Urban and Regional Planning Community Studio for Malaga Cove Plaza Parking Study

Background

Malaga Cove Plaza is a unique neighborhood-serving commercial district consisting of restaurants, retail shops, professional offices, and personal service businesses. Due to the Plaza's historic development pattern, most businesses provide little or no on-site parking and rely heavily on a limited supply of public parking. During peak business hours, weekends, holidays, special events, and seasonal periods, available parking appears insufficient to meet customer, employee, and visitor demand, resulting in increased vehicle circulation, reduced customer convenience, and potential impacts on nearby residential streets. The limited parking also negatively impacts the city's economic development by discouraging prospective businesses from starting at the Plaza.

The Purpose of the Study

The overall goal of this study is to support the city's future parking management, policy decisions, and capital improvements within Malaga Cove Plaza by providing a comprehensive parking report that includes current parking deficiencies, the forecast of future parking needs based on anticipated land use and economic activity, and the assessment of opportunities. Based on the analysis, the study will develop conceptual policy recommendations and a phased implementation strategy. The recommendations will incorporate both short- term operational improvements and long-term capital and policy solutions that preserve the historic character of Malaga Cove Plaza while supporting local businesses, enhancing the visitor experience, and maintaining the long-term economic vitality of the commercial district. The implementation strategy will be realistic and cost-effective, improving parking availability, customer access, employee parking management, pedestrian circulation, and overall parking operations.

The Scope of the Study

The community studio class of the Department of Urban and Regional Planning (URP) at Cal Poly Pomona will conduct this study. The studio class aims to help undergraduate senior students solve a real-world planning problem by applying research, analysis, and community planning procedures. The studio is divided into two classes by academic semester, the Community Planning Studio Preparation class (URP 4310) in the fall and the Community Planning Studio (URP 4320) in the spring.

Following this academic system, the studio will take the full academic year 2026-27 to produce the deliverables. URP 4310 will begin the week of August 23, 2026, and URP 4320 will end the week of May 14, 2027. Thus, the study will be conducted in two stages: the study preparation and study execution.

Study Preparation Stage

In the fall semester, the studio will primarily lay the groundwork for the study. The focus of this stage is to have a good understanding of the parking issues of Malaga Cove Plaza and other associated issues. The studio will also attempt to investigate the context of the surrounding communities and the city. During the stage, the studio class will perform.

1. Understanding the study issues: The class will have an opportunity to have a clear understanding of the parking issues by visiting the site and the demands and concerns by having meetings with the client.
2. Community characteristics analysis: To provide customized resolutions and recommendations for the Malaga Cove Plaza parking issues, it is critical to understand the unique characteristics of the surrounding communities as well as the city. To do so, the class will conduct a comprehensive, in-depth analysis of the Census data and other data.
3. Case study: The studio will investigate how other cities and communities in similar situations resolve their parking issues. By conducting the case study, the studio will learn possible policy options and strategies applicable to Malaga Cove Plaza.
4. Development of a study plan: Based on the groundwork described above, the studio will develop an action plan for the study. While articulating the tasks described below, the studio will finalize a timeline and assign members to them.

Study Execution Stage

Based on the preparation work, the studio will conduct the study in the spring semester. The tasks performed in this stage include

1. Parking data collection: The purpose of this data collection is to evaluate existing parking conditions and quantify current and future parking deficiencies. The studio will visit Malaga Cove Plaza at different times of day and days of the week and quantify how the parking spaces are utilized. This will allow evaluation of the adequacy of the existing parking supply, utilization, turnover, occupancy, circulation, and operational characteristics throughout the Plaza.
2. Shop-owners/employees interviews: The studio will collect concerns, challenges, demands, and expectations regarding parking for the shop-owners and employees at Malaga Cove Plaza. To do so, the studio will visit the shops and conduct unstructured interviews with the shop owners/employees.

3. Existing parking system and land use analysis: To optimize the existing parking system not only at the plaza but also in the adjacent areas, the studio will map the existing parking system in the vicinity of the plaza. Although adding parking facilities is not the city's priority, the studio will also create an inventory of publicly owned vacant properties, just in case, for the consideration of additional parking facilities.
4. Development of recommendations/strategies: Based on the tasks, the studio will develop data-driven recommendations to improve parking availability and management. The studio will include short- and long- term strategies. The recommendations will comprehensively incorporate a range of strategies, from policy approaches (e.g., parking fees, time limits, and more) to the placement of additional parking facilities.

The Studio Team

About 30 senior students will enroll in URP 4310 and URP 4320. Two-thirds of the students will consistently conduct the study under the supervision of the instructor, Dr. Brandy Chappell-Hill. Dr. Chappell-Hill has strong teaching and research background in community development.