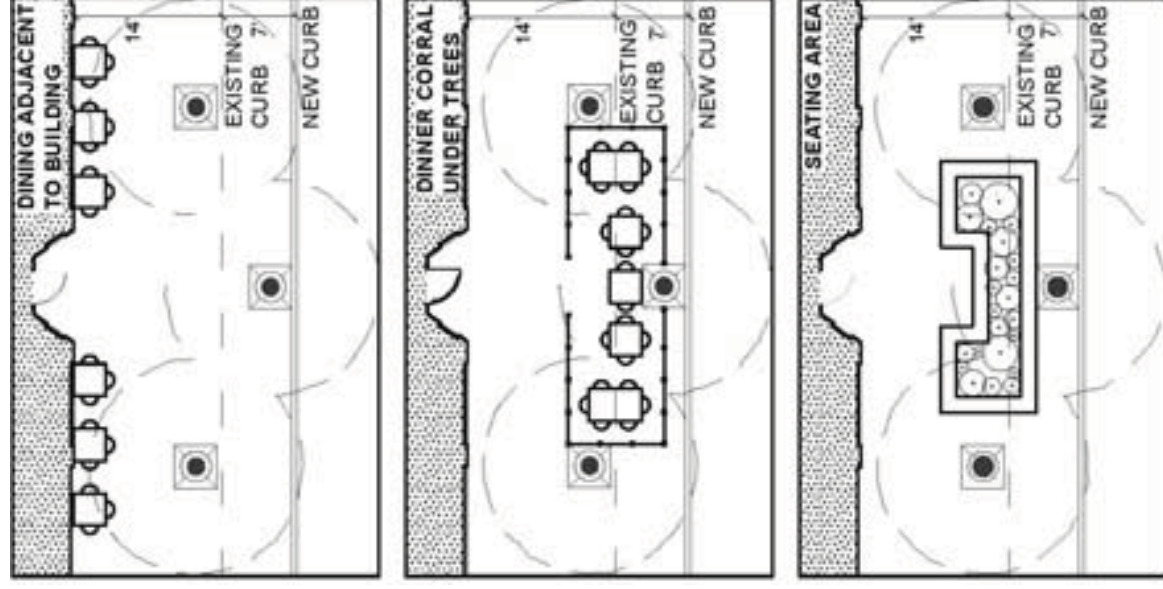


Figure d.28. Shattuck Avenue. In the long term, parking can be reconfigured so that sidewalks can be widened for more amenities.

