



Plaza Park [Cesar Chavez Plaza]

Historic District Plan

Physical Description & Boundaries

The Plaza Park [Cesar Chavez Plaza] Historic District (formerly [Cesar Chavez Memorial] Plaza Park/CBD Historic District) is situated in the northwest quadrant of Sacramento’s 1848 street grid and features one the city’s original one-block public squares. The district’s name references several names held by the plaza over the course of its history, while “CBD” is an abbreviation for “Central Business District,” a title sometimes given to Sacramento’s downtown core.

In addition to the plaza, the district consists of a mix of late nineteenth- to mid-twentieth-century commercial and civic buildings, some of monumental scale. The district is roughly bounded by H Street to the north, 8th Street to the west, L Street to the south, and 11th Street to the east.



Figure 253. The Beaux Arts City Hall building as viewed from Cesar Chavez (formerly Plaza Park).

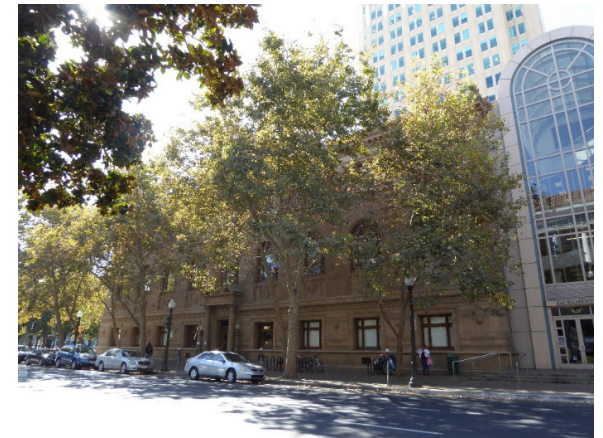


Figure 254. The Italian Renaissance style Sacramento Public Library and a modern addition (visible to the right) are shaded by rows of sycamore trees.



Figure 255. View of City Hall with the New City Hall building behind it.



Figure 256. The district contains commercial buildings that display a wide variety of architectural styles and forms, such as these buildings on 9th Street.

Brief Historic Context

The Plaza Park [Cesar Chavez Plaza] Historic District has witnessed nearly 170 years of Sacramento's history and features an equally broad spectrum of architectural periods and styles. Sacramentans have referred to the plaza by a number of names over the course of its history, including its such early appellations as City Plaza, Plaza Park, or simply, "the Plaza," and its current name, Cesar Chavez Park. The one-block lot, was one of ten public squares donated to the City by John A. Sutter, Jr. in 1848 as part of the laying out of his father's rancho into Sacramento's original street grid.¹ After Sacramento attained its status as the state capital in 1854, it was proposed that the plaza be used for the site of the Capitol building, a scheme that was later abandoned.²

The square remained undeveloped open space for several decades, to the point that local newspapers described it as an "omnium gatherum of wagons and weeds."³ In 1872, Street Commissioner John Rider was "determined to fill-in the plaza and reclaim it from the circus, the strayed animal, the dump cart and the winter's waters."⁴ The square was filled an average of five feet with material taken from the bed of the American River.⁵ John Keating was hired to

1 Page & Turnbull, "Raised Streets & Hollow Sidewalks," (report, Sacramento, CA, 2009), 7.

2 Winfield J. Davis, *An Illustrated History of Sacramento County, California: Containing a History of Sacramento County from the Earliest Period of its Occupancy to the Present Time, together with Glimpses of its Prospective Future; with Profuse Illustrations of its Beautiful Scenery, Full-Page Portraits of Some of its most Eminent Men, and Biographical Mention of Many of its Pioneers and also of Prominent Citizens of To-day* (Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company: 1890), 203-204.

3 "An Instance of Rapid Improvement," *Sacramento Daily Union*, March 16, 1878, [https://cdnc.ucr.edu/cgi-bin/cdnc?a=d&d=SDU18780316.2.55&srpos=18&e=-----187-en--20--1--txt-txIN--Ninth+Street"+Plaza+Sacramen to-----1](https://cdnc.ucr.edu/cgi-bin/cdnc?a=d&d=SDU18780316.2.55&srpos=18&e=-----187-en--20--1--txt-txIN--Ninth+Street).

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.



Figure 257. View looking south along 9th Street, showing the increase in building scale and mass toward the south end of the district.

design the landscape of the park. Keating's axial plan is still visible in the plaza's present layout.

The improvement of the plaza was a major endeavor that coincided with the raising of street levels in downtown Sacramento. The devastating floods of 1861 and 1862 prompted the local government to improve the public infrastructure of the city. Not only was the street raising project undertaken in the interest of safeguarding Sacramento residents, but also as a measure to ensure that Sacramento remained a viable location for the State Capitol and an attractive destination for the terminus of the transcontinental railroad.⁶

From 1868 through 1869, street levels were raised as much as 14 feet on K Street between 4th and 10th streets, I Street between 5th and 10th streets;

6 Page & Turnbull, 24.



Figure 258. Alleys dip down to the original city grade, prior to the street raising campaigns of the 1860s.

8th Street between I and K streets; and 9th and 10th streets between I and J streets.⁷ As a whole, the streets were raised to be level with the plaza, which was the highest land mass in the city.⁸ The resulting streetscape included hollow sidewalks, many of which are still intact within the area.

The plaza is surrounded on all sides by multi-story institutional and commercial buildings. While the majority of the area's core buildings date from the late-1890s through the 1930s, some date to the earlier commercial development of downtown Sacramento.⁹ The two-story brick building located at 904 J Street was constructed in 1856, making it the oldest extant structure in the district and one of the oldest in the

7 Ibid., 13.

8 Davis, 205.

9 "2.2.18 [Cesar Chavez Memorial] Plaza Park/CBD Historic District," (Ordinance # 85-076, Sacramento Register of Historic and Cultural Resources, July 30, 1985, updated May 2014), 2.

witnessed since the Gold Rush.¹⁵ The California-Western States Life Insurance Building, constructed in 1925 at the corner of the corner of J and 10th streets, remains a testament to this era of growth and prosperity. The classical motifs of the skyscraper compliment the Beaux Arts and Renaissance Revival municipal buildings that were also built during this period. Because of its proximity to the State Capitol grounds, the area was increasingly civic-oriented after the turn of the twentieth century. The ornate City Hall and Sacramento City Library, both located at the northern terminus of the district, were constructed in 1911 and 1918, respectively.

The area felt the effects of the Great Depression but did not cease to be a center of activity in the city. The Federal Courthouse and Post Office Building, constructed in 1933, was one of many federally-funded projects that employed Sacramentans during the Depression.¹⁶ Likewise, the Hart Brothers Cafeteria, located at 1016-1020 10th Street, served thousands of meals per day to the area's large unemployed and transient populations. At the height of the Depression, the restaurant offered free coffee and bread every evening.¹⁷

During World War II, defense-related industries brought thousands of new residents to Sacramento. The staggering population growth felt by the greater metro-area brought with it renewed commercial



Figure 260. View of the California-Western States Life Insurance Building and Plaza Park (right), looking south along 10th Street (1920). Source: California History Room, California State Library, Sacramento, California.

spending to downtown.¹⁸ The Baby Boom Generation flocked to department stores on J and K streets. Among the enterprises within the area were the Hale Brothers Department Store and S.H. Kress and Company. These businesses stood as pillars of the postwar city by catering to the “pent-up consumer demand” of the region’s rapidly expanding middle class.¹⁹

18 Annette Kassis, *Weinstock's: Sacramento's Finest Department Store* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2012), 90-91.
19 *Ibid.*, 90.

The district changed dramatically with the rise of Sacramento’s suburbs. In 1954, the shops and major department stores on K Street accounted for 75.6 percent of the county’s sales tax base. That figure had dropped to 19.6 percent by 1965.²⁰ The long-standing establishments of the district opened suburban branches throughout the 1950s and 1960s, many of which were more profitable than their downtown locations.²¹ The first regional mall in the vicinity of Sacramento, the Country Club Center, was opened in 1951.²² The Country Club Center and other new malls offered a more convenient shopping experience for the rapidly expanding suburban population.

The decline in urban commercial activity during the mid-twentieth century was directly linked to the increased efficiency of automobile transportation. The transformation was slow, at first. In 1947, the city’s extensive streetcar network was shut down in favor of buses and personal vehicles, a change that impacted the pedestrian character of downtown. In 1955, K and L streets were converted into one-way thoroughfares connecting the Tower Bridge to U.S. Route 40.²³ The final setback to the once thriving central business district came in 1968 with the completion of the Interstates 5 and 80 through downtown Sacramento, diverting automobile traffic away from city streets, entirely, and on to outlying shopping malls and newer residential areas.²⁴

The plaza played an important role in the revitalization

20 William Burg, *Sacramento's K Street: Where Our City Was Born* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2012), 130-131.

21 *Ibid.*, 131.
22 Avella, 133.
23 Burg, 117.
24 *Ibid.*, 137.

15 Steven M. Avella, *Sacramento: Indomitable City* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2003), 90.

16 Sacramento Archives and Museum Collection Center and the Historic Old Sacramento Foundation, *Old Sacramento and Downtown* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2006), 42.

17 Michael Dolugushkin, “Featured: Sacramento Restaurants,” Sacramento Room Digital Sacramento Public Library, accessed September 10, 2018. <http://cdm15248.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/featured>.

of the central business district towards the end of the twentieth century. In 1989, the Plaza Park Steering Committee worked with People for Public Places, Inc. to conduct an evaluation of the park. Their study led to the development of a popular restaurant in the park.²⁵ In 1995, the Downtown Sacramento Partnership established the state's first property-based improvement district, which has brought countless community events and programs to the plaza over the years.²⁶ In 1999, the plaza was renamed Cesar Chavez Plaza after the labor rights activist and founder of the United Farm Workers of America.²⁷



Figure 261. View looking west along K Street, with the Hale Bros. department store on the right and the Montgomery Ward and Kress buildings on the left (1938). Source: California History Room, California State Library, Sacramento, California.

²⁵ "Cesar Chavez Park and Plaza: Sacramento, California," American Planning Association, 2012, <https://www.planning.org/greatplaces/spaces/2012/cesarchavezpark.htm>.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

Significance

The Plaza Park [Cesar Chavez Plaza] Historic District was designated for listing on the Sacramento Register of Historic and Cultural Resources by the City Preservation Commission in 1985 in Ordinance #85-076 as the [Cesar Chavez Memorial] Plaza Park/CBD Historic District.

The following table provides a current evaluation of significance under the requirements and considers the factors based on the above historic district context and the 2018 historic district survey. Additionally, this historic district relates to the Railroad Context Statement and World War II, Transportation, and Redevelopment Context Statement of the city’s General Plan Technical Background Report.

(B) Listing on the Sacramento Register – Historic districts	
(1) Requirements	
(a)	The Plaza Park [Cesar Chavez Plaza] Historic District meets requirement (a) for listing on the Sacramento Register, because it is a geographically definable area.
(b)(i)	<p>The Plaza Park [Cesar Chavez Plaza] Historic District meets requirement (b)(i) for listing on the Sacramento Register as an area that possesses “a significant concentration or continuity of buildings unified by: (A) past events or (B) aesthetically by plan or physical development.”</p> <p>The Plaza Park [Cesar Chavez Plaza] Historic District is significant for its concentration of buildings that reflect over a century of civic and commercial development in Sacramento’s central business district. The diversity of buildings and uses within the district also reflect changing tastes in commercial and civic architectural styles over time. Early twentieth-century civic and institutional buildings, including City Hall and the Sacramento City Library, are characteristic examples of the Beaux Arts and Italian Renaissance styles, respectively. Conversely, the design of the Federal Courthouse and Post Office, which was constructed at the low point of the Great Depression, is representative of federally funded WPA buildings of the period. The district’s many commercial buildings, meanwhile, range from small nineteenth-century brick commercial buildings to the larger department stores of major national brands that remained a vibrant part of the city through the middle of the twentieth century.</p>
(b)(ii)	<p>The Plaza Park [Cesar Chavez Plaza] Historic District meets requirement (b)(ii) for listing on the Sacramento Register as an area “associated with an event, person, or period significant or important to city history.”</p> <p>The Plaza Park [Cesar Chavez Plaza] Historic District is significant for its association with Sacramento’s evolution from burgeoning Gold Rush town to modern metropolitan city. Cesar Chavez Plaza, formerly the City Plaza, was, itself, one of the public squares donated by John A. Sutter, Jr. to the City as part of the laying out of his father’s rancho into the city’s existing street grid. It was also the first of these squares to be developed as a park. Its present form still exhibits some of the elements of John Keating’s original landscape design from 1872, such as its axial walkway plan. Additionally, the district contains several high-integrity sections of hollow sidewalks that were created when the city’s streets were raised during the 1860s to protect the city from floods. The effort stabilized Sacramento and allowed the city to continue to expand. Moderately-sized brick buildings on the edges of the plaza recall early commercial development in Sacramento’s central business district in the nineteenth century, while the concentration of grand civic buildings—including Sacramento’s City Hall, City Library, and Federal Courthouse and Post Office—and larger early to mid-twentieth-century commercial buildings on K Street reflect Sacramento’s growth into a modern city.</p>

Period of Significance: 1848-1951

The period of significance for the Plaza Park [Cesar Chavez Plaza] Historic District spans from 1848, when Sacramento’s original street grid and public plazas were laid out, to 1951, when the Country Club Center was erected as Sacramento’s first regional mall, drawing commercial activity away from downtown. The suburban mall, along with increased automobile and home ownership during the postwar period, forever changed the ways in which residents interacted with the central business district.²⁸ Large shopping malls outside of Sacramento’s downtown grid attracted mobile, middle-class individuals who were no longer dependent localized services and retail.

Property Types from the Period of Significance

- Commercial
- Institutional/Civic
- Recreational

Architectural Styles from the Period of Significance

- Queen Anne
- Neoclassical
- Art Deco
- Commercial Styles:
 - Three-Part Block
 - Vault
- Romanesque Revival
- Italian Renaissance
- Streamline Moderne
- One-Part Commercial Block
- Two-Part Vertical Block
- Beaux Arts
- Late Moderne
- Two-Part Commercial Block
- Central Block with Wings

(B) Listing on the Sacramento Register – Historic districts	
(1) Requirements	
(c)	The Plaza Park [Cesar Chavez Plaza] Historic District meets requirement (c) for listing on the Sacramento Register as it aligns with the goals and purposes of historic preservation in Sacramento, as well as the city’s other goals and policies. Per the Sacramento City Code, the preservation of the district enhances the “city’s economic, cultural and aesthetic standing, its identity and its livability, marketability, and urban character.”
(B) Listing on the Sacramento Register – Historic districts	
(2) Factors to be considered	
(a)	Factor (2)(a) states that “a historic district should have integrity of design, setting, materials, workmanship and association.” The East End Historic District retains sufficient integrity to meet this factor for consideration as a historic district.
(b)	Factor (2)(b) states that “the collective historic value of the buildings and structures in a historic district taken together may be greater than the historic value of each individual building or structure.” The Plaza Park [Cesar Chavez Plaza] Historic District meets this factor because its buildings and structures represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose collective historic value is greater when taken as a whole.

²⁸ Avella, 133.

Character-Defining Features

Element	Character of Historic District
Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commercial and civic buildings of varying ages and styles oriented around 9th Street and Cesar Chavez Plaza Changes in use and character between the north and south ends of the district—large civic buildings concentrated on I and 9th streets at the northern terminus of the district, modest One- and Two-Part Block commercial buildings on the south edge of the plaza, and large department stores located on K Street (i.e. Hale Brothers, Kress, and Montgomery & Ward)
Mass & Form	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Horizontally massed civic buildings and vertically massed commercial buildings Tallest buildings frequently situated on corner parcels
Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Predominately brick, stone, terracotta, and concrete masonry
Roofs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Predominately flat roofs with protruding cornices and ornamented soffits Commercial buildings with flat or geometric parapets, particularly those facing the south edge of the plaza
Entries & Doors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recessed entrances, particularly on One-Part Commercial Block buildings Presence or evidence of garage doors for vehicular access on numbered streets and alleys
Windows	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Large shopfront windows at street level Multi-story boxed, semi-hexagonal, and rounded bay windows Wood-frame, double-hung windows on the upper stories of mixed-use buildings

Element	Character of Historic District
Ornamentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimal wall surface ornamentation Classical Revival details, such as egg-and-dart trim, dentil bands, medallions, and garlands High density of Art Deco-style elements near the intersection of 9th and K streets Columns and pilasters topped with Ionic or Corinthian capitals and Roman or segmental arches with prominent voussoirs and keystones Ghost signs on the exposed sides of older brick buildings
Property Landscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimal or no property landscaping due to zero-lot-line buildings Axial pathways intersecting at the Coleman Fountain at the center of Cesar Chavez Plaza
Streetscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deep, south-facing setbacks in front of City Hall and the Federal Courthouse and Post Office building Minimal or no setback in front of commercial buildings throughout the district Rows of mature, evenly spaced, deciduous street trees—most often sycamore, palm, and walnut trees—planted in planters or small parking strips lining the sidewalks Large gilded lampposts at the primary entrances of civic buildings Extant hollow sidewalks and sunken alleyways dating to the street raising campaigns of the 1860s Some cobblestones and granite curbs along street edges

Boundaries & Location

The following map shows the boundaries and location of the Plaza Park [Cesar Chavez Plaza] Historic District.

To view the statuses of individual properties as contributing or non-contributing resources to the historic district, refer to the Sacramento Register of Historic and Cultural Resources.

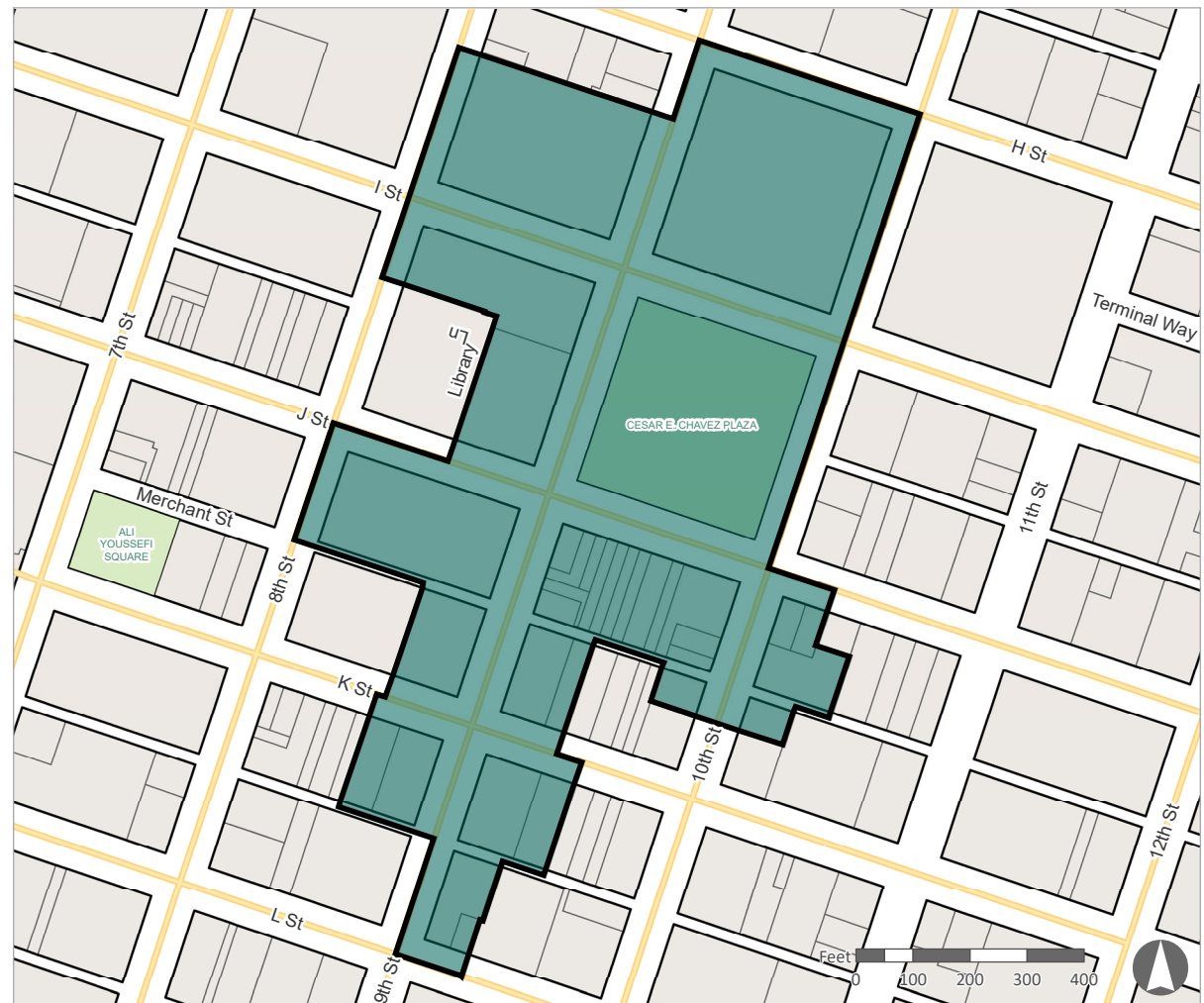
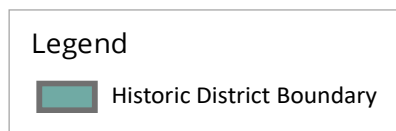


Figure 262. Map of the Plaza Park [Cesar Chavez Plaza] Historic District. Source: City of Sacramento and Page & Turnbull, 2019.

District-Specific Standards & Criteria

Design Principle

Maintain and strengthen the grand civic and commercial character of this district as part of Sacramento's historic civic core.

Rationale

The Plaza Park [Cesar Chavez Plaza] Historic District contains many of the city's most iconic civic and commercial resources, ranging from Sacramento's first civic institutions and its first developed park in the late nineteenth century to iconic commercial buildings constructed in the early and mid-twentieth century. The area represents the city's symbolic center, consisting of a variety of buildings and public spaces that contained the activities that defined city life. The district continues to serve as the city's civic core and is connected by important commercial and transportation corridors along 9th and 10th streets to the Capitol and J and K streets to Downtown, the intermodal transit facility, outlining freeways, and the city's outlining neighborhoods. The preservation of the contributing resources which convey the district's historic significance and the strengthening of its civic identity is vital for a thriving downtown.

In addition to the Standards & Criteria Common to Sacramento's Historic Districts in Section 1, the following district-specific standards and criteria apply when planning a project in the Plaza Park [Cesar Chavez Plaza] Historic District.

1. Rehabilitation of Contributing Resources

- 1.1 Make every effort to preserve, repair, and maintain existing steel or wood frame windows, which contribute to the commercial or civic character of the district.
 - Re-instate multi-lite steel or wood frame windows, where they have been removed, if there is adequate documentation and if feasible.
 - Replace removed historic street-facing windows where feasible, if there is adequate documentation to inform design.
- 1.2 Avoid filling in or obstructing historic window or door openings.
- 1.3 Re-open historic window and door openings that have been filled in.
 - Use compatible new windows and door materials, types, and forms.
- 1.4 Preserve and restore articulated storefronts with recessed entries on contributing buildings.
- 1.5 Avoid painting or applying new finishes on historically unpainted exterior masonry, particularly where historic painted signs (ghost signs) are present.
 - Consider removing paint or finishes from historically unpainted exterior masonry, using the gentlest methods possible, during exterior repairs or renovations.
 - Maintain paint on exterior masonry where likely to be the historic condition.



Figure 263. Historic exterior cladding and decorative ornamentation contribute to the character of the district as a whole.



Figure 264. The historic facades, exterior materials, windows, and entries of several buildings on J Street have been covered with incompatible non-historic cladding and additions.

2. Additions & Accessory Structures for Contributing Resources

- 2.1 Where rooftop additions are desired, consider using step backs in order to maintain the existing street façade height, especially facing Cesar Chavez Plaza.
- 2.2 Maintain existing recessed entries where they exist to preserve the characteristic street frontage pattern.
- 2.3 Use durable, high-quality materials that are compatible with the materials of adjacent contributing buildings in the district such as stone, cast-stone, masonry, concrete, metal, and wood.

3. New (Infill) Construction & Alterations to Non-Contributing Resources

- 3.1 Preserve the historic pattern of siting new buildings with a zero-lot-line setback from the street.
- 3.2 Where buildings taller than the surrounding contributing buildings are proposed, consider using step backs to maintain the existing street facade height of adjacent contributing buildings.
 - Taller heights and larger masses may be appropriate for buildings sited at street corners.
 - New buildings adjacent to 926 J Street should be lower in height and set back to protect visibility of the contributing high-rise building.
- 3.3 Consider the alignment of windows, doors, and variations in façade treatments to be compatible with adjacent contributing buildings in order to maintain the existing pattern of door and window openings within the block.
- 3.4 Use durable, high-quality materials that are compatible with those in the historic district.
- 3.5 Incorporate awnings that reference the form, scale, and materials of historic awnings at ground level of primary street frontages.



Figure 265. The addition to City Hall incorporates materials, height, scale, and a generous setback that are compatible with the historic building and maintain its primacy in the wider streetscape.



Figure 266. The California-Western States Life Insurance Building at 926 J Street is a visual focal point of the district.

4. Site Features, Streetscape, & Landscaping

- 4.1 Maintain and preserve existing historic landscape plan and features at Cesar Chavez Plaza, including axial pathways and statues.
- 4.2 Preserve historic street and alley grades, when feasible.
- 4.3 Maintain and preserve existing historic cobblestones and street paving.
- 4.4 Maintain, preserve, and, where necessary, repair and restore historic lighting and signage features.
- 4.5 Use signage methods, materials, and proportions that are reflective of historic signage used on contributing properties within the district.

- 4.6 Encourage a streetscape palette including lighting, street furniture, and street tree planting along 9th Street to Capitol Avenue that is compatible with that used at Cesar Chavez Plaza.
- 4.7 Encourage a streetscape palette at J Street surrounding Cesar Chavez Plaza that is compatible with that along 9th Street.

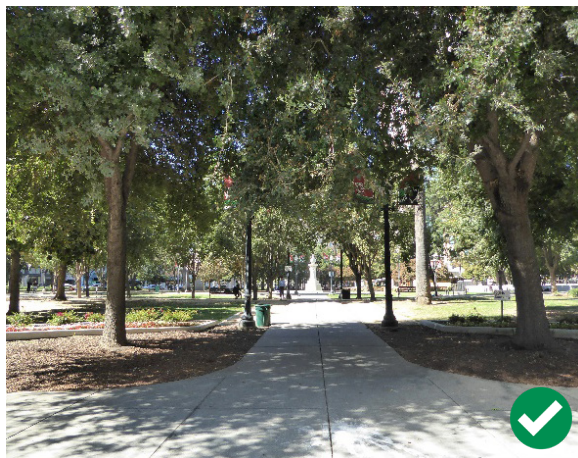


Figure 267. Axial pathways are historic features of Cesar Chavez Park.



Figure 268. Dipping alley grades are a remnant of the city's original street levels.



Figure 269. Historic cobblestones survive in some parts of the district.