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[National City looks at turning its southwest corner into a 10-minute neighborhood](#)



National City has adopted a plan to turn its southwest corner into a transit-oriented, 10-minute neighborhood where the community can access transportation, work and shopping within walking or biking distance. (Nelvin C. Cepeda / The San Diego Union-Tribune)

Residents, businesses warn against gentrifying area

By [TAMMY MURGA](#)REPORTER

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A 760-acre swath of land in southwestern National City that is now home to a collection of disconnected businesses, apartments and residences could become a cohesive community with all the amenities under a plan recently adopted by the National City Council.

The area is bounded by Plaza Boulevard to the north, State Route 54 to the south, Interstate 5 to the west and Highland Avenue to the east.

Within those boundaries are longtime residents and businesses ranging from corner markets to auto shops and auto dealerships. There's also the 24th Street Transit Center, Kimball Elementary School and Paradise Creek.

The area is not quite pedestrian-friendly, said Alicia Sanchez, a community health worker, or promotora, who lived in Old Town National City for 10 years before moving to the downtown area.

National City 10-minute mile plan

Site encompasses 760 acres within one mile of 24th Street Transit Center.



Sources: The City of National City; Nextzen; OpenStreetMap

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Walking from one destination to another is dangerous due to the high volumes of cars, she said in Spanish via a phone interview. There are also too many vacant lots and shops with toxic waste near residences, which is concerning for people such as her husband, who has cancer, she added.

Sanchez and other residents said they can see a more connected area under the plan, but with some caveats: increase affordable housing and avoid displacement of residents and small businesses.

The plan, dubbed the 24th Street Transit Oriented Development Overlay, or TODO plan, envisions addressing some of these concerns via a series of recommendations that would turn the city's southwestern corner into a 10-minute neighborhood, a place where residents can meet their daily needs within a short walking or cycling distance.

Some potential ways to do this include:

- Improve connectivity from the transit center to the San Diego Bay in the southwest, as well as to downtown National City in the northeast via Paradise Creek.
- Have D Avenue serve as a major bridge between Plaza Boulevard and 24th Street.
- Strengthen pedestrian and bicycle connections to the transit station, especially along 22nd Street.
- Increase and diversify housing opportunities through multiple housing prototypes that would integrate into the existing city fabric. Some examples include tiny homes and adaptive reuse of industrial and commercial structures.



TODO does not mandate any land use or regulation changes, “but serves as a blueprint for any potential changes,” said Martin Reeder, principal planner with National City. Its recommendations will be considered for any proposed zoning regulations as the city updates its general plan.

While the plan has received majority support, some fear it could have gentrifying effects and lead to displacement.

“The Environmental Health Coalition works very closely with many residents within Old Town areas of National City,” said Danny Serrano, campaign director with the Coalition. “Their concerns are such that, if new developments or capacity for new development is significantly increased in their communities, that can have a gentrifying effect. It could have the potential for increased rents and so then that leads to dislocation. There needs to be a balance.”

Balance, for Steve Bidi who has long managed the corner National City Market on 18th Street, is about improving the area without gentrification so that longtime, small businesses can remain and more residents can easily access their storefronts by foot, he said.

Bradley Bang, a retired teacher and National City resident, said the plan can work if the city adopts its own inclusionary housing policy.

“We need to encourage affordable housing. I think (the plan) could work if there was some inclusionary policy and this is a good opportunity to incorporate an inclusionary policy into our general plan,” he said. “We need development here in the city but, on the other hand, we need to match what Chula Vista and San Diego are doing.”

National City does not have inclusionary zoning as does its neighbors. Residents and the Coalition have recommended that the city consider incorporating an initiative akin to San Diego’s “Complete Communities,” an optional program that incentivizes developers to build near public transit and surpass density limits so long as a percentage of homes are restricted for very low- and moderate-income housing units.

Council members have expressed support for an inclusionary policy and said a discussion on the topic would come as the city updates its general plan. For now, the council adopted the plan on June 1 with a 4-1 vote after adding language that the recommendations must not displace residents nor create incompatible new land uses.

“We need revitalization without gentrification, and we need those efforts to be very laser focus, very intentional and protections need to be there. So, I think the language that we are including gives us that,” said Mayor Alejandra Sotelo-Solis.

Councilman Ron Morrison, who voted against adopting the plan, warned that the added language was too general and emphasized the possibility of displacement.

“Both the concept of displacement and gentrification have so many different definitions depending on who you talk to that by putting them in at this level without that discussion happening, I think just puts a huge amount of limits on us,” he said.

To learn more about the TODO plan, visit 24thstreettodo.com.