

# The Case for A Living Plaza in Arcata



Front Page Photo: Terrence McNally

### About CRTP

The mission of CRTP is promote transportation solutions that protect and support a healthy environment, healthy communities and a healthy economy on the North Coast



**Modeshift** is a new CRTP project that aims to redesign Arcata's streetscape should around the needs of people. We believe that seemingly disparate issues like civic health, business environment, and city-wide adaptability to climate change are deeply connected to how Arcata Transportation policies are detracting from our social spaces.

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The Plaza is not a parking lot. It's not a traffic corridor. The Plaza is Arcata's living room-- it's where we come together as a community.

### **Executive Summary**

The Arcata Plaza is our premier civic resource. It holds festivals and markets, and is a great place to spend a summer afternoon. The Plaza is also Arcata's prime business place with restaurants, bars, and shops selling goods that range from furniture to clothes to art.

In our view, the Plaza is being underutilized. Roughly 64% of the space is expressly dedicated to automotive use. Space used by automobiles is space that is not being used for other means, and there are many other uses that are valuable.

Imagine a Plaza with a public arts venue that hosted concerts and plays. Imagine a Plaza with playgrounds and arts expos. Imagine a Plaza with a community garden, or expanded outdoor dining and retail vending, or a bustling foot cart scene.

A **"Living Plaza"** could be all of these things. We favor an approach that slows traffic, removes parking, and builds the public and private amenities needed to connect people and anchor the energy needed to sustain life on the Plaza.

### A Living Plaza Would:

Improve revenues for businesses
Revitalize civic life on the Plaza by increasing the variety of activities, public performances, and art displays
Improve safety for drivers, pedestrians, cyclists, and transit users
Create a more inclusive atmosphere that enabled access by all of our community members



# What is a Living Plaza?



On a typical day, the Plaza is nearly empty.

(photo: city of Arcata)



During the big events like the Oyster Festival it's filled with life – social, civic, and business. (photo: north coast journal)





A Living Plaza follows an approach called "placemaking", which specifically addresses what makes some places succeed while others fail. Evaluations of thousands of public spaces around the world show that good public spaces generally share four qualities:

- 1. they are **Accessible**
- 2. people are engaged in **Activities** there
- 3. the space is **Comfortable** and has a good image
- 4. it is a **Sociable** Place: one where people meet each other and take people who come to visit.

The place diagram is a tool to help judge any place by these four criteria (Project For Public Spaces).





In regard to these criteria, let's ask some <u>fundamental questions</u> about the Plaza as posed by (Project for Public Spaces)

**Accessible:** A successful public space is easy to get to and get through. It is visible both from a distance and up close. Accessible spaces have high parking turnover, and are convenient to public transit.

- Can people easily walk to the place?
- Does the space function for people with special needs?
- Can people use a variety of transportation options to reach the place?

**Active:** Activities are the basic building blocks of a place. Having something to do gives people a reason to come, and return. When there is nothing to do, a space will be empty.

- Are people using the space or is it empty?
- Is it being used by people of different ages?
- How many different types of activities are occurring people walking, eating, playing ball, relaxing
- Are nearby businesses thriving?
- Are there choices of things to do?
- Is there a management presence can you identify anyone in charge of the space?

**Comfortable:** Whether a public space is comfortable and presents itself well, is key to its success. Comfort includes perceptions about safety, cleanliness, and the availability of places to sit.

- Does the place make a good first impression?
- Are there more women than men? Does the mix of ages and ethnic groups reflect the community at large?
- Are there enough places to sit? Are the seats conveniently located? Do people have a choice of places to sit?
- Is the space clean and litter free?
- Does the area feel safe? Is there a security presence?
- Do vehicles dominate pedestrian use of the space?

**Sociable:** When people see friends, greet their neighbors, and feel comfortable interacting with strangers, they tend to have a stronger sense of place.

- Is this a place where you would choose to meet your friends? Are others meeting friends here or running into them?
- Are people in groups? Are they talking with one another?
- Do people bring visiting friends and relatives to see the place and point out its features with pride?
- Are people smiling? Do they make eye contact?
- Do people use the place regularly? Can people use it at all times?



# Is the Plaza accessible?



Photo: Humboldt State University



# **An Abundance of Parking**

Parking is important for providing delivery and customer access to businesses. However, the Plaza currently has more parking capacity than necessary We conducted a parking inventory in the downtown core of Arcata with Google Maps that included public on-street and off-street parking, and private off-street parking dedicated to customer use. Our results are shown below, both as gridded data and as a heatmap. (Campbell, 2017)





The Plaza contains about 105 parking spots (63 on its inside core). The downtown core of Arcata (between K Street & F Street and between and Samoa Boulevard & 11<sup>th</sup> Street) contains about 2,243 parking spots, the furthest being 0.25 mi from the Plaza. (Campbell, 2017) Thus, more than 95% of downtown parking is not located on the Plaza but is close by and available to interested customers for free! Parking in downtown Arcata is roughly evenly distributed, with surplus inventory mostly in locations extremely close to the Plaza.

A Google map (see next page) shows the availability of parking in Arcata. In green are facilities with publically available parking spaces, including public streets. In red are private parking facilities. **Parking and roads account for roughly 50% of all land use downtown.** This agrees with (Akbari, 2003) who used high-resolution imaging in Sacramento to find that 41% of the city center use was roads, parking areas, and sidewalks.





#### Removing parking would not significantly reduce the customer base.

According to (Yang, 2012) nearly all Americans are willing to undertake a 0.25 mi walk to shop or eat at a restaurant. In Arcata, we know this first hand. **The best days for business on the Plaza are festival days -- days when parking are the scarcest.** 



### Make parking work for business.

Excessive parking requirements, often mandated through zoning, create a number of problems including inflated build costs, increased rents for business, and spreading businesses further apart. Parking is expensive. Parking costs \$4,000 per space to build in locations similar to the Arcata downtown. (Victoria Transport Policy Institute, 2016) The total annualized costs are huge. Assuming two on-street and three off-street parking spaces per vehicle in a typical urban area, costs may run \$4,400 dollars per year. Most of these costs are born through increased taxes, reduced wages, and additional retail prices. (Victoria Transport Policy Institute, 2016) **In other words, excessive parking reduces profit!** 



Table 5.4.5-0	Estimated Annualized Farking Costs Fer Vehicle					
	Spaces Per Vehicle	Annual Cost Per Space	Paid Directly By Users	Directly-Paid Costs	External Costs	Total Costs
Residential	1	\$800	100%	\$800	0	\$800
Non-res. Off-street	2	\$1,200	5%	\$120	\$2280	\$2,400
On-street	2	\$600	5%	\$60	\$1140	\$1,200
Totals	5			\$980 (22%)	\$3420 (78%)	\$4,400 (100%)

#### Table 5.4.3-8 Estimated Annualized Parking Costs Per Vehicle

Free parking is less beneficial to business than is commonly perceived. A recent (City Lab, 2012) summarizes a number of reasons for this.

- 1. **Free parking slows parking turnover**, reducing the number of patrons able to visit shops. (Mingardo, 2012) studied 80 urban shopping centers and found that higher parking costs led to higher parking-space turnover and therefore higher retail potential.
- 2. **Retailers often overestimate how many customers arrive by car**. One study, (Sustrans, 2004), shows the gap between retailer perception and shopper reality. "Retailers believed that only 12 percent of their customers lived within a half-mile when in fact 42 percent did; believed cars were the most frequent mode of arrival when in fact walking was; and believed parking would elevate the shopping experience when in fact shoppers said less traffic and more area improvements would." (City Lab, 2012)
- 3. **Drivers spend less than bicyclists.** According to a study conducted in Portland, OR (Clifton, 2012), bicyclists spend more money per month at convenience stores, restaurants, and bars than cars do. They tend to spend less per trip, but have more trips overall. Pedestrians and motorists spend roughly the same amount per month.
- 4. **Retail mix is more important than parking supply**. When you ask shoppers what brings them to a given store, they say that a mix of stores and social atmosphere are much more important than parking. (Teller, 2008)

# Parking makes access difficult for those with disabilities.

The large amount of parking on the Plaza can make navigating the environment difficult for people with disabilities. Parking acts as a buffer, pushing pedestrians into crosswalks where the majority of vast majority of collisions with automobiles occur. (Safe Transportation and Education Center, 2017) This use of space is neither fair nor equitable. (Photo: Lost Cost Outpost)





# Rates of driving in Arcata are falling fast.

According to the newest data from (Census Bureau, 2017), only 51% of residents downtown Arcata commute by car, nearly 30% walk, and 9% bike. The long term trend has seen commuting driving in downtown Arcata fall from 60% since 2000.





## **G and H Streets Are Not Natural Arterials.**

G and H Street are designed as an arterial couplet. But according to data mapped on (Trulia, 2017), even with that type of road design, traffic volumes are low enough to be designated "low traffic." Other arterials such as Samoa Boulevard, and 7<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Streets seem justified based on traffic volume. However, "Desire Lines" show that traffic does not just flow unimpeded on G and H Streets – i.e., **G and H Streets do not seem like a natural arterials even when designed as such.** We suggest K Street, and a redesigned F Street, both of which already function better as arterials, could take up any capacity displaced by redesigning G and H Streets.





# Is the Plaza comfortable?



Photo: Lost Coast Outpost



# The streets around the Plaza are not safe for all users.

G and H Streets are classified by the city of Arcata as an arterial couplet, a roadway designation that encourages speeding and is not conducive to the kinds of civic activities that enrich the Plaza.

Using the TIMS querying tool (Safe Transportation and Education Center, 2017), we accessed traffic injury data for the City of Arcata spanning the years from 2000 – 2016. During that time there were 426 collisions that injured or killed 479 victims. 76 of those were pedestrians, nearly half (43.4%) of which were crossing in marked crosswalks at intersections. By far the most common location to be hit was downtown, mostly on the arterial streets of Samoa Boulevard, K Street, 11<sup>th</sup> Street, G Street, and H Street. **Why are G and H Streets on the Plaza being used in a manner that is so dangerous for pedestrians and bicyclists?** 



Heat map of Transportation Injuries in Arcata from 2000 – 2016. They nearly all occur downtown, nearly all on arterials



The Plaza is a common location for pedestrians to be injured by motorists. (Safe Transportation and Education Center, 2017)



Mostly, pedestrians are hit because motorists fail to yield at crosswalks. (Safe Transportation and Education Center, 2017)

Total # of Ped Collisions: 76

# of Pedestrians Killed: 4, # of Pedestrians Injured: 71

Note: Victim Gender table and Victim Age chart used victim counts on pedestrian collisions while other tables used number of ped collisions.

Type of Violation		
Driver must yield to pedestrian right of way in a crosswalk.	29	38.2%
Unsafe turn with/without signaling.	6	7.9%
Starting or backing while unsafe.	2	2.6%
Hit-run, injury or death, immediate report of fatal.	1	1.3%
Driving under the influence of alcohol, drug, or combination, causing injury or death to another.	2	2.6%
Public or private property, yield to approaching traffic so close as to constitute an immediate hazard.	1	1.3%
Stop sign, failure to stop at limit line, crosswalk, or entrance to intersection.	3	3.9%
Under influence of alcohol, drug, or combination, while driving a vehicle.	2	2.6%
Sidewalk, failure to yield to pedestrian on.	1	1.3%
Walking on roadway, other than pedestrian's left edge.	2	2.6%
Unsafe speed for prevailing conditions (use for all prima facie limits).	2	2.6%
Pedestrian yield, upon roadway outside crosswalk.	12	15.8%

Pedestrian Action		
B - Crossing in Crosswalk at Intersection	33	43.4%
C - Crossing in Crosswalk Not at Intersection	3	3.9%
D - Crossing Not in Crosswalk	15	19.7%
E - In Road, Including Shoulder	14	18.4%
F - Not in Road	8	10.5%
Not Stated	3	3.9%



While some people drive or ride bicycles, everyone walks, speeds above 25 mph quickly become extremely dangerous. (UK Department of Transport, 1997)

### **Eventually Everyone Ends Up On Foot**

Slower speeds and narrower streets benefits everyone.

## **Streets downtown can be safer**

Between 2000-2016 there were 76 collisions in Arcata involving vehicles and people walking. (Safe Transportation and Education Center, 2017). **We shouldn't just accept these injuries and deaths, when we can act to reduce them.** 

The Plaza has wide lanes which means fast speeds. Nominally, the speed limit is 25 mph, -- the upper survival limit for pedestrians involved in a collision, but much of the traffic moves more quickly. Moving vehicles through quickly does not create a sidewalk environment that feels safe or comfortable. Further reducing lane widths, much slower speed limits, and pedestrian priority ("woonerf type design") are possible solutions.

Simply doubling the street width causes 20x more collisions. (Victoria Public Transport Institute, 1999)



# Is the Plaza active?



(Photo: Humboldt State University)



# The power of 10+

The project for Public Spaces (PPS) has found that 10+ things are needed at each scale to create the kind of synergy required to make a public space flourish. They call this **the Power of 10+.** (Project for Public Spaces, 2009)

By this metric, the Plaza doesn't succeed as a public space. We were able to identify five activities that are commonly performed on the Plaza at times other than farmers markets and festivals. Note that four of these activities really aren't occurring on the Plaza itself, just at places near to it.

LAYERED TO CREATE SYNERGY





**At night, life on retreats from the Plaza, except for the bars.** This creates a vacuum whereby the business, family, and civic norms have slowly been edged out by our transient culture. **The key to addressing this is inclusion.** We need people on the Plaza, and activities that anchor them there.



Crime data from (Arcata Police Department, 2017) show that the Plaza has by far the highest crime rates in Arcata. This creates an unwelcoming atmosphere for us all.





## <u>Difficulty:</u> "Normative Shield" on 9<sup>th</sup> Street

In our view, the row of parking and streetscape on 9<sup>th</sup> Street acts to concentrate one set of norms at the expense of others. The parking acts as a **"Normative Shield."** 

Let's see the effect that this could have. Imagine the following scenarios.

In (1) there are 14 people on the Plaza. 9 are hanging out on bar row drinking, 4 are shoppers, and 1 person is reading a book on the Plaza. The D norm dominates the other norms.

In (2) the parking on 9<sup>th</sup> has been removed and a food cart pod built in its place. The bars are serving food and beverages outside replacing the D norm with B and C norms. The D norm is still there (we include everyone), **but it's part of the Plaza not all of the Plaza.** The Plaza is thriving!

Scenario #1: clustered drinking due to parking shield













Drinking NormBusiness Norm

C Civic Norm





## What activities sustain civic life?

Playgrounds (sidewalk trampolines!) Photo by kluke, via

panoramio)



















Public Performance Space

(Photo: bldsf.com)





Expanded Outdoor Dining

(Photo: R. Kennedy Visit Alexandria)



Public Art Display

(Photo: Amo Antix)





### Spotlight: Noorderpark (Slowstreets, 2016)

"As an example, in Noord (North) Amsterdam is Noorderpark, a park that had issues with people using hard drugs. In North America, our reaction would be to send in police and put up signs saying "The consumption of Drugs and Alcohol is Prohibited

Amsterdam not only didn't do that, but counter intuitively built a bar that serves alcohol, along with playgrounds for children, wading pools, and an indoor/outdoor cultural programming center. The city followed the PPS recommended Power of 10+ to get as many people, for as many different reasons to be in the space.

The result? Noorderpark is now a safe, enjoyable place to take your family." Clockwise from the top left is (1) the new cultural center, (2) noorderparkbar, (3) an inside shot of the cultural center, (4) a playground.





# The Plaza retail geography is differentiated.

While the Plaza offers a wide range of businesses, they are not uniformly distributed. **Most of the businesses on 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Streets are restaurants. Most of the businesses on G and H Streets are retail vendors.** In our view, removing parking on 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Streets to offer increased outdoor dining options would only have upsides for businesses immediately adjacent, and would do so in a way that would increase the vitality on the Plaza. (Parcel Map Modified from City of Arcata)





# An active Plaza means everyone thrives!

Urban bicycling and pedestrian use is often framed as being antagonistic to business interests. But statistics kept by (peopleforbikes.org, 2017) show that converting to less autocentric land use patterns is good for city and local business bottom lines, as well as for the health of people and the environment. **Consider the following ten cases they cite:** 

- 1. "On Salt Lake City's Broadway, replacing parking with protected bike lanes increased retail sales. A street upgrade removed 30 percent of the auto parking from nine blocks of the major commercial street but improved crosswalks, sidewalks and added protected bike lanes. In the first six months of the next year, retail sales were up 8.8 percent. After the changes, 59% of business owners on the street said they supported them; only 18% opposed."
- 2. "Each kilometer cycled in Denmark produces an estimated benefit of 24 cents for all of society; each kilometer driven, meanwhile, costs society about 84 cents."
- 3. "The more often an employee cycles and the longer the distance traveled, the lower the rate of absenteeism."
- 4. "A recent CDC study found that community-based physical activity interventions, such as new bike paths and trails, are "money well spent," meaning they are more cost-effective than traditional preventive strategies in reducing new cases of many chronic diseases and improving quality of life. Interventions like enhanced access to bike paths reduce new cases of disease by: 5-15 cases per 100,000 people for colon cancer; 15-58 cases per 100,000 for breast cancer; 59-207 cases per 100,000 for type 2 diabetes; 140-476 cases per 100,000 for heart disease."
- 5. "When San Francisco made its Valencia Street less conducive to automobile travel and better for bicyclists and pedestrians, nearly 40% of merchants reported increased sales, and 60% reported more area residents shopping locally due to reduced travel time and convenience. Two-thirds of merchants said the increased levels of bicycling and walking improved business."
- 6. "A 20-year study of efforts to make streets less convenient for cars and better for pedestrians and cyclists found that after changes are implemented, businesses in these areas show stronger growth than autofriendly shopping centers. "



- 7. "After the installation of a protected bike lane in New York City, injuries to all street users decreased by 58%, and retail sales increased by as much as 49% (compared to a 3% increase in sales citywide). "
- 8. "Houses located in areas with above-average levels of walkability [or bikeability] are worth up to \$34,000 more than similar houses in areas with average walkability levels."
- 9. "More CO2 is emitted by the United States' transportation sector than any other nation's entire economy, except for China."
- 10. "When the complete life cycle of the following modes are taken into account, the carbon emissions are approximately: Bicycle, 21 g CO2/passenger/km traveled
  Electric-assist bicycle, 22 g CO2/passenger/km traveled
  Passenger car, 271 g CO2/passenger/km traveled
  Bus, 101 CO2/passenger/km traveled "



# Is the Plaza social?



(photo: HSU Lumberjack)



#### American social networks are shrinking. In

1985, the typical American reported having three people to confide in about important matters. By 2004, the network size had shrunk to only 1 person, a number that includes spouses. Table data from (Brashears, 2011).

Research has emerged that shows just **how important social networks are**. (Bartolini, 2013) shows that one's social network is among the strongest determinants of happiness and subjective well-being. For example, having a social network as small as the average American's (**i.e. 1 friend**) has a comparable

### American Social

Network size.

0       4.27%         1       48.47%         2       18.32%         3       13.77%         4       8.24%         5       3.83%         6       1.01%         7       0.98%         8       0.02%         9       0.49%         10       0.30%		
1       48.47%         2       18.32%         3       13.77%         4       8.24%         5       3.83%         6       1.01%         7       0.98%         8       0.02%         9       0.49%         10       0.30%	0	4.27%
2     18.32%       3     13.77%       4     8.24%       5     3.83%       6     1.01%       7     0.98%       8     0.02%       9     0.49%       10     0.30%	1	48.47%
3     13.77%       4     8.24%       5     3.83%       6     1.01%       7     0.98%       8     0.02%       9     0.49%       10     0.30%	2	18.32%
4     8.24%       5     3.83%       6     1.01%       7     0.98%       8     0.02%       9     0.49%       10     0.30%	3	13.77%
5       3.83%         6       1.01%         7       0.98%         8       0.02%         9       0.49%         10       0.30%	4	8.24%
6       1.01%         7       0.98%         8       0.02%         9       0.49%         10       0.30%	5	3.83%
7     0.98%       8     0.02%       9     0.49%       10     0.30%	6	1.01%
8         0.02%           9         0.49%           10         0.30%	7	0.98%
9 0.49% 10 0.30%	8	0.02%
10 0.30%	9	0.49%
	10	0.30%

effect on happiness to getting divorced or the death of a spouse. Going from friendless to having one friend has the same effect on life satisfaction as a tripling of income. **If just 10% more people thought they had someone to count on in life, it would have the same effect on national life satisfaction as giving everyone a 50% raise.** (Helliwell, 2010)

	<b>Happiness</b>		Happiness
Income level (Medium)	0.1724***	Political (Center)	-0.0508
Income level (High)	0.3527***	Political (Right)	0.2503***
Age	-0.0435***	Religious (Medium)	-0.0334
Age squared	0.0005***	Religious (High)	0.2916***
Female	0.1771***	Place (Suburbs of big city)	0.0889**
Health (Bad)	0.5688***	Place (Town or small city)	0.1358***
Health (Bair)	* 06=6***	Place (Country village)	0.1421***
Health (Fair)	1.0050	Place (Farm. countryside)	0.1958***
Health (Good)	1.5603***	Country group (Medium social	0.0036
Health (Very good)	2.0716***	capital)	
Lower secondary (ISCED 2)	-0.0387	Country group (High social capital)	0.3212***
Upper secondary (ISCED 3)	-0.0145	Social capital (global)	
Post-secondary non tertiary	-0.0846	Institutional trust (Global PCA)	0.3150***
(10020 4)		Social trust (Global PCA)	0.4422***
Tertiary education (ISCED 5, 6)	-0.1507**	Civic-social engagement, (Global	0.0933***
Separated or divorced	-0.5070***	PCA)	
Widowed	-0.6216***	Political networks (Global PCA)	0.0108
Never married	-0.4830***	Social networks (Global PCA)	0.4825***

**How much socializing do people need?** According to a recent Gallup poll, (Harter, 2008), the beneficial effects of socializing are not fully tapped into until about 6 hours per day. However, according to (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016), in 2015 **Americans spent on average 0.68 hours a day socializing --** only 38% socialize at all on any given day.



#### Gallup-Healthways Happiness-Stress Index

By hours of social time per day

% With a lot of enjoyment/happiness without a lot of stress/worry



% With a lot of stress/worry without a lot of enjoyment/happiness

Jan. 1- May 25, 2008

A walkable and bike-friendly downtown promotes social time. According to recent studies, people who drive more are less social. Specifically, they:

- <u>Are more likely to get divorced.</u> A 2011 study by Erika Sandow (Science Daily, 2011) found that people who commute more than 45 minutes per day were 40% more likely to divorce.
- <u>**Retreat from public life.**</u> According to the (Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey, 2000) of 30,000 people, they are less likely to know their neighbors, get involved with social groups, or participate in politics.
- <u>Have smaller social networks.</u> Longer commutes mean that one's friends live further apart, reducing the ease of socializing (Farber, 2013). According to a 2009 study of commuters, each extra 6 miles of commute, means one's friends live 1.39 miles further apart.
- More likely to have children in gangs. A long commute by parents is a key contributor to gang membership (Wyrick, 2004).

People with more of social capital are healthier and have been found to have:

- lower rates of psychotic disorders, including schizophrenia, which is most common in neighborhoods with thin social networks (Park, 2010)
- fewer colds, heart attacks, cancers, and depression (Seeman, 1996)
- better sleep (Kurina, 2011)
- longer lives (Putnam, 2000)
- report being happier



# **Challenges to a thriving social scene on the Plaza**

According to "The Social Value of Public Spaces" (Joseph Roundtree Foundation, 2017), sociable public spaces have certain shared qualities:

- <u>Protection From Weather:</u> Protection from the weather has a significant effect on the vibrancy of the street scene. The Plaza has very limited weather protection even though we live in an extremely wet climate.
- <u>The 'Power of well-being'</u>: This provides a starting point for developing strategies for public spaces that bring the economic, social and cultural aspects of daily life together. In Arcata, most serious **discussions about** the Plaza focus on its economic value. We must broaden the scope to collective well-being.
- **People-shaped:** The most successful social spaces examined were places that encouraged people to play a role in the evolution of activities and to help shape these places. **Regenerating the social value of the Plaza** requires increasing the range of activities available there.
- <u>Multi-disciplinary management:</u> Deep coordination is needed between the town, business owners, and users of a public space to achieve good functionality. The Plaza does not have a recognizable management presence besides police officers.
- <u>Playful Spaces:</u> Children are less mobile today, and may know little about attractions and features outside their neighborhoods. Extending their familiarity with the city through creative activities in public spaces and developing pedestrian-friendly urban routes could create a wider sense of attachment and discovery. The Arcata Plaza has no activities designed expressly for children.
- <u>Accessible to Seniors</u>: Older people are discouraged from fully using public spaces -- especially after dark -- by inadequate facilities and transport, security concerns, and a general lack of interesting activities or venues around public places geared for their preferences. **The Arcata Plaza has no senior focus beyond retail.**
- <u>People-focused, not car-focused</u>: The dominance of road traffic in street design, poor appearance and the lack of greenery detract from the social value of space. 64% of the Arcata Plaza is designed for the express use of automobiles.



Other considerations: equity and climate change.



# Arcata does not have a fair parking policy.

The parking policy promotes inequality and is expensive to maintain. The Plaza, as our symbolic heart, should promote fair access to all.

According to some estimates the build and land costs per on-street parking space can be as high as \$4,000! That single parking space can cost far more than the net worth of many American households. The maintenance costs average almost \$600 per year per spot. This means the 105 spots on the Plaza cost the city over \$60,000 per year for the city maintain! If indirect costs such as increased taxes and negative effect on business are added in, Plaza parking amounts to a loss of over \$440,000 per year (Victoria Transport Policy Institute, 2016).

Parking spaces make Arcata into a less affordable city. According to some estimates (Litman, 2016), in the lower price urban centers with land costs comparable to those in downtown Arcata, the parking space required by the City code adds 15% to the build cost of a home. With an average home cost in Arcata currently at \$321,600, parking can add \$48,000 to the costs of our homes – putting homeownership out of the reach of many families.







# What does the Arcata Plaza have to do with the climate crisis?



Transportation is the single largest source of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in the state, according to the (California Air Resources Board, 2014). It accounts an even larger share locally, according to a 2002 GHG inventory for Arcata (City of Arcata, 2002).

The Plaza is both a popular destination for local trips and, through its design and use of land, an important demonstration of local transportation priorities. Currently, the Plaza appears to demonstrate a dedication to automobile primacy, with almost  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the space taken up by car-serving infrastructure. Sidewalks are dominant features of the Plaza, but lead only from one street to the next with no other pedestrian destinations. Only one unimproved bus stop serves the Plaza. Meanwhile, car parking on both sides of the streets around the Plaza, combined with the two-lane one-way configuration of G & H Streets and inadequate bicycle parking, make it uninviting to access via bicycle.



It is now well established in the academic literature that excessive vehicular capacity induces more driving, and that reducing capacity produces social and economic benefits without increasing congestion (Handy, 2015). Free and abundant parking is another type of vehicular infrastructure which induces more driving, a fact recognized by the state in its current draft guidelines for implementation of SB 743. (California Senate, 2013)

The City of Arcata recognizes the need to shift trips from cars to transit, walking and biking in order to reduce GHG emissions. Among other key documents, the Community Greenhouse Gas Reduction Plan calls for improved bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure and disincentives for driving (City of Arcata, 2002), and the Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan calls for increasing non-motorized mode share in the city to 50% (City of Arcata, 2010) (City of Arcata, 2014). Yet the Plaza remains a monument to the private automobile, and the abundant parking and design of G & H Streets as two-lane arterials no doubt both induce significant unnecessary car traffic.

Arcata's cultural, civic and economic center should be redesigned as a friendly and inviting space for pedestrians, bicyclists and transit users as a testament to the City's commitment to addressing the climate crisis



Possible futures for the Plaza.



## What is a Woonerf?



(Photo: startribune.com)

A Woonerf is a Dutch-inspired space that is oriented toward pedestrian traffic and bicycling enthusiasts, but is also open to low-speed motor traffic, primarily for parking.

Four principles of Woonerven include:

- Visible Entrances which are clearly marked by a sign
- Shared Paved Space, intended for all street users
- Physical barriers such as curves to calm traffic
- Landscaping and Street Furniture

As shown above, a woonerf lacks many conventional street design elements. It minimizes the use of traffic signs and the separation between road and the sidewalk.



People can easily walk, bike, or drive to local businesses. (Photo: Urban NL)



Lots of room for outdoor dining, or retail vending in front of shops.



(Photo: blog.ianbicking.org)



# **Maximize Alleyways**

Alleyways between businesses can be given new life when cafes and bars are added to them rather than vehicles. Such redevelopment has associated costs, but can create revenue for the city and customers for businesses.

#### In Melbourne, Australia:



In Denver, Colorado (before, after):

(photos: Confluence Denver)







## Support for a New Vision of the Plaza in Arcata's Plans, Codes and Policies

Limiting private vehicle use around the Arcata Plaza has the potential to make the area more conducive to family-friendly community gathering and events, stimulate economic activity, and create a strong symbol of support for more sustainable forms of transportation by transforming the historic and cultural heart of the City. This would in turn encourage people to make fewer trips by car and more trips using other modes, particular by foot and by bicycle. Such a project is supported by many of the City's existing plans and policies around the environment, community and safety, and would help the City meet many of its stated goals:

### General Plan: Transportation Element (City of

Arcata, 2014)

• <u>Guiding Principle/Goal C</u>: "Provide for increased use of alternatives to the single-occupant vehicle, including walking, bicycling, public transit, carpooling/vanpooling, and ridesharing."

• <u>Guiding Principle/Goal F</u>: "Educate residents, employees, and students about the importance of using alternative forms of transportation instead of the singleoccupant automobile."

• <u>Guiding Principle/Goal G</u>: "Promote land use patterns that encourage walking, bicycling, and public transit use."

• <u>Policy T-2</u>: "Reduce the percentage of automobiles and reduce the annual vehicle-miles of travel." Objective T-2a further specifies the need for "pedestrian-oriented land use and urban design."

• <u>Objective T-4b(2)</u>: "The Department of Public Works shall prepare alternative cross-sections for new arterial streets utilizing a smaller right-of-way, and prepare alternative cross-sections for existing rights-ofway that reduce traffic speed and safely accommodate bicycle and pedestrian traffic."

• <u>Policy T-5</u>: "...Increase the percentages of person trips via walking and bicycling..."



• Objective T-5f: "Prioritize implementation of improved pedestrian facilities and enhancements in areas of the city with the greatest need including the Arcata Plaza... The following pedestrian improvements and safety enhancements should be considered in future planning for these areas:... Reduce street crossing distance with curb extensions and smaller curb radii.... Plant street trees or place street trees in planters in the parking lane...."

• <u>Objective T-6a</u>: "The following shall apply to parking within the Plaza Area Commercial land use category: 1. Develop additional public parking lots. Municipal parking lots shall be provided *in the perimeter of downtown* to create an adequate parking supply to serve existing businesses, future development, and *to replace on-street parking removed for pedestrian, bicycle, and landscaping improvements....*" (emphasis added)

# <u>General Plan: Design Element (</u>City of Arcata, 2014)

• <u>Objective D1-b</u>: "Emphasize Arcata Plaza area as the main community focal point. Buildings fronting on streets around the Arcata Plaza shall be multi-story. Architectural and other design elements shall emphasize the importance of the Arcata Plaza as the community's main focal point for commerce, entertainment, and special events. *Designs shall promote pedestrian access and continuity of retail space at the street level. Parking should be accommodated off-site to the extent practicable.*" (emphasis added)

• <u>Objective D-2b</u>: "Future changes to public street rights-of-way in the downtown shall focus on improving amenities and safety for pedestrians, bicycles, and *reasonable and safe* vehicle access...." (emphasis added)

### General Plan: Land Use Element (City of

#### Arcata, 2014)

• <u>Objective LU-1c</u>: "The Plaza has historically been, and should continue to be, the commercial, civic social, and cultural center of the community, and the main



location for community-wide special events ...."

"When the pedestrian option feels safe, accessible, comfortable, and practical, we are more likely to be pedestrians for our various needs—shopping, errands, exercise, commuting. When the pedestrian option is also interesting and beautiful, we may choose to be pedestrians for recreation and social outings...A pedestrian network that draws more pedestrian use has been shown to correspond positively to economic and recreational activity in cities across the United States. The direct benefits of pedestrian activity will expand to benefit our environment, our local economy, our civic events and social engagements." - Bicycle & **Pedestrian Master Plan** 

#### Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan (City of

Arcata, 2010<u>) (</u>City of Arcata, 2016)

• <u>Plan Goal</u>: "Work towards achieving 50% of all trips that begin and end in Arcata being made by non-motorized modes by year 2020."

• <u>Objective C.3</u>: "Identify and mitigate travel impediments and obstacles on designated walking routes, especially along prime school routes and in commercial areas."

• <u>Objective H.4</u>: "Expand and support activities that promote non-motorized travel."

• <u>Objective H.5</u>: "Market Arcata as a pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly city."

• <u>Description of Existing Pedestrian Facilities</u>: "The most interconnected pedestrian system is in the downtown area; however, the sidewalks are particularly narrow for a commercial center."



# 2016-2017 City Council Goals (City of Arcata, 2016)

• <u>Goal</u>: "Enhance appearance, public safety and livability of the City"

• <u>Policy Objective 1</u>: "Develop policies and support community organizations that provide services that improve the quality of life in Arcata and events that promote Arcata as a 'livable community.'"

• <u>Policy Objective 9</u>: "Maximize opportunities for public participation and civic engagement."

• Priority Project 29: "Work with the Parks and Recreation Committee & Economic Development Committee, in coordination with Arcata Main Street, Chamber of Commerce, and other community groups, to review current and potential uses of the Plaza and provide recommendations for streamlining and increasing programming and recreational use (including evaluating permit streamlining, use fee incentives, etc.)."

### **Community Greenhouse and Gas Reduction Plan** (City of Arcata, 2002)

• <u>Measure</u>: "Improve bicycle infrastructure."

• <u>Measure</u>: "Improve pedestrian infrastructure (sidewalks, paths and walkways)."

• <u>Measure</u>: "Educate to discourage driving and create disincentives to lessen driving."

### Land Use Code (City of Arcata , 2017)

• <u>Section 9.36.080.C</u>: Provides that no parking spaces are required for non-residential uses in the Commercial Central (CC) zone, which includes all land immediately surrounding the Plaza.

• <u>Section 9.36.080.E</u>: Provides that businesses in the CC zone may provide off-site parking to meet any requirements.



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