



Written comment on item 7-A for 10/21/25 city council meeting

From Mitch B <mitchaball@gmail.com>

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To CITYCOUNCIL-List <CITYCOUNCIL-List@alamedaca.gov>

Hello,

I will be making a public comment on item 7-A for the 10/21/25 city council meeting and wanted to share a written copy with linked citations and a few images.

I'd like to talk about the proposed public safety parcel tax. Public safety, whether it be achieved through police or mental health response teams, is important, so I don't take issue with funding these public services through a parcel tax, but I am concerned about the structure of the proposed parcel tax.

For context, we are in a housing crisis. There are many people living on the streets or in their cars because there are not enough homes available. Many people my age do not benefit from a home purchased decades ago, are struggling to pay rent, and may never retire because they just can't afford to put anything into savings.

The current proposal is for the tax to be collected per sqft of building floorplan area. Unfortunately, taxing buildings discourages the development of desperately needed new housing. Collecting taxes for public safety in this manner may have the coincidental unintended consequence of hurting public safety by making more people homeless and making ends harder to meet for young people. People often have more mental health crises when homeless and financial difficulties can encourage young people to turn to crime.

There is a smarter, more effective way to pay for public safety. Rather than taxing floorplan area, we can instead tax lot area like how Albany does now to pay for its sidewalk management (<https://www.albanycity.gov/Departments/Public-Works/Programs/Sidewalks>). This seemingly small change has big benefits. Firstly, it's just easier to calculate and has more predictable revenue. Secondly, rather than discouraging building homes, it instead discourages ownership of vacant or under-utilized land, which may even have the effect of actually encouraging development of more homes.

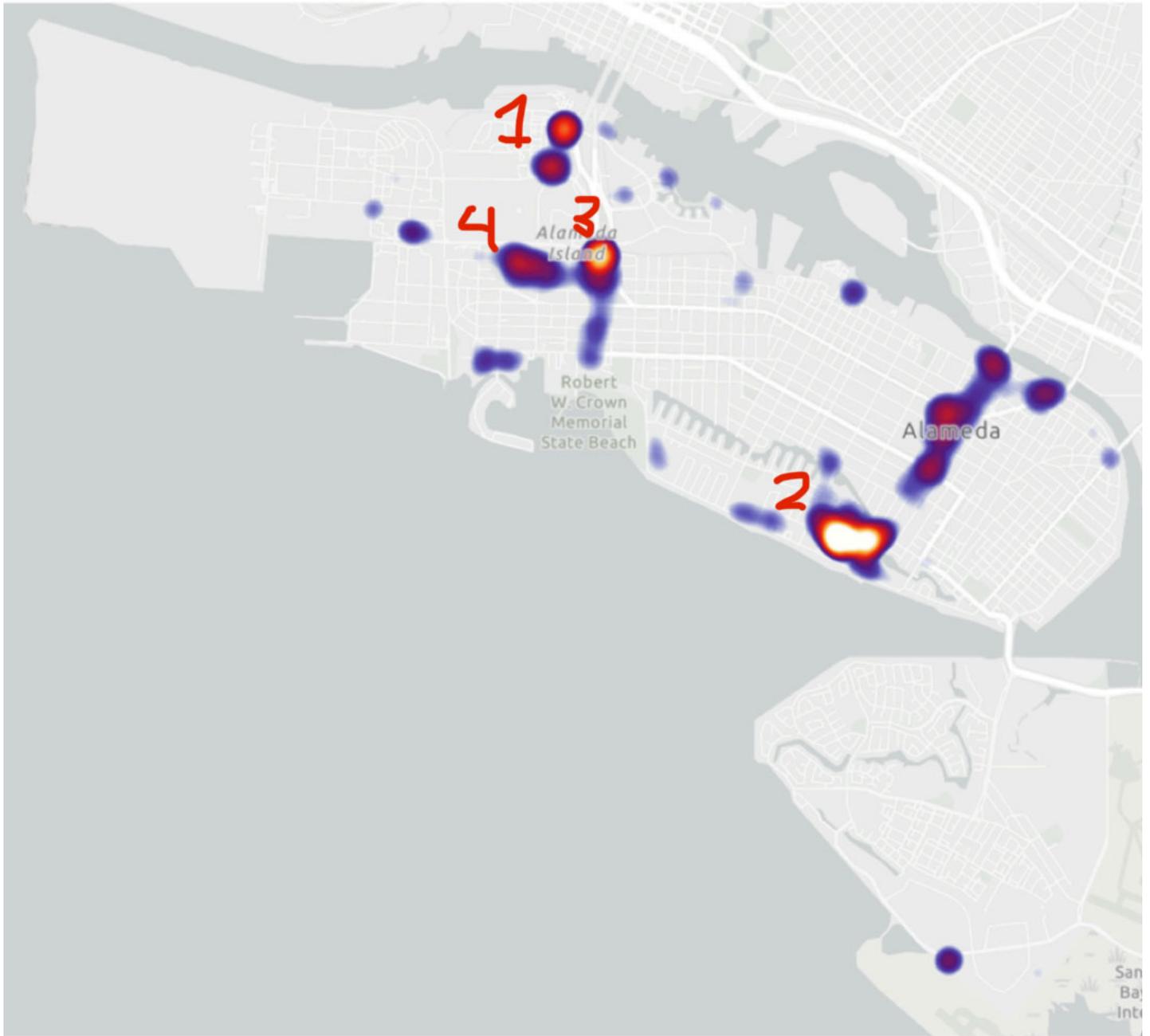
The last argument is that it better captures the tax-benefit linkage, making the tax more palatable to voters. Crimes and mental health crises do not only happen indoors. In fact, they frequently occur outdoors. According to APD's 2024 annual report, between DUIs, motor vehicle theft, and larceny from motor vehicles or their parts, nearly a third of all reported crime in Alameda last year was directly related to motor vehicles (<https://www.alamedaca.gov/files/assets/public/v/2/departments/alameda/police/apd-annual-report-2024-for-upload.pdf>) which just aren't typically indoors. This one third of course does not include citations or warnings given during traffic enforcement or the large portion of crimes committed outdoors not directly related to motor vehicles. It is in fact, land with less floorplan where the most crime in Alameda occurs. The Alameda Landing shopping mall, the South Shore shopping mall, and northern tip of the Webster St commercial district were the top three most significant hotspots for crime in Alameda last year and all three are majority parking lot by area. Vacant and under-utilized land encourages crime, so why shouldn't it be taxed for it?

If we need more funding for police and mental health response teams, then let's pay for it, but we should make sure it's paid for the right way. Good tax policy is designed around thoughtful incentives and clear linkage between what is taxed and the public benefit that the tax provides. Unlike a floorplan area parcel tax, a lot area parcel tax achieves both of these, and this smarter implementation will be to the benefit of all of Alameda.

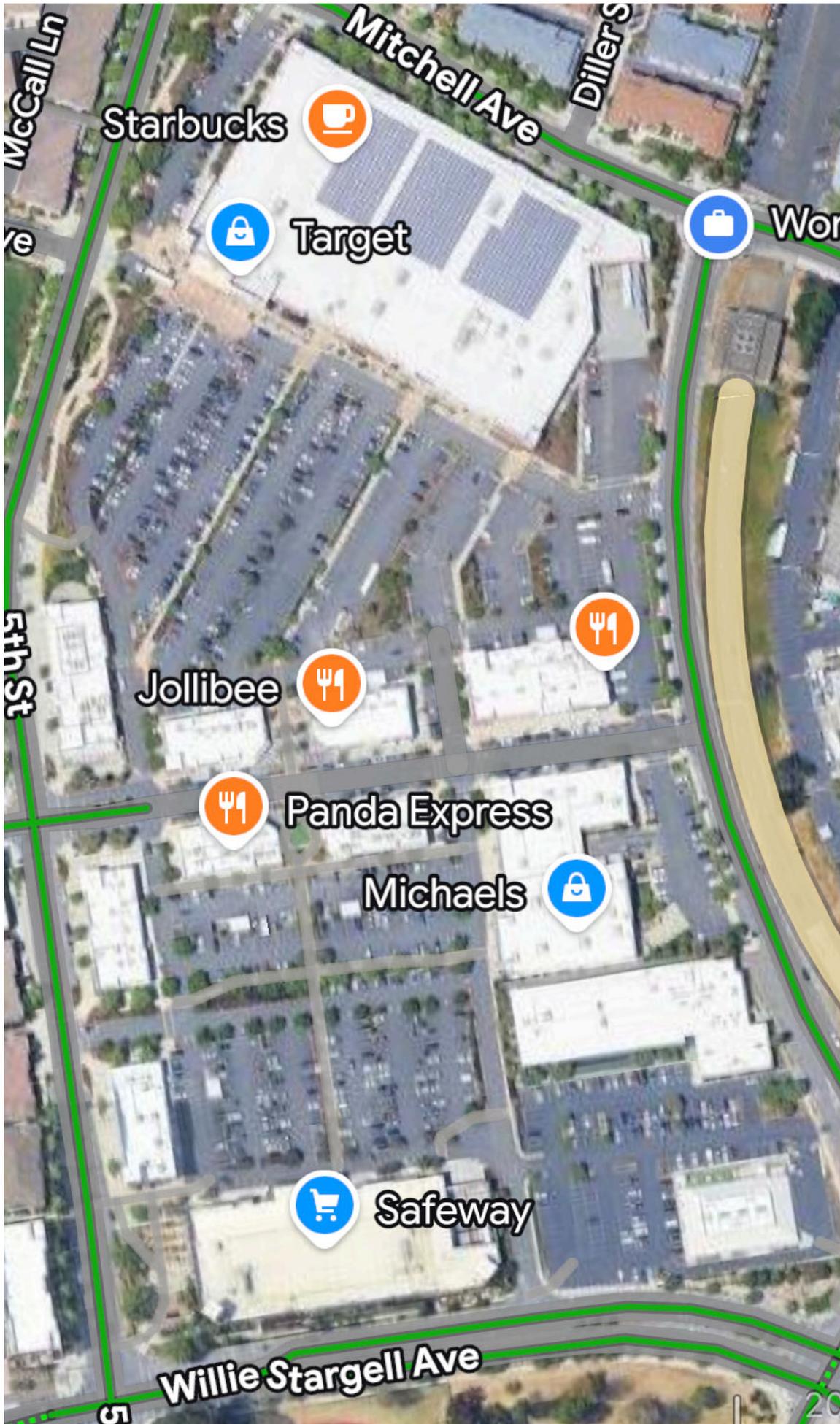
Thank you,
-Mitch Ball

Note for written comment only: I'm imagining someone might argue that floorplan area rather than lot area better captures the higher crime rate of apartment complexes. But that begs the question, do apartment complexes have higher crime rates? The only apartment location of note to show up in the heat map is Summer House Alameda, which is unique amongst apartment complexes on the island with its large open spaces and parking lots. Despite having 3-story buildings, this apartment complex has a similar floor area ratio to plenty of nearby single family homes. Meanwhile, there are plenty of higher floor area ratio apartment complexes throughout the island that don't show up on the heat map at all. Apartment complexes appear to have more crime in Alameda on average due almost entirely to Summer House Alameda, but the more significant factor contributing to crime is a low floor area ratio, likely due to the large parking lot at Summer House Alameda. Parking lots are simply hotbeds for crime.

Crime hotspots from APD 2024 Annual Report

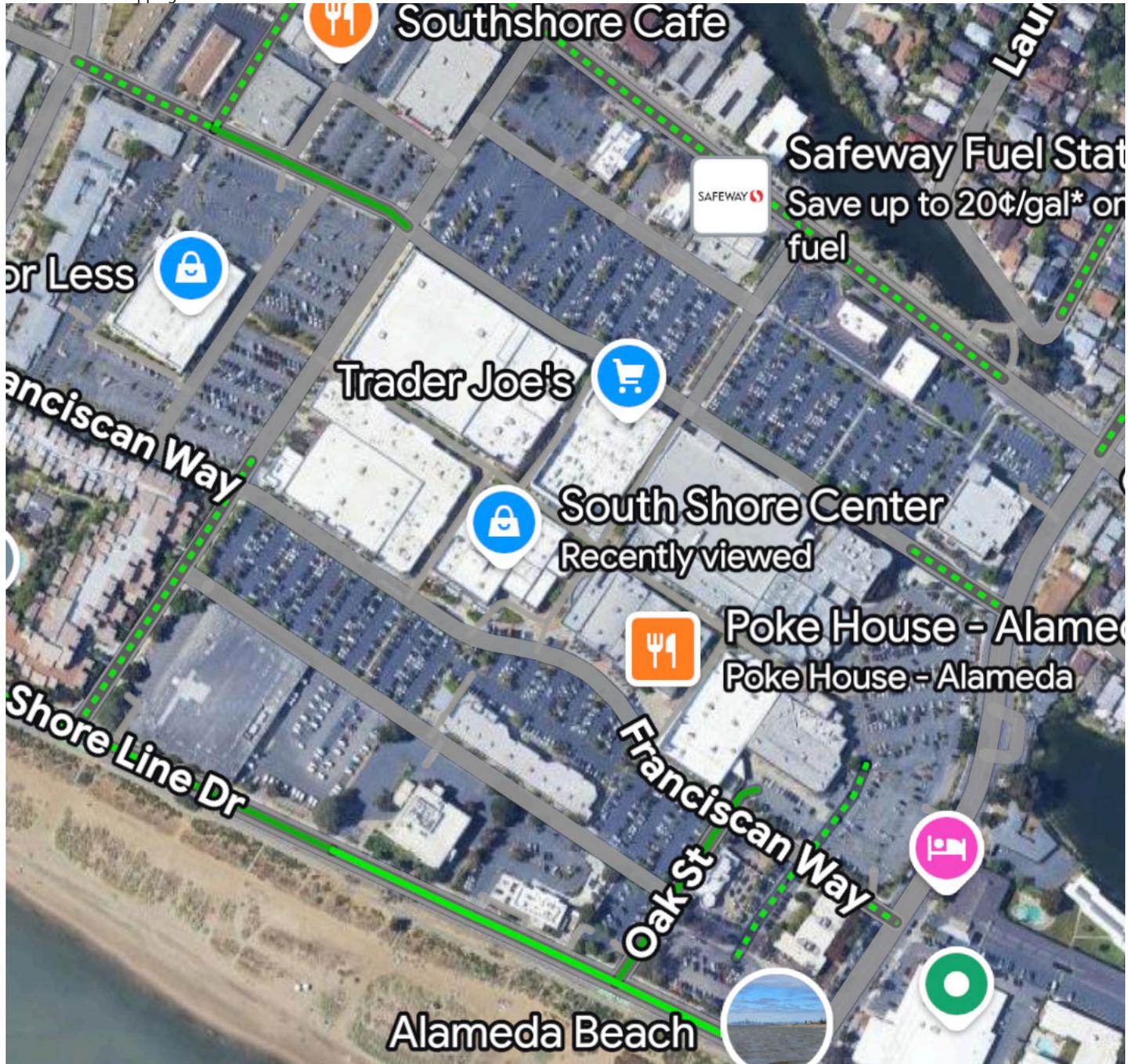


1. Alameda Landing Shopping Mall

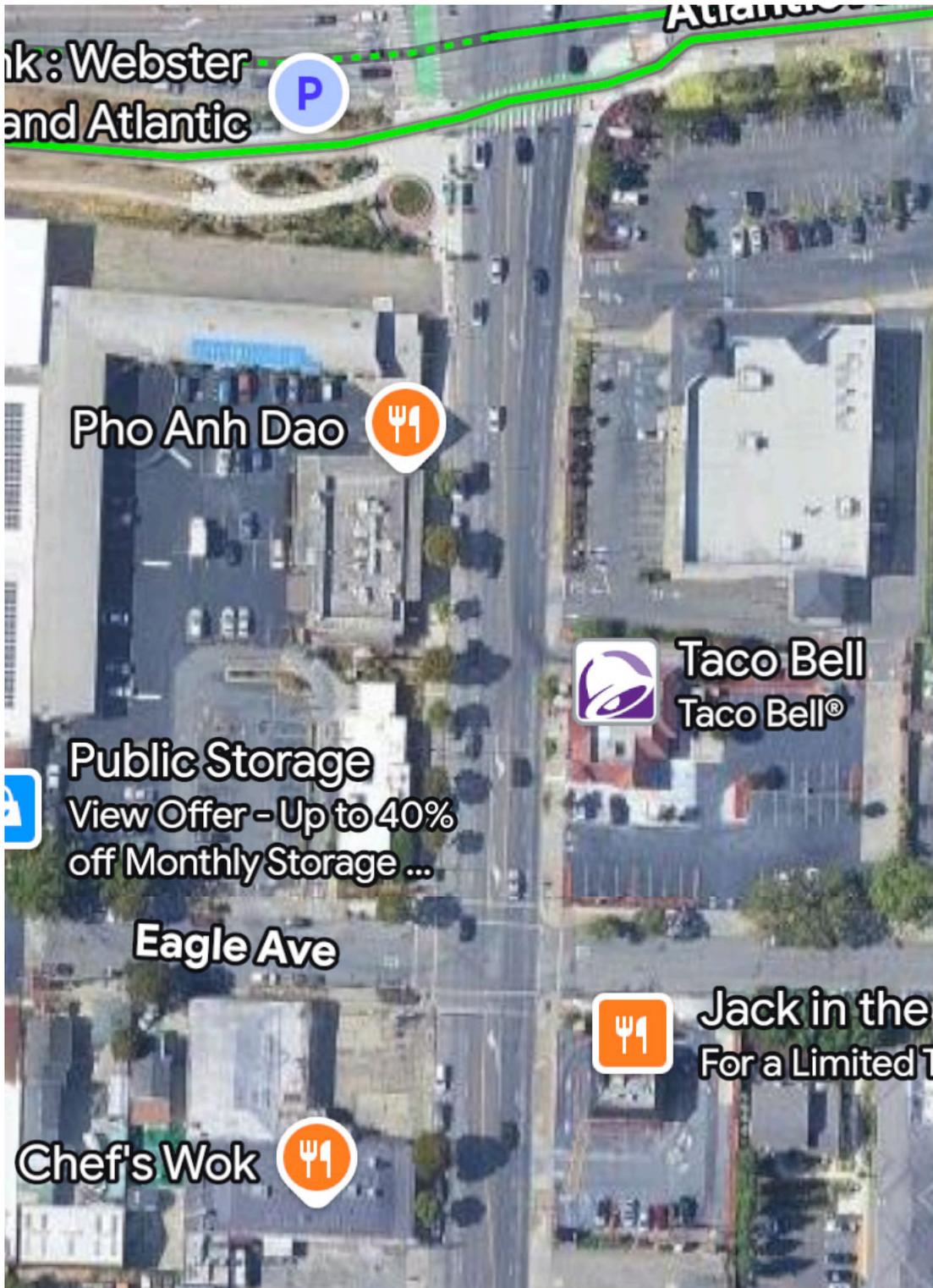




2. South Shore Shopping Mall



3. Northern Webster St Commercial District



4. Summer House Alameda

