

Los Altos Library Parking Study

Background

The Infrastructure subcommittee of the Los Altos Library Commission designated the study of parking requirements and how to alleviate parking issues at the main Los Altos Library in its 2019-2020 workplan.

Library parking is widely considered to be a challenge. During events, it is not uncommon to find cars lining up in the parking lot in search of a parking spot.

This situation has become more acute as the 70+ spaces in front of the community center are no longer available due to the demolition and construction for the new center.

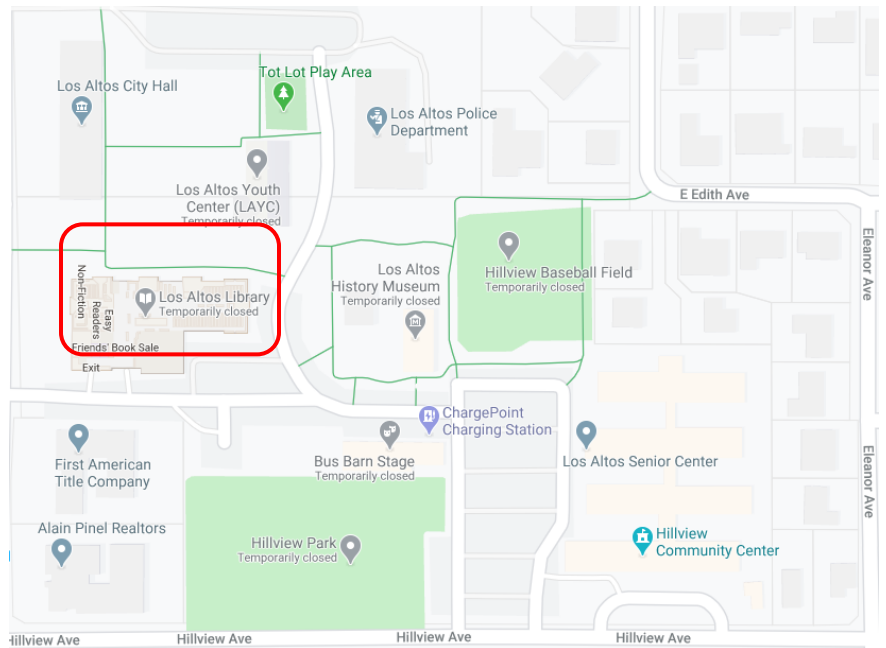
During this project, the library and other community facilities were shut down because of Bay Area and California responses to COVID-19, limiting the value of some of the data collected.

Los Altos Library Parking Lot Description

The library shares a common parking area with several other facilities, all within walking distance. These facilities include:

- Los Altos City Hall
- Los Altos History Museum
- Hillview Community Center
- Los Altos Senior Center
- Los Altos Youth Theatre
- Los Altos Youth Center
- Hillview Baseball Field
- Los Altos Police Department
- Hillview Park

In total, this shared parking area has 198 total spots, not including those in front of the new community center (excluded due to demolition and construction activity).



Project Approach

This project attempts to determine how to best manage supply and demand for parking. To elaborate:

- Adding to the supply of parking spaces is a long-term investment decision on the part of the community—and is driven as part of a larger set of related investment decisions.
- Management or shaping of demand is both an easier and quicker lever to exercise. Therefore, this project will focus on identifying how and whether demand may be managed.

Unlike a supply-side solution, demand shaping mechanisms can be reversed. Any parking solution should consider the implications, costs and tradeoffs for the community. One approach is to “do-nothing”. If patrons must wait too long for parking, they may opt not to attend or go elsewhere for parking. However, this approach can result in dissatisfied patrons and the opportunity costs from losing their presence and participation in events and transactions.

Active demand shaping measures may include time limits for parking or fees. Enforcement of these measures is discretionary and will impact effectiveness.

The planned project approach consists of three key steps:

1. Visit other libraries in nearby communities to understand the supply/demand situation at those libraries and what demand shaping techniques are used
2. Quantify parking demand by profiling the number of empty spots vs. number of vehicles looking for parking over an extended period of days and hours during each day. Is the premise of library parking shortage true?
3. Conduct interviews of subject matter experts to understand Los Altos policy on the desired bounds for parking wait times and models for sizing parking lots. Apply those to findings on library parking demand and wait times to quantify number of parking spots required.

Due to the impact of COVID-19, data collected in steps 1 & 2 are partial and not conclusive. Consequently, step 3 was not carried out. The Library Commission may decide later to revisit this workplan, collect more up-to-date data and finish this study.

Preliminary Recommendations

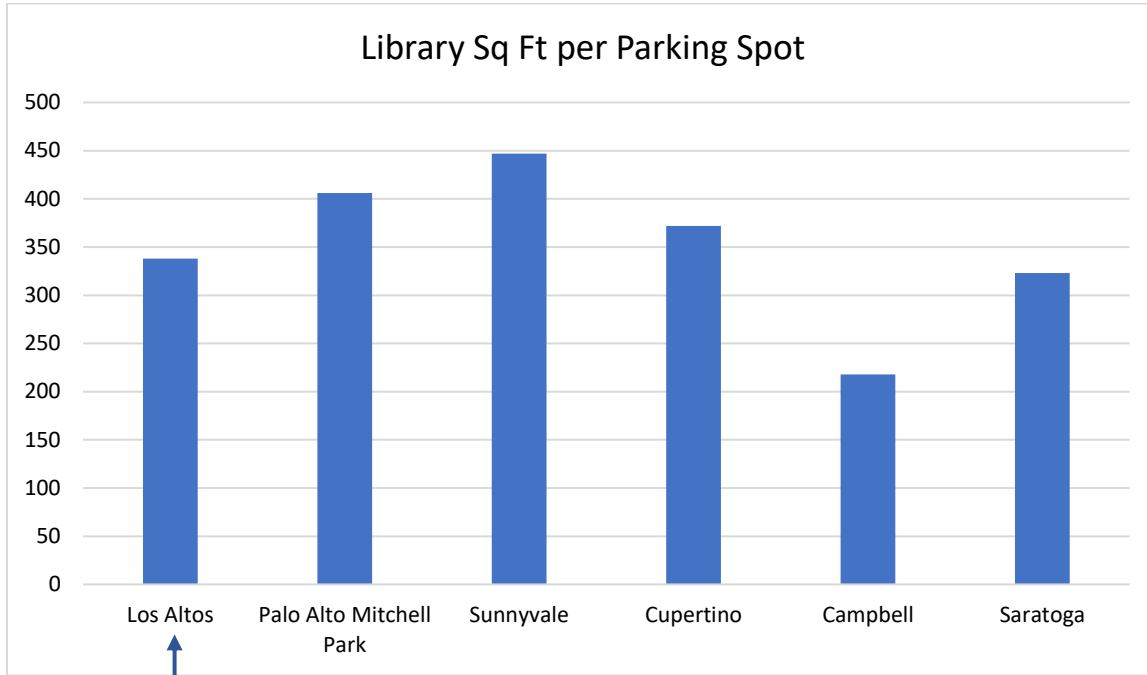
	Recommendation	Rationale
1	Near term, no change to current policy	The time required to return to normal is unknown. Even when group activities resume, attendance levels will likely be suppressed until people regain a sense of comfort regarding their personal risk.
2	Institute time limits for parking, with stickers for employee parking	<p>The parking lot across San Antonio Road has a 3-hour limit, while the Library parking lot has none. Not having limits attracts those wishing to stay longer than 3 hours, even if they may not be visiting the library.</p> <p>Employee parking permits is a more flexible solution than assigned parking which locks up a parking spot from the public.</p>

Key Findings

1. The Los Altos Library has a reasonable number of parking spots for its size relative to nearby libraries, neither the least for its footprint nor the most.
2. However, the Los Altos Library does have an issue with parking shortages when popular events are held at the Library or neighboring facilities.
3. Cupertino’s main library appears to also have a supply vs. demand problem. Unlike other libraries, Cupertino has opted to have a 4-hour time limit to help manage demand. From its website: “Library patrons were recently surveyed...The majority of people that responded to the survey visit the library for less than 4 hours.”

Nearby Library Parking Supply vs. Demand

Several libraries in the Santa Clara County Library District and adjacent communities were visited to understand their parking situation and how parking is managed.



The Los Altos Library has a comparable number of parking spots for its size relative to other nearby libraries—at the middle of the range of libraries assessed

Library	Shared or Dedicated Parking Lot	Library Size (sq. ft.)	Parking spots along and across from Library / + Nearby Shared ⁽¹⁾	Library Sq. Ft. / Parking Spots	Demand Mgmt. Measures
Los Altos Main	Shared	28,050	83 / 198 ⁽²⁾	338 / 142	None
Palo Alto Mitchell Park	Shared	41,000	101 / 271	406 / 151	None
Sunnyvale	Shared	60,800	139 / 265 ⁽³⁾	447 / 229	None
Cupertino	Shared	54,000	145 / 221	372 / 244	4-hour time limit
Campbell	Shared	24,000	110 / not counted	218 /	None
Saratoga	Dedicated	48,500	150	323	None
San Jose West Valley	Dedicated	20,000	66	303	None
San Jose Calabazas	Dedicated	10,000 ⁽⁴⁾	47	212	None

- (1) Nearby Shared defined as parking easily accessible by foot in adjoining parking lots, even if not directly along or across from the library—e.g., parking by the Los Altos Civic Center
- (2) Spaces for the new Community Center not included
- (3) Includes the parking lot behind the library, some of which are dedicated for Library Staff. Excludes lot that is closer to the City of Sunnyvale HR Department and NOVA Job Center.
- (4) “Cupertino Residents Stop by Calabazas Library final time before its closure”, San Jose Mercury News, August 23, 2009

Library Parking Demand

Both the Los Altos and Cupertino libraries have instances of tight parking availability. Cupertino does have a 4-hour time limit on its parking.

Library	Dates Visited	Observations
Los Altos Main	12/11/19 3/10/20 3/11/20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An event was being held at the library during the December visit at lunchtime. No parking was available. People were circling to find a spot. • SCCLD shut off all events as of 3/6/20. The library was still open during the March visits, and parking could be found, albeit tight at times.
Palo Alto Mitchell Park	2/26/20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ~20% of parking spots available
Sunnyvale	12/15/19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plenty of spots available to the rear and side of the library (~30% of spots)
Cupertino	12/14/19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very few spots. Saw cars circling in search of parking.

Other libraries in the first table were not visited prior to the shut-down, unfortunately.

Los Altos Library Parking Availability Survey

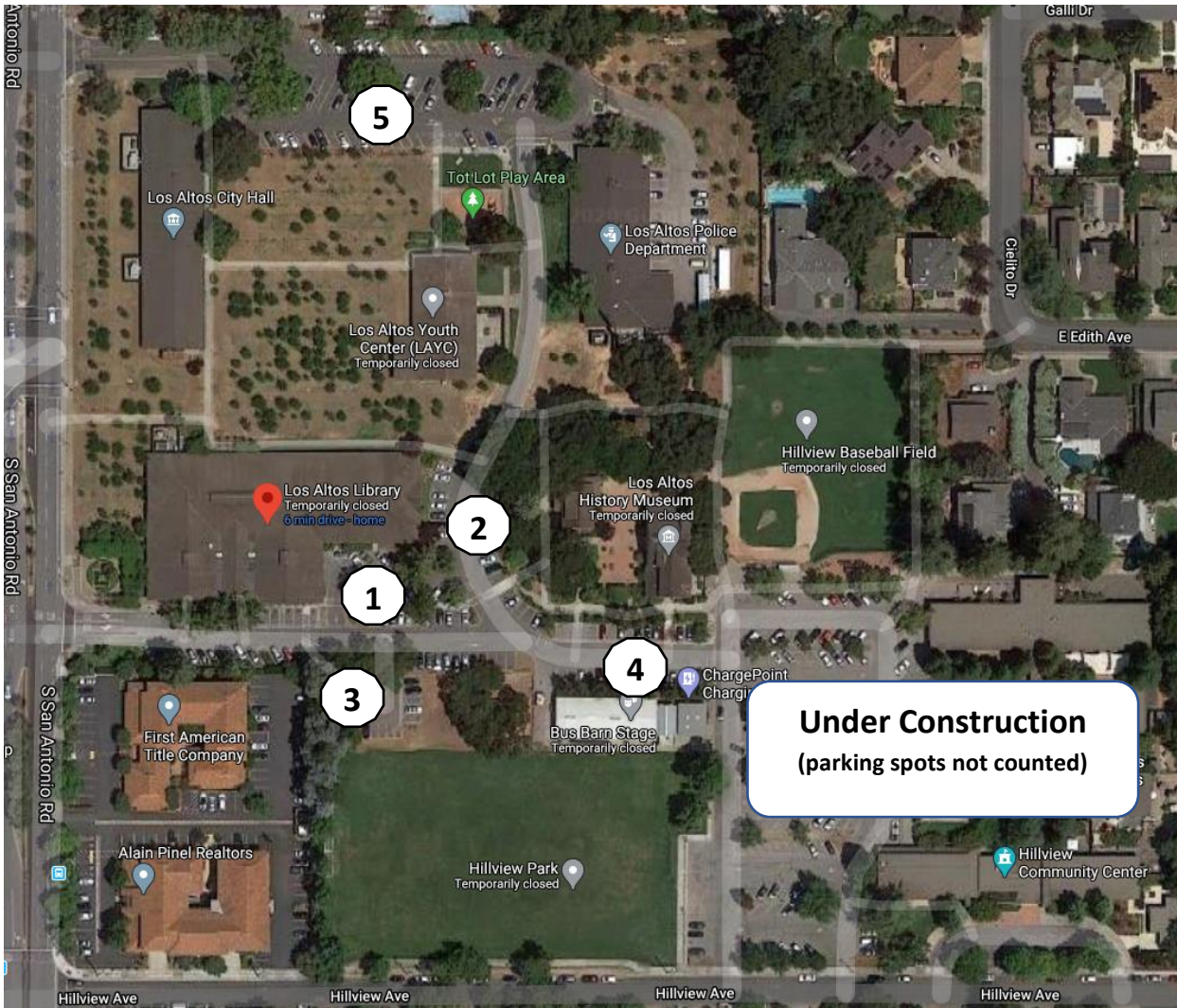
Survey conducted after SCCLD had shut down all events, but library was still open.

Parking Spots Available at:	3/10/20	3/11/20
10:30 a.m.	7 spots near Library (<10% available)	47 (~50% available)
12:30 a.m.	22	34
2:30 p.m.	20	16
4:30 p.m.	15	4 (~5% available)
6:30 p.m.	43	28

During these visits, no events were being held in venues near the Library—e.g., History Museum, Hillview Field, or Bus Barn Stage. Even so, parking could be difficult, confirming observations made during the December visit.

Appendix—Details on Nearby Libraries

Los Altos Library



Under Construction
(parking spots not counted)

Lot 1: 3 Handicap spots, 2 Short Term, and 40 regular parking spots

Lot 2: 22 spots closest to the library and History Museum

Lot 3: 16 spots close to Library and Hillview Park

Lot 4: 2 Handicap spots, 2 EV charging spots, 24 regular parking spots

Lot 5: 4 Handicap, 8 reserved for City, 75 regular parking spots

- The main Los Altos Library is 28,050 sq. ft. and serves a population of ~39,000 in Los Altos and Los Altos Hills
- Across San Antonio Road is parking for shoppers and has a time limit of 3 hours
- Further away is residential parking without any posted time limit

Palo Alto Mitchell Park



Lot 1: 6 Handicap parking spots, 3 EV, 5 carpool, 87 regular

Lot 2: 6 Handicap, 100 regular

Lot 3: 2 Handicap, 62 regular

- Mitchell Park Library is in a complex that includes a Palo Alto Community Center, tennis court, ball field and park
- Plenty of open spots when visited on a Wednesday lunchtime -- ~20% available
- 41,000 square foot library was built in 2014
- Nearby residential parking has no time limit

Palo Alto Mitchell Park



Sunnyvale



Lot 1: 3 Handicap parking spots, 49 regular

Lot 2: 4 Handicap, 2 short term (10 minutes), 81 regular

Lot 3: 50 Staff parking, 76 regular

- 60,800 sq. ft. facility; last expansion was in 1985 for an additional 19,000 sq. ft.
- In 2007, the Sunnyvale City Council approved plans for a 116,000 sq. ft. facility, but the \$108M bond measure fails to receive the 66.7% threshold to move forward

Sunnyvale

View of Lot 3



Cupertino



Lot 1: 5 Handicap, 4 EV, 2 Short Term (4 minute), 24 Library Staff, 77 regular spots

Lot 2: 24 Permit C (Civic Center)

Lot 3: 31 regular parking spots

Nearby street parking has a 2 hour time limit while Civic Center complex (including library) has a 4 hour limit

- 54,000 sq. ft. library serves a population of ~60,700
- Total parking spots = 221, according to Cupertino's website

Cupertino



Campbell



Lot 1: 4 Handicap parking spots, 3 EV, 2 Short Term (10 minutes), 64 regular

Lot 2: 1 Handicap, 26 regular

- 24,000 sq. ft. library—remodeled in 1989, with addition of second floor that doubled square footage
- Campbell has a population of ~42,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, July 2019)

Saratoga



Lot 1: 4 EV, 11 Short Term (5 minutes)

Lot 2: 6 Handicap parking spots, 11 Library Business Only, 2 Library Vehicles only, 126 regular

- 48,500 sq. ft. library, serving a Saratoga population of ~31,000
- Current facility built in 2003

San Jose West Valley



- Single parking lot with 3 Handicap spots and 63 regular spots
- 20,000 sq. ft. library built in 2003, and is San Jose's first LEED certified municipal building
- No time limit on parking, but street parking has 2 hour limit

San Jose Calabazas



- Single dedicated parking lot with 2 Handicap, 3 EV/Fuel Efficient, 2 motorcycle, 1 Short Term (5 minutes), and 41 regular spots
- No time limit in the parking lot, but street parking has a 2 hour limit
- 10,000 sq. ft. library. Completed in 2010; \$7.8M facility, according to San Jose Mercury News