2 History & Place

PLAN
MID-CITY
Communities Plan Update

2.1. Introduction

OVERVIEW

The planning area contains some of the oldest communities in the City of San Diego. Neighborhood development began on the west side of the planning area in the 1910's and moved east, where most of the development east of 54th Street generally occurred in the post-World War II period. The neighborhood layout, block patterns, and building typologies reflect this history, creating an area diverse in setting and context. This chapter outlines this history and it's influence on the physical form of the community.

TOPOGRAPHY AND SETTING

Mid-City is bound on the north by steep hillsides that rim Mission Valley and Grantville, as well as the College Area. The western and west-central portion of the planning area is located on a central mesa, punctuated by a network of canyons. Bound by the I-805 freeway to the west, and SR-94 freeway to the south, these freeways form a combination of natural and man-made edges to the community, limiting connectivity. To the east, the Eastern Area community is characterized by varied topography as well as the Chollas Park and the Chollas Reservoir as part of the Chollas Valley.

Important natural features shown on Figure 2-1 include:

- Mission Valley
- Chollas Creek Canyon, Chollas Creek, and Chollas Reservoir
- Talmadge Canyon
- Fairmount Canyon
- Devils Sandbox Canyon
- Manzanita Canyon
- Swan Canyon
- 47th Street Canyon

The land form and canyon system contributes significantly to the sense of place and forms a backdrop of open space, with a number of accessible hiking trails and canyons such as the City Heights Canyons Loop Trail, Manzanita Canyon Open Space Trail, North Chollas Loop Trail, Chollas Lake Loop Trail, Azalea Park Canyon Trail, and Shamrock Canyon. However, many of the canyons are not accessible, or are located on private property.

North rim, view north to Mission Valley from Mid-City planning area

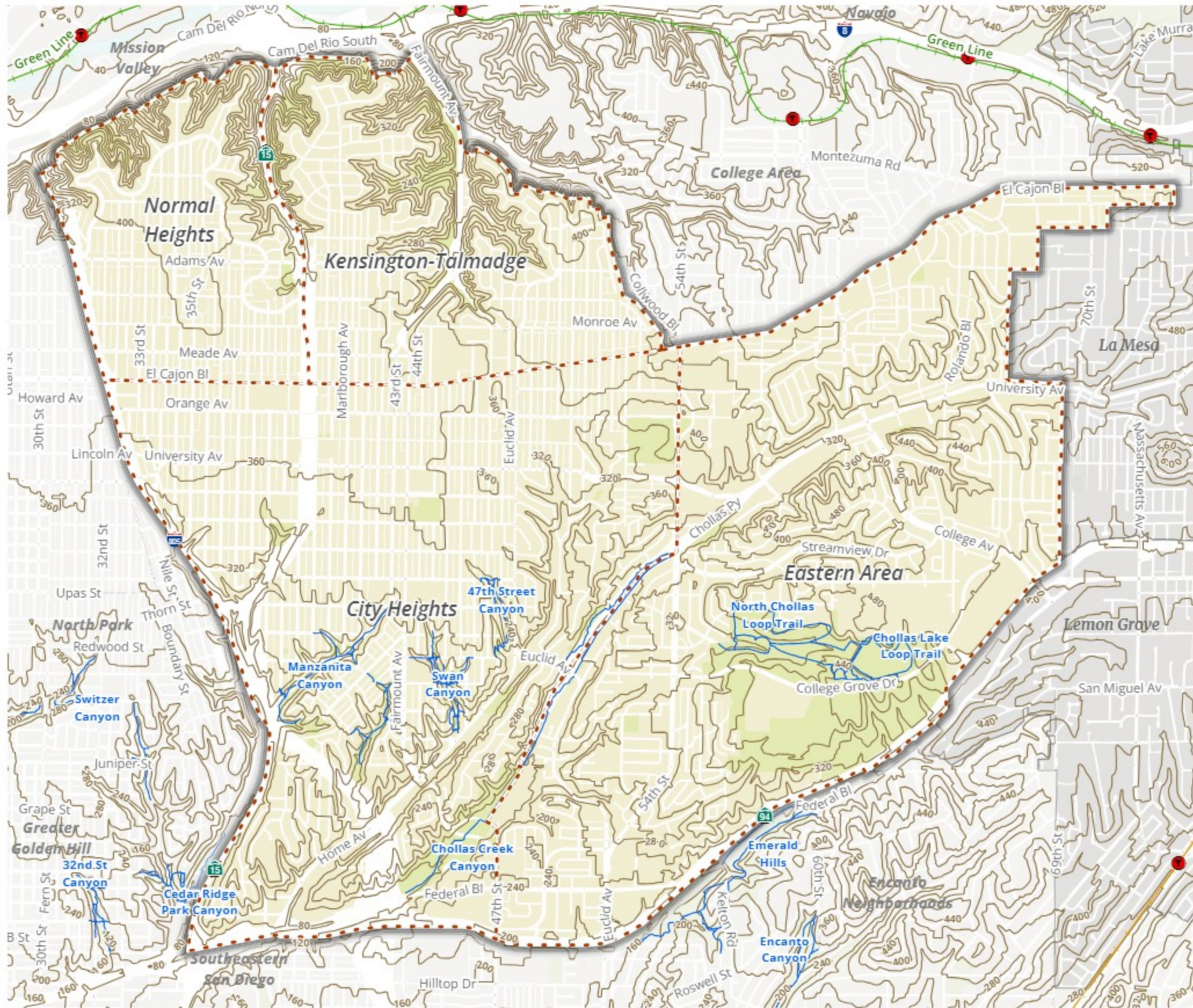

View to Devils Sandbox Canyon, Normal Heights


View to Fox Canyon, City Heights

View to Chollas Lake Park from College Avenue

PLAN
MID-CITY
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Figure 2-1 Topography and Natural Features

Legend:
- 40' Topo
- Trails
- Community Planning Boundary
- Trolley Stop
- Open Space

City of San Diego, SANGIS, SANDAG

0   0.25   0.5 Miles

2.2. Brief History

OVERVIEW

Mid-City includes some of the oldest communities in the City of San Diego. Much of the western portion of the community saw rapid growth in the 1910-1930 era, before the Second World War, while development east of 54th Street generally occurred in the post-World War II period. Figure 2-2 illustrates the development era of Mid-City subdivisions.

Overall, residential development is a mix of single-family and multi-family homes, with pockets of varying multi-family densities ranging from duplex development to early century apartment courts, garden apartments and higher-density residential and mixed-use development.

Commercial and business development have historically been concentrated along the three major east-west corridors: El Cajon Boulevard, Adams Avenue and University Avenue.

The evolution of Mid-City is organized into six significant periods to illustrate the major changes in transportation, land use and development patterns:

- Kumeyaay, Spanish and Mexico
- East San Diego
- Streetcar Suburbs
- Post-War Boom and Suburbanization
- Freeways and Urban Decline
- Revitalization

KUMEYAAY, SPANISH AND MEXICO

For thousands of years, San Diego has been a part of the ancestral homeland of the Kumeyaay people. The Kumeyaay lived in both permanent villages and seasonal encampments. The Chollas Creek, which flows through Mid-City, was well known to Kumeyaay, who used it for settlement and as a major trail through the region. A prehistoric village has been identified at the mouth of Chollas Creek, which had access to fresh water and marine resources needed to sustain a large population over time.

The founding of Mission San Diego de Alcala in 1769 and the Spanish occupation via the mission system brought about profound changes in the lives of the Kumeyaay. In 1821, Mexico became independent from Spain, and San Diego became part of the Mexican Republic, which established the rancho system of extensive land grants to individuals.

1. City Heights Town Council website, cityheightstowncouncil.org/city-heights-history.html.

San Diego became part of the United States in 1848 following the U.S. victory in the Mexican-American War, and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. San Diego was incorporated two years later, in 1850.

EAST SAN DIEGO

The origin of City Heights began in the 1880s when entrepreneurs named Abraham Klauber and Samuel Steiner bought 240 acres of land and named it City Heights because of its 360-degree expansive views. Residents living in the City Heights area voted to become an incorporated City of East San Diego on November 2, 1912.

During the period of incorporation, the population in the area boomed from 400 in 1910 to 4,000 in 1912. The growth was spurred by the anticipation and excitement of the 1915 Panama-Pacific Exhibition. On December 31, 1923, the City of East San Diego was annexed into the City of San Diego and re-adopted the name "City Heights."[1]

This area continued the traditional grid format development pattern seen in adjacent areas of the city to the south and west. During the development of streetcar lines in the early 1900's, a trolley connected City Heights to downtown San Diego via University Avenue.
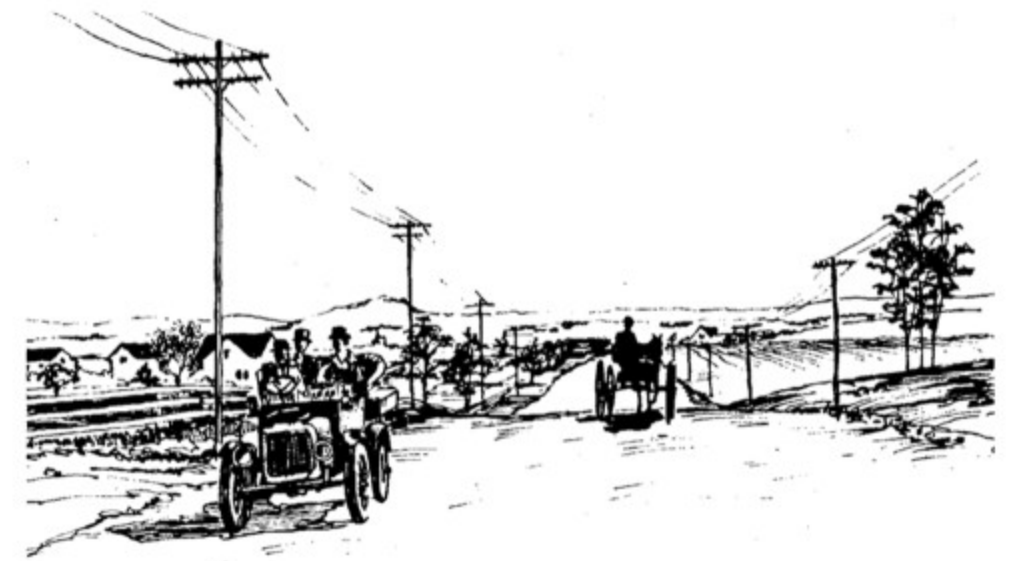
El Cajon and 43rd, 1910

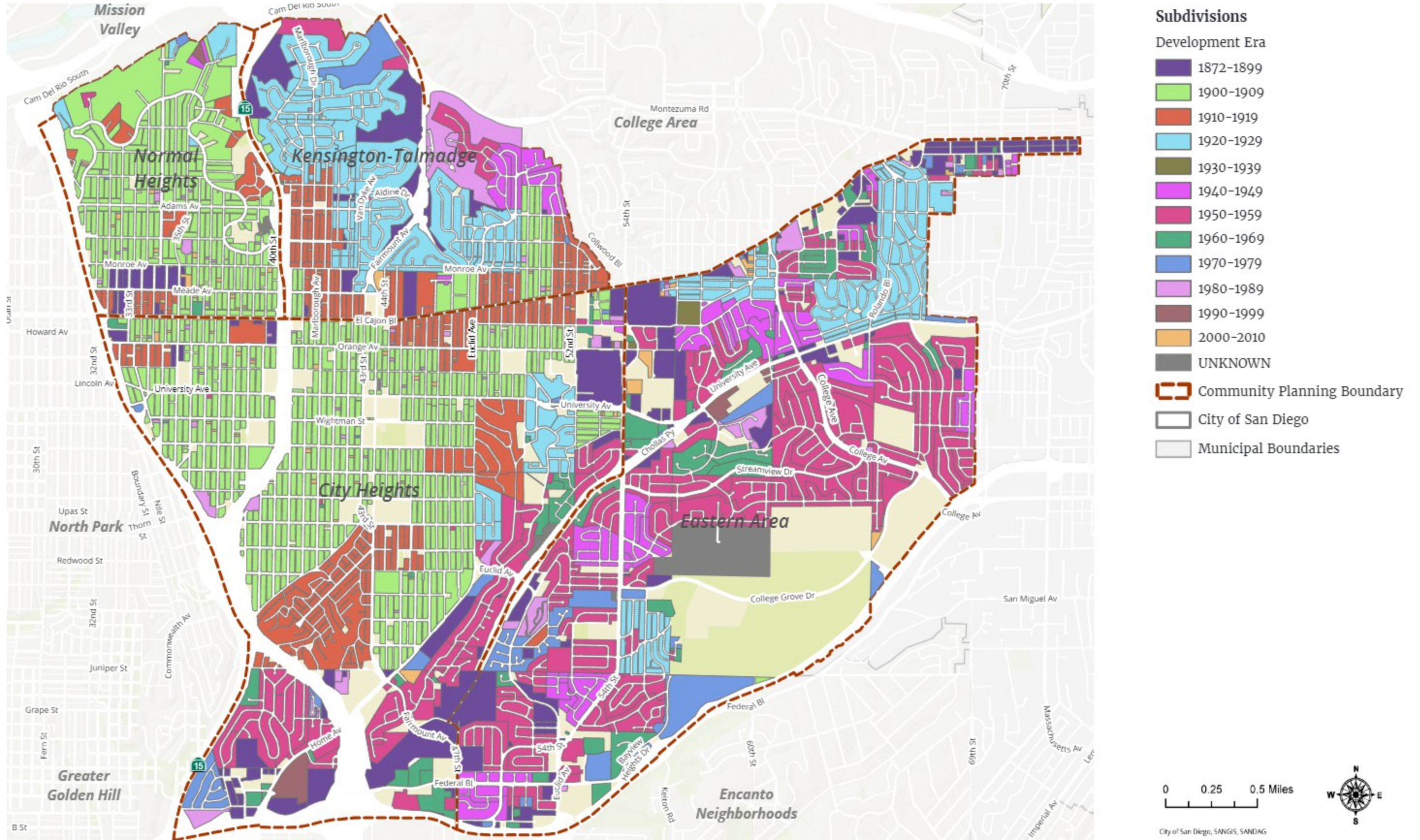*Daily life at plaza at Presidio de San Diego, 1790*

Image: Sketch by Gene Locklear & San Diego History Center

Fairmount and University, 1917

Images: 1984 Mid-City Community Plan

PLAN MID-CITY
Communities Plan Update

Figure 2-2 Historic Subdivision

Subdivisions

Development Era

- 1872–1899
- 1900–1909
- 1910–1919
- 1920–1929
- 1930–1939
- 1940–1949
- 1950–1959
- 1960–1969
- 1970–1979
- 1980–1989
- 1990–1999
- 2000–2010
- UNKNOWN
- Community Planning Boundary
- City of San Diego
- Municipal Boundaries

0   0.25   0.5 Miles

City of San Diego, SANGIS, SANDAG

STREETCAR SUBURBS

The Normal Heights and Kensington communities are some of San Diego's earliest examples of "streetcar suburbs" that developed in the 1920s. An electric trolley route along Adams Avenue was added as part of the San Diego Electric Railway system in 1907 and expanded to extend from downtown San Diego to Kensington by the end of the decade.

The addition of the streetcar along Adams Avenue spurred development in the two neighborhoods, which included a series of winding roads and cul-de-sacs adjacent to the northern steep slopes and the valley rim; and an urban grid infill in between, continuing the development pattern of the City Heights community to the south. Homes in Normal Heights consist primarily of single-family bungalows and bungalow courts, whereas Kensington developed many Tudor-style homes. Normal Heights was annexed to the city of San Diego in 1925 and Kensington soon after in 1936.[2]

POST-WAR BOOM AND SUBURBANIZATION

After World War II, American cities began rapidly developing auto-oriented suburbs in response to the national housing shortage and the rising popularity of the automobile. El Cajon Boulevard was once the main east-west highway for the region (Highway 80) until I-8 was built in the late 1950s. Adams Avenue is located north of El Cajon Boulevard and University Avenue is located south of El Cajon Boulevard. Both Adams Avenue and University Avenue were areas with early neighborhood commercial activity. These three corridors function as main streets with commercial development ranging from more historic community centers to post-war commercial "strip" development.[3]

The subdivision of Islenair is an early example of an auto-oriented suburb in City Heights (Figure 2-3) reflecting architectural trends from Spanish Eclectic to Minimal Traditional and Ranch styles, visually illustrating and encapsulating the booms, busts, and trends in working-class suburban development in San Diego from 1926 through 1952. It was designated a historic district by the City of San Diego Historical Resources Board (HRB) in 2007. Many neighborhoods in the Eastern Area were planned and developed in this auto-oriented suburban style following 1945, as shown in Figure 2-2.

The historic streetcar map illustrates streetcar connections to Mid-City along Adams Avenue and University Avenue.

Image credit: https://www.aaaarch.com.

Photo of No. 11 streetcar on Adams Avenue in 1948.

Image credit: Images of America San Diego's Kensington, 2017.

El Cajon Boulevard in 1942 when it was known as Highway 80.

Source: El Cajon Boulevard Business Improvement Association, theboulevard.org

The original Jack in the Box location on El Cajon Boulevard, 1951

Source: John Fry Productions, Johnfry.com

2. *The Journal of San Diego History, "San Diego's Normal Heights: The Growth of a Suburban Neighborhood, 1886–1926" by Suzanne Ledeboer.*
3. *Portions adapted from 1998 Mid-City Community Plan.*

FREEWAYS AND URBAN DECLINE

Mid-City was particularly affected by the construction of freeways, most notably I-805 and I-15. Prior to the 1980's, the urban form of City Heights was continuous between 40th and Central Avenue. Nine blocks of land were cleared in the 1980's by Caltrans to build the I-15 segment through City Heights. This type of neighborhood clearance to build freeways was common, particularly in community of color and immigrant neighborhoods, and created gaping holes between once vibrant, connected urban communities.

During much of the 1930s through 1950s, the older retail areas of City Heights, Normal Heights and Kensington-Talmadge still acted as important commercial centers, particularly University Avenue, El Cajon Boulevard and Adams Avenue. With the development of the freeway system and the construction of suburban shopping centers just outside the planning area, such as Fashion Valley, Mission Valley and the College Grove Shopping Center, these commercial areas began to lose business, further fraying the urban fabric of these areas.

REVITALIZATION

To combat the trend of urban disinvestment and community fraying that occurred during the period between the post-war era and the 1980's, a series of comprehensive community initiatives were undertaken by locals to promote the physical and social revitalization of urban areas most impacted by suburbanization and urban decline. These comprehensive community, or place-based initiatives, constructed apartment buildings, financed small businesses, organized residents, offered tax breaks, paved streets, rehabilitated arts centers, financed charter schools, provided workforce training and more to reinvest in the urban areas of the Mid-City Communities.[1]

One such example of these comprehensive community initiatives is the creation of the Little Saigon Cultural and Commercial District, established by the city in 2013. The district runs along a six-block stretch of El Cajon Boulevard, as shown in Figure 2-3, and is meant to highlight, celebrate and draw visitors to the Vietnamese enclave in this area of City Heights. A series of art installations was installed throughout the district as part of the Little Saigon Project, an initiative to feature the work of local artists that speak to the area's culture.

The Little Saigon Cultural and Commercial District and sites that have been designated as historically significant by the City's Historical Resources Board (HRB) are shown in Figure 2-3.

1. San Diego's City Heights Initiative Research Report by Brett Theodos, 2022


Aerial view of City Heights in 1945 before the construction of Interstate 15, at the intersection of University Avenue and Fairmount Avenue looking northwest. Image credit: San Diego History Center Howard Rozelle Aerial Collection.

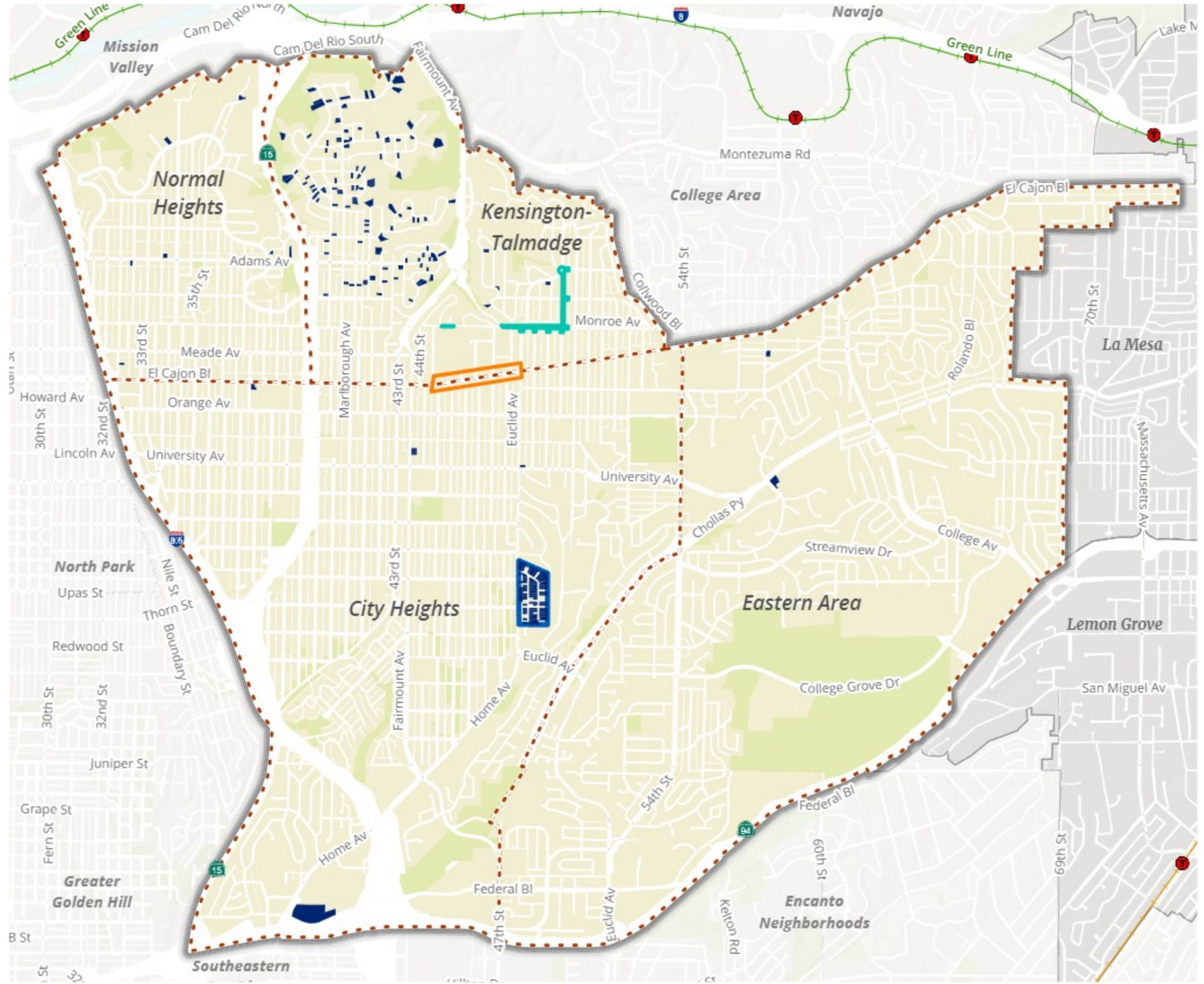*Little Saigon street mural in the Little Saigon Cultural and Commercial District in City Heights.*
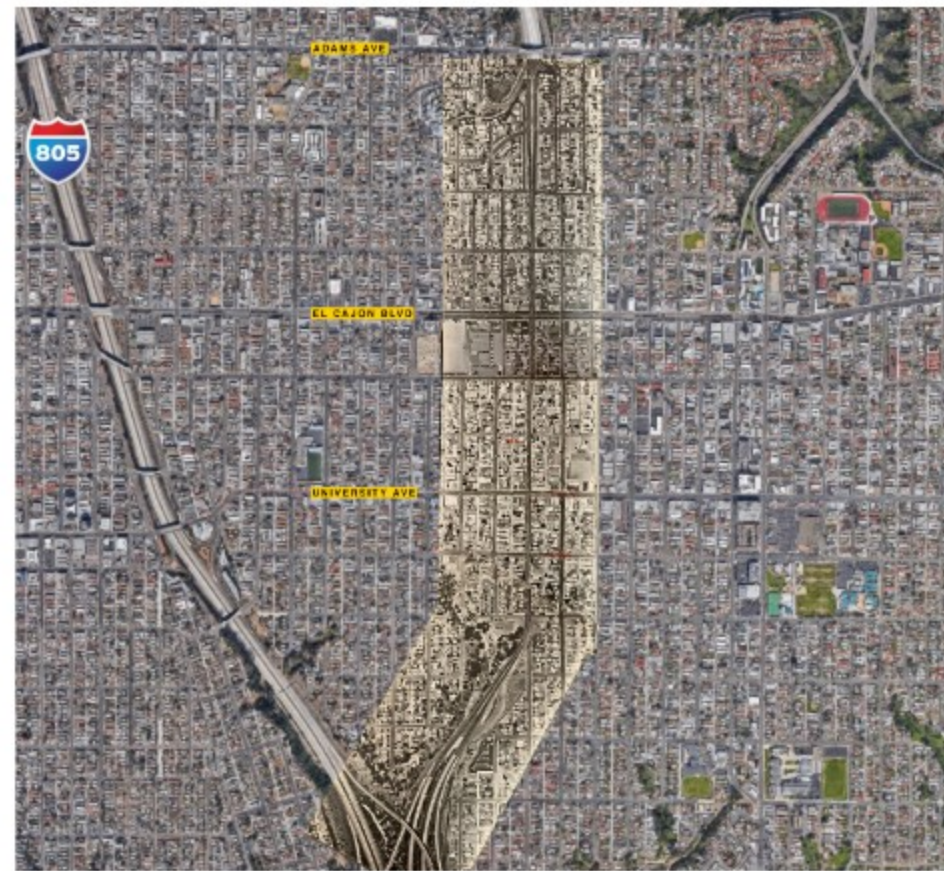
Aerial image of Mid-City before SR-15 and after SR-15
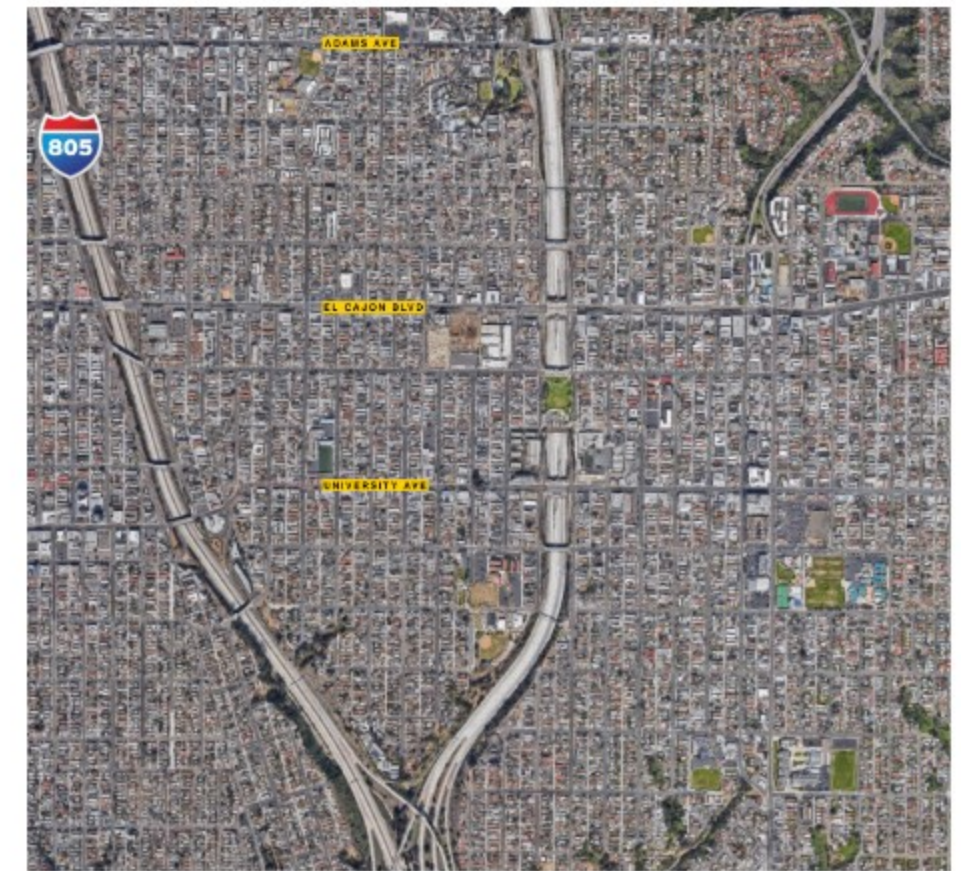
Images: Andrew Bowen KPBS – Before Google Maps, Caltrans After Google Maps

Figure 2-3 Historic Sites and Districts

Legend:

- Community Plan Boundary
- Open Space
- HRB Designated Sites

Historic Districts
- Islenair
- Talmadge Gates

Cultural District
- Little Saigon

0   0.25   0.5 Miles

City of San Diego, SANGIS, SANDAG

Map labels:
Green Line, Mission Valley, Cam Del Rio North, Cam Del Rio South, Navajo, Lake M, Green Line, Montezuma Rd, Normal Heights, College Area, El Cajon Bl, Kensington-Talmadge, La Mesa, 35th St, Adams Av, 33rd St, Meade Av, Marlborough Av, Monroe Av, 44th St, Collwood Bl, 54th St, Rolando Bl, 70th St, El Cajon Bl, Orange Av, 43rd St, Euclid Av, Howard Av, Lincoln Av, University Av, University Av, North Park, Upas St, City Heights, Chollas Py, Eastern Area, Streamview Dr, College Av, Lemon Grove, Redwood St, Thorn St, Boundary St, 43rd St, Massachusetts Av, Grape St, Juniper St, Home Av, Euclid Av, College Grove Dr, San Miguel Av, 30th St, 32nd St, Nile St, Fern St, B St, Greater Golden Hill, Home Av, Federal Bl, Encanto Neighborhoods, 47th St, Federal Bl, 54th St, 60th St, Ketton Rd, Euclid Av, 69th St, Southeastern, Fairmount Av

2.3. Development Patterns

Development patterns in Mid-City range from an older traditional urban grid fabric to post-war suburban development patterns. The following sections describe the development patterns, block patterns, and building typologies in more detail.

BLOCK PATTERN AND FIGURE GROUND MAPS

As shown in Figure 2-4, the block pattern within Mid-City varies from a rectangular grid pattern in the pre-war neighborhoods, located generally in the north and west of Mid-City, to a curvilinear suburban development pattern in the post-war neighborhoods, located in the east and south of Mid-City. Superblocks appear within both block patterns and are shown as clusters of large buildings with no internal streets in Figure 2-5. Residential block pattern typologies are described in more detail in sections that follow.

Large changes in topography are present throughout Mid-City. The topography and associated canyon network affect neighborhood design and connectivity and in some areas impacts intersection density and connectivity due to topographical limitations. The canyon network is reflected in the block pattern, shown in Figure 2-4 as large continuous black areas of the map with few connecting streets (shown in white).

BUILDING TYPES

Figure 2-6 shows a representation of the variety of residential, mixed-use, and non-residential building styles that exist within Mid-City. Each building types is characterized briefly below. It should be noted that the planning area reflects a rich and diverse range of building types, scales, and styles, of which numerous variations are present throughout.

Residential: Mid-City includes a range of residential building types that vary in density, style and building age. Single-family housing appears throughout both the urban grid and suburban neighborhoods and varies in size, style and age. Medium density housing, including cottage courts and low-rise apartment buildings, and multi-plexes, appear throughout the urban grid. Higher-density housing appears primarily along larger collector streets or commercial corridors and typically was built within the past 50 years.

Mixed-Use: Mixed-use development typically includes ground floor, street-facing commercial uses with multi-family residential uses above or behind. This type of development appears throughout Mid-City, although in much less frequency, and has been built primarily within the last 50 years.

Non-Residential Uses: The non-residential uses differ the most between the urban grid and suburban communities. In the urban grid, small and medium-sized, street-facing commercial structures are the most prevalent along commercial corridors. In more suburban or auto-oriented development patterns, commercial and other non-residential uses are located in strip malls or large commercial centers off of arterial streets, both of which include large parking lots between the street and the building.

RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOOD AND BLOCK TYPE COMPARISON

A range of neighborhood and block typologies appear in Mid-City. These residential typologies are summarized graphically in Figure 2-7 and are described briefly below.

Urban Grid Typology: Defined by a repeating rectangular block approximately 630 feet by 300 feet and oriented in the north-south direction, the urban grid appears in the older communities within the planning area, including Normal Heights, Kensington, Talmadge, and City Heights. In many areas, alleys provide access to the rear of the residential parcels, and service commercial parcels where they appear.

Urban Grid at Canyon/Ridge Typology: Where the urban grid meets a canyon, a collector street often follows the ridge line of the canyon, providing the irregular shape of the urban block. Local streets and alleys connect to adjacent urban blocks to provide connectivity to the urban grid. This typology appears in parts of the Normal Heights and Kensington-Talmadge communities, adjacent to the Mission Valley rim.

Suburban Typology: Developed primarily in the post-World War II era, suburban development consists of a network of curvilinear residential streets served by an arterial street. Distances between residential neighborhoods and commercial services are large and sidewalks are not always provided, creating a more auto-oriented circulation system. This typology adapts easily to large changes in topography and appears primarily in the Eastern Area community and parts of the City Heights community.

Superblock Type 1: Superblocks may appear within the urban grid or suburban typologies and consist of larger blocks divided into large parcels that contain a mix of uses, including residential. Superblocks have limited internal connectivity to the perimeter streets and generally each parcel organizes its internal circulation system separately. This typology appears primarily in parts of the Eastern Area and City Heights communities.

Superblock Type 2: Residential infill occurs primarily in large or consolidated parcels along commercial corridors. Infill projects consist primarily of street-facing, high-density, multi-family wrap housing and may provide an internal circulation system to improve connectivity within the parcel. This type of infill housing can be seen scattered throughout the Mid-City Plan Area.

SCALE COMPARISON

Figure 2-8 shows Mid-City compared to other adjacent localities including Downtown San Diego, Chula Vista and Mira Mesa. Mid-City is approximately five miles in the east-west direction at its widest point and approximately four miles in the north-south direction at its longest point. The size of the planning area encompasses the size of the comparison cities/communities as well as their surrounding areas.

25

Figure 2-4 Block Pattern

Legend:

- ■ Block
- ⊏⊐ Community Plan Area Boundary
- Open Space

Trolley Stops
- Ⓣ Green Line
- Ⓣ Orange Line

Light Rail Routes
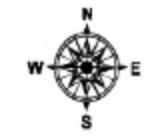- Green Line
- Orange Line

0   0.25   0.5 Miles

City of San Diego, SANGIS, SANDAG

PLAN MID-CITY
Communities Plan Update
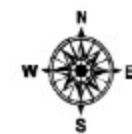
Figure 2-5 Building Figure Ground Map

Legend:

- ■ Building
- Community Plan Area Boundary
- Open Space

Trolley Stops
- Ⓣ Green Line
- Ⓣ Orange Line

Light Rail Routes
- Green Line
- Orange Line

0   0.25   0.5 Miles

City of San Diego, SANGIS, SANDAG

Figure 2-6 Building Typologies

Kensington: Pre-war residential

Normal Heights: Pre-war residential

City Heights: Canyon-adjacent residential

City Heights: Cottage homes

Normal Heights: Cottage Court

City Heights: Apartments

City Heights: Residential infill along El Cajon Boulevard

Adams Avenue in Kensington: Urban mixed-use residential Infill w/ integrated parking, and rear alley

Normal Heights: Urban commercial corridor, with rear alley

(West) El Cajon Blvd: Suburban-style commercial corridor with ethnic grocery anchor

(Central) El Cajon Blvd: Asia Business Center commercial area in Little Saigon

College Avenue: Suburban-style commercial corridor with big box retail anchors

Figure 2-7 Residential Neighborhood and Block Type Comparison

Urban Grid Typology

Older neighborhoods of the Mid-City, such as portions of Normal Heights, Kensington, Talmadge, and City Heights are organized with an urban grid typology, and many include alleys. Blocks are generally oriented north-south with residential facing east or west towards local streets.
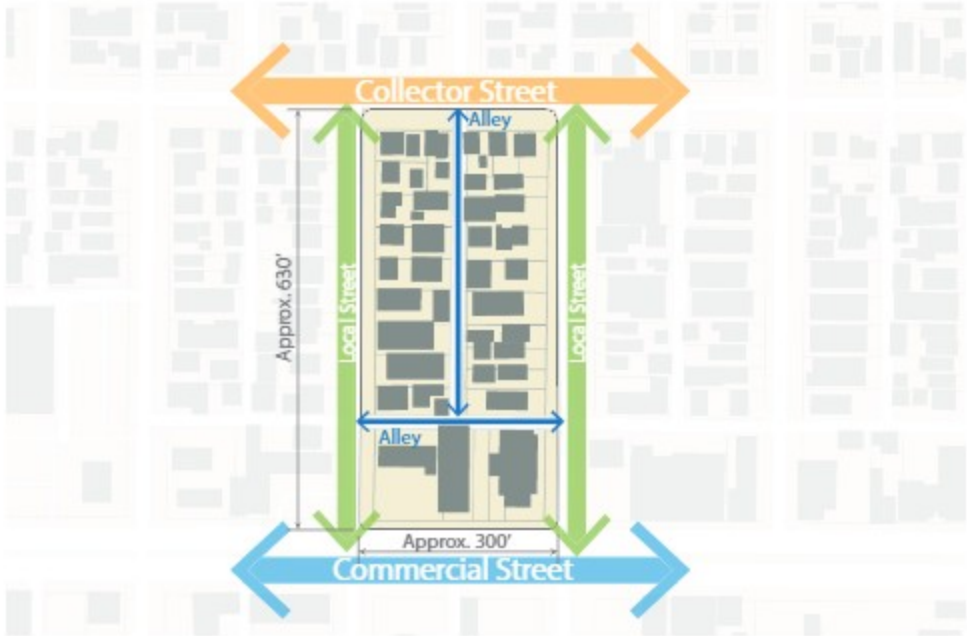
An enlarged view of a typical urban block within the urban grid. Blocks are either generally residential, or contain commercial uses at their north or south end, fronting a commercial street. An alley serves as a transition between the commercial street and the residential neighborhood.

An example of a residential local street within the urban grid in the Normal Heights community.

Urban Grid at Canyon/ Ridge Typology

Where the urban grid meets canyons, the street network follows the ridgelines, and alleys continue through the middle of the block where possible.

An enlarged view of a block within the urban grid at canyon typology. Local streets and alleys connect to adjacent urban blocks. A collector street follows the canyon ridgeline.

An example of a ridgeline street with residential housing and canyon views beyond in the Normal Heights community.

Figure 2-7 (Continued)

Suburban Typology

Suburban development is characterized by curvilinear residential streets, often ending in cul-de-sacs, served by an arterial street. Residential streets continue along ridgelines where necessary.

Distances to individual lots from the Arterial Street are often larger and connectivity to adjacent neighborhoods is limited, creating an auto-oriented circulation system.


An example of a more suburban residential street along a ridgeline in the City Heights community. A sidewalk has been provided on only one side of the street. Single-family residential units face the street, with apartments below accessed from a lower-level street.

Superblock Type 1

Superblocks range in scale throughout the Mid-City Plan Area, and may be divided into large parcels including a variety of uses such as housing, shown in orange above. They typically are located along arterial or collector streets.
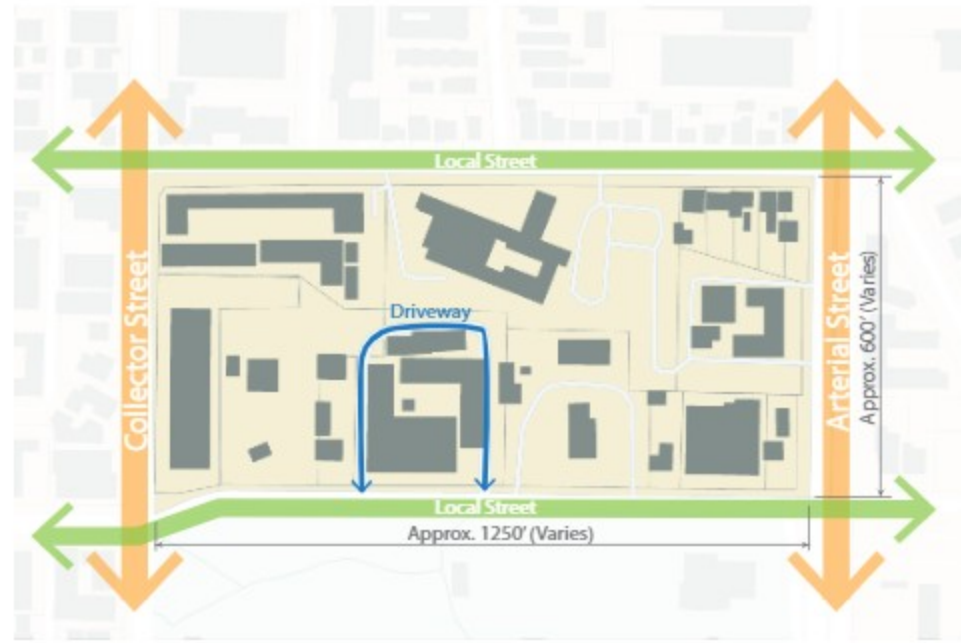
Superblocks have limited internal connectivity to surrounding streets and blocks. Each parcel organizes internal and/or private circulation separately from the others, creating an auto-oriented circulation system.

An example of a multi-family housing development within a superblock in the Colina Park neighborhood of City Heights.

PLAN
MID-CITY
Communities Plan Update

Figure 2-7 (Continued)

In recent years, some parcels along commercial corridors have been infilled with large high-density, multi-family "wrap" housing projects such as those shown in orange above.

These infill housing projects may be organized to wrap or line larger parking garages, with units facing the streets, in addition to an inner pedestrian path, courtyard, or paseo.

An example of a larger mixed-use infill project on El Cajon Boulevard in the Eastern Area community.

Superblock Type 2

Figure 2-8 Scale Comparison

> **The Mid-City is approximately five miles in the east-west direction at its widest point and approximately four miles in the north-south direction at its longest point.**

PLAN MID-CITY
Communities Plan Update

2.4. Building Age

RESIDENTIAL

Mid-City includes an extremely broad range of residential types, ranging from craftsman-style bungalows, tract home development, apartment and cottage courts, tiny cottage homes, six- and eight-plex apartment buildings, multi-story senior housing, and newer mixed-use residential development and infill. Much of Mid-City is residential, with clusters of multi-family located along and around the commercial corridors.

The northern portions of the Mid-City planning area, including much of Kensington, Talmadge, and portions of Normal Heights include distinctive neighborhoods and early planned communities dating to the 1920s or earlier. As shown in Figure 2-9 and Figure 2-11, Kensington-Talmadge has the largest portion of buildings that were constructed prior to 1964, with approximately 44 percent of the residential buildings constructed prior to 1945, and an additional 25 percent built between 1945 and 1964. Nearly 60 percent of the residential buildings in Mid-City, were constructed prior to 1964. Additionally, most residential buildings that exist today in Normal Heights, Kensington-Talmadge, and Eastern Area were built prior to 1984, and only 4 percent of construction occurred after 2005. It is important, however, to note that when a property goes through significant reconstruction or rehab, then the recorded construction date is updated, which means that the map figures and associated statistics may not represent a true picture of age, or construction activity.

Due to the size of Mid-City, detailed maps illustrating residential building age have been provided in Figures 2-12 through 2-15, for the Normal Heights, Kensington-Talmadge, City Heights, and Eastern Area communities.

NON-RESIDENTIAL

Commercial development in Mid-City ranges from early main street-type retail corridors, such as those along Adams Avenue in Normal Heights and Kensington and University Avenue in City Heights, to neighborhood centers, strip centers, and regional shopping centers located along El Cajon Boulevard, College Avenue, 54th Street, Euclid Avenue, and Chollas Parkway. There are a diverse range of ethnic grocery stores, restaurants, and shops, serving a rich mix of residents, including Little Saigon along El Cajon Boulevard (expand this discussion). As shown in Figure 2-10 and Figure 2-16, 47% of today's non-residential buildings were constructed between 1965-1984, with only 4% of construction occurring after 2005.

1 California Historical Resources Inventory Database
2 1998 Mid-City Community Plan and Heartofkensington.org

In general, Normal Heights has a higher percentage of non-residential buildings that were built pre-1945, as well as in the period of 1945 to 1964, with approximately 38% of non-residential buildings dating to before 1964.

In addition to the Mid-City planning area's diverse mix of commercial uses, there are broad range of elementary, high schools, and charter schools, churches and religious institutions of different denominations, community-serving uses, and health centers.

HISTORIC PROPERTIES

There are over 130 designated historic properties[1] in Mid-City, including buildings in the following styles:

- Craftsman (Arts and Crafts)
- Colonial Revival
- Spanish Colonial Revival
- Mission Revival
- French Eclectic
- Spanish Eclectic
- Tudor
- Minimal Traditional
- California Ranch
- Modern Ranch
- Streamline Moderne

A significant number of designated properties are located in the Talmadge Gates Historical District, and the Islenair Historic District. Additionally, there are historic structures and districts which are eligible for historic designation, including the Carteri Center Historic District in Normal Heights, the Kensington & Talmadge Historic District, and the Egyptian Revival Euclid Tower, Garage, and Silverado Ballroom in City Heights, and the Chollas Heights Navy housing project in the Eastern Area.[2]
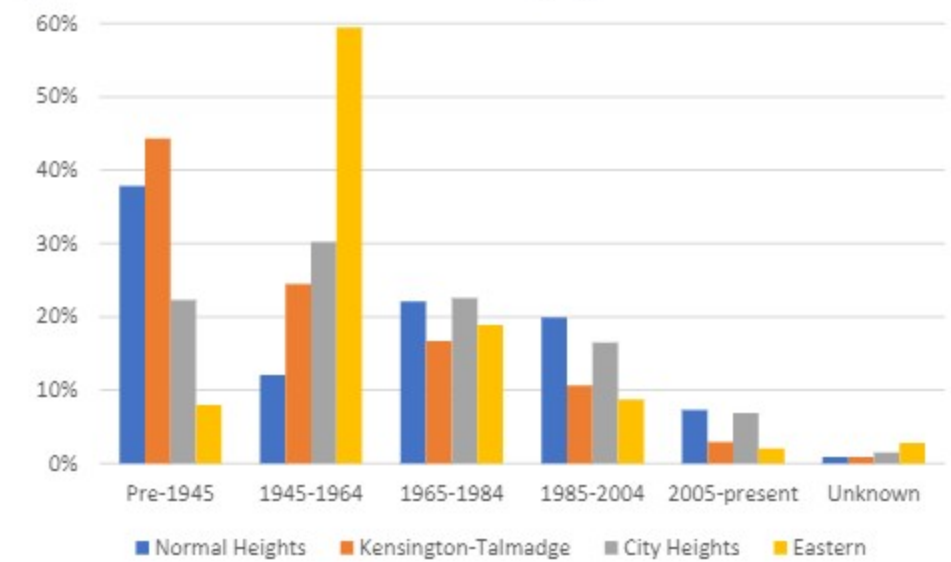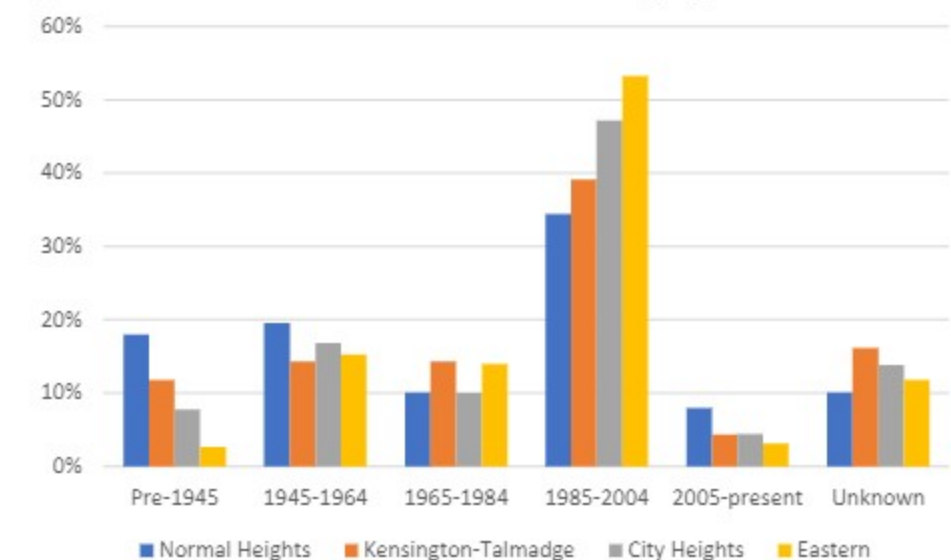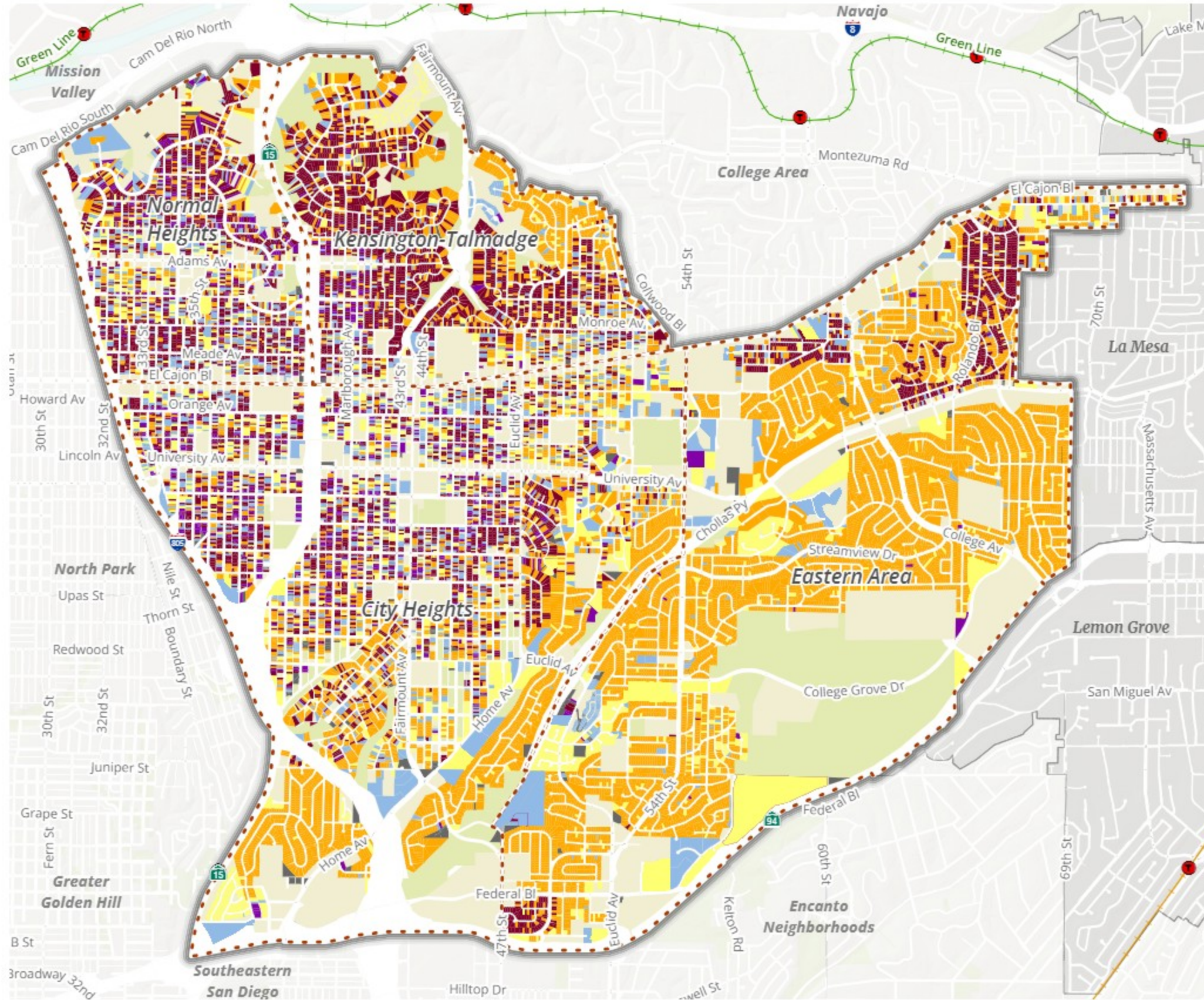
Figure 2-9 Residential Building Age

Figure 2-10 Non-Residential Building Age

Figure 2-11 Residential Building Age

Year Built
- Pre-1945
- 1945–1964
- 1965–1984
- 1985–2004
- 2005–Present
- Vacant/Undeveloped Parcel

Community Plan Area Boundary

Open Space

Trolley Stops
- Green Line
- Orange Line

Light Rail Routes
- Green Line
- Orange Line

City of San Diego, SANGIS, SANDAG

0   0.25   0.5 Miles
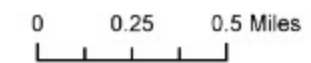
Figure 2-12 Residential Building Age - Normal Heights in Detail

Year Built

- Pre-1945
- 1945-1964
- 1965-1984
- 1985-2004
- 2005-Present
- Vacant/Undeveloped Parcel

Community Plan Area Boundary

Open Space

(T) Green Line

(T) Orange Line

Light Rail Routes
- Green Line
- Orange Line

0   0.1   0.2 Miles

City of San Diego, SANGIS, SANDAG
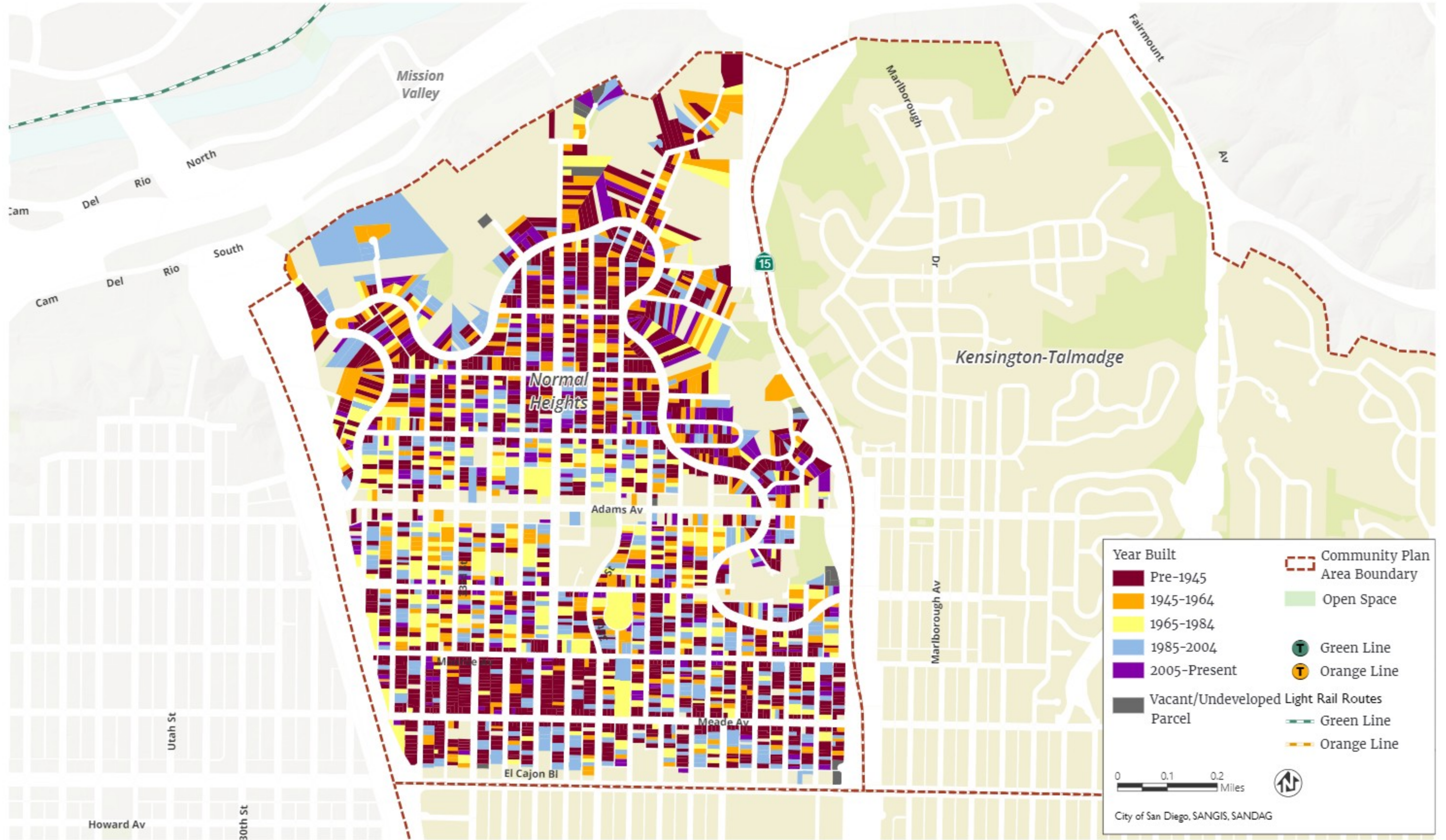
Figure 2-13 Residential Building Age - Kensington-Talmadge in Detail
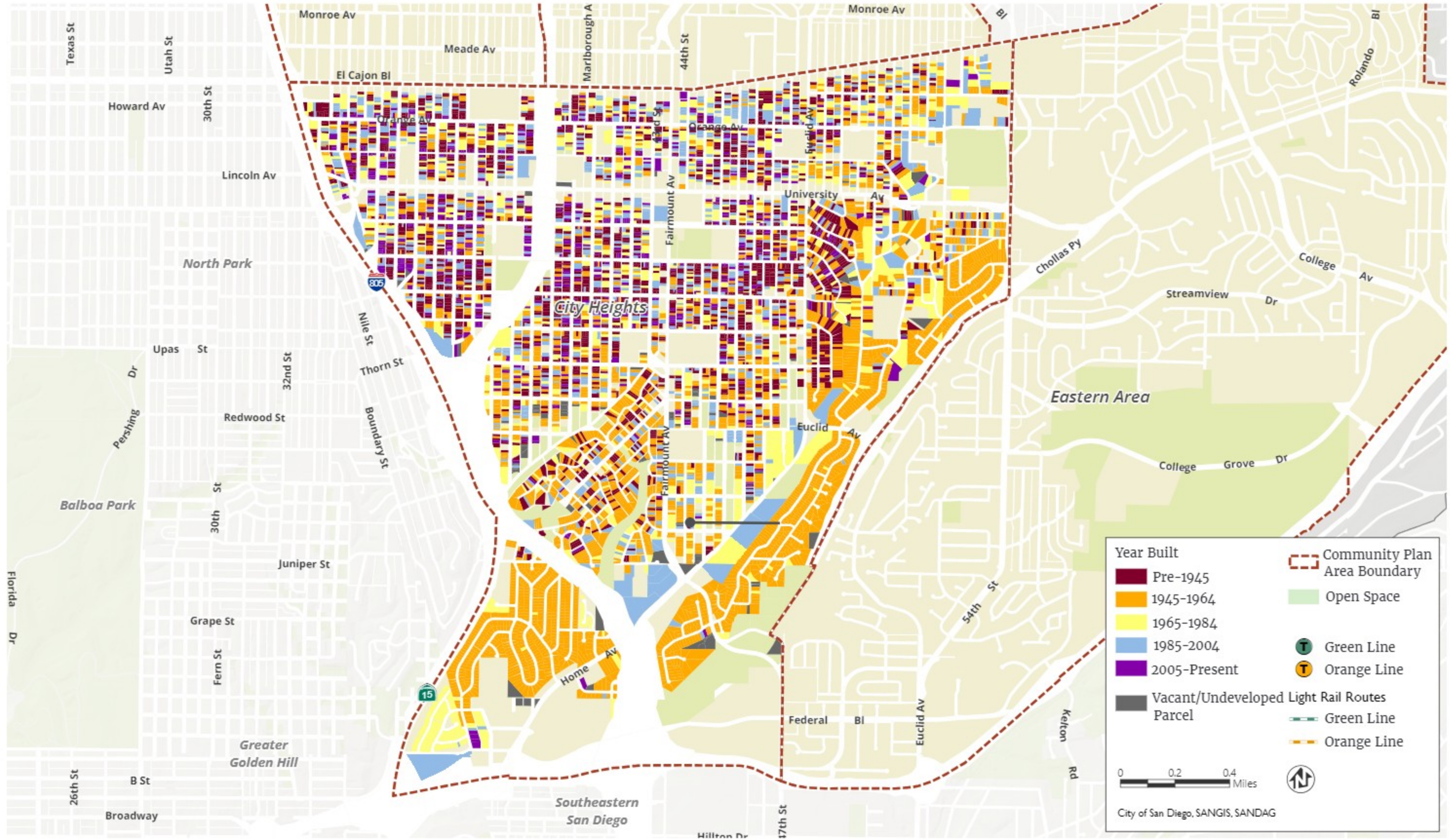
Year Built
- Pre-1945
- 1945-1964
- 1965-1984
- 1985-2004
- 2005-Present
- Vacant/Undeveloped Parcel

Community Plan Area Boundary

Open Space

- T Green Line
- T Orange Line

Light Rail Routes
- Green Line
- Orange Line

0   0.1   0.2 Miles

City of San Diego, SANGIS, SANDAG

Figure 2-14 Residential Building Age - City Heights in Detail

Year Built
- Pre-1945
- 1945-1964
- 1965-1984
- 1985-2004
- 2005-Present
- Vacant/Undeveloped Parcel

Community Plan Area Boundary
Open Space

Light Rail Routes
- Green Line (T)
- Orange Line (T)
- Green Line
- Orange Line

0   0.2   0.4 Miles

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Figure 2-15 Residential Building Age - Eastern Area in Detail

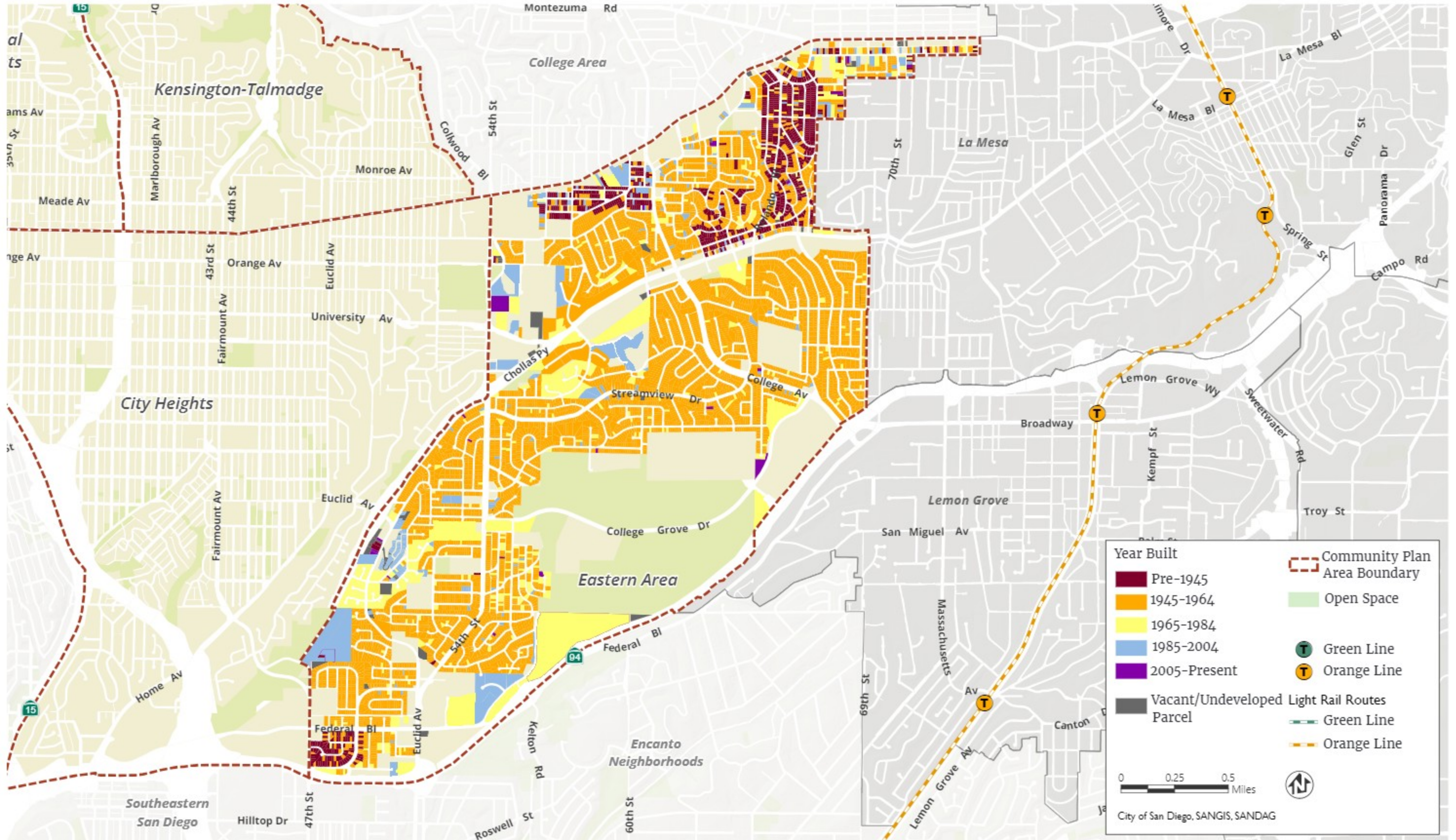Year Built
- Pre-1945
- 1945-1964
- 1965-1984
- 1985-2004
- 2005-Present

Vacant/Undeveloped Parcel

Community Plan Area Boundary

Open Space

Green Line

Orange Line

Light Rail Routes
- Green Line
- Orange Line

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Figure 2-16 Non-Residential Building Age
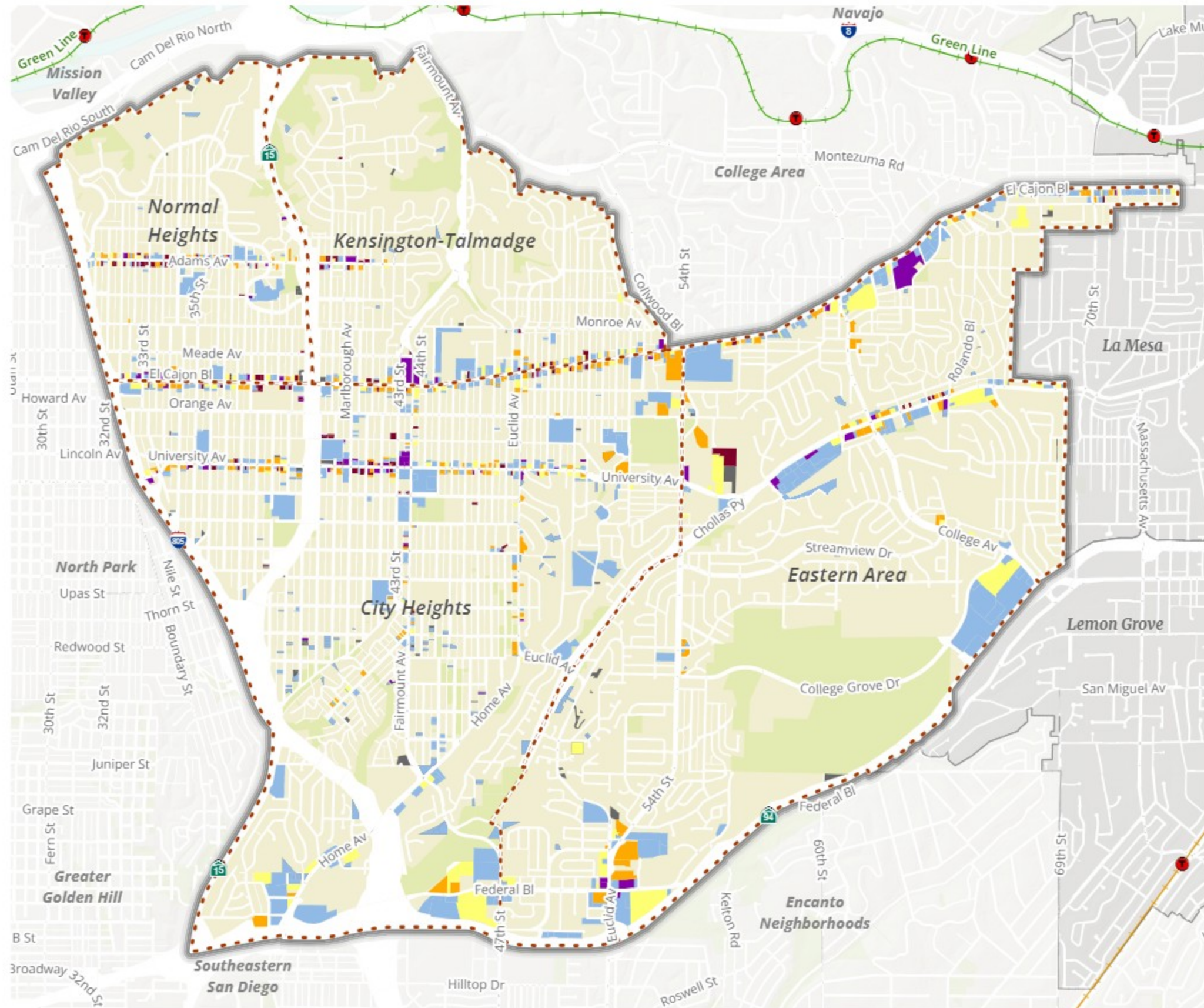
Year Built
- Pre-1945
- 1945-1964
- 1965-1984
- 1985-2004
- 2005-Present
- Vacant/Undeveloped Parcel

Community Plan Area Boundary

Open Space

Green Line

Orange Line

Light Rail Routes
- Green Line
- Orange Line

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40

2.5. MURALS AND PUBLIC ART

Mid-City is rich with public art, including historic murals, recent murals developed through community art programs, street art, and painted electrical boxes.

Many of the murals and public art pieces have been led and/or sponsored through the work community-led programs, such as those led by the Normal Heights Urban Arts Committee, founded in 2016 by Normal Heights residents, and the Normal Heights Community Development Corporation; and other programs such as Moving the Lives of Kids Community Mural Project (MLK Mural); the ArtReach San Diego Mural Program; and the San Diego Cultural Arts Alliance.

Examples of murals and other examples of public art throughout the Mid-City planning area.

2.6. Important Places and Neighborhood Centers

Numerous cultural, religious, historical and municipal facilities act as neighborhood centers, gathering and connecting community members throughout the Mid-City planning area. Figure 2-17 shows the location of some of the key neighborhood centers within the planning area and an example in each of the four Mid-City Communities has been described briefly below.

Normal Heights Gateway Sign

This classic neon "Normal Heights" sign spans Adams Avenue, the main commercial retail street in the Normal Heights community. The sign forms the backdrop for many annual community events held on the street, including the Adams Avenue Street Fair, Taste of Adams Avenue, and Holiday on Adams Avenue.

Talmadge Gates

The Talmadge Gates are a series of historic metal sidewalk gates unique to the Kensington-Talmadge community. Designed and constructed in 1927, the gates were restored in 2002 and form the basis of the Talmadge Gates Historic District which runs along Monroe Avenue from 44th street to 49th street and along 49th street from Monroe to Adams Avenue (also shown in Figure 2-2).

Teralta Park

Teralta Park is a four-acre park constructed in 2001 on top of State Route 15 between Orange Avenue and Polk Avenue in the City Heights community. Neighborhood residents, led by community organizers, lobbied Caltrans to build open space on top of the freeway in order to mitigate the effect of community separation that resulted from the construction of SR-15 in the 1980's.
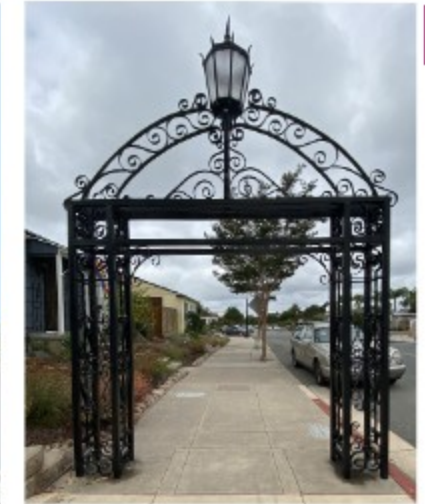
The Salvation Army Kroc Center

The Kroc Center acts as a church, community center, and fitness center in the Eastern Area community. Its services include performances, counseling, children's classes, food distribution and a full-service fitness facility that includes swimming pools, an ice arena, and a recreation field.

Normal Heights Gateway Sign

Little Saigon

Talmadge Gates
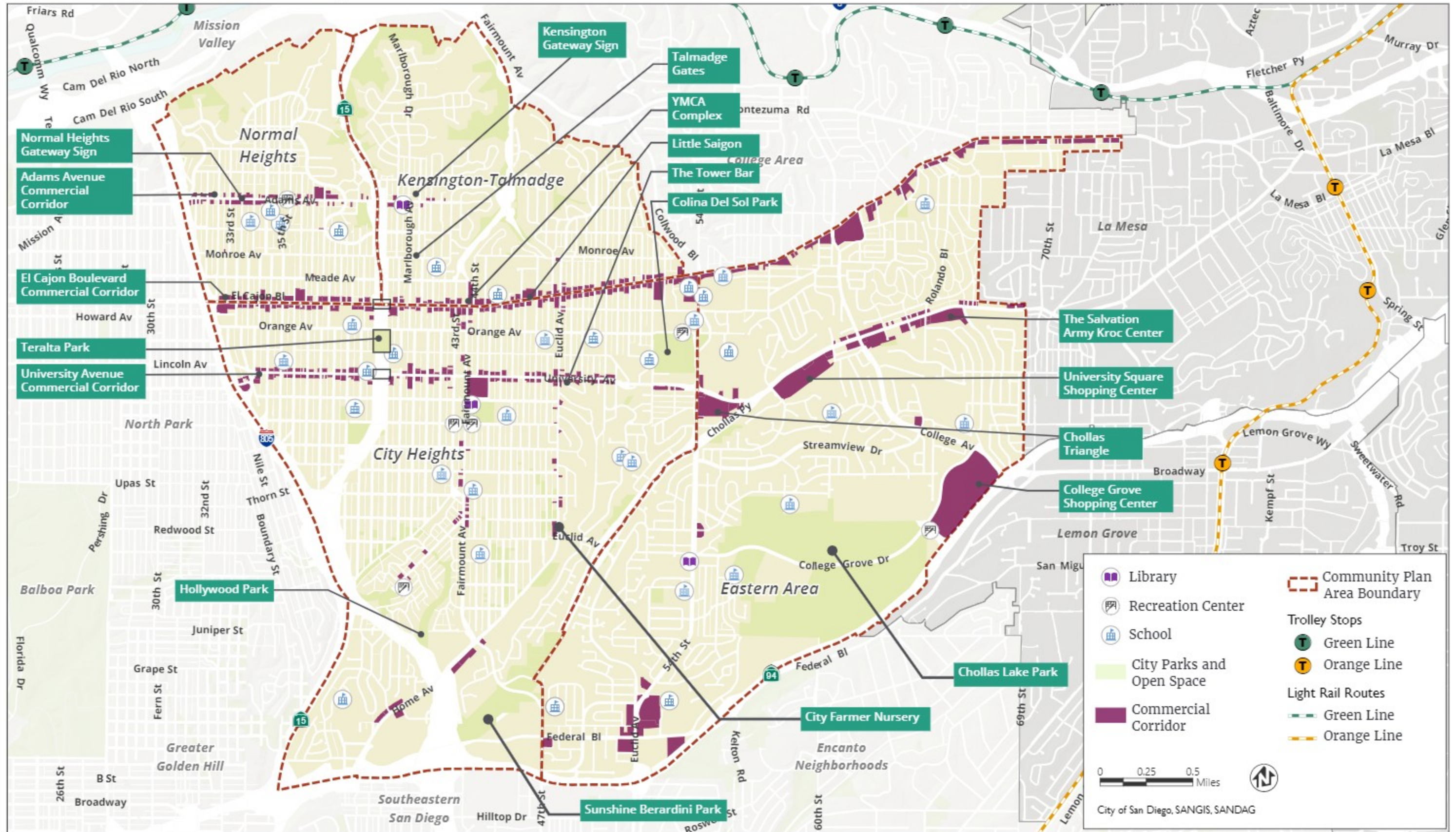

The Tower Bar

Kensington Park and Library

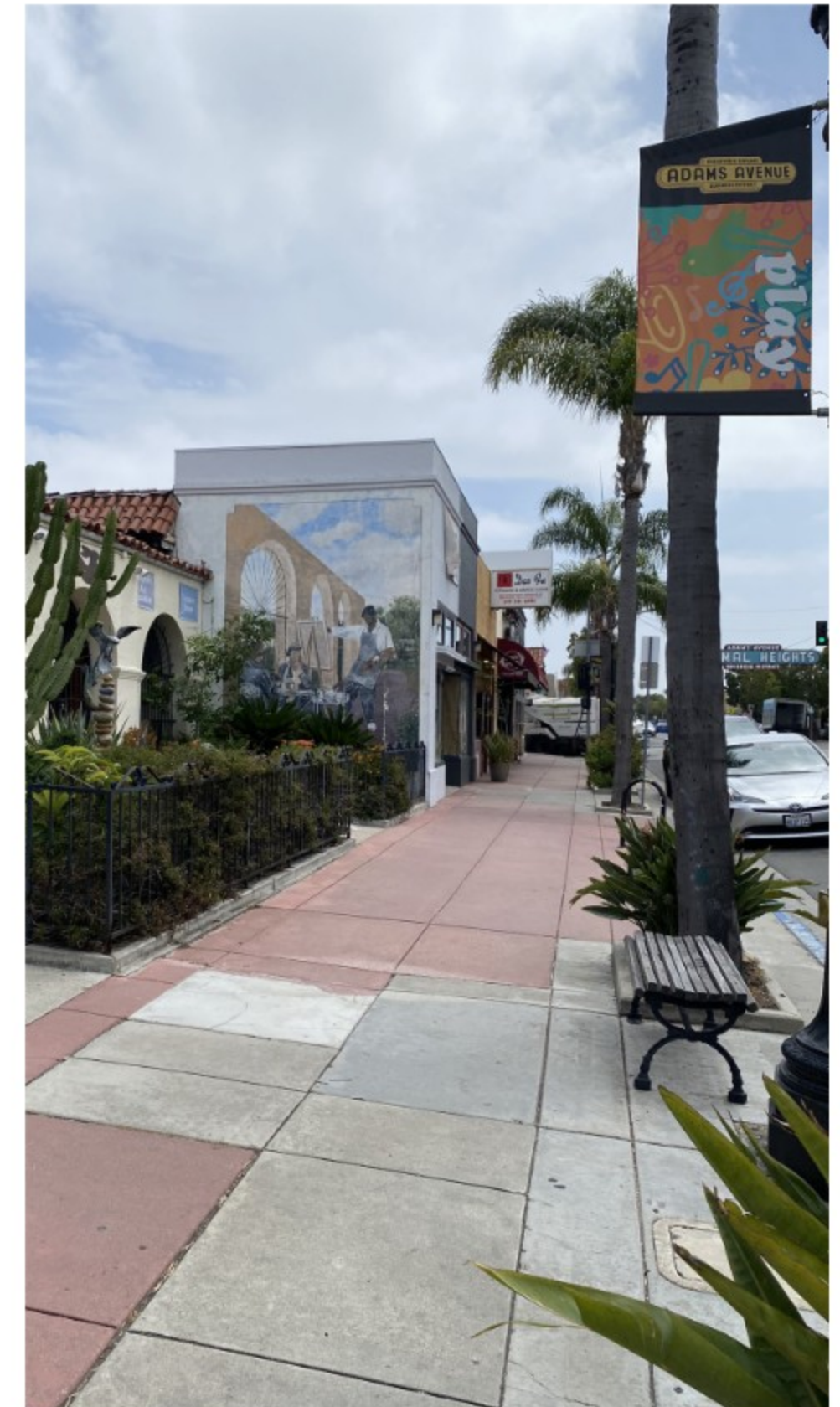*Teralta Park*

The Salvation Army Kroc Center

Chollas Lake Park

Figure 2-17 Important Places and Neighborhood Centers

Kensington Gateway Sign

Talmadge Gates

YMCA Complex

Little Saigon

The Tower Bar

Colina Del Sol Park

Normal Heights Gateway Sign

Adams Avenue Commercial Corridor

El Cajon Boulevard Commercial Corridor

Teralta Park

University Avenue Commercial Corridor

The Salvation Army Kroc Center

University Square Shopping Center

Chollas Triangle

College Grove Shopping Center

Chollas Lake Park

City Farmer Nursery

Hollywood Park

Sunshine Berardini Park

Legend

📖 Library

Recreation Center

🏫 School

City Parks and Open Space

Commercial Corridor

Community Plan Area Boundary

Trolley Stops
- 🟢 Green Line
- 🟠 Orange Line

Light Rail Routes
- Green Line
- Orange Line

0   0.25   0.5 Miles

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PLAN MID-CITY
Communities Plan Update

2.7. History & Place Summary

This section summarizes the key information related to history and place for the Mid-City planning area presented in this chapter.

- Mid-City is approximately **13 square miles**, an area larger than Downtown San Diego and other adjacent localities.

- The **canyon system** contributes significantly to the sense of place and forms a backdrop of open space to the Mid-City planning area.

- The history of the urban fabric follows similar patterns to other urban neighborhoods with periods of **urban growth, urban decline, and revitalization**.

- The block development patterns mirror the historical development of the city, with older neighborhoods displaying an **urban grid typology** and newer neighborhoods, a **suburban typology**.

- Mid-City contains a rich and **diverse range of building typologies, scales, and styles.**

- Approximately half of the residential buildings in Mid-City were constructed prior to 1964. **Very little construction has occurred after 2005.**

- There are a diverse range of ethnic grocery stores, restaurants, and shops, serving a **rich mix of residents.**

- Mid-City is **rich with public art.**

- There are **many important places** and neighborhood centers throughout the planning area where the communities come together.

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