Dear Neighbors,

I attended a panel discussion recently which was sponsored by the UCSB Economic Forecast Project titled “The State of State Street.” At this point, the problems of the multitude of empty storefronts along our core retail corridor are well known by us all. It was interesting to see the mix of academics, consultants, commercial real estate brokers, and city leaders that shone a spotlight on the issue, scratched the surface at some of the causes, and took some initial steps toward recommendations to solve the problem.

Some of the information was certainly sobering. Santa Barbara’s retail employment growth has done worse since the Great Recession than each of the following: Ventura, San Luis Obispo, the state of California, and the United States as a whole. With all of the natural advantages that Santa Barbara has, this particular chart was astounding to me. Clearly, during this time period, our particular mix of demographic factors, economic realities and regulatory framework has unwittingly conspired against us to lead to the current malaise in certain parts of our city.

As is the case with most social problems, there is no single cause. Rather, there is a patchwork quilt of contributing factors. To name a few, these include the rise of online shopping, the discouraging presence of homeless people, some absentee landlords, the City’s increasingly complex and time-consuming approval process, and the natural evolutionary cycles of the retail sector caused by an ever-shifting culture with constantly changing tastes.

The good news is that we are talking about it. The problem is now acknowledged by all and there are genuine desires and efforts to work together to address it. Part of the solution will be more efficient turnaround by the City’s planning and building departments. Part of the solution will be bringing more housing to downtown Santa Barbara. Part of the solution will be entrepreneurs bringing a better mix of retail to our Main Street. Part of the solution will be those of us who live in the Riviera spending more time and money supporting our businesses downtown, including local stores, bars, and restaurants. If you haven’t been there lately, just take a look at the Funk Zone—or on the stretch of State Street between the beach and the freeway—to see what is possible.

These areas are alive and attractive. I am optimistic that with the concerted efforts being focused on the State Street dilemma by diverse segments of our community and by both business and city leaders, we are on the path to a better and more vibrant downtown.

At the association’s fall general meeting, we decided to take a welcome breather from the 24-hour political news—whether local, national, or international—that has been dominating our lives lately. Rather, we thought it would be nice to spend a little time learning something about the early history of the beautiful area we call home. We are fortunate that John R. Johnson, curator of anthropology at the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History, has agreed to make a presentation about the “First Inhabitants of the Santa Barbara Region.” His presentation will cover the results of recent archaeological, paleoenvironmental, and genetic research that is illuminating our understanding of the living conditions and migration patterns of the Santa Barbara area’s earliest residents.

The fall meeting will be held as usual at Marymount School at 4 p.m. on Sunday, October 21st. After the chance to break bread and share drinks together, we will provide a very brief association update and then move directly into Dr. Johnson’s portion of the program. He will be available to take some questions after his presentation.

If you have not renewed your membership for 2018, please send in your dues. Alternatively, you will be able to do so at the event. We look forward to seeing as many of you as possible there Sunday, October 21st, for what promises to be a fun, informative and refreshing event!

Dale Aazam
President, Riviera Association
An Invitation

By Kristen Sneddon

I first moved from Los Angeles to the Riviera thirty-one years ago at the age of sixteen. The move to Santa Barbara was life changing. I found a haven in the winding streets, mountain views, quiet time in Orpet Park, and dark skies filled with stars. I am proud to be raising my three children in Santa Barbara, and plan to live here always. As your representative on City Council, my priority is to be a steward of our community and preserve the unique character of the Riviera and our city. I ask for your partnership and input on decisions affecting our district and our city.

There are many issues currently facing our community where your unique perspective is invaluable, and I invite you to share your views with me. We are in the seventh year of the longest drought on record. As I work with the Water Commission to ensure our quality water supply, I ask for your input on conservation efforts and impacts. As we navigate the “new normal” of a year-round fire season, I ask for your input on what you are looking for to feel safe and prepared in a natural disaster. I believe it is time for an updated evacuation analysis and plan for our Hillside District, including consideration of housing density. As we are applying Measure C funds to roads and infrastructure, I ask for your input on areas that need particular attention.

When issues of development arise on the Riviera, I invite you to let the full council know where you see incompatibility or projects that undermine the character of our neighborhoods. As the City contemplates the proposed Mission Canyon Bridge project, I invite you to share with us what is most important to you through this historic corridor. Citywide, issues of housing, State Street vacancies, and homelessness are ongoing areas of concentration that benefit from your shared ideas. Consider serving on a City Board or Commission. Vacancies are posted on the City website and the deadline for this current cycle is October 6. On these issues and others, I invite you to contact or meet with me, so that I can best represent our community: ksneddon@santabarbaraca.gov.
Streets—People—Trees—Structures

Twenty-five years ago Allen B. Jacobs, a UC Berkeley planning professor, published Great Streets. An early sentence gives the reader an insight into the eye opening view that lies ahead. “The people of cities understand the symbolic, ceremonial, social, and political roles of streets, not just those of movement and access.”

Jacobs informs us 25 to 35 percent of American cities’ developed land is public right-of-way. The more obscure consequence of this fact is that with every adjustment to our roads, alleys, curbs, sidewalks, lighting, buried utilities, etc., comes an opportunity for improvement. If all the adjustments take place under the sway of a great general goal then the results will be the successful design of one-third of the city and an immense positive impact on the rest.

Painting with the widest brush, Jacobs presents the reader with four criteria for great streets. This introduction is followed by a written and pictorial presentation of great streets done in fine detail. Great Street Criteria: 1) Help create a sense of community, 2) Are physically comfortable and safe, 3) Encourage participation, 4) Are memorable.

In Jacobs’ analysis American and Western European streets predominate. With the turning of a few pages the reader can compare San Francisco’s Market Street, which Jacobs titles a Once Great Street, and Paris’ Saint-Michel a Great Street. Today’s Market Street, although the recipient of millions of dollars of voter approved funds, is not the street Jacobs traveled in his youth. Sidewalks have been widened; street trees planted; designer enhanced street signs, benches, and trash bins have been added, but on the pedestrian level the street is lifeless. The primary, but not the sole, cause of this demise is the loss of stores. The contemporary office building at the pedestrian level is likely to have large entrance lobbies or a bank branch. Gone with the older generation of office buildings is the multitude of street level shops, vying for the walker’s attention. In contrast Saint-Michel has what Market now lacks: shops with goods overflowing onto the sidewalk, restaurants with outdoor seating, wonderful shade trees, and the curious stroller.

Closer to home is Jacobs’ category “Residential Boulevards.” Here he calls to our attention Orange Grove Boulevard in Pasadena with its alternating trees, tall palm and low magnolias; uniform and well-scaled white globed street lights contrasting well with the green foliage; and, I would add, “A” level maintenance.

To bring all of the above to a close, I invite the reader to engage in a compare and contrast exercise using this Pasadena residential street to a Santa Barbara residential street of your choosing.
Santa Barbara is On a Road Trip

By Chuck Croninger

Ohio has claim to the first recorded American motor vehicle crash. The 1891 crash involved a car, a tree root, and a hitching post. It was the first drop in a statistical bucket which 127 years later runneth over. The 2016 National Highway Traffic Safety Administration Crash Statistics is a sea of information exemplified by Appendix D that lists fifty-two acronyms used in the report.

In the limited category of “Police Reported Motor Vehicle Traffic Crashes” 34,439 fatalities were reported; 5,987 were pedestrians, and 840 were pedal cyclists.

Sweden confronted its road carnage in 1990 with a program titled Vision Zero. Vision Zero’s goal was to eliminate serious and fatal injuries on the road. To date, noting only California cities, San Francisco, Sacramento, Fremont, San Jose, Monterey, San Luis Obispo, Los Angeles, and San Diego, have adopted a Vision Zero program.

An early adjustment in the program was a change in terminology, the replacement of the term “accident” with the term “crash.” Accidents happen, end of story. “Accident” suggests inevitability and the futility of attempted human intervention. In contrast “crash” leads us down the road of analysis and correction. Eyes are directed to human behavior on the road, the design of the roadway, and the development of safety equipment.

On August 23rd, the Santa Barbara Transportation and Circulation Committee received the city’s Public Works Division’s, Santa Barbara Vision Zero Strategy 2030 program. With community suggestions which widened the plan’s fact gathering net, Santa Barbara’s Vision Zero was enthusiastically approved and sent to the City Council where on September 11th, it was unanimously approved and adopted. The process took five years with the leading community advocates being COAST (Coalition For Sustainable Transportation) and SBBIKE.

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Speed is especially lethal for vulnerable users like pedestrians and people biking. The risk of injury and death increases as speed increases.

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