

# The Mesa Village / a neighborhood vision

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draft by:

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## OVERVIEW

The Mesa is a vital and thriving part of Santa Barbara, with a strong identity, clear physical boundaries, a variable south-facing topography and a unique micro-climate. A diverse population of around 10,000 occupies an area of approximately 1,500 acres. Cliff Drive and Meigs Road divide the Mesa into four primary neighborhoods, with a compact and diverse commercial center at their intersection.

Our comfortable, oceanfront district has the potential to become more coherent and integrated with a number of strategic improvements. We believe that working together to define and achieve these improvements, we can make the Mesa a more self-sufficient, sustainable village while preserving its unique character. By identifying and working toward common interests that benefit us all, such as improving parks and circulation, our sense of community will be enhanced. By promoting local culture and business, our self-sufficiency will be increased. By supporting public transportation, safe bicycle routes, walkability, and a healthy lifestyle and environment, our sustainability will be insured.

## SUB-NEIGHBORHOODS

The Mesa contains four primary neighborhoods: West Alta Mesa and West Mesa, both west of Meigs Road and separated by Cliff Drive, and East Alta Mesa and East Mesa, both east of Meigs Road and separated by Cliff Drive. Each of these quarters is complimented by diverse smaller neighborhoods as different as La Coronilla and Marine Terrace, and completed by a significant, but compact Village Center commercial district around the intersection of Cliff and Meigs.

## COMMERCE

The Mesa has a diverse and compact zone of commercial and office uses near the center of the neighborhood at the intersection of Cliff Drive and Meigs Road. However, Mesa residents must travel to other parts of the city for many of their entertainment and specialized needs. While it may never be possible or necessary for the Mesa to be fully self-sufficient, complementary commercial and entertainment uses should be encouraged.

The careful location and design of some small grocery/convenience stores in **Neighborhood Serving Commercial** zones along Cliff Drive would provide walking access to daily necessities for hundreds of households and reduce vehicle trips and parking demand in the Village Center. A conditional use permit category should be created to allow this use in residential zones, providing a process that will insure neighborhood compatibility and adequate public input.

There should be an **Association of Business Owners and Merchants** on the Mesa. This would benefit neighborhood businesses by strengthening their influence in the city, but also advance community by creating a common interface for communicating with the Mesa

Neighborhood. An Association agreement creating a common parking zone of all the business spaces in the Village Center would help to reduce traffic and encourage patrons to walk between businesses.

## HOUSING

The Mesa has a healthy variety of housing types. While dominated by single-family homes, it also has market-rate apartments, publicly and privately subsidized apartments, resale-controlled and market-rate condominiums.

As in other parts of Santa Barbara, many households on the Mesa are getting smaller, and there are fewer families with children. At the same time, high mortgage payments and high property values have led to a number of illegal second dwelling units in single family neighborhoods. Some houses have become overcrowded with student renters from UCSB and SBCC. In addition, new technologies allow a growing group of people to work from their homes. All of these trends are likely to continue in the near future.

In the interest of maximizing walkability and providing more affordable housing options, there could be more **Multi-Family Zoning** along Cliff Drive. First priority should go toward areas within a 10-minute walk of the Village Center at Cliff and Meigs. Some **Small Second Units** could be allowed on single-family lots near Cliff Drive while still preserving the character of the neighborhoods.

With 16,000 students and additional faculty and staff, SBCC swells to a daily population well above the Mesa's 10,000 residents. No housing is currently provided on campus, and as a result daily ingress and egress of cars to the Mesa is dominated by the College. If the College is to maintain this student level, or grow, the Mesa is the most logical location for new housing to accommodate this growth, or increased levels of public transport must compensate.

## PARKS AND OPEN SPACE

The Mesa presently enjoys one of the best collections of large and small parks in the city, including a two-mile long shoreline. The General Plan previously called for the acquisition of the property south of Shoreline Drive and west of Shoreline Park for an expanded bluff-top park. This goal should be maintained and implemented as opportunities occur.

The park system should be enhanced with **Pedestrian Connections** between Honda Valley Park (Arroyo Hondo) and Cliff Drive, continuing to Ledbetter Beach; and between the Douglas Family Preserve and Elings Park. These walking connections would encourage longer Mesa hikes and a more active and healthy population.

Proximity to the ocean is one reason many Mesa residents live where they do, yet access to it and the shoreline are limited. **Additional Beach Access Stairs** should be provided at strategic new locations, and Ocean Overlooks should be created at Santa Cruz Street, Oliver Street, and the Coast Guard property south of Washington School. These features would enhance residents' experience of one of our greatest natural assets and encourage socializing to strengthen community.

As in most villages throughout the world, the Mesa should have a **Public Plaza** at its heart that encourages neighbors to gather. This type of urban open space would provide a community focal point. The frontage road at the northeast corner of Cliff and Meigs offers one logical site for this important function. A closure of this public street would reduce traffic problems at the Meigs intersection and could provide outdoor dining space for the resident restaurants, an enhanced public transit shelter area, a neighborhood information kiosk, landscaping, public art, and other public amenities, while offering the businesses more foot traffic and exposure. The plaza creation could be done economically, but would require a reorganization of parking for this commercial area.

The Mesa needs **Community Garden Space** for residents without yards to grow their own food. The activity of communal gardening increases community, self-sufficiency and sustainability. More Trees planted along streets and in parking lots will increase the urban forest with its many beneficial effects.

#### PUBLIC AND INSTITUTIONAL USES

The Mesa has three elementary schools spaced fairly evenly across its length, and Santa Barbara City College at its east end. Enhanced use of these campuses during off-school hours for neighborhood activities, such as sports, meetings, films and lectures could build community and reduce the need for trips to downtown.

The only City facility currently on the Mesa is Fire Station #6. As has been consistently stated in the General Plan, the Mesa should have its own **Public Library Branch**. A **Neighborhood Public Services Center and Post Office** would further build community and reduce the need for travel downtown. An ideal location would be near the intersection of Cliff and Meigs. One possibility is to combine these services with a **Community Meeting Space** at the old church property adjacent to Washington School.

#### CIRCULATION

Cliff Drive, our major transportation corridor, presents a unique opportunity for improvement that can change the way we move in and through our village. It is often the first impression of the Mesa for visitors, and touches most of our resident's lives every day. We have developed a number of recommendations for changing our main street, covered on their own series of pages.

Meigs Road, a major route between the Mesa and downtown, has bicycle lanes and recently improved sidewalks. These sidewalks should be made continuous from Cliff Drive to San Andres Street on at least one side, and **Crosswalks** to provide safe routes for pedestrians. The section of Meigs just north of Cliff Drive, with high-speed downhill cars encountering five outlets for cross traffic needs improved traffic control to make this area safer.

Shoreline Drive is a major tourist and resident route. **Sidewalks** should be made continuous on both sides of the street to Cliff Drive, and a crosswalk installed between La Mesa Park and Washington School. Bicycle riding should be encouraged with safe, posted routes

established; and **Bike Lanes** added to Cliff and Shoreline Drives. Emphasis should be placed on providing ways for our children to walk and bike to school safely.

The Mesa is currently served by several bus lines, but **Improved Transit Access** could be achieved with a bus route connecting Hendry's / Arroyo Burro Beach to the Harbor, and more frequent service downtown. More convenient public transit will reduce automobile traffic and provide better transportation for our non-drivers. Bus or shuttle stops within a 10-minute walk of most homes would be ideal.