



COLLEGE AREA COMMUNITY PLAN UPDATE

URBAN DESIGN FRAMEWORK, ISSUES + OPPORTUNITIES

JUNE 2021





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01.

INTRODUCTION



This workbook presents the College Area from a community design perspective. The concepts developed during this phase will be used to craft the Community Plan.



The City of San Diego is in the process of updating the community plan for the College Area. The College Area is projected to grow and change in the years ahead, and the plan update should guide that change in a way that serves city and regional goals while enhancing quality of life and the vision of the community.

COLLEGE AREA

The College Area is located approximately eight miles northeast of Downtown and includes San Diego State University (SDSU), a core area around the campus and its Trolley station, and the surrounding, predominantly single-family residential neighborhoods. El Cajon Boulevard, a major east-west commercial corridors, is the community's southern edge while I-8 and Alvarado Canyon border the community to the north. The College Area is projected to nearly double in population by 2050, with an increase in population from about 25,400 people in 2020 to about 49,100 people by 2050.

COMMUNITY PLAN UPDATE

The City of San Diego has begun a collaborative effort to update the College Area Community Plan, which was last updated in 1989.

Community plans provide goals and policies for housing, mobility, open space & parks, public facilities, conservation

& sustainability, urban design and historic preservation. The updated community plan will help to revitalize key activity centers, provide housing options and recreational opportunities, and strengthen connections between SDSU and the community. During the update process, Planning Department staff is working with the College Area community to identify and consider important questions, issues, and opportunities including:

- How can the community best plan for new **housing opportunities** for a diversity of community members?
- How can College Area strengthen the **community's connection to SDSU**?
- How can the community support neighborhood businesses, including those along the **El Cajon Boulevard corridor**?
- How can the community build on College Area's robust **transit network**, including the trolley and the El Cajon Boulevard Bus Rapid Transit?
- Where can College Area create **public and recreation spaces** that provide opportunities to get outside, connect and play?

•How will College Area grow over the next 20-30 years?

URBAN DESIGN FRAMEWORK, ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

This Workbook presents the College Area from a community design perspective. It builds on detailed existing conditions analysis done during the first phase of the Plan Update to identify key issues and opportunities.

This Workbook is sets the stage for a program of urban design analysis of:

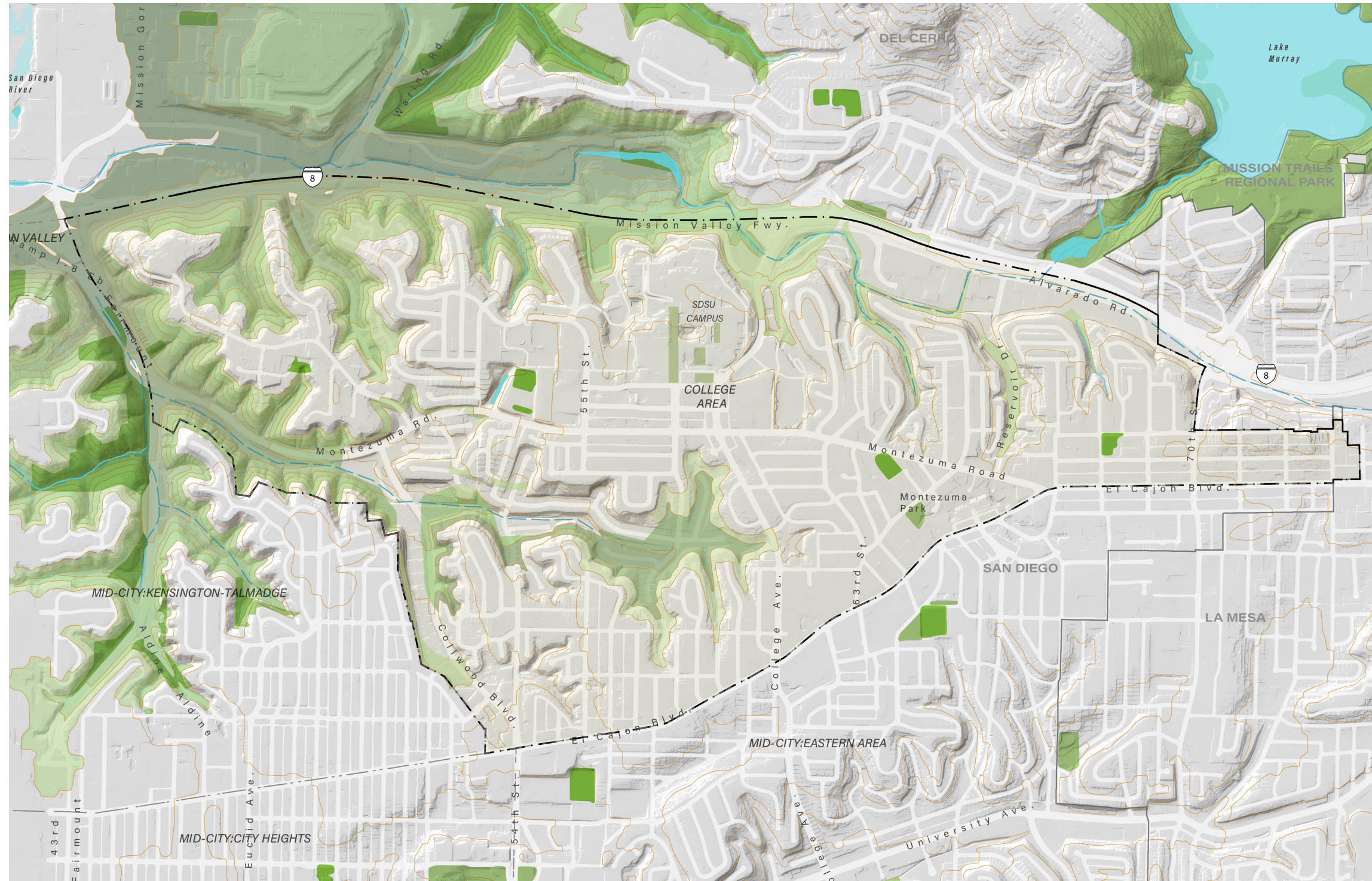
- Streetscape and Urban Greening
- Development and Urban Form
- Parks and Public Spaces

The concepts developed during this phase will be used to craft land use alternatives and a preferred plan, and to provide detailed guidance for future public investments and development standards for private development.



01.

URBAN DESIGN FRAMEWORK



- Canyons
- Water Bodies
- Existing Parks
- Existing Joint-use Parks With Schools

LANDFORMS, NATURAL SYSTEMS & PARKS

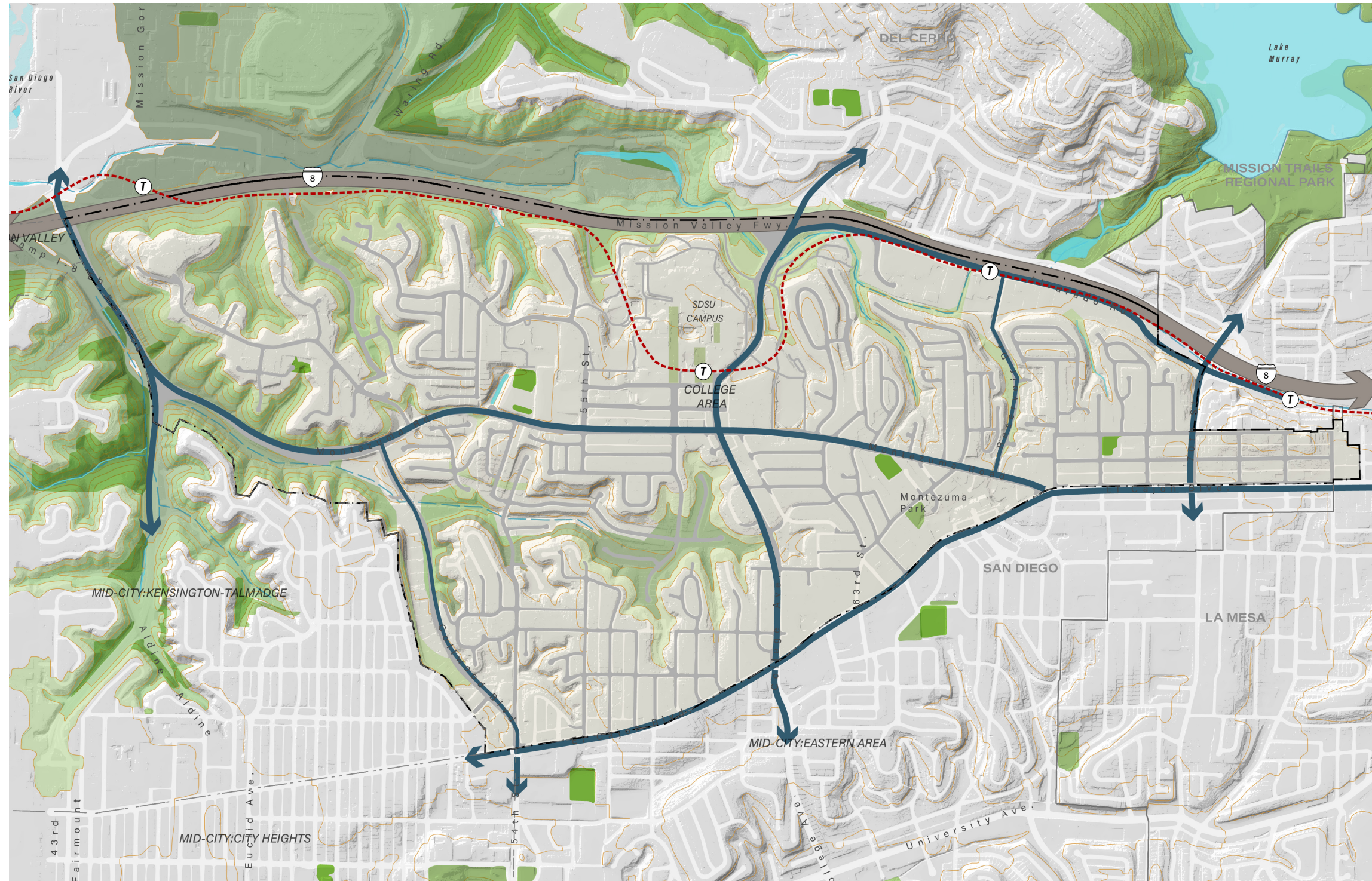
The College Area exhibits San Diego’s most characteristic topography: canyons and mesas. This topography provides the fundamental sense of place in the community.

The northern and western edges of the community have significant topographic changes, with steep slopes descending from the mesa rims. Canyons are formed by drainages, which come together toward the northwestern edge of the community and feed into the San Diego River in Mission Valley.

The mesa, where almost all of College Area’s neighborhoods are, slopes down gently from north to south, with SDSU at a somewhat higher elevation than El Cajon Boulevard.

While the steep canyons are primarily undeveloped, they are mainly in private ownership and inaccessible to the public.

CIRCULATION



- Major Corridors
- T Trolley Station

The canyon and mesa topography strongly influence the College Area's circulation network.

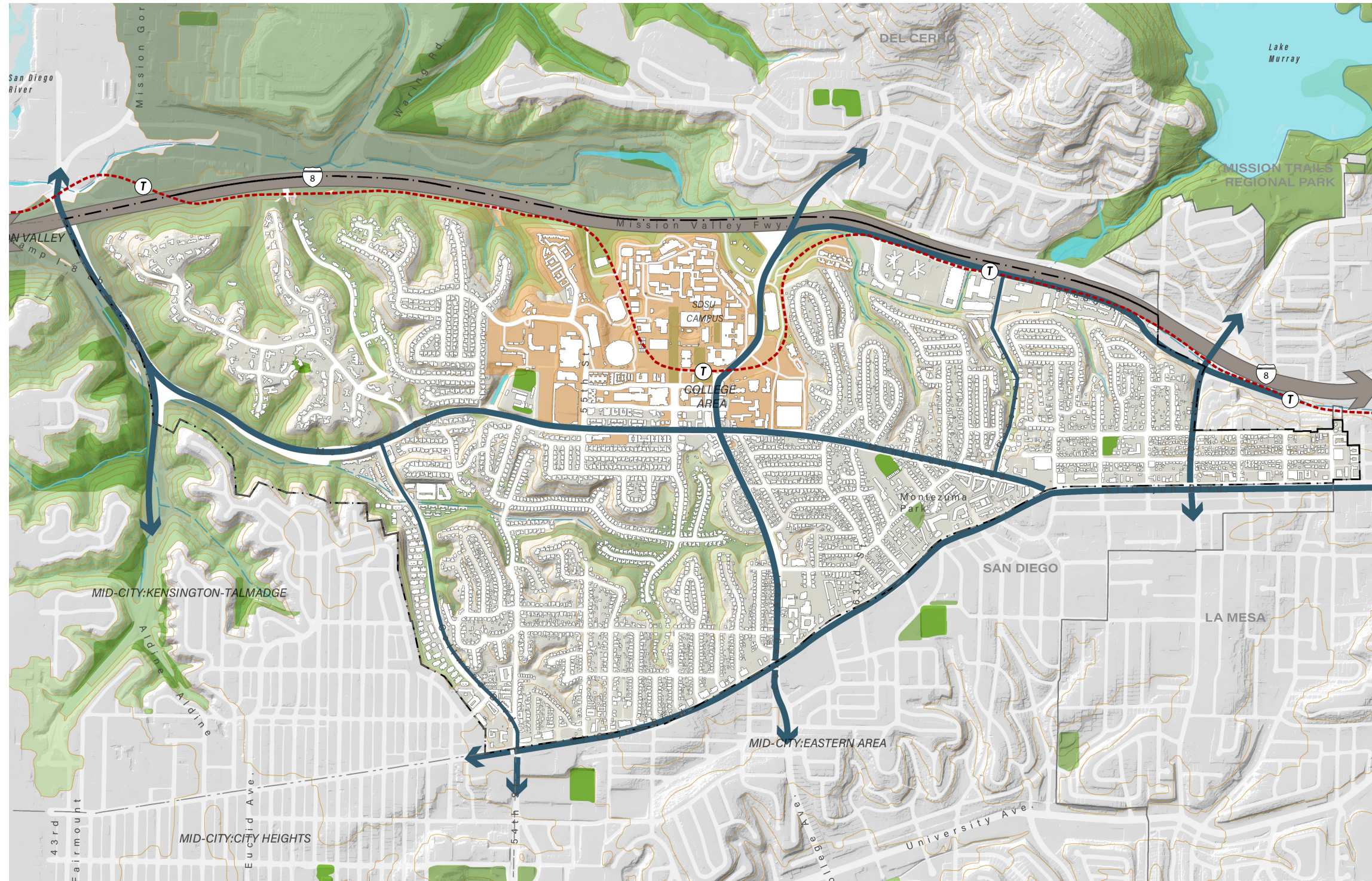
El Cajon Boulevard crosses the mesa, and predates Interstate 8 as the highway connecting San Diego to the east. Neighborhoods close to El Cajon Boulevard tend to have relatively connective streets. In these areas, the grid pattern generally spans around 600 feet by 300 feet in size, although varied in block size and orientation.

I-8 and Fairmount Boulevard follow canyon bottoms and define the community's access from the west and north, feeding local streets that often end in cul de sacs on canyon rims.

The overall circulation pattern is hierarchical, with a small number of continuous routes that must serve all modes of travel. The three key corridors—Montezuma Road, El Cajon Boulevard, and College Avenue—act as the major community spines.

Today, while most of these corridors have sidewalks and some have facilities for bikes and transit, they are primarily auto-oriented.

URBAN FORM



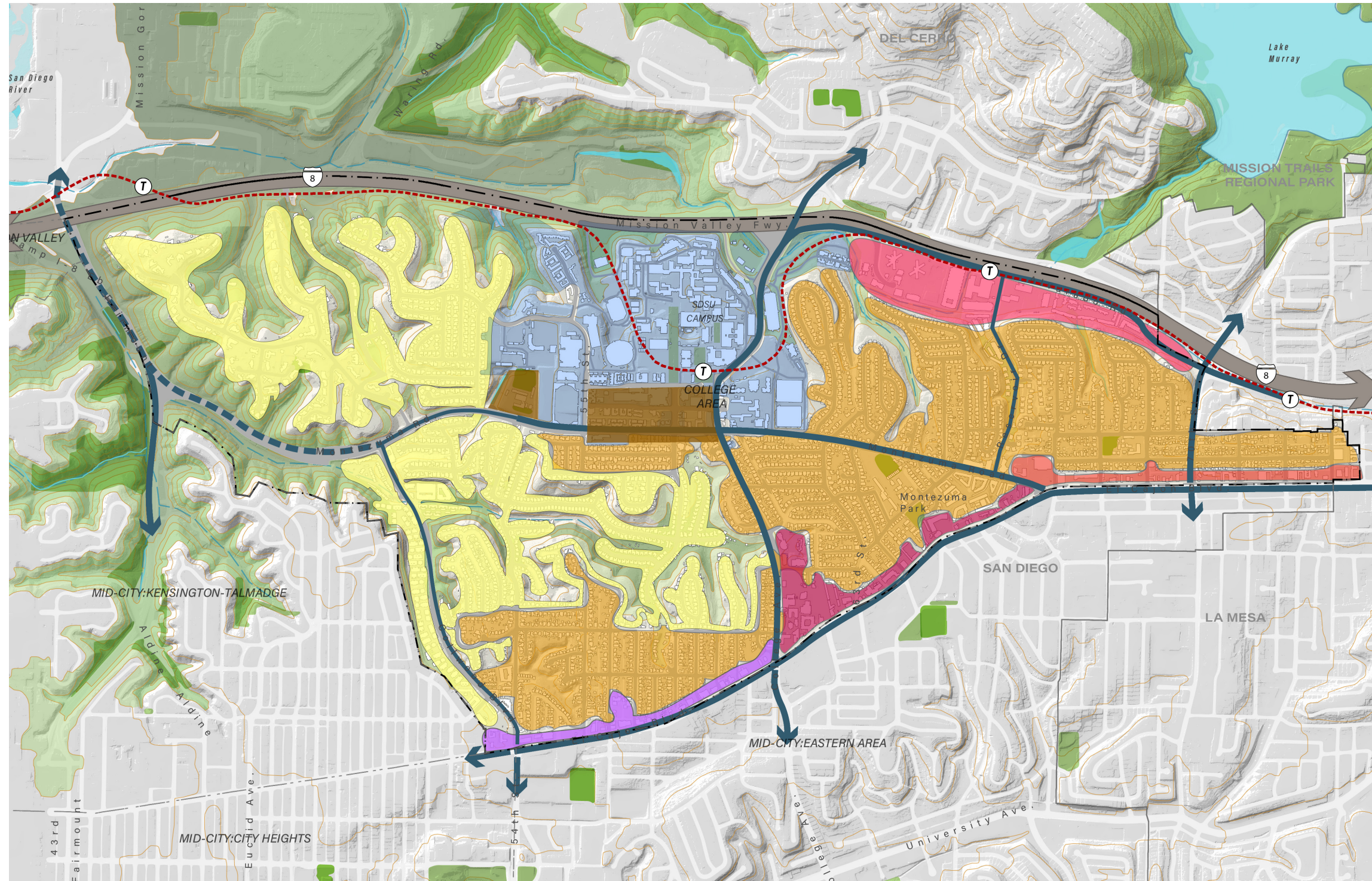
- Major Corridors
- T Trolley Station
- Building Footprints
- SDSU Campus

The street pattern is the framework for parcels, buildings, and neighborhoods. The earliest neighborhoods and commercial development were built adjacent to and along El Cajon Boulevard, starting in the 1930s. Development in much of the community took off in the 1950s - even today, half of the community's residential buildings date to that decade.

The majority of the College Area consists of single family homes on lots that typically range between 5,000 to 15,000 square feet. Higher density housing is clustered directly adjacent to SDSU and along portions of the major corridors. Commercial activity is located in commercial centers and small-scale standalone commercial buildings, mostly along El Cajon Boulevard. Multifamily and commercial lot sizes range significantly, from 4,000 to 150,000 square feet, depending on land use and location.

SDSU's relatively urban, pedestrian-oriented campus is a distinct presence in the community. The formal pattern and higher-intensity built form of campus is shared by the emerging mixed-use district directly to the south. Finally, the canyon bottom along Alvarado Road is characterized by a variety of larger buildings arranged in different ways on their sites.

COMMUNITY CHARACTER



- Canyon Residential
- Urban Residential
- SDSU Campus
- Hospital/Research
- Campus/Community Seam on Montezuma
- El Cajon West
- El Cajon Central
- El Cajon East

The mesa, bluffs, and canyons are the foundation of the urban form of the College Area. The circulation network is laid on top of this topography, while connecting to the larger grid of San Diego. Urban development follows main thoroughfares and stays largely confined to the mesa.

El Cajon Boulevard, the largest and most established corridor, has a continuous, commercial character but there are three distinct segments along its length defined by parcel and block sizes, and scale of development. The western and eastern segments have smaller parcels; the western segment has a higher frequency of intersecting streets due to the block orientation with shorter side along El Cajon. The central segment of the Boulevard between College Avenue and Montezuma Road has larger blocks without a regular street grid. The buildings in this segment are taller with larger footprints.

Residential neighborhoods are largely suburban in character, though a distinction can be made between the neighborhoods on the open mesa and those that come up to the edges of canyons.

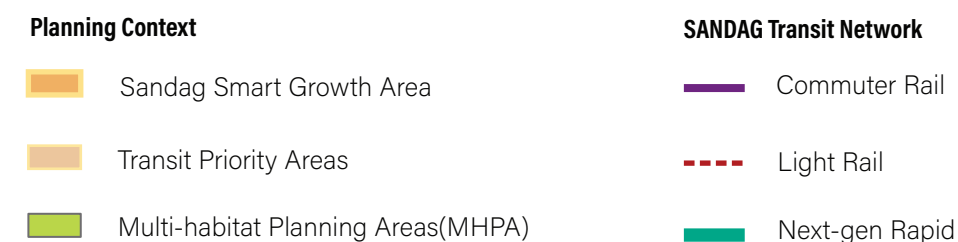
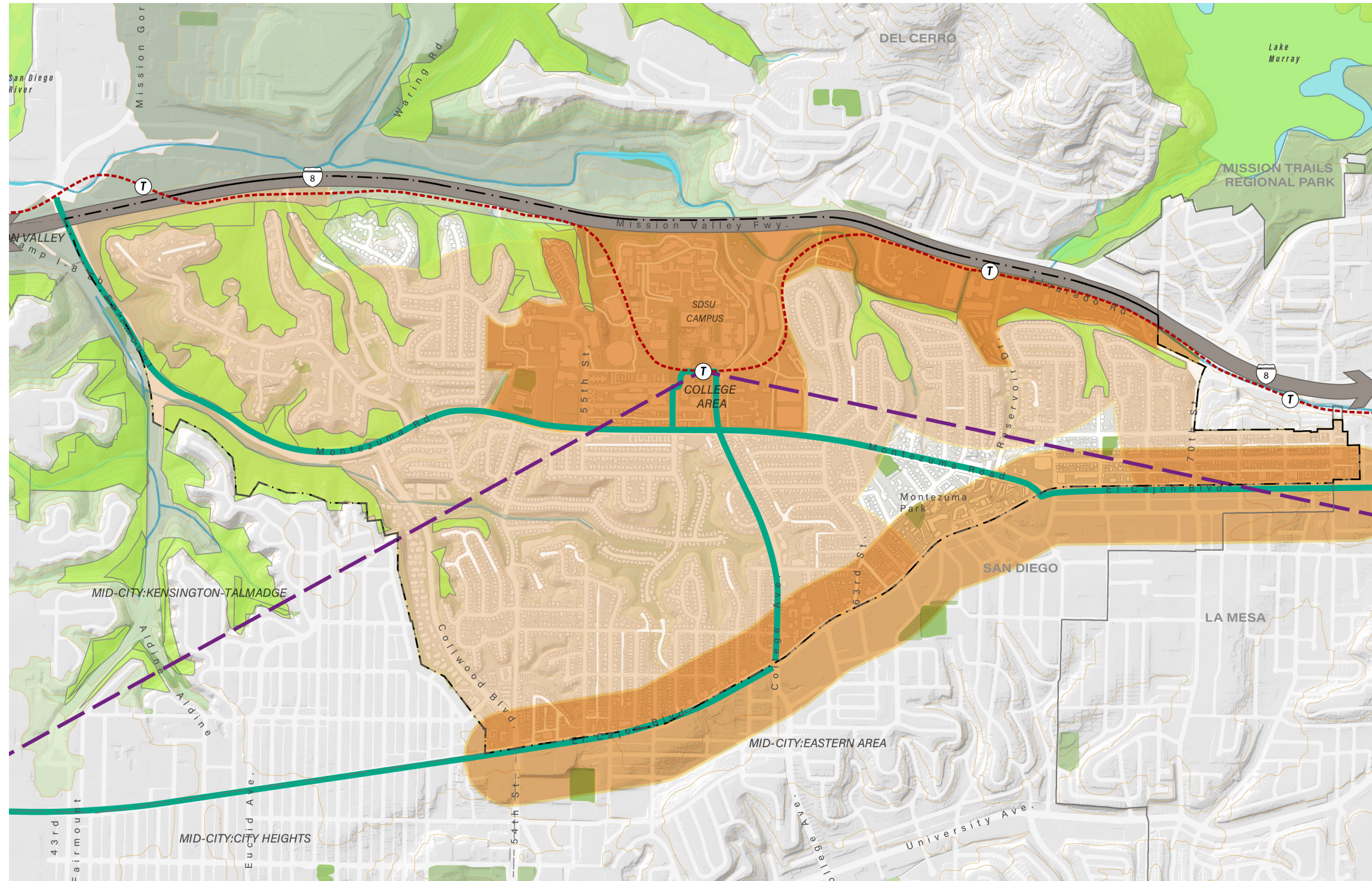
The area along Alvarado Road is its own distinct environment, at the canyon bottom along I-8, and characterized by the hospital and a mix of office and multifamily housing development.

Last but not least is the SDSU campus with majority of the buildings built in the Mission Revival architectural style. Although there is a formality in the organization of the campus itself, it doesn't offer a formal presence along Montezuma Road or College Avenue. The blocks between Lindo Paseo and half block south of Montezuma Road, forms a seam between the campus and the community, which can be further strengthened by improved connections, placemaking strategies, and streetscape elements.



COMMUNITY CHARACTER

Community character and design inform how residents and visitors experience it and remember it. Community character plays an important role in creating a distinct identity, and influence the overall quality of life. While it predominantly relates to the aesthetic quality of the urban form and the resulting sensory experience, it can have a significant impact on economic development, community health and well-being, safety, vitality, public services and mobility.



SMART GROWTH & ECOLOGICAL CONSERVATION

An integrated approach to land use and mobility is important to reduce dependence on privately owned vehicles. Both San Diego and the larger region are committed to focusing growth in mixed use villages and corridors served by high frequency transit. At the same time, the region protects rare and endangered species by protecting undeveloped land with habitat value.

TRANSIT PRIORITY AREAS

Transit Priority Areas (TPAs) or areas within a half-mile of major public transit stops. Multifamily Residential projects in TPAs are not required to provide parking, an incentive which can reduce development costs and increase housing production. Affordable housing projects within TPAs are eligible for density bonuses beyond standard state bonuses for affordable housing.

SMART GROWTH AREAS

Portions of the community are also designated by SANDAG as Smart Growth Areas. These areas should be planned to create more housing, jobs, and transit accessible places. Smart Growth Areas also receive higher priority for transportation improvements. In the College Area, **College Avenue and Montezuma Road** is identified as a Community Center; the **SDSU campus and station area** is designated as a Special Use Center; **Alvarado Medical Center and light rail station** is designated as a Town Center; and **El Cajon Boulevard** is identified as a Mixed Use Transit Corridor.

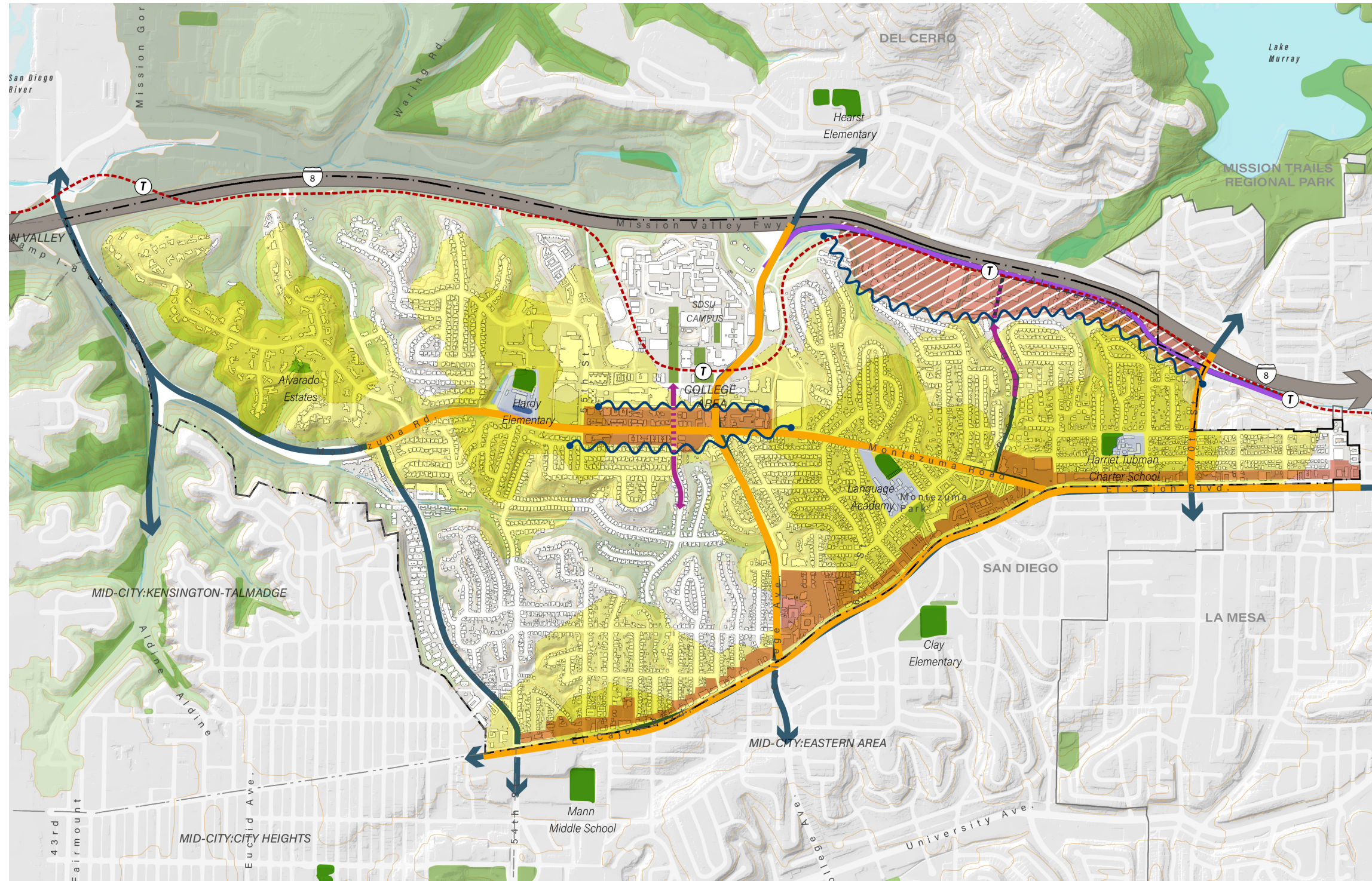
MULTI-HABITAT PLANNING AREAS

The Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP) is a comprehensive, long-term habitat conservation planning program. At its core is the identification of Multi-Habitat Planning Area (MHPA). Within the MHPA, development is limited to protect and ensure the viability of covered" species, as well as to preserve a network of open space, habitat, and wildlife linkages in San Diego. In the College Area, much of the undisturbed scrub and chaparral along canyon slopes is protected as MHPA.



02.

ISSUES + OPPORTUNITIES



CONSTRAINTS

PARKS + PUBLIC SPACES

Montezuma Park, 1.2 acres in size, is the College Area's only neighborhood park. The community also has three "joint use parks" at Hardy Elementary, Harriet Tubman School, and Language Academy. These sites are available for community use during non-school hours, but may not have a full set of park amenities. The community currently has just 0.4 acres of park land per 1,000 residents, and limited available land for new parks.

URBAN FORM

The College Area has defined residential neighborhoods and a core area around campus that has well-defined character. However, the key corridors that have such a strong influence on how the community is experienced do not have a cohesive urban character. In addition, the campus-community relationship is not obvious or well-defined along Montezuma Road. The area along Alvarado Road is disconnected from the rest of the community due to steep slopes, and I-8 freeway acts as a barrier. Development within this district feels fragmented and disconnected.

ACCESS + KEY CORRIDORS

The key corridors offer a high-stress environment to pedestrians and bikers due to fast-moving traffic, sidewalks and bike facilities that are not well buffered, a lack of tree canopy and amenities, and the auto-scaled development pattern. While the SDSU transit station is gracious and well-integrated into its district, the stations along Alvarado Road lack easy access from adjacent neighborhoods.

Streetscape Analysis

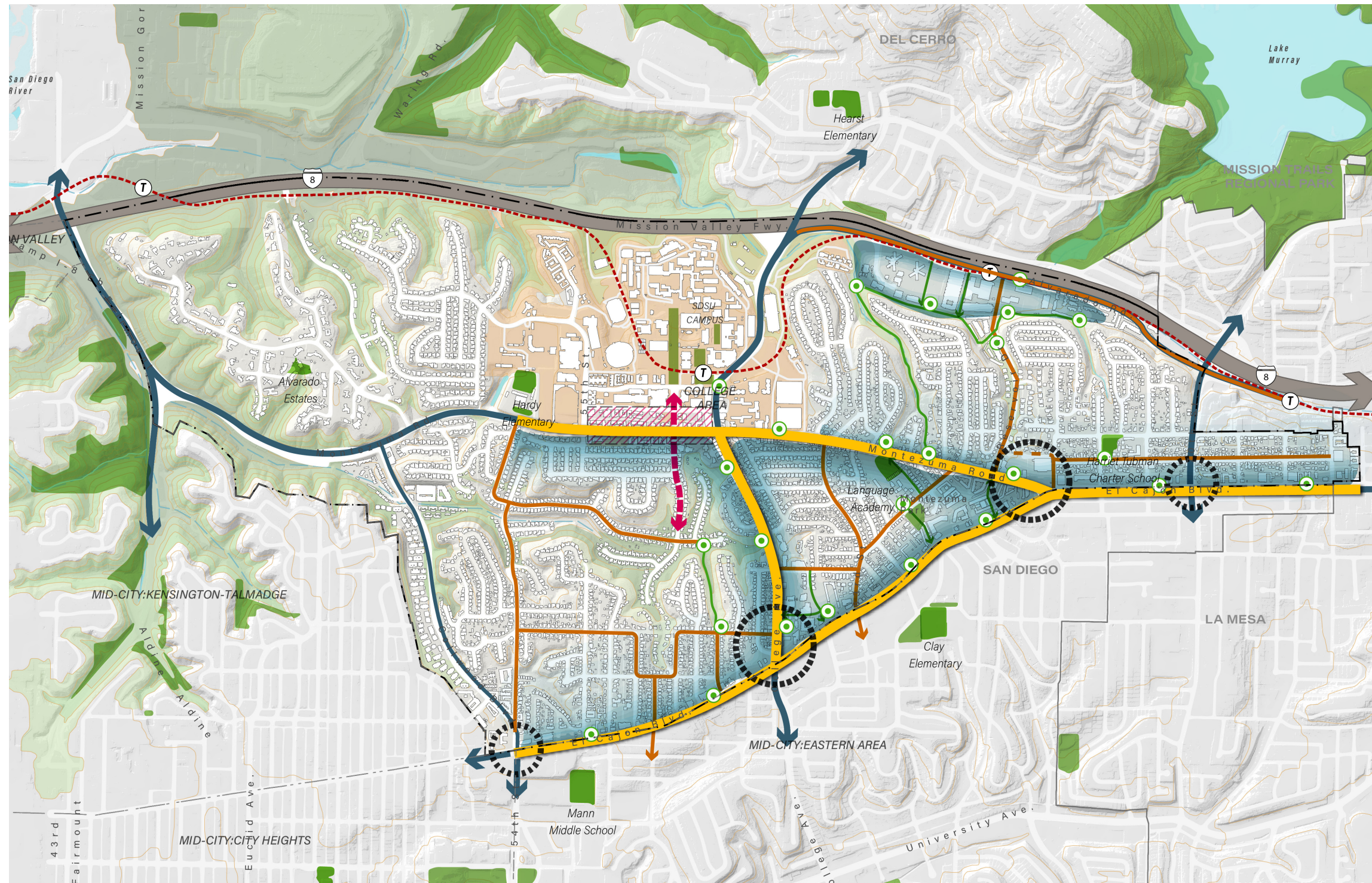
- High Stress Environment For Bikes And Pedestrians
- Lack Of Pedestrian-friendly Environment
- 5 & 10 Minute Walkshed From Parks/Joint-Use Sites

Parks/Open spaces

- Campus Plazas
- Existing Parks
- Existing Joint-use Parks With Schools

Development Analysis

- Lack Of Cohesive Built Environment/public Realm
- Disconnected From The Community And Lacking In Cohesive Identity.
- ~ Perceived/Physical Barriers



OPPORTUNITIES

The College Area will need to absorb substantial new development in the coming years to fulfill the need for jobs and housing. New development can provide an opportunity for new community-serving amenities, enhance quality life and offer housing and employment options.

PARKS + PUBLIC SPACES

Opportunities to add new park land and public spaces should be explored and prioritized. Opportunities include new parks on City-owned land and vacant parcels; public realm transformation to create complete streets and linear parks; and small public spaces created as part of future development. There are also great opportunities to enhance the quality of existing parks and joint-use sites, and make access improvements across busy corridors. The canyons which are the predominant natural feature in College Area also create a great opportunity for access to natural open space.

URBAN FORM

A high-quality built environment can strengthen sense of place and identity. Activation along corridors can be created by integrating ground-floor uses with the public realm. Transit stops can become vibrant activity nodes with businesses, social gathering spaces and cultural activities. Encouraging development of a diverse scale and intensity allows infill to be compatible with existing development and offers a variety of housing choices. The SDSU campus could have a stronger connection with adjacent neighborhoods along Montezuma Road, by introducing land use and programming that serves both the campus and the larger community.

ACCESS + KEY CORRIDORS

El Cajon Boulevard, Montezuma Road and College Avenue can become multi-functional corridors, that:

- Offer comfortable and attractive mobility choices, including transit, walking, and biking;
- Provide gracious sidewalks, shade trees, and a high-quality of public realm;
- Strengthen the connection between SDSU and El Cajon Boulevard;
- Prioritize street trees and integrate green infrastructure in streetscape design; and
- Create opportunities for social interaction.

Streetscape Potential

- Multi-functional Corridors
- Ped and Bike Improvements to Secondary Streets
- New Pedestrian Connections

Parks/Open spaces

- Potential Parks/-Public Space
- Existing Parks
- Existing Joint-use Parks With Schools

Development Opportunities

- Opportunity For Cohesive Public Realm And Built Form Through Mixed Use Infill And/or Enhanced Streetscape
- Enhanced Campus-Community Seam
- Strengthen Campus-Community Connection

- Potential Activity Nodes



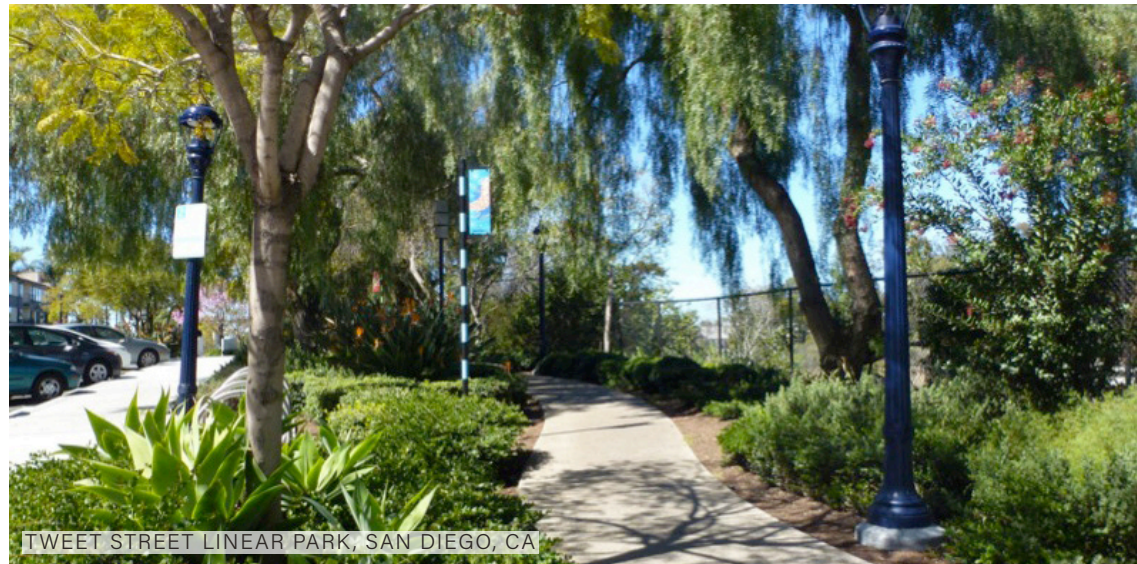
SANTANA ROW, SAN JOSE, CA



SEATTLE, WA



CASTRO VALLEY BOULEVARD, CASTRO VALLEY, CA



TWEET STREET LINEAR PARK, SAN DIEGO, CA



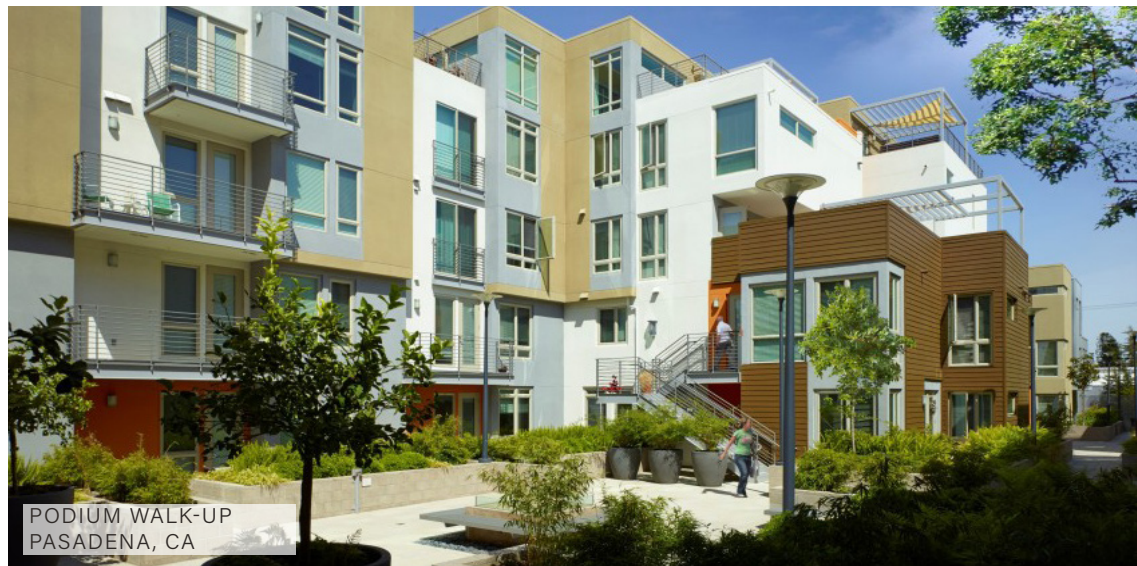
SANTA MONICA PIER, SANTA MONICA, CA



PALO ALTO, CA

STREETScape + URBAN GREENING OPPORTUNITIES

Good streetscape design improves opportunities for urban greening, creates a cohesive and attractive pedestrian environment, encourages social interaction, and contributes to a strong sense of place.



DEVELOPMENT + URBAN FORM OPPORTUNITIES

Development of diverse scale and intensity allow infill to be compatible with existing development, and provides diversity of housing types. Design and program of building ground floors contribute to a vibrant and engaging street experience.



PEARL DISTRICT, PORTLAND, OR



SOUTHWARD SCHOOL, PHILADELPHIA, PA



PRARIE LINE TRAIL, TACOMA, WA



PORTLAND, OR



PATRICIA'S GREEN, SAN FRANCISCO, CA

PARKS + PUBLIC SPACE OPPORTUNITIES

New public space opportunities can be explored on public and vacant sites and within both public realm and private realm. Sidewalks, street medians, parklets, canyon trails, multi-use paths/ greenways can be accommodated within public realm. Privately owned public spaces such as paseos, courtyards, arcades, galleries, plazas, etc. provide valuable social gathering spaces.