

Walkability Audit

Paths to Green Space from an Affordable Housing Complex adjacent to Downtown Morgan Hill

By Maureen Grzan-Pieracci with review and considerations from John Moniz
On behalf of the Morgan Hill Parks and Recreation Commission
Conducted February 2022

Executive Summary

This report seeks to audit three pedestrian routes centering from Crossings on Monterey (16800 Monterey Road), an affordable housing complex in Morgan Hill, CA, to public green space. Crossings on Monterey (Crossings) hosts 39 affordable housing units, faces a major thoroughfare and lacks on-site green/open space. The site has a small “tot lot” and two picnic tables¹. However, access to public green space is essential for quality of life for both individuals and families. As such, the housing site was selected as the center point for this report with a walkability audit conducted on three routes connecting Crossings to municipal parks, the only public open space in the near vicinity. Municipal parks include Community Park, 4th Street Park and Railroad Park.

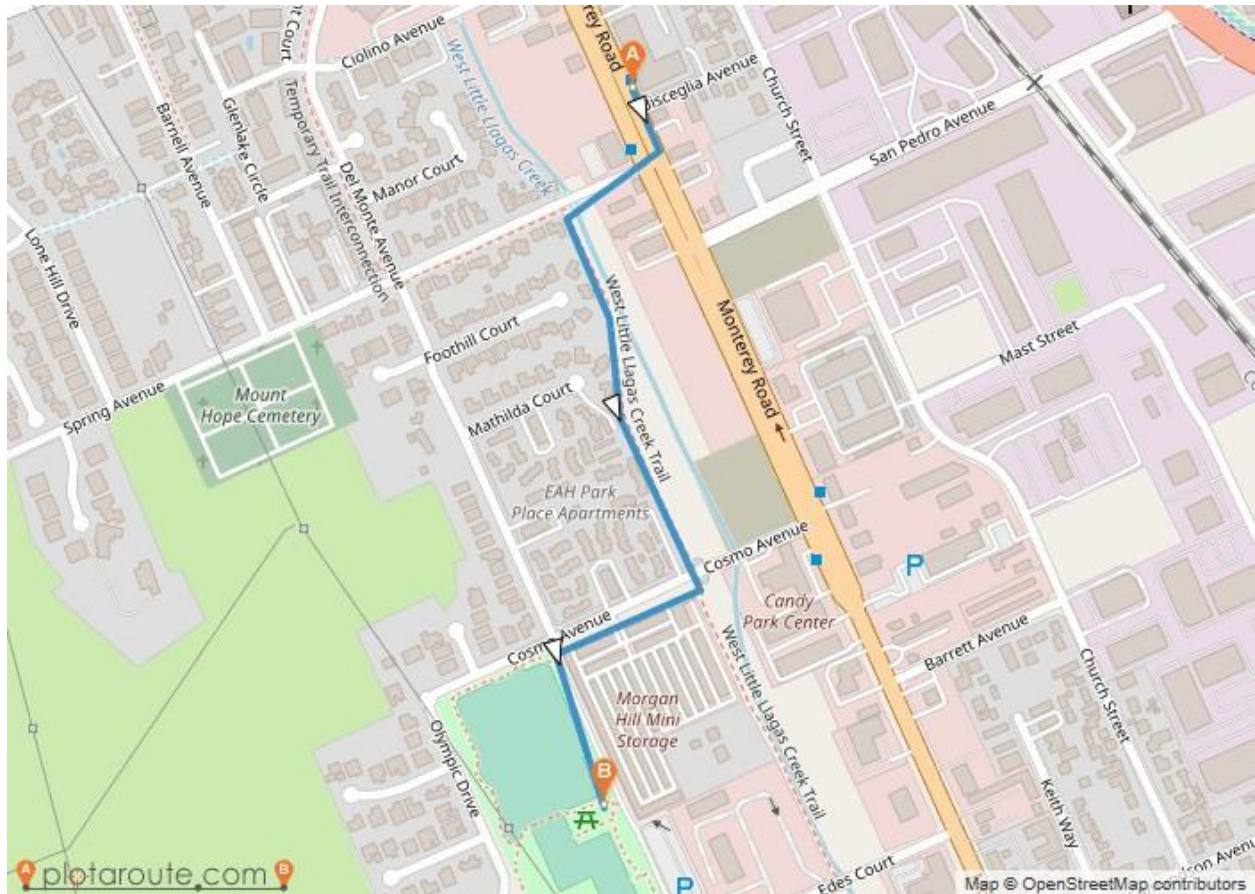
In February 2022, the audit was conducted for three routes on a Saturday between 9 a.m. – 12 p.m. During the audit, each walk was assessed using a walkability worksheet and rubric (see appendix). The worksheet ascends from greatest importance (safety features) to medium importance (accessibility and aesthetics) to least importance (shade).

Following an overview of route options, this report concludes with a summary of findings with considerations for pedestrian improvements that range from tree plantings to bike lanes.

¹ Crossings on Monterey. UHC Communities. Accessed February 28, 2022.
<http://uhccllc.net/communities/family/crossings-on-monterey>

Route Overview

Route One: Crossings on Monterey to Community Park



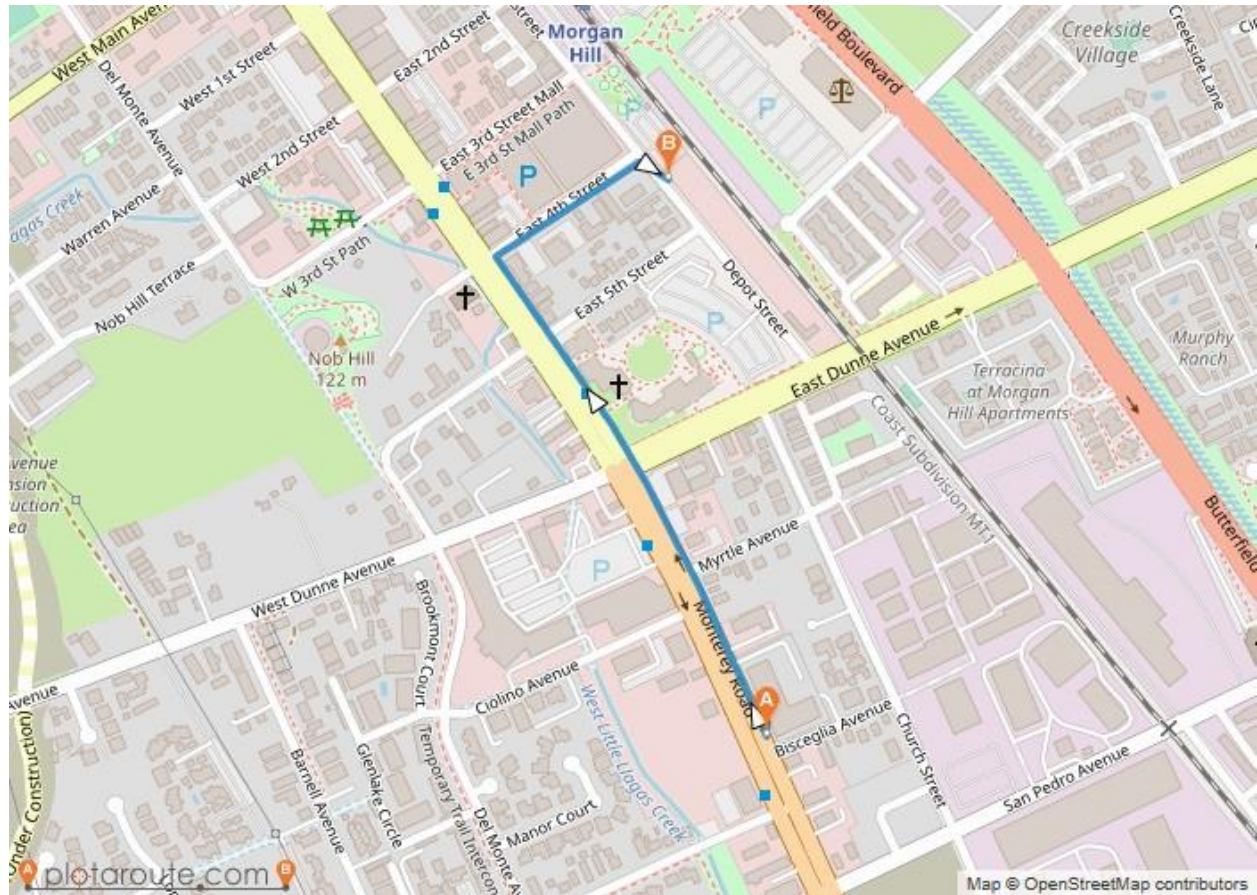
Route One connects Crossings to Community Park. Community Park is the City of Morgan Hill's largest municipal park featuring baseball fields, circular walking path, off-leash dog areas, basketball court, tennis courts, open grass field and playground. At a .59 mile distance, the route travels through both street adjacent sidewalks to an off-street trail.

Beginning at Crossings and heading south, the sidewalks adjacent to Monterey Road have observable cracks and raised areas. The route then crosses Bisceglia Road and continues south along Monterey Road. To reach West Little Llagas Creek Trail, the route turns west along Spring Avenue. This section of the route is surrounded by cement barriers and steel mesh fencing. An opening in the fencing opens to the trail with little wayfinding. West Little Llagas Creek Trail is an asphalt path with little to no maintained landscaping, running in between apartment buildings and small retail. The trail does not have sufficient lighting for twilight or night walking.

To get to Community Park, the route crosses Cosmo Avenue and turns right to enter the north side of Community Park. There is no crosswalk present to cross Cosmo Avenue at the Community Park access point. Additionally, there is no sidewalk access into the park. As such, pedestrians and bicyclists must share the access road with automobiles until the tennis courts. At that point, a gravel path is accessible to the pedestrian/bicyclist.

Score: 57 / 100

Route Two: Crossings on Monterey to Railroad Park



Route Two connects Crossings to Railroad Park. Railroad Park is one of the City of Morgan Hill's newest parks featuring active play space, including slides, rope climbing, musical play and benches. At a .53 mile distance, the route travels through along Monterey Road into Downtown Morgan Hill.

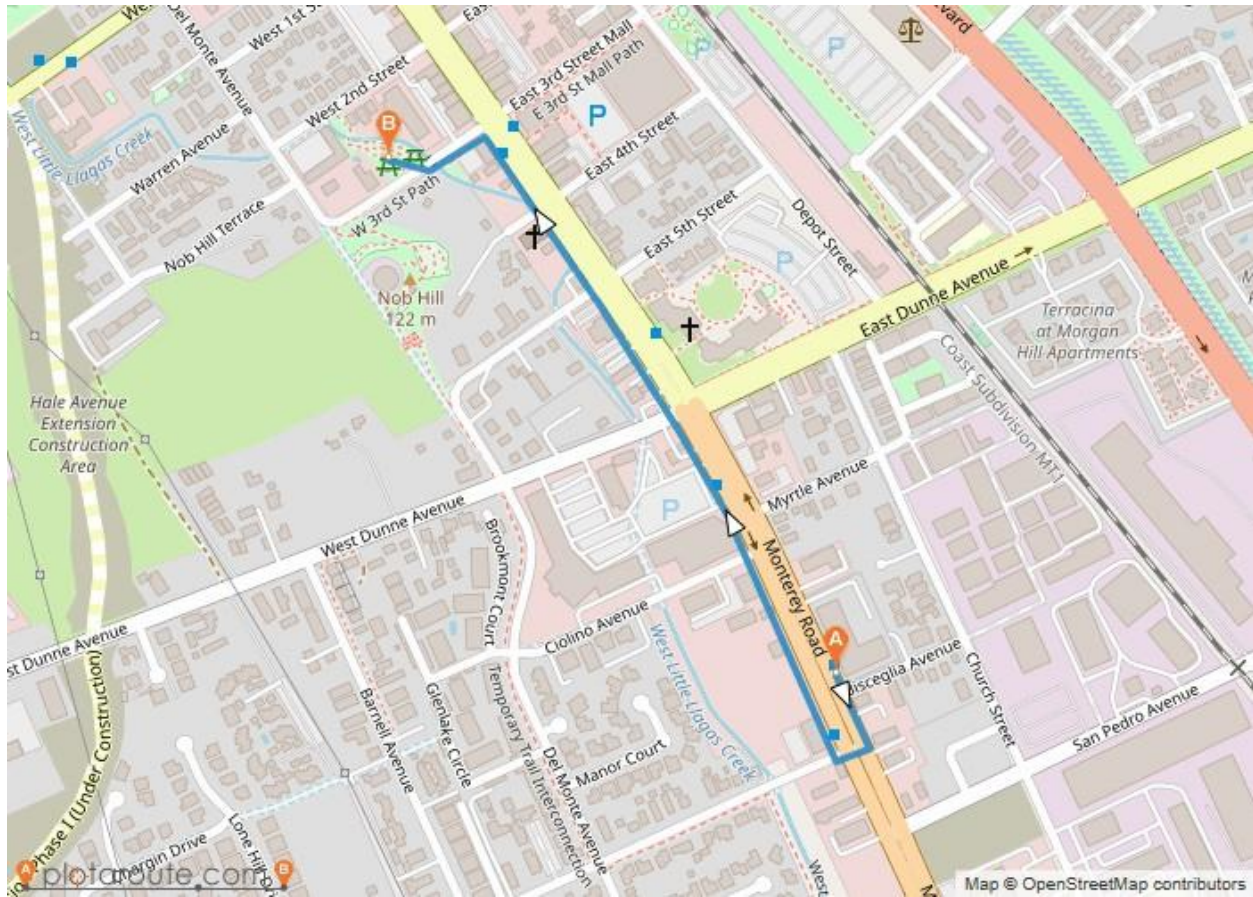
Beginning at Crossings and heading north, the Monterey Road sidewalks are well maintained with attractive landscaping directly in front of the development. After Crossings, the sidewalk appears to have overgrown vegetation and noticeable amounts of trash. At the Myrtle Avenue crossing, there is no crosswalk present. Additionally, cars parked along Monterey Road cause a blind spot for vehicles looking to turn on Myrtle Avenue. During the audit, a vehicle turning onto Myrtle Avenue to get to the Taco Bell parking lot came close to collision with a pedestrian.

Continuing north, the route approaches Dunne Avenue. The intersection at Dunne Avenue and Monterey Road has little landscaping on the south end. The crosswalk is well defined and the crossing time is sufficient. As the route enters Downtown , the route is aesthetically pleasing with native landscaping, wide sidewalks, street lamps, and large, manicured median. The route continues along Monterey Road before making a right onto 4th Street. Along 4th Street, the audit observes coffee shops, small retail, as well as a public promenade.

At the intersection of 4th Street and Depot Street, Railroad Park is observed on right and, at the time of the audit, a farmers market on the left. The area is lively with a variety of individuals and families shopping, socializing, and playing.

Score: 58 / 100

Route Three: Crossings at Monterey to 4th Street Park



Route Three connects Crossings to 4th Street Park. Opening at the same time as Railroad Park, 4th Street Park features game tables, climbing structures for youth, and public art in a native, lush setting. At a .63 mile distance, the route travels through along Monterey Road into Downtown Morgan Hill.

Beginning at Crossings, the route crosses Monterey Road at Spring Avenue to the westerly side of Monterey Road before heading north. Along Monterey Road, the route passes small retail. At the time of the audit, some buildings are vacant. There is no vegetation observed along Monterey Road. Sidewalks are sufficient for access. Similar to Route Two, the intersection of Dunne Avenue and Monterey Road, while devoid of much vegetation, has defined crosswalks and sufficient crossing time. As the route leads into Downtown, the sidewalk widens and becomes more aesthetically pleasing with vegetation, public art, and active retail. At 4th Street, the route turns left onto 4th Street for a short distance, before crossing into the park. There is a secondary picnic area prior to reaching the park which also features a bike fix-it station. Finally, while not apart of this route, 4th Street continues toward Nob Hill Park and acts as an “exercise hill”.

Score: 64 / 100

Conclusion

Crossings on Monterey is one of the City of Morgan Hill's recently developed affordable housing complexes. To the auditor's knowledge, no improvements have been made to pedestrian paths in coordination with the recent developments. However, there is potential for pedestrian path improvements, leading to safer, more aesthetically pleasing walks that increase health and wellness, as well as quality of life.

SUMMARY OF SCORES

Below lists a series of high, medium, and low improvement considerations for the City and Water District. Some improvements can be considered as annual street maintenance is conducted or can be incorporated into upcoming developments and projects.

High Priority Improvements:

- Red curb along Monterey Road extending 35 ft from intersections;
- Landscaping along Monterey Road sidewalks to minimize overgrowth;
- Lighting at the Little West Llagas Creek Trail entrance;
- Dedicated bike lanes along Monterey Road;
- Truncated dome mats at intersections; and
- Crosswalk stripes at Monterey Road at Myrtle Road.

Medium Improvements:

- Trash clean-up alongside Monterey Road between San Pedro Avenue and Dunne Avenue;
- Native landscaping or aesthetic boulders along West Little Llagas Creek Trail;
- Wayfinding from Monterey Road to West Little Llagas Creek Trail;
- Pavement improvements along West Little Llagas Creek Trail;
- Benches and public art inclusion along West Little Llagas Creek Trail; and
- Dog poop clean-up stations along West Little Llagas Creek Trail.

Low Priority Improvements:

- Tree plantings along Monterey Road between Cosmo Avenue and Dunne Avenue;
- Tree plantings along West Little Llagas Creek Trail.

Opinion: Walkability Tools in Policy Planning

A walkability audit is a low cost way to examine and evaluate the environment for pedestrian safety, aesthetics, access and convenience. In conducting a walkability audit, the goal is for pedestrian challenges to be identified. The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) provides walkability toolkits online to assist senior communities in evaluating the accessibility and enjoyment of the pedestrian paths in their communities. The AARP recognizes that access to vehicles decrease as one ages, while exercise and socialization becomes even more important. As such, accessible, enjoyable, and purposeful paths are essential to one's quality of life (AARP Walk Audit Tool Kit).

The audit is a great community engagement tool for planners and should be used to evaluate around new developments or as part of annual review. The audits can also provide need/justification for grant applications, general funding, or to inspire volunteer work.

APPENDIX:

Walkability Tool Rubric

- A. Pedestrian Facilities (High): presence of suitable walking surface (e.g., sidewalk, path).**
1. No permanent facilities on either side of the street, or completely away from streets
 - 2.
 3. Continuous sidewalk on both sides of the street, or completely away from streets
 - 4.
 5. Continuous sidewalk on both sides with low conflict potential
- B. Pedestrian Conflicts (High): potential for conflict with motor vehicle traffic due to driveway and loading dock crossings, speed and volume of traffic, large intersections, low pedestrian visibility.**
1. High conflict potential
 - 2.
 3. Medium conflict potential
 - 4.
 5. Low conflict potential
- C. Crosswalks (High): presence and visibility on roads intersecting the segment. Traffic signals meet pedestrian needs with separate “walk” lights that provide sufficient crossing time.**
1. Crosswalks not present despite major intersections
 - 2.
 3. Some crosswalks where there are intersections
 - 4.
 5. Crosswalks are present and clearly marked for major intersections, or no intersections present
- D. Maintenance (Medium): cracking buckling, overgrown vegetation, standing water, on or near the walking path. Does not include temporary deficiencies likely to soon be removed (e.g., tall grass).**
1. Major or frequent problems
 - 2.
 3. Some problems
 - 4.
 5. No problems
- E. Path Size (Medium): measure of useful path width, accounting for barriers to passage along pathway.**
1. No permanent facilities
 2. <3 feet wide, significant barriers
 - 3.
 - 4.
 5. >6 feet wide, barrier free
-

F. Buffer (Medium): space separating path from adjacent roadway.

1. No buffer from roadway
- 2.
- 3.
4. > 4 feet from roadway
5. Not adjacent to roadway

G. Universal Accessibility (Medium): ease of access for the mobility impaired. Look for ramps and handrails accompanying steps, curb cuts, etc.

1. Completely impassible for wheelchairs, or no permanent facilities
2. Difficult or dangerous for wheelchairs (e.g., no curb cuts)
- 3.
4. Wheelchair-accessible route available but inconvenient
5. Designed to facilitate wheelchair access.

H. Aesthetics (Medium): includes proximity of construction zones, buildings, noise pollution, quality of landscaping and pedestrian-oriented features, such as benches and water fountains.

1. Uninviting
- 2.
3. Some features present
- 4.
5. Pleasant

I. Shade (Low): amount of shade, accounting for different times of day.

1. No shade
- 2.
3. Some shade
- 4.
5. Full shade

(Please note: the examples given above are intended to provide general scoring guidance)

Sum of High Importance (A-C): _____ x 3 = _____

Sum of Medium Importance (D-H): _____ x 2 = _____

Sum of Low Importance (I): _____ x 1 = _____

Total Score: _____ / 100

Walkability Worksheet

Route/Location: _____ Date: _____

- A. **Pedestrian Facilities (High):** presence of suitable walking surface (e.g., sidewalk, path).
Score (1-5) _____
- B. **Pedestrian Conflicts (High):** potential for conflict with motor vehicle traffic due to driveway and loading dock crossings, speed and volume of traffic, large intersections, low pedestrian visibility.
Score (1-5) _____
- C. **Crosswalks (High):** presence and visibility on roads intersecting the segment. Traffic signals meet pedestrian needs with separate “walk” lights that provide sufficient crossing time.
Score (1-5) _____
- D. **Maintenance (Medium):** cracking buckling, overgrown vegetation, standing water, on or near the walking path. Does not include temporary deficiencies likely to soon be removed (e.g., tall grass).
Score (1-5) _____
- E. **Path Size (Medium):** measure of useful path width, accounting for barriers to passage.
Score (1-5) _____
- F. **Buffer (Medium):** space separating path from adjacent roadway.
Score (1-5) _____
- G. **Universal Accessibility (Medium):** ease of access for the mobility impaired. Look for ramps and handrails accompanying steps, curb cuts, etc.
Score (1-5) _____
- H. **Aesthetics (Medium):** includes proximity of construction zones, buildings, noise pollution, quality of landscaping and pedestrian-oriented features, such as benches and water fountains.
Score (1-5) _____
- I. **Shade (Low):** amount of shade, accounting for different times of day.
Score (1-5) _____

Sum of High Importance (A-C): _____ x 3 = _____

Sum of Medium Importance (D-H): _____ x 2 = _____

Sum of Low Importance (I): _____ x 1 = _____

Total Score: _____ / 100
