

# Enhancing Walkability in Sherman Heights



Prepared by



for the  
**Sherman Heights/Grant Hill Revitalization Action Team**  
in conjunction with  
**Sherman Heights Neighborhood Cultural Council**  
**City of San Diego Council Member Ralph Inzunza**  
**Sherman Heights Community Center**

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## *Introduction*

The City of San Diego neighborhood of Sherman Heights is one of the region's earliest "street-car suburbs." It was designed to be highly walkable, with small blocks, an easily navigated grid-street system, and wide sidewalks offset by a planting strip on both sides of every street. With the demise of the streetcars and catering to growing volumes of traffic, the neighborhood suffers today from dominance by automobile traffic. WalkSanDiego worked with the Sherman Heights Revitalization Action Team to determine needed walkability improvements, in order to assist residents who now walk and to support more walking within the neighborhood. The City of San Diego Traffic Engineering Division is responsible for pedestrian safety throughout the city, but does not have the resources to work with residents to determine the highest priority projects. This report is intended to fill that gap for Sherman Heights.

The report documents the result of a community workshop conducted by WalkSanDiego on February 5, 2005, to determine pedestrian-related improvements the neighborhood would like to see implemented. This workshop was the first of a series launched as WalkSanDiego's *Next Steps Project*. Next Steps is designed to assist low-income communities where walking for transportation is still common and the risk of being hit by a vehicle is therefore higher than in the general population.

## *Who We Are*

WalkSanDiego ([www.walksandiego.org](http://www.walksandiego.org)) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit membership organization dedicated to enhancing the livability of communities throughout the San Diego region by helping cities and neighborhoods make walking a safe and viable choice for people of all abilities. WalkSanDiego has approximately 150 members, an 11-member Board of Directors, and a 10-member Advisory Council of distinguished community leaders.

## *Acknowledgements*

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### *Walkable Community Workshop*

The workshop was held February 5, 2005, and included 35 residents and representatives of local organizations. Several mono-lingual Spanish attendees were assisted by simultaneous translation. The meeting opened with a PowerPoint presentation by WalkSanDiego Vice-President Andy Hamilton that presented existing conditions for streets and intersections in the Sherman Heights area, showed how other U.S. cities have made streets pedestrian friendly, and solicited comments from participants regarding local streets. Following this discussion, Mr. Hamilton and fellow WalkSanDiego board member Danielle Putnam lead a walk through the neighborhood, highlighting pedestrian safety issues (both positive and negative), and potential solutions. After returning from the walk, attendees listed and diagrammed safety and walking environment issues they would like to see addressed, and their locations. Attendees were also provided maps on which they marked problem streets and intersections.

### *Positive Walkability Features of Sherman Heights*

The workshop brought out ways in which Sherman Heights remains a walkable community:

- ▶ The neighborhood is compact, densely settled, with many walking-distance destinations.
- ▶ Blocks are short, arranged in a grid pattern, and easily navigated on foot or by bicycle.
- ▶ Commercial and residential buildings are built with shallow or zero set-backs, which provides interest for walkers, helps maintain “eyes on the street” for crime prevention, and slows traffic somewhat.
- ▶ Historic Victorian architecture provides interest to walkers.
- ▶ Sherman Elementary and Our Lady of Angels School are both centrally located and serve as focal points for the community. Many children in the neighborhood walk to school, alone or accompanied by parents. Installation of a musical “song rail” on the 25<sup>th</sup> Street bridge over I-94 provides safer and more interesting passage for children and parents crossing the freeway to reach the schools.
- ▶ The area is well-served by frequent public transit that reaches nearby neighborhoods within minutes.





## Introduction & Methodology

### *General Walkability Challenges in Sherman Heights*

Sherman Heights is bounded by State Route 94, Interstate 5, Imperial Avenue, and 25<sup>th</sup> Street, and lies directly east of Downtown San Diego. As the streetcar system connecting Sherman Heights to Downtown was replaced by busses and private vehicles in the 1940's and 1950's, the neighborhood increasingly became a through-zone for commuters. As traffic volume increased, major arterial streets were configured to serve large volumes of traffic. These include Market Street, Imperial Avenue, and 25<sup>th</sup> Street. With increased traffic and noise and reduced pedestrian access, neighborhood-serving businesses along these streets declined, reducing local walking trips still further. Specific issues are as follows:

- ▶ Crossing opportunities on major streets are spaced several blocks apart; these streets thus divide the community.
- ▶ Some residential streets are excessively wide, inducing speeding and exposing pedestrians to traffic for longer than necessary.
- ▶ There are no bus stop shelters in the neighborhood.
- ▶ Traffic on streets that feed to or from freeway ramps exhibits excessive speed
- ▶ Lighting is limited on many streets.
- ▶ Corner curb ramps are lacking at many intersections.
- ▶ Crosswalks are very limited, and several are in need of repainting. There are very few crosswalks adjacent to the two elementary schools.

### *History of Pedestrian Crashes*

The City of San Diego provided data on pedestrian collisions from the most recent five calendar years, 2000-2004, in the area bounded by 19th Street, Imperial Avenue, 25th Street, and G Street. During this period, there were 18 collisions involving pedestrians, with 17 injuries and 1 death. The single death was a wheelchair user who was riding in the street. (This is frequently where wheelchair users travel in San Diego.)

Streets and intersections with multiple collisions were as follows:

▶ 25th & G Street	3 pedestrians hit
▶ 25th & Market Street	3 pedestrians hit
▶ 25th & Imperial Avenue	3 pedestrian hit
▶ 22nd & Market Street	3 pedestrians hit
▶ 24th & Market Street	2 pedestrians hit
▶ Market Street	9 total pedestrian collisions*
▶ 25th Street	10 total pedestrian collisions*

The multiple collisions on Market Street and 25th Street further support the community's contention that these arterial streets pose the greatest challenges to pedestrian safety and circulation in the neighborhood.

Of the 18 incidents, half were officially the fault of the pedestrian, and half that of the driver. Six of the 9 cases in which the pedestrian was determined to be at fault involved a pedestrian crossing mid-block. This may be more of an indication of lack of safe crossing opportunities than careless walking behavior. More incidents occurred during daylight hours, which is atypical for the San Diego region as a whole, and probably results from the high number of transit riders commuting during daylight hours.

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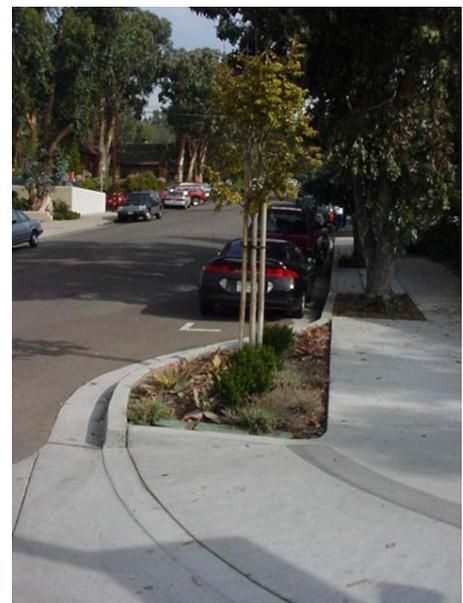
\*Three collisions were common to both streets, i.e. at 25th & Market.



## “Do Everywhere” Improvements

Some pedestrian improvements should be incorporated gradually wherever possible, as infrastructure and redevelopment occur. These include the following:

1. **Bulb-outs** - Curb extensions at the corners of blocks decrease crossing distance and improve visibility of pedestrians by motorists.
2. **Install Missing Sidewalks** - Gaps in the pedestrian network may exist in a limited number of locations.
3. **Install Street Lights** - The city’s street lighting standard requires lighting within ¼ mile of transit stops, which would include much of the neighborhood.
4. **Lane width reductions** - For most street classifications, the City’s Street Design Manual includes lane widths of 10-11 feet on streets of 45 mph or less. Narrower lanes calm traffic, especially when combined with street trees, diagonal parking, and/or curb extensions.
5. **Reduce Perceived Pavement Width** - Install shoulder stripes or possibly bike lanes where there is excessive street width.
6. **Diagonal Parking** - Some low volume residential streets are wide and lack sufficient parking. Both conditions can be remedied by installing diagonal parking.
7. **Crosswalk Markings** - Replace the minimal double-line crosswalk markings with more visible markings (ladder or zebra style), supplemented by appropriate legends and signage.
8. **Right Turn on Red Prohibition** - Signalized intersections with heavy pedestrian volumes should be examined for possible prohibition of right turn on red.
9. **Corner Curb Ramps** - Consistent with the Street Design Manual, two curb ramps per corner should be installed, and crosswalks placed back accordingly as needed.
10. **Lead Pedestrian Indicator** - LPI’s provide a 3-second “head start” for crossing pedestrians. These should be provided as necessary at signalized intersections, particular in locations near bus stops.
11. **Light Timing** - Walk intervals for pedestrians should lengthen to allow slower pedestrians sufficient time to cross.
12. **Art in Infrastructure** - Consistent with the City’s Public Art Master Plan, include public art elements in all qualifying infrastructure and redevelopment projects.



**Corner bulb-outs reduce crossing distance, calm traffic, and increase pedestrian visibility.**



# Top Priority Areas

Sherman Heights residents identified areas lacking pedestrian elements as well as pedestrian-friendly areas that should be improved. Based on their comments, WalkSanDiego observations, crash data, and traffic volume data, three major areas emerged as the best candidates for improvements. Most predominant are the streets surrounding the two neighborhood schools, and the major transit/commercial corridors.

## 1 Market Street

**Traffic Characteristics:** Market Street is a 4-lane major arterial with a two-way turn lane (TWTL) and parallel parking on both sides. It serves neighborhood and commuter traffic to Downtown and the major freeways of I-5 and SR-94. Average daily traffic (ADT) volume is 10,000-13,000 vehicles, which is relatively light for 5 lanes. (Similarly configured Washington Street in Mission Hills handles over 30,000 ADT.)

**Issues:** The highest vehicle speeds on Market Street exceed 45 mph. There are significant steep grades westbound, which contributes to frequent speeding. With the prevailing speeds and the current configuration, pedestrians are wisely reluctant to cross at unsignalized intersections. However, signals are spaced several blocks apart, making the road a serious barrier for walkers.

**Solutions:** Market Street could be restriped to one lane in each direction with TWTL, and include left and right turn pockets at intersections where needed. This treatment would calm traffic considerably by allowing the most prudent driver to set the speed. Based on similar situations in other U.S. cities, the excess roadway space could be used in one or a combination of the following ways:

- ▶ Diagonal parking;
- ▶ A bus-only lane in each direction, similar to the configuration proposed for University Avenue in North Park;
- ▶ An extra wide bike lane;
- ▶ Additional sidewalk space, with room for street trees, outdoor dining areas, street trees, bus shelters, and street furniture such as benches and trashcans.
- ▶ Curb extensions and/or medians to reduce pedestrian exposure to traffic, make pedestrians more visible to drivers, and provide pedestrians with greater visibility.

Particular attention should be paid to the intersection of 25th and Market Streets. Bulb-outs, medians, and more visible crosswalks would improve safety for pedestrians. The signal timing should be checked to ensure elderly or persons with disabilities have sufficient time to cross. Lead Pedestrian Indicators (LPI) and countdown timers would also be appropriate at this important intersection.





## 2 Sherman Elementary School

**Traffic Characteristics:** Streets surrounding Sherman Elementary school experience light volumes of traffic, but high peak volumes during school drop-off and pick-up. The six intersections around the school are stop-controlled (stop signs).

**Issues:** Residents feel the intersections around the school could be made safer for pedestrians of all ages and abilities. The surrounding streets are wider than necessary, exposing students and parents to more crossing time and higher vehicle speeds than appropriate for a school zone or residential streets.

**Solutions:** More crosswalks, a more visible crosswalk pattern, and traffic calming measures such as corner bulb-outs, would improve



pedestrian safety in the vicinity of the school. The school will be demolished and rebuilt for Fall 2008, and the sidewalks around the school will be repaired. The new design will improve the safety of pedestrians accessing the “front door” area of the campus. In addition, the city has an opportunity to use bulb-outs and more visible crosswalks at all access points around the school to improve safety for students and their parents. Disabled access could also be improved by providing required corner curb ramps.

## 3 25<sup>th</sup> Street

**Traffic Characteristics:** 25<sup>th</sup> Street is a 4-lane arterial, which serves around 10,000 ADT.

**Issues:** Despite its moderate volume, 25th Street is relatively wide. Safe crossing opportunities are limited to the signalized intersections (at Market Street, L Street, and Imperial Avenue). Vehicles frequently speed.

**Solutions:** Similar to Market Street, 25th Street could be reduced to one lane in each direction, with TWTL and/or left and right turning pockets as necessary. Raised medians or bulb-outs at most intersections could provide greater safety for pedestrians.





## Recommendations

### 4 Imperial Avenue

**Traffic Characteristics:** This collector street serves both commuters and adjacent businesses, some of which are large markets. The street’s current configuration is 2-lane, with TWTL. There are many pedestrians using and crossing the street.

**Issues:** The street configuration is appropriate for the uses and volume of traffic. However, residents report vehicle speeds to be excessive at times, and safe crossing opportunities infrequent when traffic is heavy.

**Solutions:** The city should consider using raised medians and highly visible crosswalks to provide greater safety for pedestrians crossing the street. This could also help control vehicle speeds. . Particular attention should be given to the intersection of 25th Street and Imperial Avenue. Corner bulb-outs and/or medians could be effective in improving crossing safety.

### 5 Commercial Street/Trolley Station

**Traffic Characteristics:** Commercial Street is not officially within the boundary of Sherman Heights, but many Sherman Heights residents access the trolley at 25 Street. Commercial Street includes the trolley right of way.

**Issues:** Residents point to the low visibility of pedestrians accessing the trolley platform, and the lack of a sufficient buffer between the street and the platform.

**Solutions:** The trolley platform could be redesigned to provide greater visibility and safety for pedestrians exiting the station to nearby streets. Planned public art installa-



tions at the platform should help calm traffic. Crosswalks could be repainted to provide more visibility, and the use of Lead Pedestrian Indicators, countdown timers, and bulb-outs should be considered, particularly in the vicinity of the trolley station.

### 6 G Street

**Traffic Characteristics:** G Street is a 2-3 lane, one way East Bound street running adjacent to SR94. Bridges connect G Street to Golden Hill at 22nd Street and 25th Street.

**Issues:** G Street lacks adequate lighting, crosswalks, a sidewalk on the north side. Drivers tend to use excessive speed because vehicles exit onto this street from I-5, and use it to access the SR94 on-ramp east of 25th Street.

**Solutions:** Lighting should be added, particularly at intersections. At 22nd Street and 25th Street, bulb-outs and ladder-style, yellow crosswalks should be added, in light of the the many students who cross these bridges to reach the schools.



## 7 19<sup>th</sup> Street

**Traffic Characteristics:** Like G Street, 19th Street is a one-way street which serves traffic entering and exiting the freeway system, in addition to serving local traffic.

**Issues:** The primary issue cited by residents is the presence of homeless people lingering at most of the intersections along this street. They feel the homeless are engaged in illegal activities and are a threat to pedestrians, and avoid using this street, or crossing it on foot to reach downtown.

**Solutions:** Social service agencies located in East Village should consider creating a viable sleeping area for the homeless served by agencies located near this area, or address their needs in other ways to prevent gathering under freeways along 19th Street.

## 8 Residential Streets

**Traffic Characteristics:** Low volume, local use, but excessively wide streets.

**Issues:** The width of the neighborhood’s residential streets encourages speeding and makes crossing the streets on foot more dangerous. In some cases, steep grades exacerbate the problem. Particular attention should be paid to L Street (southern boundary of Sherman Elementary), J Street between 19th and 20th Streets, 22nd Street, and 24th Street.

**Solutions:** Bulb-outs and well-marked crosswalks would improve pedestrian safety and calm traffic. Additional street lighting should also be provided where lacking. To fund both the traffic calming and the lighting, WalkSanDiego recommends the neighborhood consider adopting a Maintenance Assessment District (MAD), which consists of a self-imposed tax on all properties within a specified area. Traffic calming “on the cheap” should be avoided, specifically the excessive use of stop signs. Other neighborhoods have seen a proliferation of new stop signs. WalkSanDiego has observed and heard from members that drivers are increasingly running these stop signs where they sense the signs have been installed to calm traffic rather than to ameliorate a conflict.





# Community Comments

## Market Street

- ▶ Dangerous big hill - lots of accidents
- ▶ Quick pedestrian signal phase - not enough time to cross
- ▶ Fast moving street
- ▶ Cars stop in crosswalk
- ▶ Reconfigure for one lane turning and one through lane?
- ▶ 26<sup>th</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup> and Market - around hill needs stop signs
- ▶ Median island with or without bulb-outs, depending on available street width
- ▶ Center diagonal parking?

## Market & 22<sup>nd</sup> Street - Bus Stop

- ▶ Downhill - fast cars
- ▶ No bus shelters
- ▶ No bulbouts
- ▶ Has crosswalks

## Market and 25<sup>th</sup> Street

- ▶ Median island and/or bulbouts to reduce crossing danger or perception of it
- ▶ Bolder crosswalk striping (diagonal)
- ▶ Stop line setback
- ▶ Landscaping for coffeeshop
- ▶ Bike lane from park to Golden Hill

## Market and 26<sup>th</sup>/28<sup>th</sup>

- ▶ Market doesn't go through to Golden Hill
- ▶ School bus stop is unsafe

## Storefronts on Market

- ▶ Require transparent glass storefronts for visibility and interest.
- ▶ Jack in the Box restaurant has window plants, respects historic district

## 24<sup>th</sup> Street

- ▶ Dark at night
- ▶ Low visibility
- ▶ Painted crosswalks, but set back to stop for right turn-2 lanes of traffic
- ▶ Put in stripe or bulbout at red curb area
- ▶ Wrong angle to curb out sight impaired
- ▶ 2400 block of Market - center island?
- ▶ Diagonal parking?
- ▶ Landscaping?

## Sherman Elementary School, 24th Street Entrance

- ▶ Dark
- ▶ No windows
- ▶ Stark, not a clean entrance
- ▶ Kids, homeless gather after dark-poor lighting
- ▶ Crosswalk can be marked better
- ▶ Red curb needed across street to improve visibility
- ▶ Daughter had accident
- ▶ No visibility, vehicles exceed stop bar
- ▶ Pull-in drop-off awkward here
- ▶ Morning traffic jam
- ▶ Raised crosswalks would be good
- ▶ Imbedded lights in crosswalks

- ▶ Children's art in intersection to slow traffic
- ▶ Solutions need to address all four corners of the site

## Our Lady of Angels School

- ▶ Large bushes block sidewalk near church
- ▶ G Street - 1-way, very fast traffic, must slow it down
- ▶ Car hit her son here
- ▶ Cars - no stop at church corner
- ▶ No sidewalk on north side of G
- ▶ No defined crosswalk
- ▶ ADA - slope of driveway - not flat at sidewalk
- ▶ Tripping - walks
- ▶ Make G Street 2 ways?
- ▶ Diagonal parking on both sides?

## 22<sup>nd</sup> & G

- ▶ Needs everything!
- ▶ No crosswalks
- ▶ Needs lighting
- ▶ Connect better to Golden Hill
- ▶ Cars come from freeway
- ▶ Extend the curb so cars don't switch lanes from freeway exit
- ▶ Work with Caltrans- pedestrian and bike planners

## 19<sup>th</sup> Street and East Village Connection Generally

- ▶ Need light - homeless dominate at intersections
- ▶ Homeless have migrated from East Village to Commercial and Imperial. It feels unsafe so people are not walking as they used to. One needs to cross the bridge to the Library, etc., but this is where homeless illegal activity is concentrated.

## 25<sup>th</sup> and Imperial / Commercial

- ▶ Bulbouts
- ▶ Diagonal parking for businesses

## Villa Monte Museum

- ▶ Additional parking needed for visitors

## Port District

- ▶ Port District parking in neighborhoods is a problem; they need more parking

## 20<sup>th</sup> and Island

- ▶ Needs lighting

## 25<sup>th</sup> and J Street (and vicinity)

- ▶ Needs longer pedestrian phase

## 25<sup>th</sup> and K Street (and all along 25<sup>th</sup>)

- ▶ Reduce speed of cars going downhill
- ▶ Add crosswalks, possibly raised crosswalks

## Trolley Station

- ▶ Improve visibility to Sherman Heights commercial area
- ▶ Fast traffic close to platform. Pedestrians step into it from behind fence. Slow down traffic

## 20<sup>th</sup> and L Street

- ▶ Need crosswalks