

# The Merrydale Segment of the North San Rafael Promenade



Prepared by the Merrydale Promenade Citizens Advisory Group and WTB-TAM  
April 12, 2022

## Table of Contents

### 1. Cover Letter

### 2. Appendix

Exhibit A: History of the Merrydale Promenade Segment

Exhibit B: Project Map (Circulation Diagram)

Exhibit C: Regional Connections Map

Exhibit D: Northgate Path Dimensions

Exhibit E: Civic Center Path Dimensions

Exhibit F: Alternatives Drawings

Exhibit G: Cross Sections

Exhibit H: Area Parking Inventory

April 12, 2022

San Rafael City Council  
1400 Fifth Avenue  
San Rafael, California 94901

RE: Merrydale Road segment of the North San Rafael Promenade

Dear Vice Mayor Kertz,

Thank you for taking time to focus on the Merrydale segment of the North San Rafael Promenade, one of the most important unbuilt projects in San Rafael and Marin County. This project is part of a larger system of pathways intended to connect the two halves of North San Rafael that are divided by US 101. It was first conceived in 1997 (see **Appendix Exhibit A**) and has been in planning for over two decades. The segments immediately to the north (Northgate) and south (Civic Center Drive) of the Merrydale Promenade segment are already complete. The Merrydale Road segment is the key gap remaining to be closed (see **Appendix Exhibit B**).

Not only will this segment connect future Northgate Town Square residents to SMART and the Civic Center, but it will also connect the neighborhoods, schools, and civic and recreational facilities east and west of US 101 to each other, to the rest of San Rafael, and to all of Marin and Sonoma Counties via SMART and the regional pathway network. The Merrydale Promenade segment is at the heart of Marin's Multi-Modal Sustainability Grid, and connects three different regional pathways: the North - South Greenway, the North - South Bikeway, and the Bay Trail (see **Appendix Exhibit C**).

From the very beginning, the Promenade was conceived as more than just a utilitarian path. It was envisioned as a conduit for social connectivity and for connectivity between humans and nature. We continue to strive for that vision, and for a pathway that people will actually enjoy using because it's attractive and fits in with the surrounding terrain, vegetation, and creeks both tidal and ephemeral.

With this commitment to environmental stewardship in mind, we ask that the project avoid the removal of any of the native California oak trees or redwood trees that grow along the western shoulder of Merrydale Road. Merrydale Road is unnecessarily wide (as much as 48 feet in places) given its function, causing excessive run-off during rain events. Here lies an opportunity to reduce overall impermeable surface area and redirect water into more ecologically beneficial bioswales which manage storm water, mitigate flooding, and filter runoff before it reaches Gallinas Creek.

Best practices for multi-use pathway design call for spatial separation of modes and sufficient space for cyclists and pedestrians to safely share the pathway despite their traveling at disparate speeds. The completed pathway segments immediately to the north and the south of the Merrydale segment follow best practices, with striping and different colored pavement demarcating separate zones for cyclists and pedestrians. The pathway to the north (around the perimeter of Northgate) includes an 8-foot bikeway alongside a 5.5-foot walkway for a total width of 13.5 feet (see **Appendix Exhibit D**). The pathway segment to the south (parallel to Civic Center Drive) includes a 10-foot bikeway alongside a 7-foot walkway for a total width of 17 feet (see **Appendix Exhibit E**). To



ensure continuity between these three Promenade segments, we recommend that the Merrydale segment likewise provide clearly signed and demarcated zones for bikes and pedestrians as well as strive for dimensions as close as possible to those on the Civic Center Drive segment.

Of the four alternatives that the City's consultants designed, we recommend advancing the No Parking alternative as the preferred alternative (see **Appendix Exhibit F**). In the other three alternatives, on-street parking would take up valuable space that could otherwise be used to widen the pathway to Civic Center Drive standards (17 feet) and to reduce the overall impermeable surface area and create new bioswales or areas for planting trees for summer shade (see **Appendix Exhibit G**). Recycled water is available along Merrydale Road. Two of the with-parking alternatives would require encroachment of new asphalt into the existing bioswale on the western side of Merrydale Road, as well as the removal of two native California oaks. Removing these trees is unnecessary and conflicts with the tree protection language found in San Rafael's General Plan and Community Climate Action Plan.

In the future, the Merrydale Promenade segment will play an increasingly prominent role as a hub of activity and movement in North San Rafael. It is the key connection linking Marin County's most significant new housing development to the County's regional multi-modal sustainability grid. The Promenade will plug future Northgate Town Square residents (as well as all of Terra Linda's existing residents) directly into SMART, the Bay Trail, and the regional active transportation network. Fewer trips originating and ending at Northgate, Civic Center, and other Terra Linda destinations will require cars. More residents, consumers, and visitors of all ages and abilities will be able to walk or ride bikes safely and conveniently to their destinations or to buses, trains, and ferries that will bring them to their destinations.

We envision the Merrydale Promenade segment as the future gateway to a North San Rafael increasingly oriented around people, community, and the environment rather than cars, highways, and parking. The Promenade is the City's welcome mat for those arriving by SMART train or North - South Greenway. This walkability and bicycle-friendliness will improve the vitality and health of North San Rafael's millennials, families, and retirees.

We envision low vehicular volumes on this dead-end segment of Merrydale Road, mainly consisting of visitors to the storage and Guide Dogs properties, and shuttle bus and ADA access to the SMART station. If the project must include on-street parking, we recommend that parking spaces "bump out" around the two oak trees marked for "removal" in the alternatives drawings, and that parking be time-limited. Parking and passenger drop-off for regular (non-ADA) SMART riders should occur on the east side of the station on Civic Center Drive, McInnis Parkway, and in existing parking lots.

There is ample parking within a short walk of Merrydale Road for all other parking needs (see **Appendix Exhibit H**). Insisting on parking in this area conflicts with the City's Climate Change goals and does not serve the community. This area is the premier opportunity to demonstrate real change in how things can be done in San Rafael by emphasizing safe, lovely, livable pedestrian walkways and bikeways.

By providing a safe, direct connection between where people live and where they want to go, the Merrydale Promenade segment will generate new multi-modal trips both locally and regionally, taking cars off the roads and reducing congestion and greenhouse gas emissions. When this project is complete, it will be a Safe Route to Schools, a Safe Route to Transit, a Safe Route to the Civic Center, Farmer's Market, and Fairgrounds, and for future residents of Northgate Town Square, a Safe Route Home.

We urge the City Council to direct staff to give high priority to pathway continuity, user safety, user experience, and minimizing environmental impacts (including preserving native trees, reducing overall permeable surface area, and preserving and enhancing bioswales). We urge Council to direct staff to place low priority on parking or to recommend the No-Parking alternative. Finally, we recommend Council to direct staff to devise a strategy to complete this vital project contemporaneously with the Northgate Town Square project and to seek funding for its construction as soon as possible.

Respectfully submitted,

Merrydale Promenade Citizens Advisory Group

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WTB-TAM

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## Appendix Exhibit A

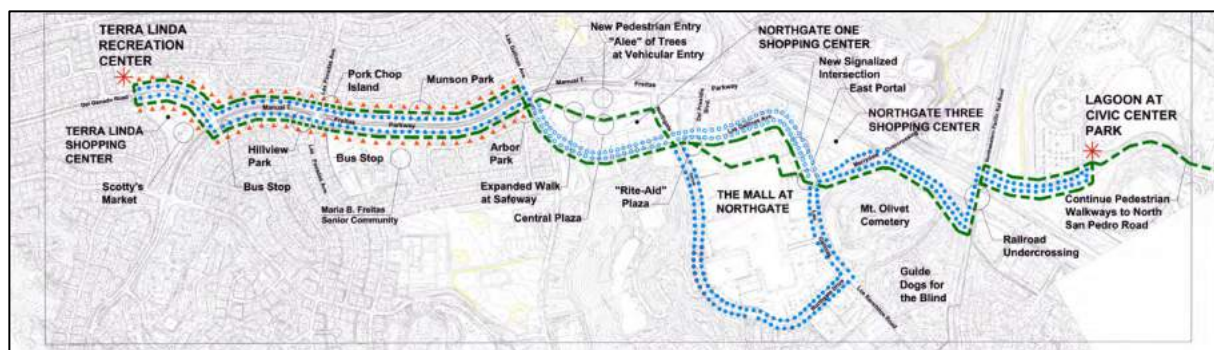
### History of the Merrydale Promenade Segment

1996

*North San Rafael Vision:* Community visioning process specifically identified desire to complete a bicycle and pedestrian pathway through the area and connecting major destinations.

2002

*North San Rafael Vision Promenade Conceptual Plan:* Adopted plan proposes improved bicycle and pedestrian connections between Terra Linda Recreation Center and Lagoon Park at the Marin Civic Center, and forming a connecting between the east and west sides of North San Rafael. The planning process included extensive public outreach and according to the City of San Rafael represented a community consensus.



2011 (and 2018 update)

*San Rafael Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan:* In 2011, the Merrydale Promenade was identified as a mid-term project to be built within 1-10 years. The 2018 Master Plan update listed the Merrydale Promenade project as a Group A highest priority project.



## Appendix Exhibit A

2012

*San Rafael Civic Center Station Area Plan:* “During the course of developing this Station Area Plan, this section of the Promenade became a key design concern. Merrydale Road North may experience some traffic increases from residents dropping off and picking up passengers at the SMART station on the west side. Similarly, this section of the Promenade will provide an important link to the station from the west, including the Northgate Shopping Center, for cyclists and pedestrians...[T]he new facility would be a shared bicycle/pedestrian path similar to portions of the Promenade already constructed...Although the Merrydale Road right-of-way appears adequate to accommodate this higher-quality connection, in some portions of the roadway it may require on-street parking prohibitions to achieve the benefit associated with separating bicycles and pedestrians from auto traffic.” (excerpt, page 20)

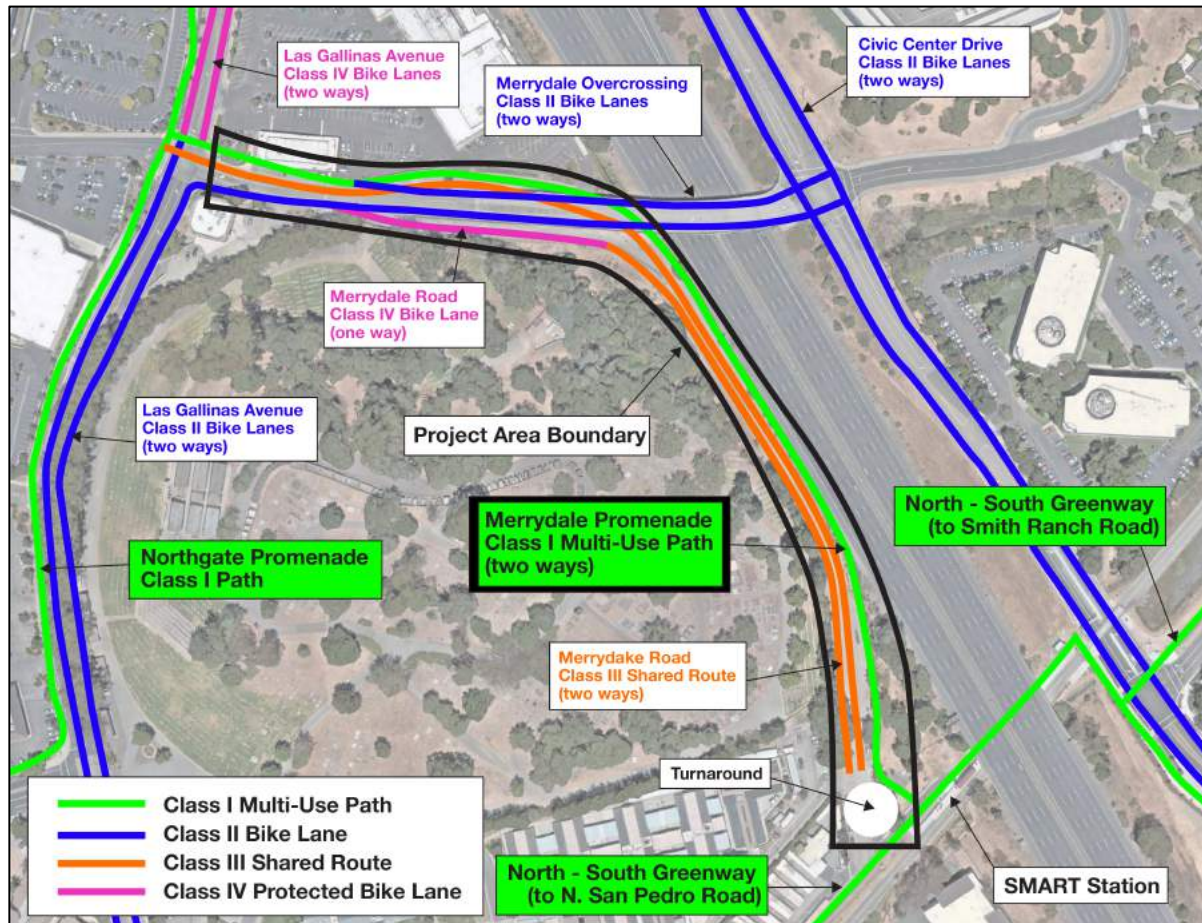


2016

*San Rafael General Plan:* Calls for implementation of the Bicycle Pedestrian Master Plan and specifically calls for “an excellent network of bikeways and pedestrian paths.” General Plan also calls for adoption of design criteria “to support alternative transportation modes to better meet user needs and minimize conflicts between competing modes.”

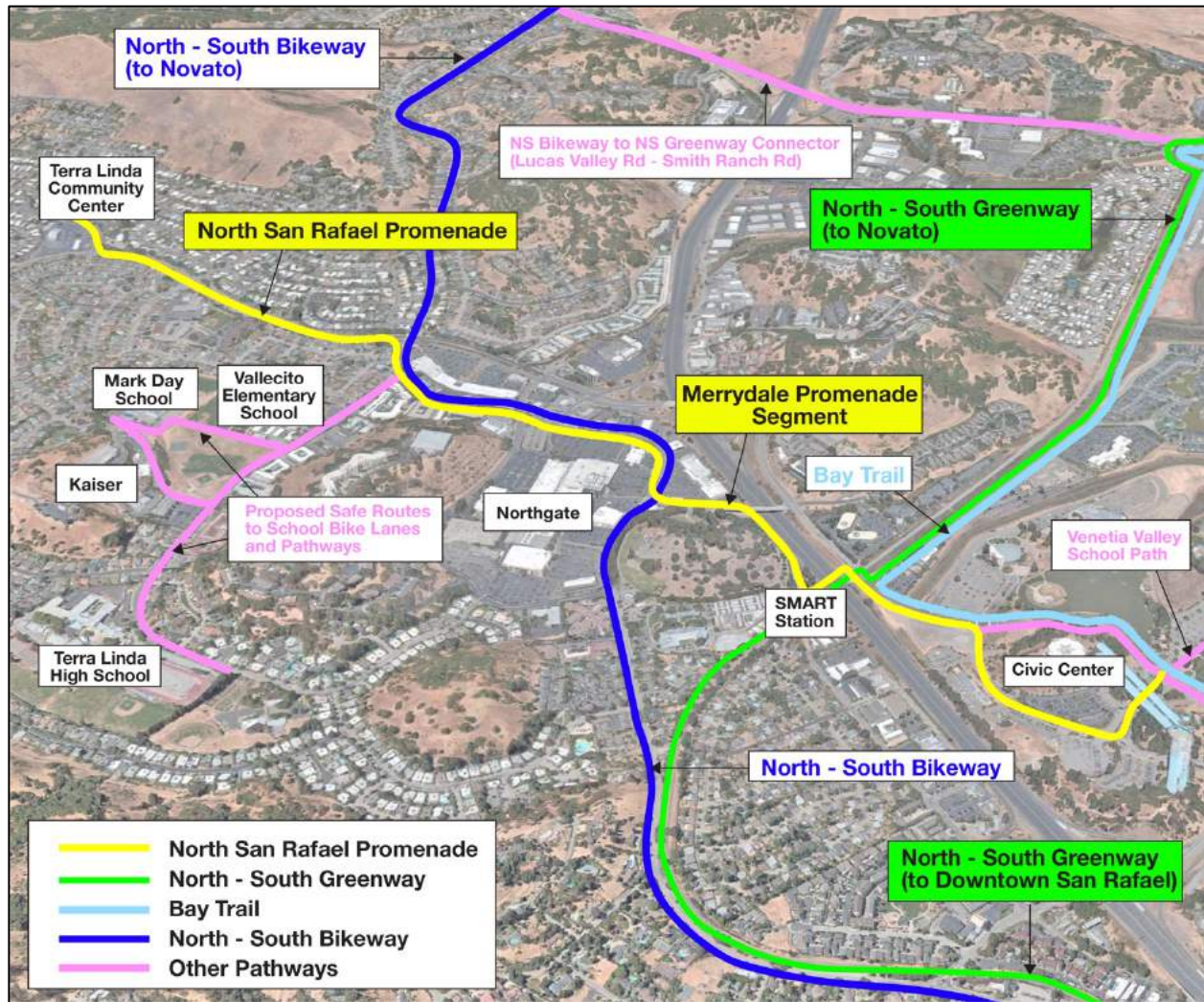


## Project Area Diagram





## Regional Connections Map



## Northgate Pathway Dimensions

### Northgate Promenade

Runs along perimeter of Northgate Shopping Center, parallel to Las Gallinas Ave.

Total pathway width: 13.5 feet

Bikeway component: 8 feet (4 feet in each direction)

Walkway component: 5.5 feet





## Civic Center Drive Pathway Dimensions

### Promenade at Civic Center Drive/Avenue of the Flags

Runs parallel to Civic Center Drive from the SMART station to the Lagoon Park roundabout.

Total pathway width: 17 feet

Bikeway component: 10 feet (5 feet in each direction)

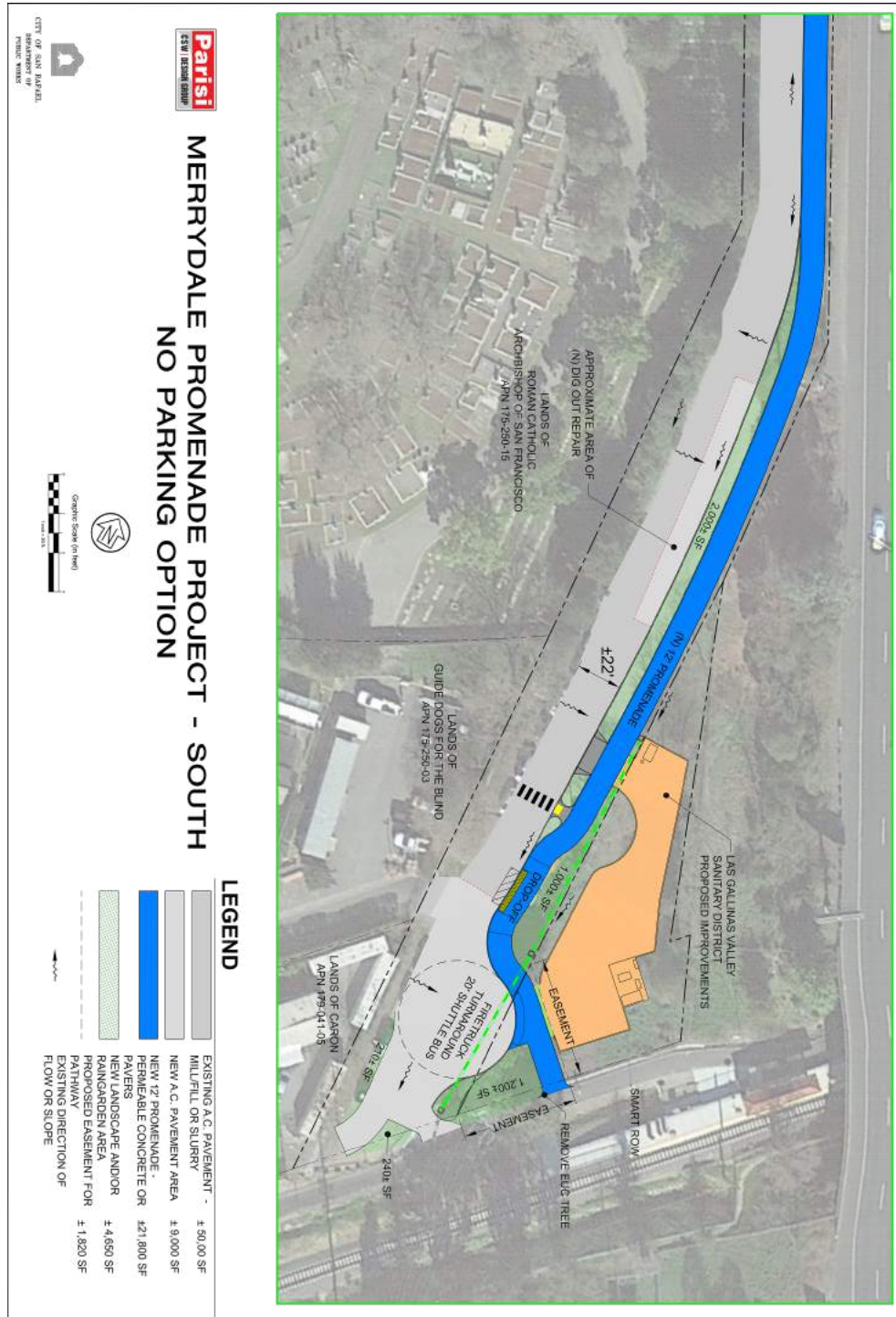
Walkway component: 7 feet



## Alternatives Drawings

CSW/Parisi, 2020

## No Parking Alternative

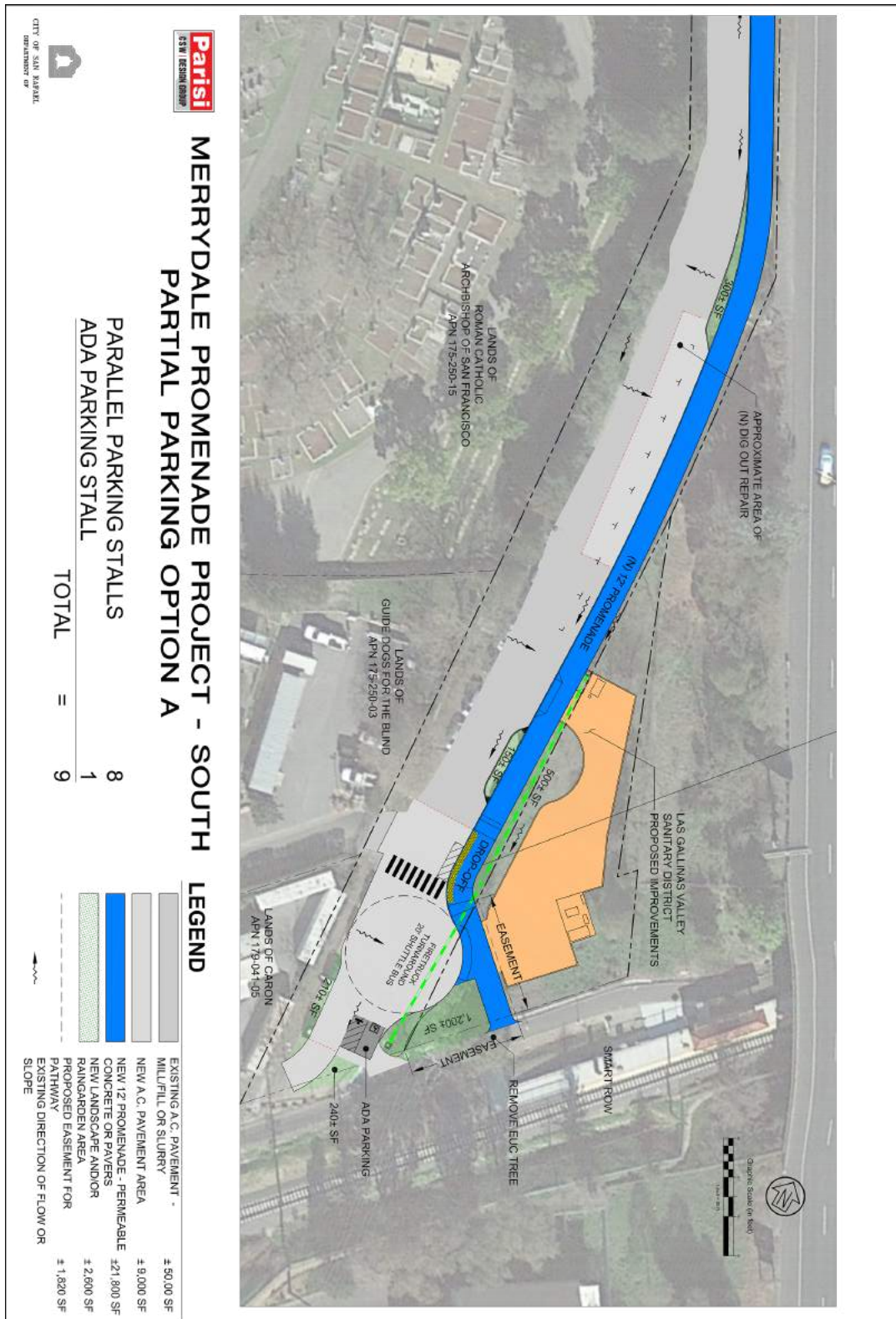




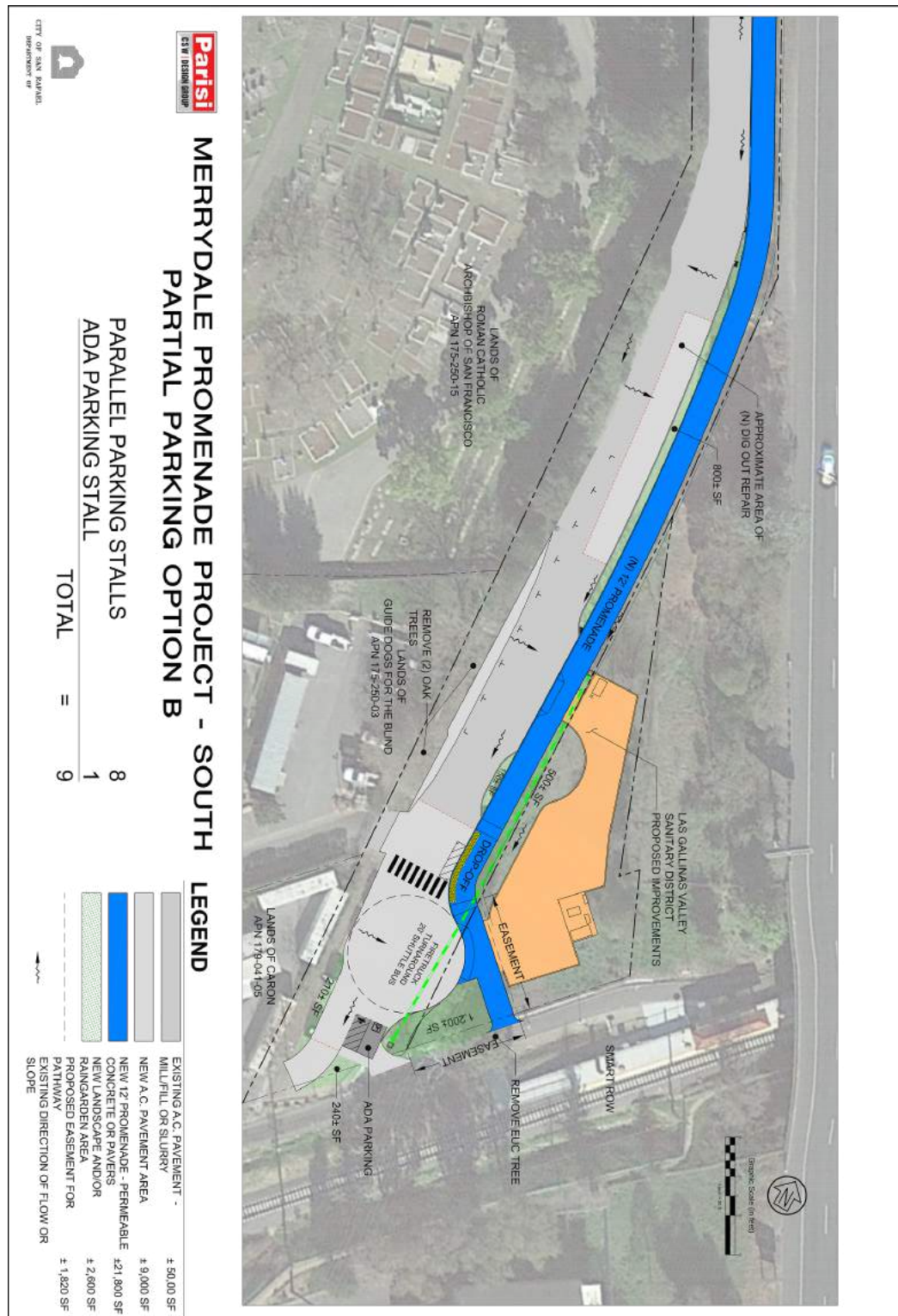
# Appendix Exhibit F

## Partial Parking Alternative A

Parking on the eastern side of Merrydale Road, adjacent the planned pathway.



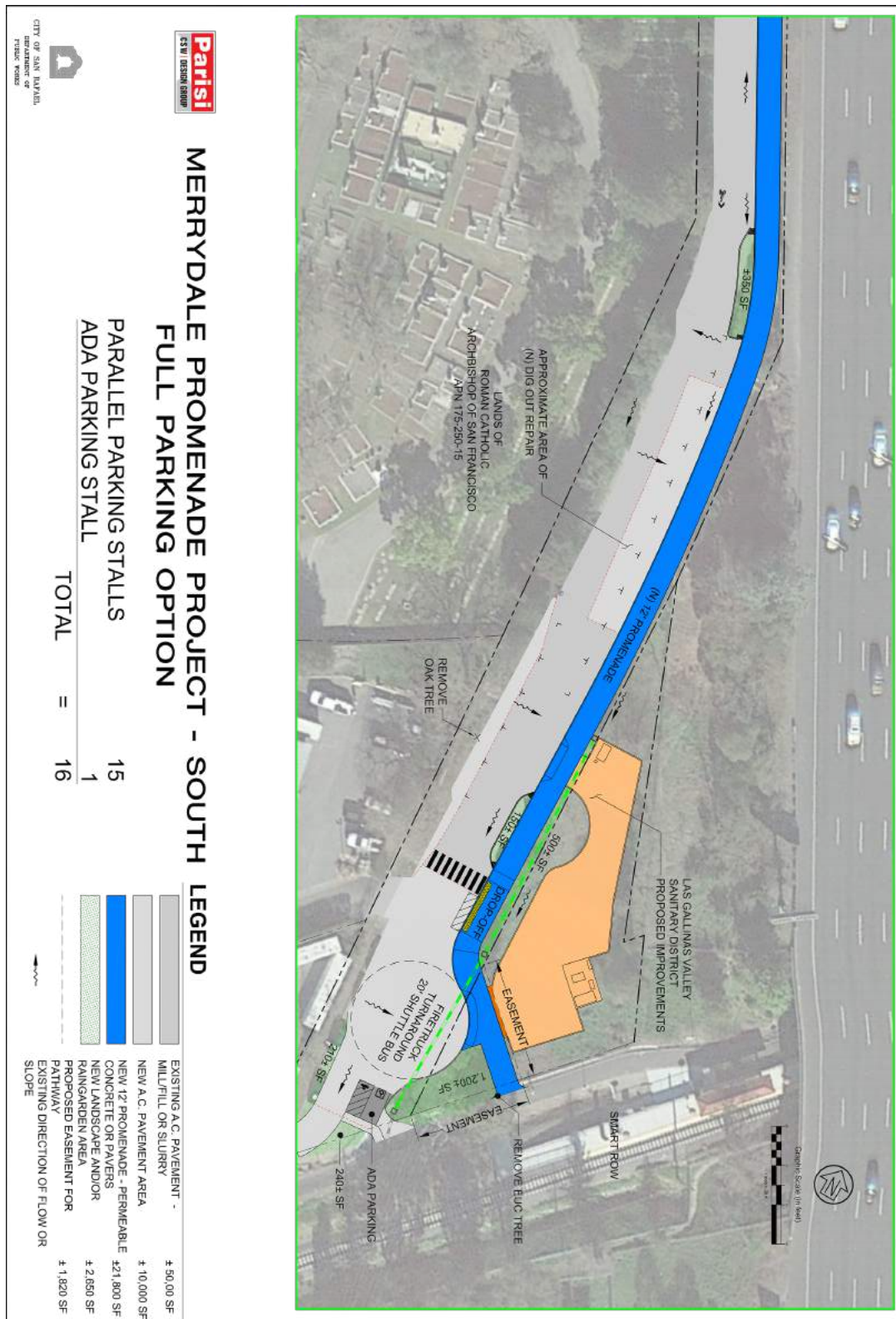
Parking on the western side of Merrydale Road, on the opposite side of the street from the planned pathway.





# Appendix Exhibit F

## Full Parking Alternative Parking on both sides of Merrydale Road

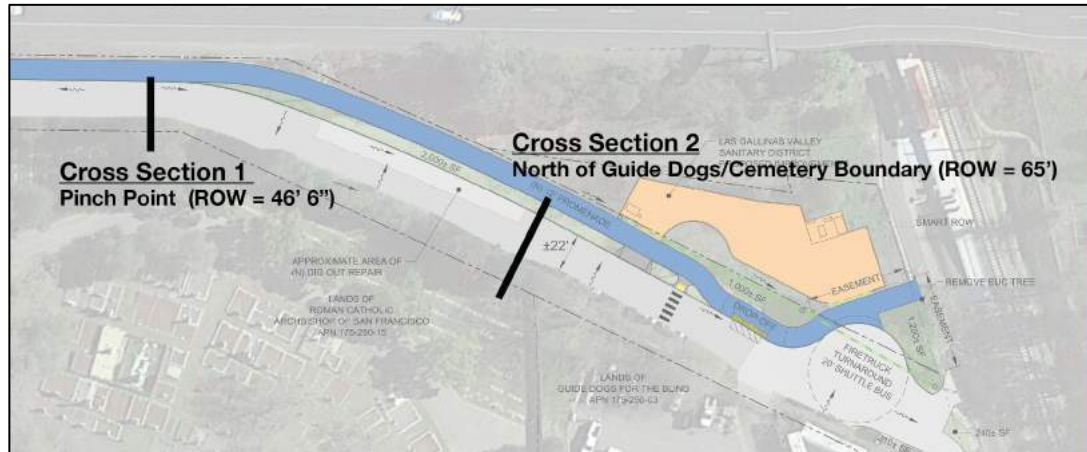


## Appendix Exhibit G

### Cross Sections

Based on CSW/Parisi plans (WTB-TAM, 2022)

#### Cross Section Locations



#### Cross Section 1

Pinch Point boundary (ROW = 46.6')

##### EXISTING CONDITIONS



##### ALL ALTERNATIVES





## Appendix Exhibit G

### Cross Section 2

North of Cemetery/Guide Dogs property boundary (ROW = 65')

#### EXISTING CONDITIONS



#### NO PARKING OPTION



#### PARTIAL PARKING OPTION A



#### PARTIAL PARKING OPTION B



#### FULL PARKING OPTION



## Appendix Exhibit H

## Area Parking Inventory

Map shows existing (2022) parking in the vicinity of the Merrydale Promenade project.

Even after some of the existing parking lots at Northgate are transformed into housing, there will still be ample parking in the area.

