

# 5

## **ECONOMIC PROSPERITY**

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## INTRODUCTION

The Community Plan envisions “creative placemaking” to transform North Park into a vibrant location that supports and enhances the needs of the community and businesses by designing places people want to live work and visit. The Economic Prosperity Element furthers this vision by outlining ways to:

- Foster thriving commercial areas supporting locally owned small businesses in a pedestrian, accessible and bicycle friendly environment;
- Implement multimodal transportation solutions to preserve the pedestrian-oriented environment of village-style commercial areas;
- Preserve historic buildings for future generations to encourage heritage tourism;
- Recognize North Park’s Arts and Entertainment districts as a destination for residents and tourists;
- Enhance the experience in the commercial areas and improve circulation patterns with streetscaping and traffic calming measures; and
- Improve community infrastructure to support commercial and residential pedestrian activity; “sustainable” neighborhoods and commercial areas.

In 1890, North Park was the first area connected to downtown San Diego by an electric streetcar system. The expansion of the affordable streetcar transportation, installation of utilities in the area, and the City’s substantial growth in population, prompted a subdivision of land in North Park beginning in the late 19th century and continuing into the early 20th century. The initial development in North Park occurred during the 1920s and 1930s, and continued following the end of World War II into the 1940s and 1950s.

Expanded streetcar service began in parts of North Park in 1907. Tourism was at an all-time high as this streetcar system was able to link North Park with people from all parts of San Diego. Individuals would come to shop, eat, and even reside in the residential communities which began to grow in 1924. Due to the streetcar services, University Avenue and 30th Street became the primary business district in North Park. As automobiles became affordable and were the primary mode of transportation, this caused a decline in streetcar usage. Streetcar service was discontinued in 1949.

## Economic Prosperity Element Goals

1. *Promote arts and culture, and entertainment/hospitality districts which appeal to both residents and tourists.*
2. *Expand the neighborhood commercial districts where the residents purchase a significant share of their basic needs and services from within the community.*
3. *Promote collaboration between the Business Improvement District association in “greater” North Park area to strengthen the connection between the northern, southern and eastern commercial districts.*
4. *Increase the diverse mix of business types in North Park to support daytime and night time activities*
5. *Enhancement of commercial corridors appearance and upgraded infrastructure.*
6. *Acquire funding for successful local economic development and revitalization actions.*

El Cajon Boulevard (formerly El Cajon Avenue) developed more as a result of the automobile. The development of El Cajon Boulevard, started as bus service began in the 1920s and automobile usage steadily increased in the 1930s and 1940s. The development of El Cajon Boulevard began with gas stations, auto repair stores, and retail establishments which favored the automobile. By 1940 El Cajon Boulevard was designated a part of U.S. Highway Route-80. The explosion in auto usage after the end of World War II coupled with suburban growth reinforced El Cajon Boulevard’s popularity as a commercial district. The subsequent auto orientation turned this commercial corridor into a classic 1950s commercial strip.

## 5.1 BUSINESS DISTRICTS

The portions of Adams Avenue and Park Boulevard which run through the North Park Planning area were first developed to serve the buildout of the surrounding communities of Normal Heights and University Heights. The number 1 and 11 trolley lines began service to these areas about the same time that the North Park trolley lines began operations in the early part of the 20th century. The North Park portion of Adams Avenue is unique from University Avenue and El Cajon Boulevard in that it maintains a more residential feel with smaller scale housing and less commercial development.

By the early 1960s, commercial activity along University Avenue and El Cajon Boulevard began to decline, due in part to: 1) the construction of Interstate-8, which drew vehicular traffic away from El Cajon Boulevard's and 30th and University's shopping districts; and 2) the opening of nearby shopping centers – such as College Grove, Mission Valley Shopping Center, and Grossmont Center – which provided new competition for the retail outlets along North Park's commercial corridors.

The historic resources in North Park provide a sense of place. Throughout the Economic Prosperity Element there are policies that relate to the historic resources in North Park. North Park contains multiple designated historic resources and 4 designated historic districts – Shirley Ann Place, University Heights Water Storage and Pumping Station, and the Burlingame and North Park Dryden neighborhoods. Refer to the Historic Preservation Element for more information about historic resources in North Park and designated and potential historic districts.



*North Park's commercial areas provide pedestrian-oriented storefronts.*

Commercial activity in North Park tends to be emphasized at key nodes or intersections, such as Park Boulevard and Adams Avenue; major intersections along 30th Street at Adams Avenue, El Cajon Boulevard, University Avenue, and 32nd Street and Upas Street, and at El Cajon Boulevard at Park Boulevard and Texas Street. Commercial activity dominates corridors between these nodes, especially on El Cajon Boulevard, University Avenue, 30th Street, and Adams Avenue.

North Park's commercial areas are distinct compared with suburban shopping centers because of the unique offerings and pedestrian-orientation. However, El Cajon Boulevard is distinct from North Park's other commercial areas. While El Cajon Boulevard can be as pedestrian-oriented as other grand commercial boulevards, it also has a tradition of auto-orientation associated with its historical role as U.S. Highway Route-80, higher traffic volume, and larger lots.

El Cajon Boulevard, from Florida Street to Texas Street, has emerged as a concentration of ethnic restaurants and The Lafayette Hotel has undergone renovation to restore its reputation as a visitor and regional event destination. The University Avenue and 30th Street business district has a concentration of restaurants and nightlife activities. Adams Avenue also has many restaurants, nightlife activities and offers neighborhood commercial services.

Professional service firms are attracted to North Park because of its emergence as a community for creativity, its amenities, diversity and centrality in the region. The North Park office inventory occupies a small share of the regional market; however, this office space provides a needed foundation for business and professional services in the community.

## POLICIES

- EP-1.1 Develop a North Park Gateway Signage Plan and Neighborhood Identifying Signage Plan.
- EP-1.2 Support historic resources, historic districts, and Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), which create a sense of place and results in heritage tourism.
- EP-1.3 Attract unique commercial businesses that are reflective of the diverse economic commercial areas history and strengthen North Park's village-style environments which are pedestrian-oriented.
- EP-1.4 Identify and implement nationally recognized best practices which promote an inclusive approach to addressing hospitality businesses and near-by residents (e.g. personal behavior issues, accountability and enforcement of regulations related to noise, trash management, cigarette, food packing, litter, parking issues and public rest room access).
- EP-1.5 Ensure adequate network of transportation services to meet the needs of nightlife patrons (e.g. safe ride, taxis, car services, extended hours for public transit).
- EP-1.6 Support the expansion of North Park's Arts District on Ray Street, which in result could attract patrons to the rest of the community's commercial districts.
- EP-1.7 Support efforts to promote the use of the North Park public garage, including the addition of signage to make visitors to this commercial district aware of this parking facility.



The North Park community has the benefit of having four business district organizations looking after the success of its commercial areas.



The University Heights – Park Boulevard Business District is shared by both the North Park and Uptown communities.



The Adams Avenue Business Improvement District which runs through Normal Heights, Kensington, Antique Row, and University Heights annually plays host to the Adams Avenue Street Fair and Adams Avenue Unplugged which are the City's largest free music festivals.

## 5.2 RETAIL AND DINING

North Park has a robust and diverse retail base ranging from national chain stores to locally owned and operated boutique services.

The neighborhood offers a unique combination of:

- Small-town atmosphere
- Historic storefronts with architectural integrity
- Freeway access
- Proximity to Downtown San Diego
- Residential blocks surrounding the retail districts, providing a large and loyal customer base
- Surrounding residential neighborhoods of South Park, Hillcrest, City Heights and Normal Heights, expanding the customer base
- Economic and cultural diversity
- Compact, distinct, walkable retail districts
- An entrepreneurial orientation which encourages a wide range of retail services

North Park is also a nationally- recognized dining, entertainment, arts and cultural center which attracts destination diners, “foodies” and tourists. Dining options range from fast/casual to formal and include locally-sourced, farm-to-table, vegan/organic/vegetarian, ethnic and farmers’ market choices. Socializing and entertainment centers around the neighborhood’s diverse craft beer, wine bar and artisanal coffee culture, earning North Park further national accolades. The neighborhood’s retail and dining economies are actively supported by the local Business Improvement Districts which sponsor events such as Taste of North Park, Festival of the Arts, seasonal/holiday/ evening “shop hops” and flash mobs, a farmers’ market, Bike the Boulevard, Roots Music Festival, and Art.

## POLICIES

- EP-2.1 Recapture a greater share of local expenditures with improved basic retail and commercial services.
- EP-2.2 Promote pedestrian-oriented retail and outside dining establishments that appeal to a broad demographic range including high quality restaurants.
- EP-2.3 Activate the alleys in commercial mixed-use corridors and nodes to improve urban design and allowing commercial shops and services while respecting the transitional nature of commercial development to residential development.
- EP-2.4 Introduce more diversified housing choices with a mixture of household incomes to enhance the buying power of North Park, particularly along University Avenue and El Cajon Boulevard.



*Street trees and landscaping can be a major economic generator for commercial districts by attracting pedestrians.*

### 5.3 COMMUNITY REVITALIZATION

North Park's many businesses are known to produce what they sell, whether it's food, arts and culture, hospitality entertainment, or services. North Park has repositioned itself in the regional market and captured a dedicated share of the local market. Private and public investment in historic landmarks, such as the North Park Theater on University Avenue and the Lafayette Hotel on El Cajon Boulevard, are recreating anchors of performing arts and leisure and hospitality businesses. The cluster of restaurants and entertainment on University Avenue and Adams Avenue are also capturing a dedicated share of the local market. With efforts in the community such as the Sustainable North Park Main Street Program and North Park Eco District, which emphasize resource conservation and efficiency, North Park is emerging as a center for sustainability and is a setting for the green economy.

The Business Improvement District (BID) associations in North Park have been contributing to economic revitalization of the main commercial areas over the years. The Adams Avenue, El Cajon Boulevard and University Avenue commercial areas all have BID associations. BID associations are geographic areas, established by the City where the businesses have voted to self-assess, to fund activities and services, which promote the business district and are beyond the services the City provides. All of North Park's BID associations practice the National Mainstreet's Four-Point approach which includes economic development strategies such as organized special events; social media marketing; and membership communication (see box to the right).

#### ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

- **Organized Special Events** fill these BID areas with consumers, increases members' sales, markets and brands the area and supplies the BID associations with profits/discretionary income. The Adams Avenue BID association is managed by the Adams Avenue Business Association. Special events in this BID area include the Adams Avenue Street Fair and Adams Avenue Unplugged which are the City's largest free music festivals.
- **Social Media Marketing** is the best way in today's culture to directly address many consumers and interested parties about business in their neighborhood or in the region. The North Park BID is managed by North Park Main Street. This BID sends an on-line newsletter to registered users, including members of North Park Main Street.
- **Membership Communication** can be both electronic and also graphic based guides that bring information to the members and the general public detailing the uniqueness of a business area. The El Cajon Gateway BID association and El Cajon Central BID association are managed by the El Cajon Business Association, a.k.a., The Boulevard. This BID produces "The Boulevard Guide", which highlights a sample of the unique businesses that can be found along the Boulevard.

Commercial areas do not stop at the borders of community planning areas. The Adams Avenue BID association's boundaries begin in North Park and continue into the Mid-City neighborhoods of Normal Heights, Kensington and Talmadge. El Cajon Boulevard BID association's boundaries begin in North Park and continue into the Mid-City neighborhoods. The North Park BID association's boundaries include a portion of University Avenue in North Park; however, the City Heights BID also covers the portion of University Avenue in the Mid-City neighborhood of City Heights. As these BID associations boundaries are not exclusive to North Park the Economic Revitalization goals lead by the BID association must include the adjacent Mid-City neighborhoods which are part of the Adams Avenue, El Cajon Boulevard, and University BIDs.

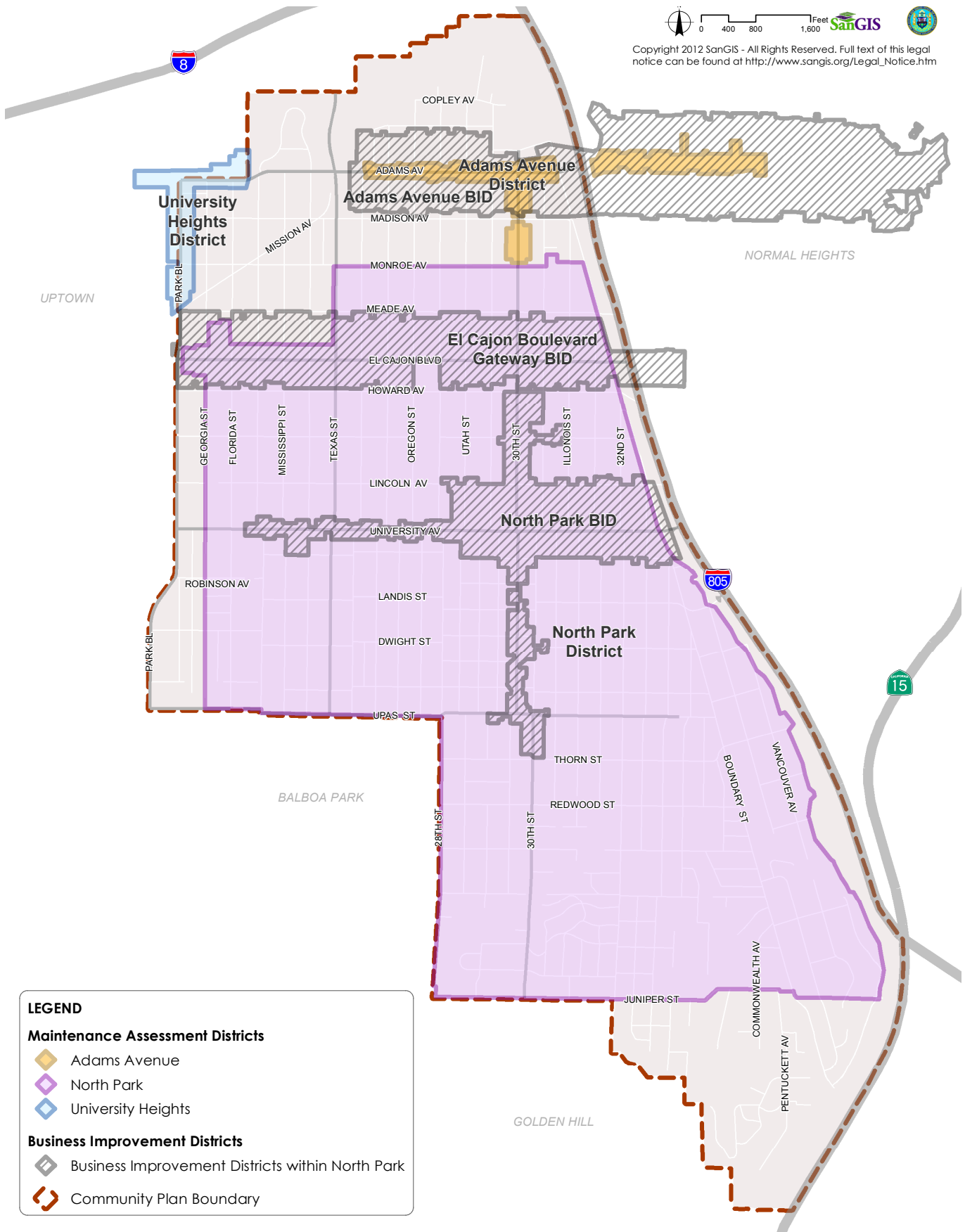
## POLICIES

- EP-3.1** Encourage the Business Improvement District associations in North Park to develop a North Park Economic Development Strategy by building upon the City's Economic Development Strategy. This would include the Adams Avenue BID association, El Cajon Boulevard BID association, and the North Park BID business association. As two of these BID associations continue into the Mid-City, the BID associations which are not fully contained within North Park must be consulted about the areas and Mid-City and how these areas interface with North Park's Economic Development Strategy.
- EP-3.2** Encourage the Business Improvement District associations in North Park and Mid-City areas, noted above, to develop a Retail Market Analysis to include a Business Attraction Plan which takes into consideration comments from the three North Park commercial areas.
- EP-3.3** Encourage the City to reestablish the Ombudsman Program to assist small businesses, through the permit process and code enforcement issues.
- EP-3.4** Encourage the BID associations to consider a North Park BIDs "branding strategies" and "signage strategy" to market the respective commercial areas, while respecting each BID associations unique character.
- EP-3.5** Promote and maintain the following efforts and revitalization tools; specifically, in the main commercial areas and BID associations boundaries within North Park's mixed use corridors and nodes, to enhance and create a competitive commercial destination.



*The growth and popularity of North Park's art, culture, and entertainment district has been major a contributing factor in North Park's revitalization.*

Figure 5-1: Business Improvement and Maintenance Assessment Districts





## 5.4 BUSINESS ATTRACTION

A component of economic revitalization is the attraction of businesses that provide activity in the commercial area during the day-time and night-time. A commercial area is more attractive to residents and nonresidents, when it active, has a variety of commercial services available, has adequate lighting, and is a safe pedestrian environment for consumers. North Park has a reputation as an Arts, Culture, and Entertainment District, organically evolving from Ray Street, due to the efforts of community organizations. Businesses that promote the arts in commercial areas and stay open after normal business hours enhance the atmosphere of a commercial area.

### POLICIES

- EP-4.1 Encourage pedestrian-oriented uses including art establishments which generate activity after normal business hours. These businesses also attract and support life-style personal services (e.g. yoga, dance, Pilates, health clubs, rock climbing, martial arts, and art classes).
- EP-4.2 Position North Park as a desirable national location for creative businesses, knowledge based industries and the green economy.
- EP-4.3 Attract and support destination restaurants (non-chain franchised restaurants) that draw consumers from inside and outside the community.
- EP-4.4 Attract restaurants that serve breakfast and lunch.
- EP-4.5 Promote infill development, along main commercial areas for the purposes of increasing employment opportunities in Village Centers.
- EP-4.6 Support the Business Improvement District associations working with the City to standardize leases on City property and special events permits to encourage the creation of a template for “pop-up retail” leases on City and privately owned vacant properties.
- EP-4.7 Promote development of physical space such as shopkeeper units, co-work space, and business incubators that support targeted commercial uses and start-up businesses and entrepreneurial enterprises.
- EP-4.8 Front commercial activity on mixed-use corridor intersections, with pedestrian-orientation to distinguish nodes at Adams Avenue and 30th Street, University Avenue and 30th Street, and Upas Street.



## 5.5 INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS AND FINANCING

Infrastructure improvements in our urban commercial areas of North Park are needed. In North Park the roads, sidewalks, and other infrastructure need repairs. Street lighting is also in need of repair and more bicycle transit infrastructure in North Park's commercial areas is needed. Adding open public space to commercial areas is also a catalyst to economic and community revitalization.

Community dedication to quality of life in North Park is demonstrated by the different self-assessment districts, which residents, property owners and business owners have approved for their community. The Business Improvement District associations and Maintenance Assessment District funds continue to be invested in the North Park community to revitalize the area and increase economic prosperity. Figure 5-1 shows the location of the assessment districts. The City's Economic Development Department and Planning Department will continue to work with the residents, community and business organizations in North Park for continued successful revitalization.

### POLICIES

- EP-5.1 Improve pedestrian, bicycle and transit infrastructure in North Park's commercial districts and areas to position North Park as one of the most sustainable communities nationally.
- EP-5.2 Install and maintain high quality streets, sidewalks, well landscaped medians with drought tolerant plants, enhanced pedestrian crossings, pedestrian-oriented historic street lighting, and creative street-scaping amenities (e.g. street furniture, planters for drought tolerant plants, public art and street signage).
- EP-5.3 Expedite the implementation of mobility improvements developed to lessen traffic congestion, encourage the use of public transit, Improve parking conditions and provide pedestrian friendly streetscape along commercial mixed-use corridors.
- EP-5.4 Consider shared parking options in Village Centers.
- EP-5.5 Develop attractive and unique gathering space, such as mini-parks, pocket parks, parklets, and interior and exterior plazas, which include public art and visitor friendly seating areas.



- EP-5.6 Promote the Downtown and Balboa Park visitor trade and improve convenient transportation linkages from those destinations to North Park, including re-establishing the historic streetcar line.
- EP-5.7 Create new financing districts and/or expand existing district and financing mechanisms to generate funds for construction and maintenance of public improvements (e.g. Infrastructure Financing Districts, Community Assessment Districts, new or expanded Maintenance Assessment Districts, Property Business Improvement Districts, and promote the use of New Market Tax Credits.)
- EP-5.8 Identify new funding sources for local economic development and revitalization efforts in North Park to support the Business Improvement District associations' programs and revitalization efforts.
- EP-5.9 Practice social equity and environmental justice in all economic development and commercial revitalization projects.
- EP-5.10 Promote fund management operation to ensure maintenance programs for infrastructure improvements.



*Parklets are an innovative way to transform parking into unique gathering spaces within commercial districts. The City's first parklet is located at 30th Street and University Avenue.*



*Older buildings can be retrofitted to create new indoor-outdoor experiences.*

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