

## Relationship to the General Plan

The City of San Diego General Plan (2008), provides overarching principles to guide the form and development of the City to achieve the compact and more environmentally-sensitive pattern of development envisioned by the “City of Villages” strategy. The Urban Design Element of the City’s General Plan includes detailed urban design goals and policies relating to the design of the built environment.

The intent of the Uptown Community Plan is to apply and advance the vision and concepts established in the City of San Diego General Plan in a manner that is specific to the Uptown community. The Uptown Community Plan is an extension of the General Plan, and as such its goals, policies and recommendations must be consistent with the broader General Plan policies.

The Urban Design Element of the Uptown Community Plan is intended to implement the General Plan’s urban design goals and policies as well as develop specific guidelines that are applicable to Uptown’s unique neighborhoods. The goals of the Urban Design Element were formulated during the community outreach process of the plan update process. These guide the formulation of neighborhood-specific as well as general guidelines for Streets and the Public Realm and Development Form for future development within Uptown.

The hierarchy of General Plan Urban Design Strategies, Urban Design Goals, and specific Uptown Community Urban Design Goals are presented below.

### GENERAL PLAN URBAN DESIGN STRATEGIES

- Contribute to the qualities that distinguish San Diego as a unique living environment;
- Build upon our existing communities;
- Direct growth into commercial areas where a high level of activity already exists;
- Preserve stable residential neighborhoods.

### GENERAL PLAN URBAN DESIGN GOALS

- A built environment that respects San Diego’s natural environment and climate.
- An improved quality of life through safe and secure neighborhoods and public places.
- A pattern and scale of development that provide visual diversity, choice of lifestyle, opportunities for social interaction, and that respects desirable community character and context.
- A City with distinctive districts, communities, neighborhoods, and village centers where people gather and interact.
- Maintenance of historic resources that serve as landmarks and contribute to the City’s identity.
- Utilization of landscape as an important aesthetic and unifying element throughout the City.

### UPTOWN COMMUNITY URBAN DESIGN GOALS

- Maintaining Distinctive Neighborhoods
- Encouraging Development Diversity
- Preserving Historic Resources
- Creating a Complete, Well-Served Community
- Ensuring Vibrant Commercial Districts
- Providing Convenient Parks and Distinctive Open Space
- Walkable Neighborhoods and Complete Streets
- Maintaining Appropriate Building Scale and Density
- Creating Graceful Transitions
- Re-establishing Transit as a Viable Transportation Alternative
- Integrating Parking into the Urban Fabric
- Designing for Sustainability in Buildings and Sites

# RELATIONSHIP TO GENERAL PLAN

**TABLE 1: COMMUNITY PLAN POLICY TOPICS**

<i>Community Plan Policy</i>	<i>General Plan Policy</i>
<i>Development Adjacent to Canyons &amp; other Natural Features</i>	<i>UD-A.3</i>
<i>Landscape Guidelines</i>	<i>UD-A.8</i>
<i>Parking</i>	<i>UD-A.11, UD-A.12</i>
<i>Wireless Facilities</i>	<i>UD-A.15</i>
<i>Utilities</i>	<i>UD-A.16</i>
<i>Safety &amp; Security (Crime Prevention through Environmental Design –CPTED)</i>	<i>UD-A.17</i>
<i>Residential Design</i>	<i>UD-B.1 – UD-B.8</i>
<i>Mixed-use and Commercial</i>	<i>UD-C.1 – UD-C.8</i>
<i>Public Spaces &amp; Civic Architecture</i>	<i>UD-E.1 – UD-E.2</i>
<i>Public Art &amp; Cultural Amenities</i>	<i>UD-F.1 – UD-F.5</i>
<i>Urban Runoff &amp; Stormwater Management</i>	<i>CE-E.1 – CE-E.7</i>
<i>Urban Forestry</i>	<i>CE-J.1 – CE-J.5</i>
<i>Sustainable Development Practices</i>	<i>CE-A.5 – CE-A.12</i>
<i>Streetscape Design</i>	<i>UD-C.7</i>
<i>Pedestrian Access to Developments</i>	<i>UD-A.5, UD-A.9</i>
<i>Site Design &amp; Building Orientation</i>	<i>UD-A.3 – UD-A.6</i>
<i>Building Compatibility &amp; Transitions</i>	<i>UD-B.2</i>
<i>Building Quality, Durability, Materials &amp; Colors</i>	<i>UD-A.4, UD-A.5, CE-A.9</i>

## Relationship to Other Plans and Ordinances

Table 1: Community Plan Policy Topics, covers applicable community plan level topics and relevant General Plan Policies. In addition to the General Plan, a number of other City plans and ordinances contain urban design guidelines that apply to the Uptown Community planning area:

### *City of San Diego Municipal Code*

The Municipal Code contains the development regulations and permitted land uses that implement community plan land uses within Uptown. The Community Plan Implementation Overlay Zone (CPIOZ) applies where community-specific development standards are needed. The development regulations in the Municipal Code and CPIOZ will be used together with the Uptown Community Plan urban design guidelines when providing design review of development within the community.

### *City of San Diego Street Design Manual*

All street design guidelines and urban design recommendations that relate to improvements within a public right-of-way will consider the street design standards set forth in the San Diego Street Design Manual. Guidelines will also consider level of service standards and carrying capacity of thoroughfares to determine design interventions.

## Relationship to Other Community Plan Elements

Urban design addresses the relationship between all elements of the urban environment. As such, the recommendations of the Urban Design Element are linked to all of the elements, but particularly the land use, mobility, conservation, and historic preservation elements. Land use influences building height and form, as well as the location and character of public spaces. Streets provide the basic framework of

neighborhoods and influence both built form and walkability. Street function (e.g., the volume and speed of traffic) also plays a definitive role in the pedestrian experience and the design of the pedestrian realm. Transportation and parking recommendations also can shape a neighborhood, based on where transit links occur, where parking is located and how much is required, and if buildings are primarily accessed and experienced by pedestrians or from moving vehicles. Parks and open space are also crucial to urban design. The location of parks and open space can significantly affect community identity and social interaction, and the availability of parkland can influence intensity of development and built form. The historic nature of Uptown, which is an essential urban form element of the community, is recognized in the Urban Design Element, but is more specifically described in the Historic Preservation Element.



*The Urban Design Element focuses on the diverse urban form of Uptown.*

## Urban Form Analysis

The Uptown community's location on a level mesa that is divided by steep, heavily-vegetated canyons is a primary, character-defining feature. The mesa's elevation gives the area a sense of seclusion from Downtown, Mission Valley and other surrounding communities, and provides a sense of openness with scenic views of the downtown skyline, the harbor, Coronado, Point Loma, and Mission Valley. The canyons, which run north to Mission Valley and southwest to the Harbor, provide fingers of open space that extend deep into the heart of the area, introducing a natural element into the built environment and creating natural boundaries between neighborhoods. They also create interruptions in the street network, which provide public access views and physical access into canyon open space areas.

### STREET PATTERN

Streets are a critical element in defining urban form, providing the basic physical framework for development that influences the size and scale of buildings, location of community centers, and general connectivity. The nature of streets, related to the size and configuration of blocks, influences the character and function of the Uptown neighborhoods. The small, "squarish" blocks in Park West and Mission Hills contribute a more intimate and walkable scale to their neighborhoods, while the longer rectangular blocks in Hillcrest and University Heights are generally less pedestrian-scaled, but the presence of mid-block alleys has a positive influence on street character by reducing the number of curb cuts and driveways. Street width and traffic volume influence character and the nature of use of the street. For example, the 68' curb-to-curb width of North Street in University Heights has a distinctly different feel from the 30' width of Jackdaw Street in Mission Hills. Similarly, the lower traffic volumes on Second Avenue create a much different character than that on Fifth Avenue even though both have the same dimensions. The issue of traffic volumes is directly tied to the constrained street connectivity within Uptown. Due to the prevalence of canyons, only a few street corridors provide continuous connections through the area. As a result, the character of streets like Washington Avenue,

# STREET PATTERN

5th Avenue, University Avenue, Park Boulevard, and Laurel Street is affected by high traffic volumes and travel speeds.

Uptown contains a variety of different street types that differ in both function and design. Some streets, such as Washington Street and Park Boulevard, function as major through vehicular travel corridors that provide primary access to and through the community. Others, such as University Avenue and Fifth Avenue, serve as major connectors within Uptown and to adjacent neighborhoods. The majority of the streets in Uptown, however, serve primarily as local streets that provide access to residential neighborhoods and shopping districts and carry much lower volumes of traffic. For the purpose of identifying recommendations that respond to these unique attributes, three general street types have been identified and are discussed below. Additional street types are recommended as part of the design guidelines to create additional typologies to support greater mobility choice and character-defining features within Uptown’s streets.

### *Major Through-Corridor Streets*

Major Through-Corridor Streets serve as the major circulation routes connecting Uptown to freeways and state highways, and to the surrounding city. They allow efficient circulation of high volumes of traffic through the community. Uptown’s two Through-Corridor Streets are Washington Street and Park Boulevard. On the majority of their length, both streets are characterized by wide right-of-ways, multiple (4–6) travel lanes, relatively high travel speeds, and limited pedestrian and bicycle

facilities or streetscape amenities. Both Washington and Park do have segments that are more pedestrian-scaled, although in general the current functional and aesthetic character of these corridors is not optimal for pedestrian, bicycle or transit use. As a result, development along these corridors tends to be more automobile-oriented in scale and design.

### *The Avenues*

The Avenues in Uptown are unique streets because they serve as important connectors between Uptown and Downtown. While they all have a similar width, the six avenues have different functions and character. First, Fourth, Fifth and Sixth avenues generally experience heavier traffic volumes due to their through connection between Downtown and Washington Street. Fourth and Fifth Avenues, in particular, are unique in that they are one-way streets that function as a couplet between Downtown and the Hillcrest core. While portions of these streets have pedestrian-scaled development, particularly as they intersect with Neighborhood Centers, the design challenge on The Avenues is to make effective use of the generally wide street cross-sections (50+ feet) to create more pedestrian, bicycle, and transit-friendly streets while their role in providing vehicular access between Uptown and Downtown.

### *Pedestrian-Oriented Retail Streets*

Uptown is known for its active, vibrant, retail streets filled with pedestrians throughout the day. Uptown’s retail streets



Washington Avenue is a Major Through-Corridor Street.



University Avenue in Hillcrest is a Pedestrian-Oriented Retail Street.

# 4.1 EXISTING CONTEXT & URBAN FORM

## STREET PATTERN



### LEGEND

- |                                 |                                 |                          |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------|
| <b>Existing Bike Facilities</b> | <b>Proposed Bike Facilities</b> | <b>Connector Streets</b> |
| Class I (Separated)             | Class II (Bike Lane)            | Connector Streets        |
| Class II (Bike Lane)            | Class III (Bike Route)          | Community Plan Boundary  |
| Class III (Bike Route)          | Bike Boulevard                  | Neighborhood Boundary    |
| Off-Street Trails               |                                 | Trolley Route & Stops    |

FIGURE 4.2: STREET PATTERNS

# STREET PATTERN

are generally continuations of streets that connect to other parts of the city, but have different dimensions and design character as they pass through the commercial district, such as Washington Street and Park Boulevard. Typically, retail streets support neighborhood retail by providing low-speed vehicular access, convenient on-street parking, wide sidewalks with pedestrian amenities, and street trees and landscaping. Narrow street widths and enhanced pedestrian crossings encourage pedestrian activity that promotes retail vitality. The best Uptown examples include sections of Fifth Avenue in Hillcrest and the north segment of Park Boulevard in University Heights. While balancing travel modes is important on retail streets, the preeminent design concern is creating a physical environment that supports the pedestrian activity that is essential for successful retail.

### *Residential Streets*

Residential Streets in Uptown are primarily local streets intended to provide access to residences within the neighborhood, with little or no through traffic. As a result, the streets are intended to accommodate relatively low traffic volumes and slow travel speeds. They are also a setting for the neighborhood’s communal life—where neighbors may stroll and greet each other. As such, the design of these streets plays an important role in community character by ensuring that these streets are both safe and attractive.

Uptown’s residential streets fall into two broad categories: the rectilinear grid of wide streets found generally in Hillcrest,

University Heights and Park West, and the narrower and often more curvilinear streets of Mission Hills and Middletown. Many of Uptown’s residential streets have a defined character, which should be maintained and reinforced. Other streets, particularly those with wide street cross-sections, have room for improvement in terms of both their aesthetic and functional characteristics. Although Uptown’s residential streets do not all share identical dimensions, their design is important for creating a clear and attractive residential character, and ensuring a safe environment

### **BICYCLE FACILITIES**

Uptown is a popular place for bicycle use as it is a central part of San Diego, and adjacent to many attractions and open space resources, such as Balboa Park, San Diego Zoo, Downtown and the Bay. Due to its urban character, it draws a population that appreciates urban lifestyle choices such as relying on bicycle commuting and transit rather than driving for daily trips. While an active bicycle culture exists, Uptown lacks sufficient bicycle facilities to truly support safe bicycle mobility. Much of this is due to adequate right-of-way on existing thoroughfares to accommodate bicycle lanes as well as standard widths for vehicle lanes. At present, Class II bicycle facilities, which are most desired and appropriate for urban areas, are located only in a few locations and not contiguous. The Mobility Element includes recommendations for additional bicycle facilities, which will be complemented by appropriate urban design recommendations for future routes and facilities.



*Typical Hillcrest Residential Street*



*Shared Lane Marking or "Sharrow" along University Avenue in Hillcrest*

## 4.1 EXISTING CONTEXT & URBAN FORM

# NEIGHBORHOOD CENTERS & NODES

### NEIGHBORHOOD CENTERS AND NODES

Urban design is also influenced by land use, as each land use generates distinct building types and circulation patterns. Residential is the predominant land use in Uptown, but there are also several nodes of retail, employment, and mixed-use, creating centers within each of Uptown's neighborhoods. These centers are generally located along the major transportation corridors, where convenient accessibility better supports commercial uses. These neighborhood centers form a basis for locating village place types identified by the General Plan (reference Land Use Element Section 2.3).

The most significant concentration of this place-type is in the Hillcrest core where several major corridors intersect. University Avenue is the anchor corridor, which is characterized largely by commercial services and retail development. Key intersections within this center often act as additional nodes when sidewalk pedestrian density and street activating uses within adjacent buildings have a synergistic effect. The Hillcrest Core also includes Robinson Street between First and Fifth Avenues, and the retail uses supporting the medical facilities and adjoining the Medical Complex neighborhood fronting on Washington Street.

Washington Street west of the Hillcrest core functions as a center for the Mission Hills neighborhood. This center is focused at the intersection of Washington and Goldfinch, and also includes retail extending eastward to the Hillcrest Core. This center includes more recent multi-unit, midrise residential buildings, many of which include pedestrian-oriented retail on the ground floor. Various streetscape improvements and public art investments have also enhanced the character of this area.

Smaller neighborhood-scale community centers also exist in Uptown's residential neighborhoods, such as on Park Boulevard and Adams Avenue in University Heights, 5th Avenue and Laurel in Bankers Hill, and along India Street in Middletown. Within these mixed use areas, pedestrian-oriented streets and building frontages create a vibrant public realm which serves the adjacent residential areas and also attracts visitors from throughout the city due to dining and entertainment destinations. Neighborhood Centers and Nodes are illustrated in Figure 4.3.



*Hillcrest Neighborhood Center/ Node*

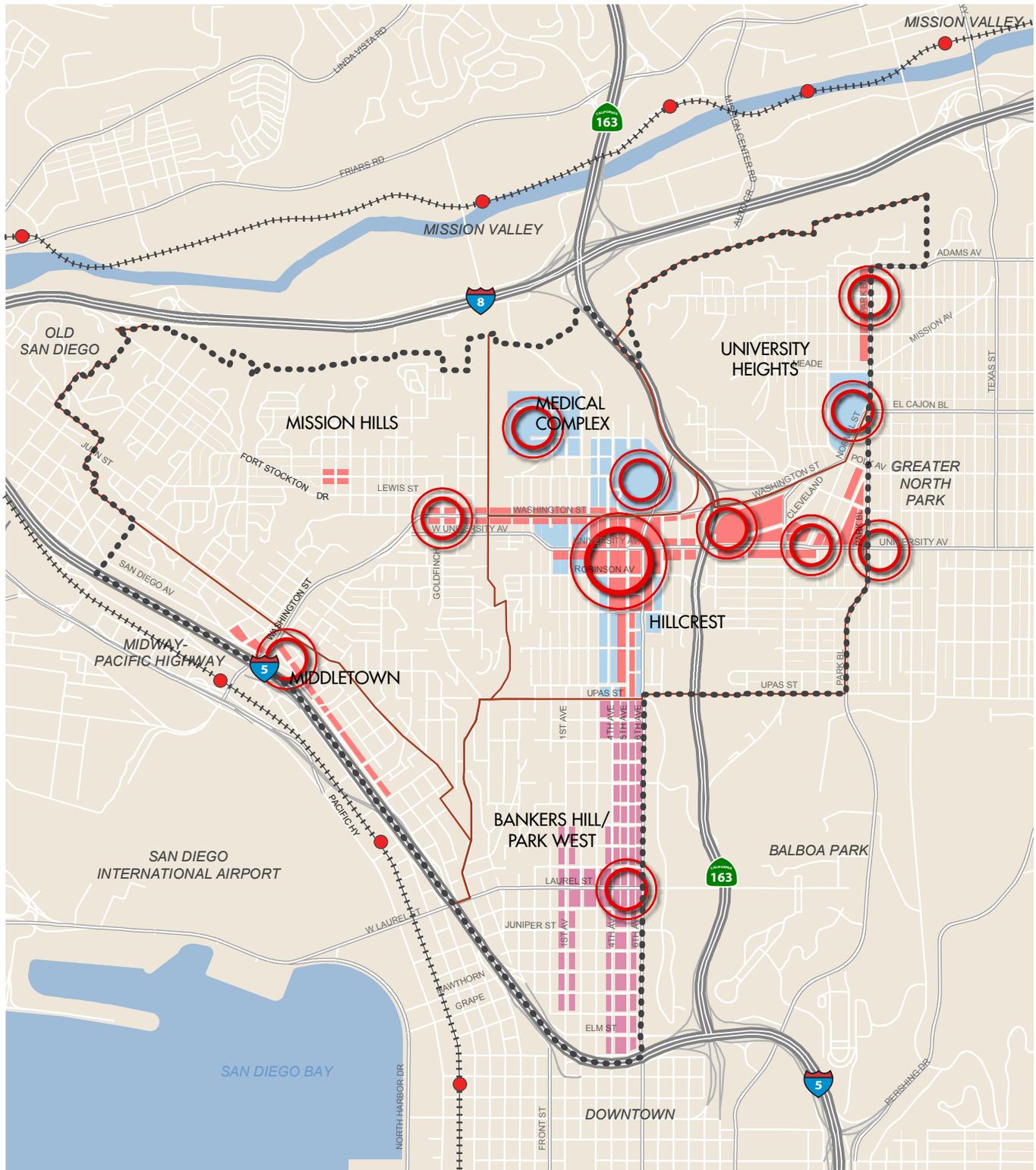


*Mission Hills Neighborhood Center/ Node*



*Middletown Neighborhood Center/ Node*

# NEIGHBORHOOD CENTERS & NODES



<b>LEGEND</b>	<span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #e91e63; border: 1px solid #e91e63; margin-right: 5px;"></span> Mixed Use	<span style="display: inline-block; border: 1px dashed black; width: 15px; height: 15px; margin-right: 5px;"></span> Community Plan Boundary
	<span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #f44336; border: 1px solid #f44336; margin-right: 5px;"></span> Mixed Use Retail Focus	<span style="display: inline-block; border: 1px solid black; width: 15px; height: 15px; margin-right: 5px;"></span> Neighborhood Boundary
	<span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #2196f3; border: 1px solid #2196f3; margin-right: 5px;"></span> Mixed Use Employment Focus	<span style="display: inline-block; border-bottom: 1px dashed black; width: 15px; margin-right: 5px;"></span> Trolley Route & Stops
	<span style="display: inline-block; border: 2px solid red; border-radius: 50%; width: 15px; height: 15px; margin-right: 5px;"></span> Neighborhood Centers & Nodes	



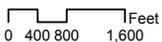




FIGURE 4.3: NEIGHBORHOOD CENTERS & NODES

# 4.1 EXISTING CONTEXT & URBAN FORM

## LANDMARKS & GATEWAYS



**LEGEND**

Landmarks	Community Plan Boundary
Gateways	Neighborhood Boundary
Bridges	Trolley Route & Stops
Buildings	

0 400 800 1,600 Feet

SanGIS

FIGURE 4.4: LANDMARKS & GATEWAYS

## LANDMARKS & GATEWAYS



*The Mission Hills sign is a key neighborhood landmark.*

Finally, the concentration of hospitals and medical support uses in the Medical Complex neighborhood forms a community center with an important employment component. While the medical uses themselves have a distinct physical form and are visible landmarks, the distribution of office uses along 4th and 5th Avenues contributes a distinct personality to these north-south corridors, and limited retail serves the adjacent residential area.

In addition to clustering of commercial and mixed-use areas, landmarks characterize distinct areas in Uptown and enhance the area's identity. Buildings such as St. Paul's Cathedral, Mr. A's, Village Hillcrest, and the Teachers Training annex are among those that serve as identifiable landmarks. The community's gateways and bridges are also landmarks. These include Uptown's unique pedestrian bridges (Quince, Spruce, and Vermont Street bridges), the historic gateway signs (Hillcrest, Mission Hills, and University Heights), and the monument signs indicating entrance into University Heights. Landmarks and gateways are important components of urban design because they create discernible markers of neighborhood distinction and can echo details of community identity. Landmarks and Gateways in Uptown are illustrated in Figure 4.4.

### BUILT FORM AND DEVELOPMENT

Uptown's physical form and design character is a product of its history, reflecting over a century and a half of growth and transformation. As one of San Diego's first neighborhoods,



*The University Heights sign is a gateway into the neighborhood commercial district.*

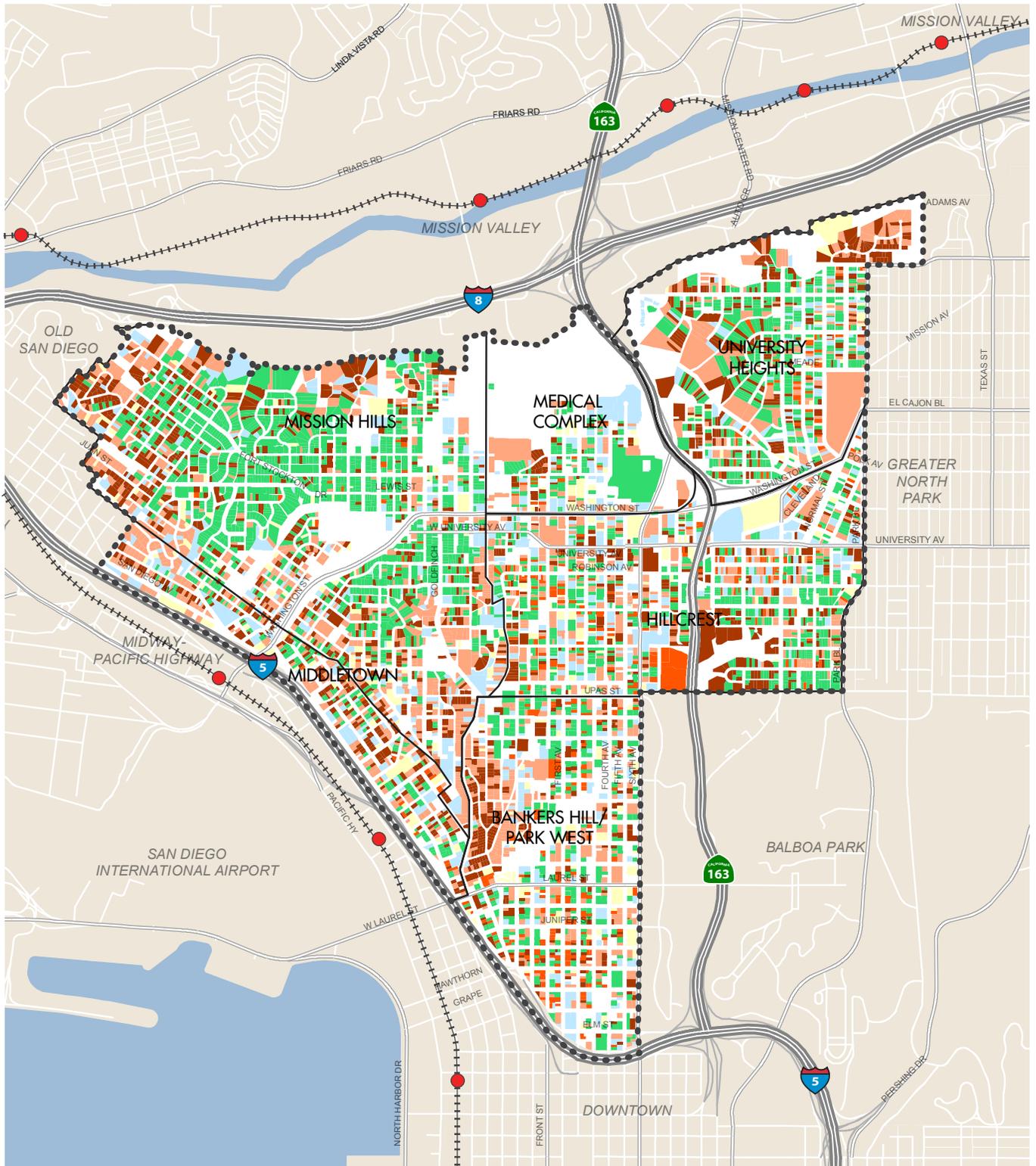
the area has been valued for its proximity to Downtown and its unobstructed views of the harbor, and includes a variety of architectural styles and mature landscapes dating to the City's early history and wealth. It also includes some of the city's most popular neighborhoods exhibiting recent trends towards more compact development and urban lifestyles, as well as infill, replacement and modification of buildings during past decades.

Historically, new development extended northward towards present-day Hillcrest and University Heights, due in large part to the construction of streetcar lines that connected the area to the Downtown. Development was primarily residential, with limited commercial uses, a state Normal School and the popular Mission Cliff Gardens arriving in the early 1900s. The form of this early development was influenced by platting of early subdivisions. Development activity accelerated related to the 1915 Panama-California Exposition at the present-day Balboa Park and by the 1930's many neighborhoods were largely developed.

Development activity accelerated due to the 1915 Panama-California Exposition at the present-day Balboa Park. Numerous residences, apartment buildings, hotels, businesses, churches and institutions were constructed across Uptown during this time, and by the 1920's, both Park West and Hillcrest were almost entirely developed as the city's streetcar suburbs. University Heights and Mission Hills were nearly built out by the 1930's.

# 4.1 EXISTING CONTEXT & URBAN FORM

## BUILT FORM & DEVELOPMENT



**LEGEND**

- ◆ 1880 - 1909
- ◆ 1910 - 1929
- ◆ 1930 - 1948
- ◆ 1949 - 1970
- ◆ 1971 - 1990
- ◆ 1991 - 2005
- Community Plan Boundary
- Neighborhood Boundary
- +•+ Trolley Route & Stops

FIGURE 4.5: BUILDING AGES



*Hillcrest in the early Twentieth Century*



*Bankers Hill/ Park West Historic Residence*

In the Post-War decades, Uptown's historic fabric began to be replaced to make room for new types and scales of development. This resulted in a substantial number of single-family homes being removed for multi-family apartment buildings and the building of new homes along steep canyon rims and slopes. Development from this era is characterized by automobile-oriented commercial development and Modern design in both residential and commercial buildings. New commercial "strips" and shopping centers, including retailers such as Sears, were developed along primary vehicular corridors, accompanied by on-site surface parking lots. Streets, such as Park Boulevard and University Avenue, formerly the home to streetcar lines, were transformed into heavily traveled motor ways. The construction of Interstate 5 also resulted in the razing of entire blocks in Middletown and

created a barrier between Uptown and Downtown. During the 1960's and 70's, accelerated suburbanization of the city's outlying areas resulted in disinvestment that sometimes lead to decay within many of the City's older neighborhoods including Uptown. Ultimately, the effects of disinvestment and suburban flight created conditions that attracted the lesbian and gay community to settle and invest in Hillcrest in the 1980's and 90's, creating an early economic renaissance and the rehabilitation and reuse of many existing buildings.

With the renewed interest in urban lifestyles that has characterized the 1990's and early 2000's, significant new commercial and residential development has been generated throughout Uptown, particularly adjacent to neighborhood centers. Key characteristics of much of this development include higher densities, mixed use development, and greater pedestrian orientation. The development of the Uptown Shopping District on the former Sears site, and the development of Village Hillcrest on 5th Avenue are early examples of this type of development. More recent residential projects include the Egyptian and Decca on Park Boulevard, which introduce higher density development while preserving and referencing the historic architecture that is important to the community's history and identity.

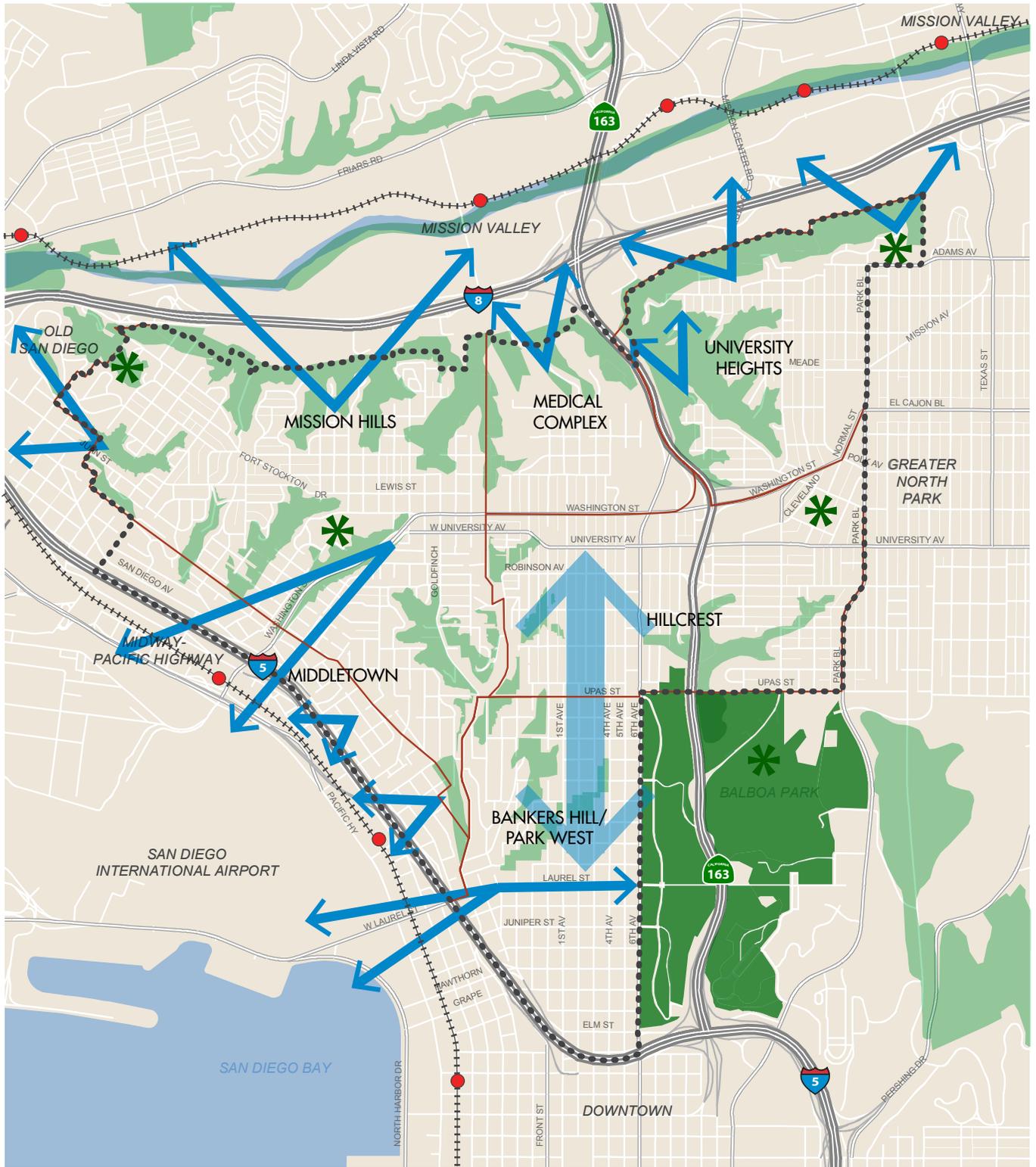
The urban form and quality in Uptown is evolving to include buildings that engage the public realm, and reflect and enhance the character of the community. At present, Uptown's urban design character is a unique "temporal collage" of development and physical improvements from all of San Diego's eras, which are illustrated in Figure 4.5.

## VIEW CORRIDORS

Due to its significant topography, Uptown has a wealth of prominent view corridors, offering views to Downtown, Balboa Park, Mission Valley, and the San Diego Bay and Harbor. While views are common from vantage points under private ownership, such as single-family neighborhoods, view corridors refer to those areas that are accessible to the public, and therefore include mostly corridors and open spaces.

# 4.1 EXISTING CONTEXT & URBAN FORM

## VIEW CORRIDORS



**LEGEND**

- Canyons
- Balboa Park
- Community Plan Boundary
- Neighborhood Boundary
- Parks
- Trolley Route & Stops
- View Corridors

FIGURE 4.6: CANYONS & VIEW CORRIDORS

# VIEW CORRIDORS



*Washington Street is a view corridor west to the San Diego Bay.*



*Maple Canyon offers view to the Bay from Bankers Hill/ Park West.*



*Bankers Hill/ Park West provides views to Downtown and the Bay.*

Washington Street is a major view corridor and is also the primary public access entrance into Middletown and Mission Hills. Due to its steep elevation and location within a canyon, Washington Street offers sweeping views of the San Diego Bay and the airport, as well as I-5 and the low-lying development along Harbor Drive. Canyons and View Corridors are illustrated in Figure 4.6.

The Avenues, including First through Sixth Avenues, are all primary view corridors in Uptown. These corridors extend north-south between Downtown, through Bankers Hill/ Park West and Hillcrest, and terminate in the Mission Hills/ Medical Complex area. Views of Downtown are accessible via these “boulevards,” as there is a gradual decrease in elevation as they head south towards Downtown. In addition, First and Fourth Avenues cross over Maple Canyon, which provide views into the canyon and westward towards the Bay. Second and Third Avenues terminate into the canyon, allowing views at those locations. Fifth and Sixth Avenue additionally offer views to Balboa Park at key intersections and vantage points, and along the edge of Sixth Avenue.

Laurel Street, similar to Washington Avenue in its dramatic topography and key entry point into Uptown, offers significant views to the San Diego Bay and a sense of entry in Balboa Park. Laurel Street directly connects Harbor Drive to Balboa Park at Sixth Avenue, intersecting with the key north-south corridors connecting Downtown to Uptown, west of Balboa Park. In addition, the single-family and multifamily development on the western slopes of the community conforms well to the natural topography. This development, in combination with the sloping land, creates a strong urban form which provides both topographical relief and numerous scenic views to San Diego Bay.

From their high elevations situated atop canyons, areas of Mission Hills, Middletown, and University Heights offer public access views to Mission Valley. Key areas and streets that offer views include Adams, Madison, and Tenth Avenues in University Heights, facing west, Third and Fourth Avenues in Medical Complex, and Fort Stockton/ Sunset Road in Mission Hills. The historic Highway 163, a primary connector of the Uptown Communities, also offers significant views to Downtown, Balboa Park, and Mission Valley as it travels through its low canyon elevation.

## 4.1 EXISTING CONTEXT & URBAN FORM

# PARKS & OPEN SPACE

Located on a lower elevation than the other parts of Uptown, Middletown offers unparalleled, direct views to the Harbor along India Street and from the curvilinear roads that connect its distinctive slope side residences.

Uptown's canyons are among the community's most treasured elements, providing natural open space features that shape the community's identity and built form. Each of Uptown's neighborhoods abut at least one of these important open space resources and is influenced by the views, the natural environment, and the open space they provide. In addition, Uptown's three canyon pedestrian bridges are landmarks within the community. Key canyons that provide distinction within Uptown include: those that provide the northern boundary for Mission Hills, Middletown, and University Heights, creating a dramatic separation from Mission Valley; the canyon that creates the separation between University Heights and Medical Complex, and in which Highway 163 passes, providing a connection to Downtown and Mission Valley; Spruce Canyon, between Curlew and Brant Streets and First Avenue; and Maple Canyon, originating at Maple Street in Middletown and passing under First and Fourth Avenues in Bankers Hill/ Park West. These canyons provide the open space framework for Uptown, which is described in greater detail in the Conservation Element. They are important to address in terms of urban design so that future development and modifications to the public realm do not negatively impact or interfere with the experience of the canyons in Uptown.

### PARKS AND OPEN SPACE

Parks and open space play a significant role in contributing a sense of openness and greenery to the community that provides an appealing contrast to the generally urban context. As discussed above, the canyons represent a major open space resource that flows throughout the community. These natural elements are augmented by two major parks located adjacent to Uptown—Balboa Park to the southeast and Presidio Park to the northwest. While not within Uptown, both contribute to a verdant, open character. The influence of Balboa Park on community character is most evident in development along 6th



*Access to Balboa Park is a key feature of Uptown.*

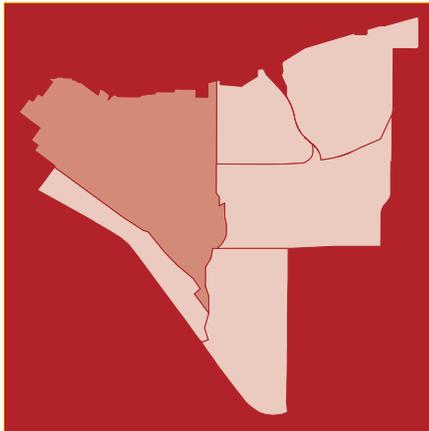
Avenue where the amenity value of the park has contributed to a distinctive pattern of mid- and high-rise buildings.

Parks and Open Space act as community gathering places and focal points throughout Uptown. Land uses located adjacent to parks typically are active and desirable to either live or to locate a business. Although specific recommendations for locations of new parks and open spaces and their design are contained in the Recreation Element, it is important to consider them as part of the urban design framework as well.

## Distinctive Neighborhoods

Uptown is known for its distinct neighborhoods. The evolution of the community through numerous eras, and the topographic definition created by the canyons, has resulted in neighborhoods that have developed unique architectural, landscape, and demographic characteristics. The distinctiveness of the individual neighborhoods is highly valued by the Uptown community, and a key objective of the urban form element is to protect and enhance the qualities that make these neighborhoods unique.

# DISTINCTIVE NEIGHBORHOODS



## MISSION HILLS

The Mission Hills neighborhood includes the area of Uptown generally south of Mission Valley, west of Curlew Street and Reynard Way, north of Norton Avenue, and east of the Old San Diego Community Plan Area. Mission Hills is a residentially-focused neighborhood consisting of predominantly single-family homes, with Washington Street as the primary corridor providing access into and through the neighborhood. A commercial core is generally located along Washington Street, with another smaller neighborhood-serving commercial area at the intersection of West Lewis and Stephens Streets. A series of higher density, multi-family developments are located north of Washington between Eagle and Ibis Streets.



Topographically, the neighborhood is perched on the upper elevations of the mesa amid a series of steep canyons that extend out from the neighborhood to the north and south, displaying sweeping views of Mission Valley, the Bay, and Downtown. The deep, heavily vegetated canyons divide the neighborhood into a series of secluded sub-neighborhoods buffered by open space. The street and block pattern reflects this topography, with small square and rectangular blocks occupying the flatter areas at the top of the Mesa, and curvilinear, non-continuous streets, and irregular blocks approaching the canyons. The street system includes an assortment of streets and street widths, with the majority of streets being quiet, relatively narrow, residential streets. Fort Stockton Drive and Sunset Boulevard serve as residential collectors that distribute local traffic in the upper areas, and Reynard Way distributes traffic to the south. The busy, four-lane arterial scale and character of Washington Street sharply contrasts with the placid character of the rest of the neighborhood. The high volumes of traffic along Washington have generated a predominance of auto-oriented commercial uses and design responses in the section east of Washington Place. West of Washington Place the street drops into a canyon and creates a physical divide in the community.



Features that contribute to Mission Hills' unique identity include the mature vegetation that characterizes the neighborhood, the use of Queen palms as street trees, and the prevalence of low front yard walls—many using local cobblestone, in addition to the neighborhood's dramatic canyons and views. The Mission Hills gateway sign on Washington Street also provides a neighborhood marker and sense of entry into the neighborhood.



## HILLCREST

The Hillcrest neighborhood is located at the center of Uptown, bounded between Washington and Upas Streets, and Dove/ Curlew Streets and Park Boulevard.

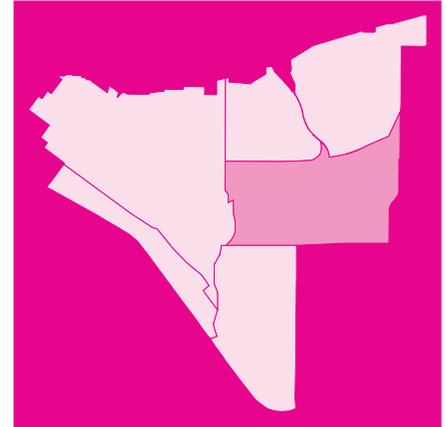
## 4.1 EXISTING CONTEXT & URBAN FORM DISTINCTIVE NEIGHBORHOODS

Topographically, the developed portion of Hillcrest is relatively flat, except for canyons extending into the southern portion of the area, and the SR-163 canyon which bisects the neighborhood.

Hillcrest is the most diverse of the Uptown neighborhoods, containing more retail, office and mixed use development and more varied residential character. The area includes the primary commercial core of Uptown, which is concentrated around the intersection of Fifth Avenue and University Avenue, and extends several blocks east, west, south. This area is a vibrant pedestrian-oriented commercial center, as well as the center of community-wide activity with active, walkable streets, mixed-use buildings and retail, office, and entertainment activities. Hillcrest is marked by the iconic Hillcrest gateway sign, at University and 5th Avenue, serving as a key neighborhood identify feature.

University Avenue is the primary spine of Hillcrest, with commercial development extending along University Avenue east of SR-163, and west until it converges with Mission Hills. The eastern portion of University Avenue generally experiences higher traffic speeds due to increased width. Streetscape improvements and the development of the mixed use Uptown District have contributed to a more pedestrian-friendly environment.

Hillcrest is one of the more intensely developed neighborhoods in Uptown. Residential development includes a variety of multi-family residential developments in both stand-alone and mixed use formats, with densities ranging from 30 to 100 units per acre in some areas, and commercial development intensities are the highest in the community, particularly in the core retail district where no development setbacks are required and surface parking is at a minimum. The majority of the structures are one- and two-stories, but more recent mixed-use and residential development generally tends to be in the 3- to 7-story range. The area also includes a handful of residential high-rise buildings, all of which were developed to take advantage of views of either Balboa Park or the Bay. Taller buildings are scattered but tend to be located in the core along 5th Avenue, near Park Boulevard and University Avenue, or at the north end of Balboa Park. Buildings in Hillcrest include a range of architectural styles. Single-family residential clusters along 1st and 2nd Avenues, and east of SR-163 and south of Robinson, include styles associated with early development, such as Craftsman, Bungalow, Prairie, and Mission and Spanish Revival. Commercial architecture is a combination of historic commercial buildings, such as on the corner of Fifth and University, and more auto-oriented buildings from later generations. Infill development completed in the last several years has introduced new architectural forms and styles, many that try to complement the form, scale and stylistic precedents in the Hillcrest community.



# DISTINCTIVE NEIGHBORHOODS



Hillcrest is generally characterized by a street grid pattern that, unlike Mission Hills, includes little variation in response to topography. The predominant block pattern consists of long rectangular blocks (300' x 600') with a mid-block alley running the length of the block. While retaining the same general dimensions, the blocks are oriented north-south along the Avenues, but are rotated east-west along University Avenue and Robinson Avenue, and then northeast/southwest along Normal Street. Despite this grid pattern, Robinson, University and Washington Streets are the only streets that provide contiguous east-west connections through Hillcrest, due to the divide created by SR-163 and canyons. Because Hillcrest is the crossroads of Uptown, with the major streets intersecting in the Hillcrest core, high traffic volumes characterize primary connector streets, presenting a challenge to preserving the core area's pedestrian orientation. Normal Street represents a unique feature in the street system with its diagonal orientation, its extremely wide right-of-way, and relatively low traffic volumes.



## MEDICAL COMPLEX

The Medical Complex neighborhood is bounded by Interstate 8 on the north, Washington Street on the south, SR-163 on the east and the Dove Street Canyon on the west. Topographically, the area sits atop a flat mesa north from Washington Street until it meets the two canyons that flow down to Mission Valley. The rim of the canyon provides dramatic views north over Mission Valley. Washington Street forms the boundary between Hillcrest and the Medical Complex, and marks the transition from Hillcrest's pedestrian-oriented retail district to the more automobile-oriented medical center uses. Buildings are noticeably taller in the Medical Complex than they are in the Hillcrest core just to the south. The two medical centers, which are both 8-12 stories tall, are surrounded by development that is predominantly 3 and 5 stories, particularly in the area east of 1st Avenue. The western portion of Medical Complex has more single family housing that is 1 to 2 stories. Development intensities, both residential and institutional, are generally higher than in the majority of Uptown. Residential densities of 30-100 dwelling units per acre are common, and the hospitals and medical office buildings have very high floor area ratios.



The Medical Complex is dominated by the presence of two medical centers: Scripps Mercy Hospital and Medical Center and the UCSD Medical Center, which occupy over 40 percent of the neighborhood. The remaining portion of the Medical Complex area is occupied primarily by residential uses, the majority being multi-family housing to serve medical center employees. Commercial development, which is mostly auto-oriented, is located on the north side of Washington Street, and sporadically surrounding the medical centers. While Medical Complex contains the lowest proportion of single-family homes in Uptown, stylistically, they are similar to elsewhere in the community. Multi-family

## 4.1 EXISTING CONTEXT & URBAN FORM

# DISTINCTIVE NEIGHBORHOODS

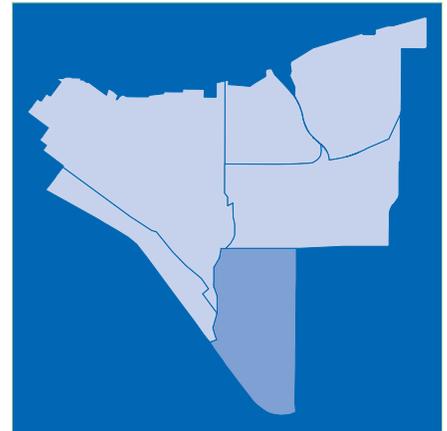
buildings are more contemporary, reflecting a combination of mid-century and late Modern and Post-Modern styles. The medical buildings have an institutional character that distinguishes them from other development in Uptown, and there is a much higher occurrence of free-standing parking garages, many of which have been sited in canyons to reduce the apparent mass. The character of the pedestrian realm varies according to the surrounding use. The more residential areas generally have pleasant streetscapes with street trees, while less attention is paid to the pedestrian environment around the hospitals, where the chief priority is vehicular access.

The block pattern of Medical Complex is similar to Hillcrest just north of Washington Street, with long north-south blocks with mid-block alleys. Approaching the canyons, the block dimensions begin to shift, first losing the mid-block alley, and then morphing into large-scale development parcels and curvilinear cul-de-sacs that respond to the topography at the canyon interface. The scale of the residential streets in Medical Complex is similar to the residential portions of Mission Hills, with narrow, intimate streets. With the exception of Bachman Place which extends north through the area to Mission Valley, the streets in the Medical Complex only provide for internal circulation with the only external connections being to Washington Street.

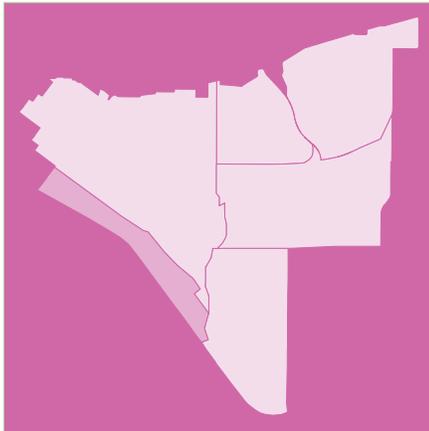
### **BANKERS HILL/PARK WEST**

The Bankers Hill/ Park West neighborhood is located just west of Balboa Park, between Upas Street and Interstate 5, and east of Reynard Way. Its proximity to Downtown and Balboa Park has been an important influence on the neighborhood, while its topography, which slopes down to the south and west, plays an important role in its character, providing dramatic views of both the Downtown and the Bay, and influencing the design of buildings. The canyons that cross the northwest corner of neighborhood introduce a natural open space element and a contrast to the regularity of the grid of streets that characterizes the majority of the area. Linear north-south streets serve as major connectors between Downtown and Balboa Park and the Uptown neighborhoods. The direct connection provided by the Avenues to Downtown results in higher traffic volumes, particularly along 4th and 5th, in addition to these avenues' designation as one-way streets. First and Fourth Avenues cross iconic historic bridges that represent the interplay of canyons within the neighborhood. Laurel Street, which originates along the Bay, is a primary connector within Banker's Hill, connecting the Bay to Balboa Park and Uptown neighborhoods.

Bankers Hill/ Park West includes single-family neighborhoods isolated by canyons in the northwest portion of the neighborhood, older multifamily residential development in the southwest area, and a significant component of professional office uses that extend the length of the area along the avenues. Small clusters



# DISTINCTIVE NEIGHBORHOODS



of neighborhood commercial are located on Reynard Way between Eagle Street and Falcon Street, on First Avenue between Ivy Street and Juniper Street and at the intersection of Fifth Avenue and Laurel Street. These commercial centers function as neighborhood centers and provide a variety of neighborhood services including grocery stores, dry cleaning businesses and entertainment establishments.



Bankers Hill /Park West contains some of the oldest architecture in Uptown, including several large Victorian and Queen Anne homes from the 1870's. Otherwise, Banker's Hill expresses a range of architectural styles and building ages—including several recent, high-density mixed-use developments along the "Avenues," to single- and multi-family neighborhoods characterized by Craftsman bungalows, Mission Revival, and Colonial Revival. Several churches and office buildings also represent distinctive architectural styles and periods of the development of the neighborhood. Building heights are greatly varied, with several buildings of 13 stories and above located between Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Avenues, taking advantage of views and proximity to Balboa Park. This is due to more generous height limits than elsewhere in Uptown, including a height limit of 150' along Fifth and Sixth Avenue. Residential density is greatest closest to Downtown with several buildings of over 100 du/acre located along Grape and Hawthorn Streets and Interstate 5. Elsewhere, the majority of buildings are low-rise (below 4 stories), and density is lower (1-15 du/acre), as buildings step down to integrate with the neighborhood.



Park West is characterized by the historic grid street pattern that is an extension of the pattern in the Downtown, not seen elsewhere in Uptown. The grid is comprised of short blocks (200' x 300') without alleys. Blocks near canyons are irregular, responding to the topography of the canyon. A key characteristic of streets in Park West is that they are generally wider than all but major collector streets in the rest of Uptown. With curb-to-curb cross-sections of 50 feet, these streets can accommodate three travel lanes and two parallel parking lanes, which is typical along the avenues. In some places, where traffic volumes are not high, these widths have been reconfigured to provide two travel lanes with diagonal parking on one side.

## MIDDLETOWN



The Middletown neighborhood is located on the far west side of Uptown, bounded by Interstate 5 to the west, Horton Avenue and Titus Street to the east, Laurel Street and Reynard Way to the south, and Witherby Street to the north. Historically the area included areas to the west and south of Interstate 5, but since the construction of the freeway are now outside of the Uptown Community Plan boundary. The development of Middletown is built on a west-facing hillside facing the San Diego Bay, as buildings step up the slope creating a distinctive urban character and providing numerous scenic views. The architecture of Middletown is diverse - representing periods of San Diego's earliest growth to contemporary styles, including both single-

## 4.1 EXISTING CONTEXT & URBAN FORM

# DISTINCTIVE NEIGHBORHOODS

and multi-family residences to large scale light industrial buildings, and commercial uses. Among the residential areas, Middletown has the highest concentration of Contemporary, Ranch, and Minimal Traditional buildings, as well as other vernacular styles. While most of the area does not have formal or consistent street tree planting, Middletown has a relatively lush landscape character which is due in part to the sloping topography, which tends to make landscaping on private lots more visible.

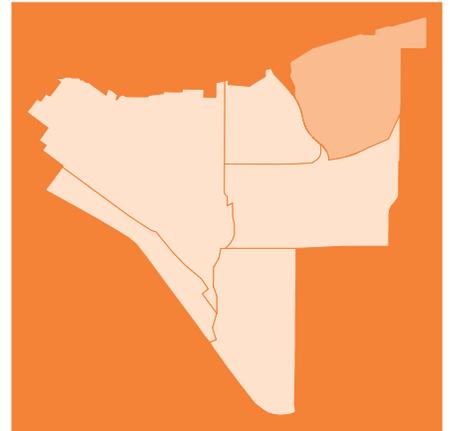
The Middletown street system is generally laid out in a grid pattern, running parallel to Interstate 5, with hillside grid blocks that are oriented to respond to the downward-sloping hillside rather than maintain the north-south orientation of Downtown or Bankers Hill/ Park West blocks. North of Washington Street, the blocks are more irregular in response to both canyon topography and large footprint uses such as hotels and large commercial/ light industrial buildings. The majority of the streets are relatively narrow residential streets that carry local traffic. San Diego Avenue/India Street, which parallels the freeway, is a busy collector street that carries both local traffic and serves as a frontage access road for I-5. As it meets Washington Avenue, India Street is also a neighborhood center/node of Middletown.

### UNIVERSITY HEIGHTS

The University Heights neighborhood is part of two community planning areas: North Park and Uptown. The portion of the University Heights neighborhood within Uptown is west of Park Boulevard, south of the Mission Valley, north of Washington Street, and east of SR-SR-163. University Heights occupies the flat top of a mesa that is ringed on three sides by canyons, with an extensive perimeter of canyon interface that creates a sense of enclosure and privacy in the neighborhood. Views of Mission Valley and Mission Bay are prominent from the canyon rims. A well-established and popular commercial district is located at the north end of Park Boulevard and Adams Avenue and is the neighborhood center for the University Heights community.

University Heights is a predominantly single-family, low-rise residential neighborhood, with multi-family residential located along and nearby to the major north-south streets west of Park Boulevard. Despite its relatively low profile, University Heights is one of Uptown's denser neighborhoods due to the high number of multi-family units. Residential development is typically 1-to 2-stories, or 24 to 30 feet in height, with commercial development along Park Boulevard ranging between the typical 1- to 2-story buildings to scattered instances of 3 story buildings. Densities range from 15 to 100 units per acre in the blocks east of Maryland Street, while single-family neighborhoods are generally between 1 and 14 units per acre.

As one of the earliest neighborhoods in San Diego, University Heights includes several historic character-defining elements and styles. The northerly terminus of Park Boulevard once served as the terminus of the San Diego Cable Railway (1890-



## DISTINCTIVE NEIGHBORHOODS

1892) and later trolley. The area west of Park Boulevard includes examples of early architectural styles such as Craftsman, Arts & Crafts, Bungalow, Prairie, Mission and Spanish revival, and Monterrey, exhibited in commercial as well as residential buildings. Most buildings date from 1910-1929 and 1930-1948 with infill from later periods. Office and public institutional uses are clustered at the intersection of Park Boulevard, El Cajon Boulevard, and Normal Street, which include the San Diego City Schools Education Center and Alice Birney Elementary School. These occupy large parcels and signify an institutional presence and a gateway into the neighborhood.

The predominant block pattern in University Heights is the same long, north-south blocks with mid-block alleys that exist in Hillcrest, with irregular block patterns approaching the canyon rim, and a series of spoke-like cul-de-sacs, like Proctor Place, Rhode Island Street, and New Hampshire Street, that extend out between the canyons. As in Park West, University Heights has very broad streets (50 foot). Since these streets generally accommodate only local traffic, they are relatively quiet with an open and airy character. The landscape character of the neighborhood is generally characterized by the natural landscape at the canyon perimeter. The Park Boulevard commercial district also has a planting pattern of palms and liquid ambers that give the street an intimate and distinctive character. Within residential areas, streetscape planting is relatively sparse, although some streets feature palm trees that unify street character. The Vermont Street pedestrian bridge, connecting University Heights to Hillcrest, the University Heights gateway sign, and the Mission Cliff cobblestone wall on Adams Avenue are all distinctive features that contribute to neighborhood character.