



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

Report to the Planning Commission

DATE ISSUED: July 9, 2020 REPORT NO. PC-20-021
HEARING DATE: July 16, 2020
SUBJECT: Hillcrest Focused Plan Amendment Workshop

SUMMARY

This is a workshop for the Planning Commission to provide early input on the Hillcrest Focused Plan Amendment.

BACKGROUND

The Hillcrest Focused Plan Amendment area encompasses approximately 350 acres of the Hillcrest and Medical Complex neighborhoods within the Uptown Community. Hillcrest is a vibrant pedestrian-oriented commercial and entertainment center, and contains a diverse mix of retail, office and mixed-use buildings as well as a varied residential character. Hillcrest serves as the primary commercial core for Uptown, which is concentrated around the intersection of Fifth Avenue and University Avenue, and extends several blocks east, west, and south. University Avenue is the primary spine of Hillcrest, with commercial development extending along University Avenue east of State Route (SR) 163, and west until it converges with Mission Hills.

The Medical Complex is dominated by the Scripps Mercy Hospital and Medical Center and the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) Hillcrest Medical Campus, which occupy over forty percent of the Medical Complex neighborhood. The remaining portion of the Medical Complex area is occupied primarily by multifamily residential uses. Commercial development, which is mostly auto-oriented, is located on the north side of Washington Street, adjacent to the medical centers.

Within the Focused Plan Amendment area, there are approximately 6,000 residents and approximately 4,200 housing units. Roughly 17,500 people work in the area, with the vast majority of the jobs concentrated in the healthcare sector within the medical complex.

DISCUSSION

The Hillcrest Focused Plan Amendment will amend the Uptown Community Plan through a collaborative effort with community members and stakeholders to increase housing capacity, identify opportunities for public spaces, strengthen mobility connections, support local business, and celebrate the LGBTQ+ culture and history of the community.

What is prompting the Focused Plan Amendment?

In 2016, a comprehensive update to the Uptown Community Plan was adopted by City Council that brought the Plan into conformance with the General Plan and Climate Action Plan. The Plan Update established a robust framework of urban design goals and policies, maintained higher density village areas along the community's transit corridors, and identified preservation strategies for the community's historic resources. However, the Community Plan did not increase housing capacity and, instead, maintained the residential densities established in the previous update of the Community Plan in 1988.

As part of the approval of the 2016 Community Plan Update, the City Council recommended staff consider including a Specific Plan for the Uptown Gateway in the Planning Department's Work Program. This Focused Plan effort is the department's approach in response to Council's recommendation during the adoption of the Uptown Plan.

What is the Focused Plan's relationship to the Uptown Gateway proposal?

As part of the 2016 adoption of the Uptown Community Plan, the City Council along with residents, businesses, and property owners identified the need for a more detailed level of planning for the Hillcrest core. The Uptown Gateway, located between 4th Avenue, 7th Avenue, Washington Street, and Pennsylvania Avenue, proposed to double the allowed residential density within this 40-acre area of the Hillcrest core. In addition, the Gateway proposed public space and mobility enhancements to facilitate greater interaction in the public realm and increase multi-modal mobility in the area. The Gateway proposal was not analyzed as part of the 2016 Community Plan Update, so the City Council recommended that staff consider a Specific Plan for the Uptown Gateway.

Why is the area east of SR-163 included?

The Focused Plan Amendment has been expanded beyond the Gateway area to include a broader section of the Hillcrest neighborhood, including land east of SR-163 between Robinson Avenue, Washington Street, and Park Boulevard. This provides the opportunity to strengthen mobility connections across the SR-163 including bicycle and pedestrian improvements, include public space opportunities and celebrate the LGBTQ+ community along University Avenue and Normal Street as well as consider additional housing needs along the Park Boulevard bus rapid transit corridor.

Why is the Medical Complex neighborhood included?

Additional considerations for the Focused Plan Amendment are the changes proposed at the two major medical campuses within the Medical Complex Neighborhood. The proposed changes will increase capacity within the Medical Complex, which will likely increase the number of employees, residents, and visitors within the area. The Scripps Mercy Hospital complex, primarily located between Washington Street, 4th Avenue, and SR-163 is proposing the demolition of existing structures and construction of new medical offices and hospital buildings that would add more than 1.5 million square feet of hospital and medical office uses to the complex.

The UCSD Long Range Development Plan (LRDP) for the Hillcrest Medical Campus, adopted by the Regents of the University of California in 2019, envisions a complete redevelopment of the campus with objectives to create a modern, mixed use health campus that promotes wellness and health care, implements mixed land uses, improves access to and within the campus, and include enhancements

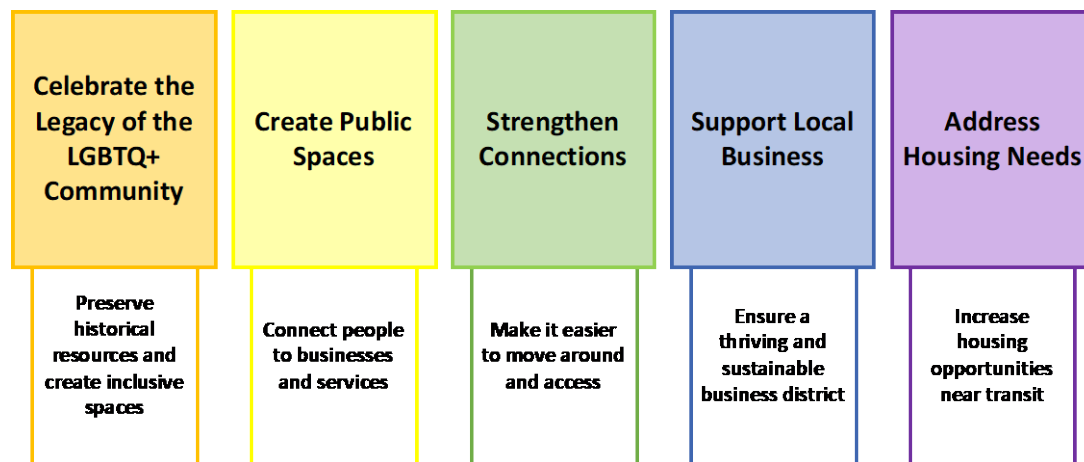
to open space. The LRDP anticipates replacement of more than 90 percent of the campus' existing building stock with modern facilities and proposes the addition of up to 1,000 multi-family residential units intended to provide housing for, but not limited to, UCSD students and campus staff. The LRDP identifies mobility improvements that require street vacations and a community plan amendment, specifically to remove Front Street between Montecito Way and Dickinson Street from the Community Plan Street Network.

The Focused Plan effort will incorporate the proposed street classification changes for the Hillcrest Medical Campus, and evaluate mobility access between the Medical Complex and Hillcrest neighborhoods. The Focused Plan will also identify additional mobility and public space enhancements that better connect the neighborhoods.

What is the Focused Amendment's Key Objectives?

Considering these efforts and building on the Uptown Community Plan, the Focused Plan Amendment will address housing, mobility, and public spaces that can strengthen the business district and bring neighborhood benefits where needed most. The Focused Plan Amendment will also identify and preserve the historical resources important to the LGBTQ+ community, and will identify new opportunities to honor and celebrate the community's culture. The Hillcrest Focused Plan Amendment envisions a complete neighborhood that celebrates its unique identity and honors the legacy of a place that welcomes everyone.

There are five primary objectives set forth for the Focused Plan effort, these are:



Hillcrest Focused Plan Amendment Objectives

Celebrate the Legacy of the LGBTQ+ Community

One key element of the plan effort is the Historic Preservation and Cultural Heritage Strategy. The City will work with the community and build on previous efforts to identify and evaluate sites that are important to the LGBTQ+ community, including a complete evaluation of the Hillcrest Potential Historic District, which was identified during the 2016 Community Plan Update, to determine if the potential district is eligible for designation for its association with Hillcrest's LGBTQ+ history. Ultimately the LGBTQ+ Historic engagement work will provide an opportunity for social and cultural history to interface with urban design, public scape, and mobility planning to create an engaging urban environment that celebrates the community in Hillcrest and informs the public through plaques, banners, way-finding signage, public art, and the like.

Create Public Spaces

Within the Focused Plan Amendment area there are no public parks and few spaces for active or passive recreation opportunities. As the plan effort begins to evaluate opportunities to add and create public space within the neighborhoods, the Focused Amendment will build on the Community Plan's public space and park policies to identify public spaces in new development and the amenities that will best serve the community. The effort will evaluate the opportunity for linear parks and gathering spots to be located along key mobility routes that ensure greater neighborhood access to public and open spaces.

Strengthen Connections

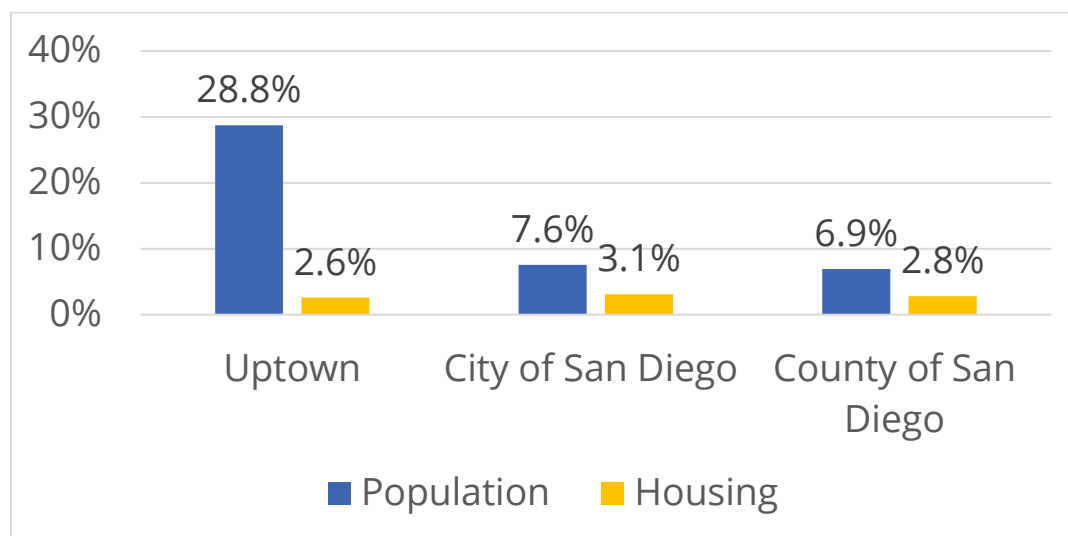
Hillcrest is one of the most walkable communities in the City. The Focused Plan Amendment will build on the pedestrian-oriented grid network of Hillcrest. Mobility concepts that further shift commuter and personal trips to pedestrian, bicycle and transit use will be emphasized. Ultimately, the goal is to create a better walking, bicycle and transit environment that achieves the City's Climate Action Plan goals and creates a more sustainable community.

Support Local Business

The Focused Plan Amendment aims to create a vibrant and diverse business district that buildings on the diversity of existing Hillcrest businesses, enhancing the Hillcrest core and commercial corridors.

Address Housing Needs

As previously stated, the 2016 Community Plan Update did not increase housing capacity in Uptown. As the plan effort begins to consider how to address the community's housing needs, it is important to note that based on data from the U.S. Census and the Federal Economic Reserve, San Diego has experienced a 6% decline in housing access over the last 35 years, while the U.S as a whole has experienced an 8% increase in housing access. This trend is consistent with the recent experience in the Uptown area as shown in the chart below. Between 2010 and 2017, the population in Uptown has increased by almost 29%, but the number of housing units added within the community has only increased by 2.6%, according to SANDAG.



Recent Population and Housing Growth (Data Source: SANDAG)

This Focused Plan effort will increase housing capacity and opportunities near transit to help address and alleviate the affordable housing crisis facing the City.

What is the Status of the Focused Plan Amendment?

The Focused Plan Amendment is in the early stages and work has been centered on gaining community input related to key issues within the plan area. Work has been centered around understanding existing land use and urban form patterns that will inform opportunities for increased housing capacity, public space opportunities, and improved mobility connections. The outreach effort has been tailored to address current restrictions to in-person meetings pursuant to the Governor's executive order N-25-20 and temporary changes made to Council Policy 600-24 in response to the COVID-19 emergency.

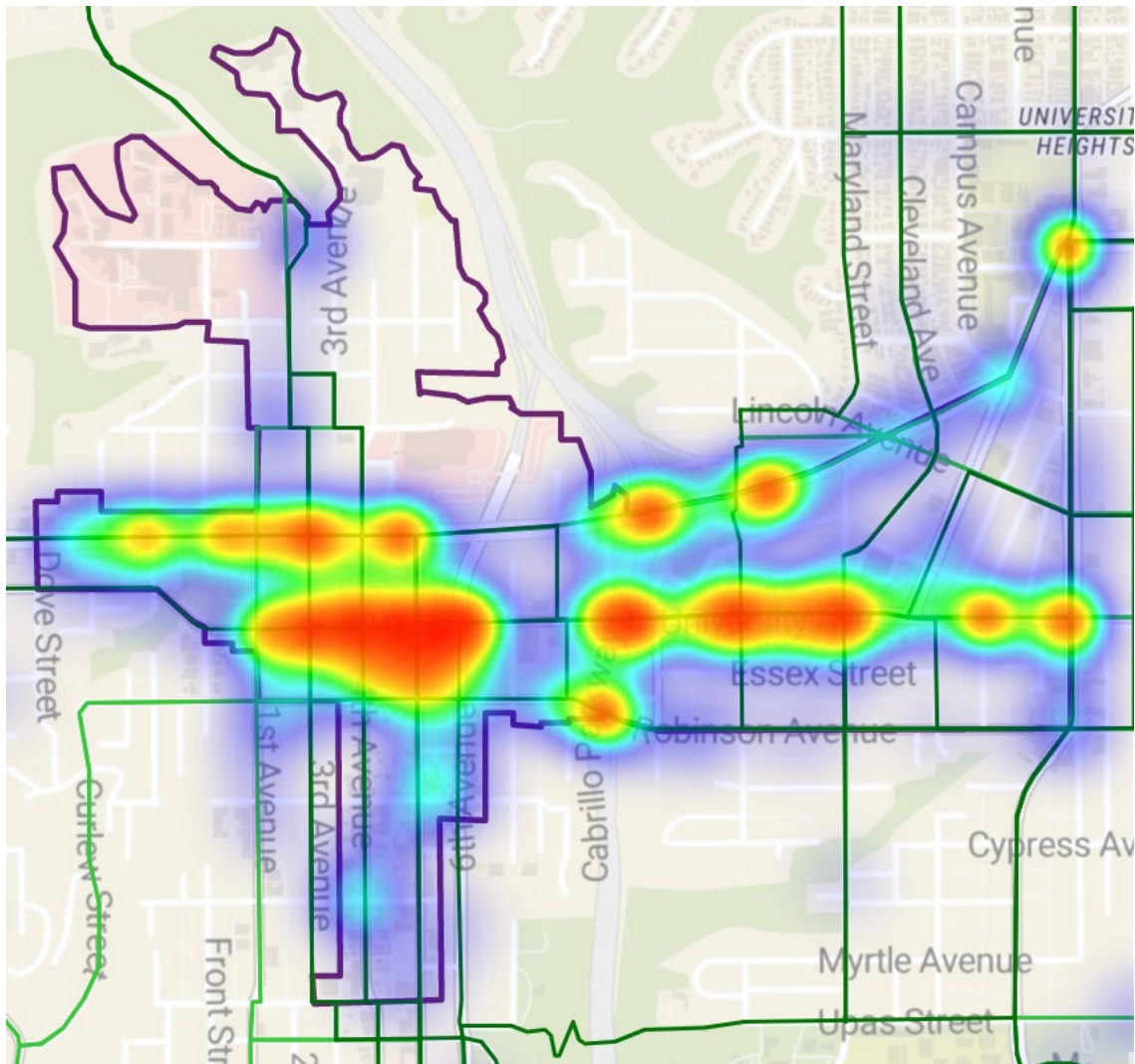
Live Webinar

On April 28, 2020, the Planning Department held the first Live Webinar for the Hillcrest Focused Plan Amendment, via Zoom, to provide background on the plan effort, an overview of the objectives, and a discussion of the existing urban form within the plan area. The Live Webinar was well attended, with over 160 participants and more than 110 questions and comments submitted during the webinar.

Community Mapping Survey

An online community survey was undertaken for a three-week period from April 28, 2020 through May 18, 2020. The survey focused on identifying community priorities and recommendations for mobility, housing, public spaces, and opportunities to celebrate the LGBTQ+ community within the plan area. The survey included a mix of questions that prompted respondents to prioritize and rank conceptual elements, and included several interactive mapping questions to allow respondents to identify site-specific recommendations within the community.

The survey received 719 individual responses. The survey responses were catalogued, synthesized and mapped, and key takeaways were summarized into a Survey Report released in July 2020. The most frequent (hot) and infrequent (cold) locations for improvements are identified in the Report using colors on a scale from red to blue. Among the responses, there was general support for increasing housing capacity in the area formerly identified as the Hillcrest Gateway. An emphasis on mobility improvements was focused along the main east-west corridors of Washington Street and University Avenue as shown in the figure on page 6 of this report. A copy of the report is available on the project website at www.PlanHillcrest.org



Community Survey Results - Identified Pedestrian and Bicycle Improvements

Community Planning Group Meetings

In June and July of 2020, Planning Department staff met virtually with Uptown Planners, the Community Planning Group for the area, to provide an overview of the plan effort and objectives, review the feedback received through the live webinar and community mapping survey, and discuss existing conditions within the area.

Existing Conditions

In the spring of 2020, work began on the existing conditions phase and an Existing Conditions Community Atlas was completed in July 2020. The Community Atlas is an informational document that focuses on mapped resources relating to community demographics, land uses, urban form, and mobility infrastructure. It was prepared to develop an understanding of the existing land uses and frame the discussion about potential opportunities within the plan area. The Atlas is posted on the project website at www.PlanHillcrest.org.

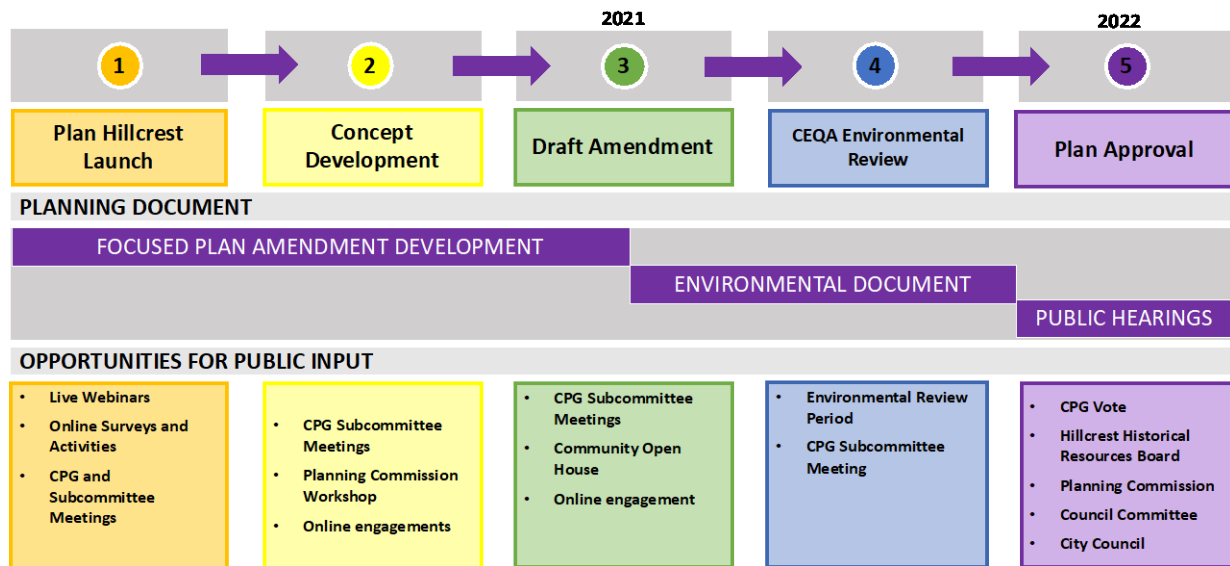
How will grant funds be used to support the Focused Plan Amendment?

The Focused Plan Amendment is funded, in part, through the State’s Building Homes and Jobs Act, known as SB 2, which provides funding to develop plans to accelerate housing production. SB 2 funding will be used to increase housing capacity and allow by-right development to reduce permit processing times and overall costs, and allow for high-density mixed-use housing to develop sooner.

In addition to SB 2 grant funding, the City submitted an application for the Local Early Action Planning (LEAP) Grant funding provided by the California Department of Housing and Community Development to evaluate land use, urban design, and public space concepts that support additional growth along the community’s existing high frequency transit corridors connecting Hillcrest to Downtown San Diego. The Focused Plan Amendment will use smart growth principles by connecting employment, retail and housing to the regional transportation system, consistent with its identification as an urban center by SANDAG on the Smart Growth Concept Map which is included in the Regional Plan.

What are the next steps for the Focused Plan Amendment?

The Focused Plan Amendment process is moving forward into the second phase of the planning effort as outlined in the project schedule below. The Planning Department will synthesize the community feedback and existing conditions information to begin developing concepts that address each of the five objectives outlined in this report. The Planning Department will continue to work with Uptown Planners and the broader community to refine proposed concepts before moving forward with preparing the draft Focused Plan Amendment.



Project Schedule

CONCLUSION

The Planning Department is presenting this first workshop for the Hillcrest Focused Plan Amendment to seek early input from the Planning Commission. Staff will continue to conduct outreach and obtain community input through multiple outlets, including work with the Uptown Planners Subcommittee, to develop plan concepts. All documents pertaining to the amendment process are available on the project website: www.PlanHillcrest.org.

Respectfully submitted,



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Planning Department

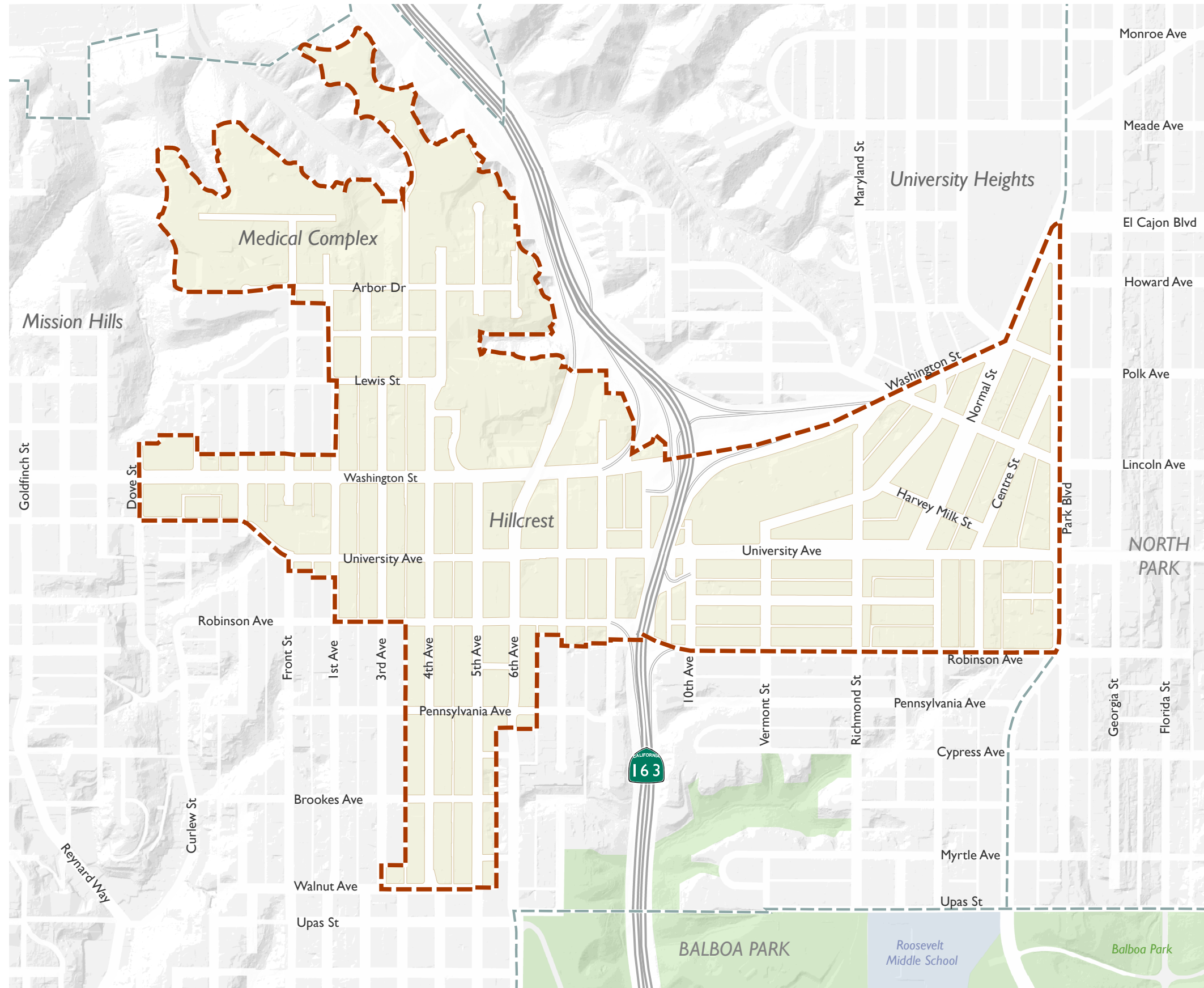
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LB/mjp

Attachments:

1. Hillcrest Focused Plan Amendment/Plan Hillcrest Area
2. Plan Hillcrest Brochure

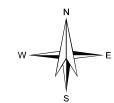
Focused Plan Amendment Boundary



-  Hillcrest Community Boundary
-  Community Plan Boundaries

Data Source: City of San Diego; SANDAG/SANGIS Regional GIS DataWarehouse, (www.sangis.org)

0 250 500 1,000 1,500 2,000 Feet



PLAN HILLCREST



Get Involved and Learn More about Plan Hillcrest!

Public participation will be important to shaping the neighborhood. There are many ways to join the conversation with your neighbors through in-person and online activities.

planhillcrest.org

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What Is PLAN HILLCREST?

PLAN HILLCREST ENVISIONS A COMPLETE NEIGHBORHOOD THAT CELEBRATES ITS UNIQUE IDENTITY AND HONORS THE LEGACY OF A PLACE THAT WELCOMES EVERYONE

Building on the Uptown Community Plan, Plan Hillcrest will focus on housing, mobility and public spaces that can strengthen the business district and bring neighborhood benefits where needed most. Plan Hillcrest will identify and preserve the historical resources important to the LGBTQ+ community, and will identify new opportunities to honor and celebrate the community's culture.

With a growing housing crisis and a changing climate, more must be done to address housing needs, make it easier to walk, bike, take transit, and provide public spaces for everyone. Plan Hillcrest will organize efforts on place-making, connectivity, housing, and the neighborhood's unique identity to ensure Hillcrest thrives into the future.



PLAN HILLCREST WILL EXPLORE OPTIONS TO:

- **CREATE PUBLIC SPACES** that connect people to neighborhood businesses and services;
- **STRENGTHEN CONNECTIONS** to make it easier to get to surrounding communities and places including Balboa Park, Downtown and North Park;
- **CELEBRATE THE LEGACY OF THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY** by preserving historical resources and creating new places that honor and promote inclusivity;
- **SUPPORT LOCAL BUSINESS BY** ensuring a thriving and sustainable business district; and
- **ADDRESS HOUSING NEEDS** by identifying areas near transit and services, and increasing housing options that serve all community members.

PROCESS AND TIMELINE

