

## **East Palo Alto**

The dominant factor in all Willows traffic problems is the cultural divide between the Menlo Park and less affluent East Palo Alto zone within the Willows. Concerns about crime, property values and cut through traffic all lead to East Palo Alto. A consultant hired to work with the Willows activists reported “There is little or no sense of community with neighbors in the University Circle area of EPA ... traffic with an origin in EPA is considered *through traffic*.” (TJKM Transportation Consultants, 2/3/92)

Willows traffic activists live by and large on streets most frequented by EPA traffic: Chester, Durham, O’Keefe and Woodland.

The map (Fig 1) shows the high population density of EPA zone and the businesses at the Willow Rd ends of O’Keefe, Durham and Chester Streets that serve them. It should be no surprise that there are a high percentage of EPA residents travelling those streets. The Preferred Plan produced by the consultant and the Willows traffic activists would have blocked all vehicle traffic (except emergency vehicles) between EPA and MP, cutting them off from Willow Rd. This would have left approximately 2400 EPA residents in a bottle with one exit.

The Preferred Plan generated opposition from EPA and Menlo Park backed off with a sequence of less blatantly offensive plans. The plan which the City Council actually approved replaced the barriers with a bewildering maze of chokers, chicanes and traffic circles. In the words of the March 16, 1993 Staff Report “Its primary purpose is to make travel through the area difficult while not actually preventing it ... a system of devices which discourages or precludes travel through a specific area”. Paul Collacchi (later a MP Council Member) stated in a letter to the City Engineer (March 3, 1993) “the plan is little more than a poorly disguised attempt to prevent the residents of EPA from entering Menlo Park. That was the *idée fixe* of the plan and has become the unalterable, unspoken value underlying it since its inception.”

## **Cut Through Traffic**

The City Transportation Division supports the activists’ claims of dire cut-through traffic by publishing cut-through traffic measurements (staff report 04-072) based on the assumption that EPA residents are outsiders. They withheld results which showed that 40 to 50% of the alleged Willows cut through traffic originates in EPA. In the “trouble spots”, Chester St for example, 80% of the alleged outbound AM cut through traffic originates in EPA.

## **Crime**

A serious outbreak of gang warfare in EPA in ’92 generated a sense that something has to be done. It was used to generate signatures on a petition asking for traffic control as a deterrent to crime. This launched the Willows Traffic Plan of ’93 – ’96. The gang activity was suppressed by extra law enforcement but the Willows Traffic plan had

reached critical mass. Paul Collacchi had this to say about the petitioning process: “When circulating petitions, Willows Working Group members circulated petitions calling for measures to reduce crime ... The crime petition was often deliberately used as a “bait and switch” lead-in to the traffic control petition. Petitioners were often vague about the finality of the (traffic) plan and I my encounter with a petitioner I came away thinking that in fact a different plan was going to be offered (to the City Council for approval)”.

In 2005, a spate of armed robberies at the La Hacienda market on Menalto. In 2003 it had been restructured to serve an EPA Hispanic clientele. As early as March 2003 it became the target of criticism for the traffic it supposedly generated. The robberies became a new argument for traffic controls “easy get-away routes may contribute to the store being a target” according to a flyer handed out at a protest demonstration 4/23/05.

In 2007, two shooting incidents generated renewed calls for traffic control for the purpose of crime control.

### **Continuing EPA phobia**

Recent EPA-related events which have been used with varying success to panic Willows residents:

1. Development of University Circle – dire pronouncements of traffic flooding the Willows, but never a positive word about the elimination of liquor stores, bars, crummy apartments and the generally unwholesome environment known as “Whiskey Gulch”.
2. Armed robberies of La Hacienda Market, which caters to the large Hispanic population of EPA. Certainly a serious problem, but there was more hysteria geared to shutting down the market and of course installing traffic obstacles than calm attention to security details, which eventually solved the problem.
3. Opening of IKEA (!!!!) – intense agitation by the traffic activists resulted in neighborhood flyers from the Transportation Staff reassuring the neighborhood that MP was tracking the situation and would protect them from the predicted traffic onslaught.
4. Creation of the NTMP. The activists took the prohibition of using the NTMP to redistribute neighborhood traffic patterns as a threat to their long term program of barring EPA. This is the only way to understand their intense lobbying to have every reference to inclusion of residents from other jurisdictions removed from the document. Likewise their intense lobbying against provisions that limited street closures to cases of over-riding safety concern. Likewise their intense lobbying against the requirement that proponents of traffic changes demonstrate support of a majority of the neighborhood. All of these provisions would interfere with their plans to close out EPA.
5. The two shooting incidents in ‘07, which the Willows activists used to link crime to traffic and to grab for themselves the right to speak for Willows Residents. The result is the current Willows Area Wide Traffic Study (think G. Bush and 9/11) designed to concentrate power in the most vocal residents - themselves.

## **The Willows Area Wide Traffic Study**

In 2010 the City Council approved the RFP for the latest study, wisely stipulating that East Palo Alto Willows residents not be considered as cut-through traffic. In spite of this requirement, the Transportation Staff and the consultant TJKM came up with a plan clearly targeting EPA residents. While not actually blocking them from entering, it diverts them from streets of traffic activists (Chester, O'Keefe, Durham and Woodland) to devious routes via other Willows and Palo Alto streets. See Fig 2.

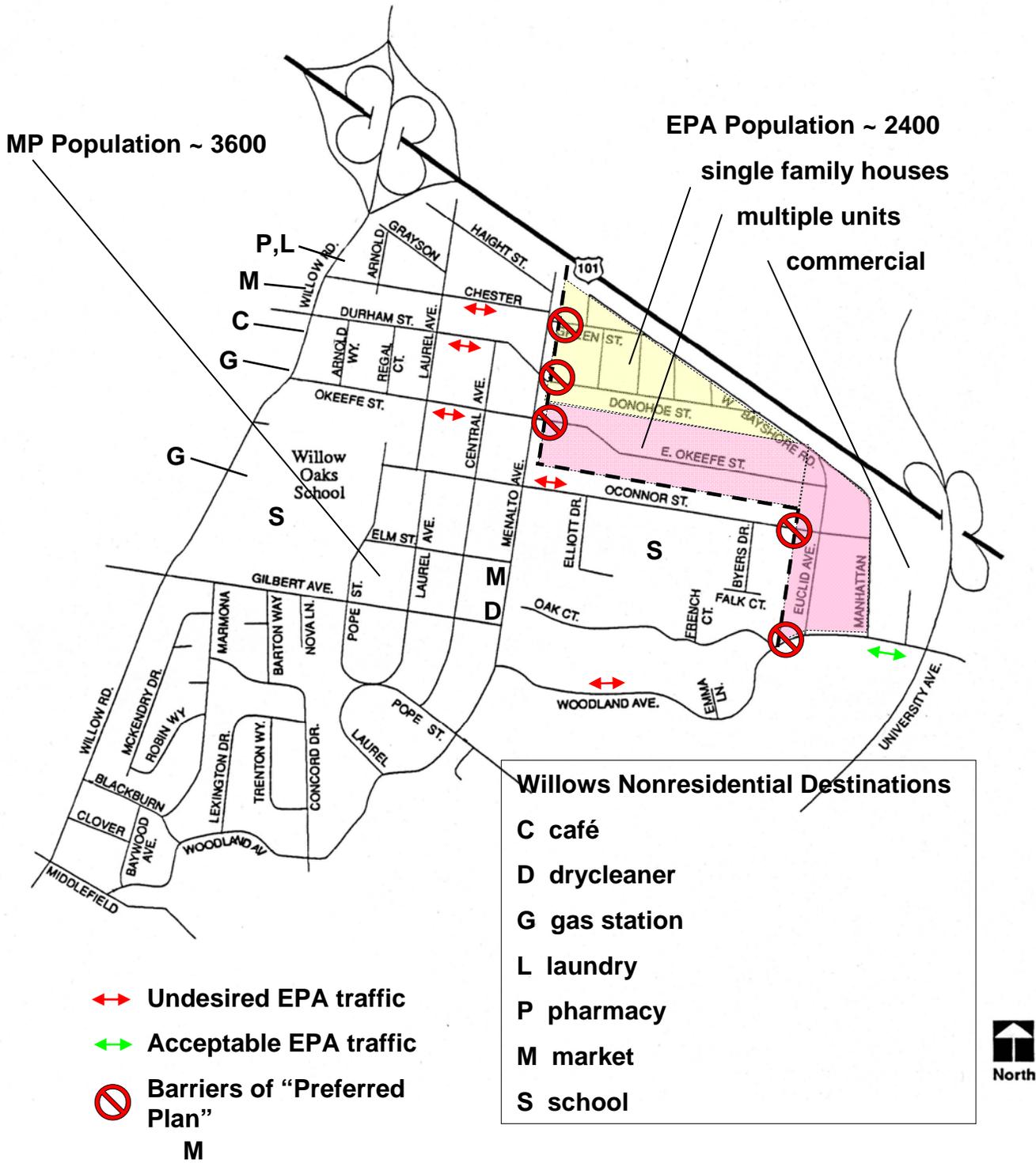


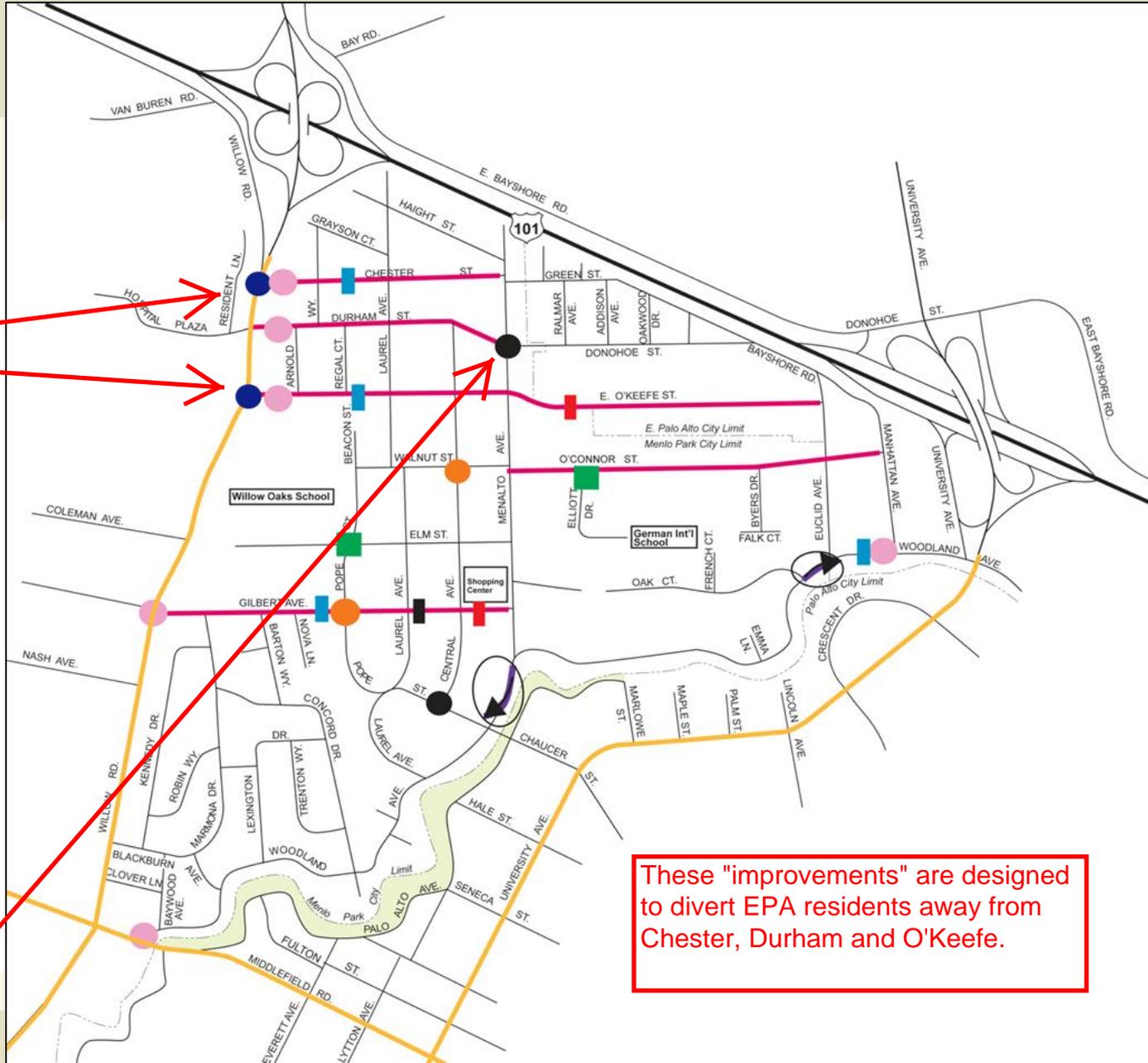
Fig 1. The Willows showing MP and EPA zones. Traditionally, EPA traffic uses Chester, Durham, O'Keefe and Woodland. "Undesired" and "Acceptable" EPA traffic refers to the preferences of Willows traffic activists, which led to the "preferred plan" of 1993 and the Willows Plan of 2011.



Fig 2.a. Diversion of traditional EPA Willows traffic by turn restrictions on Chester, O'Keefe and Durham

**IMPROVEMENTS FOR VOLUME:**

- Gateway Signs:
  - Chester St.
  - Durham St.
  - O'Keefe St.
  - Gilbert Ave.
  - Middlefield Rd.
  - Woodland Ave.
- Left Turn Restrictions on Willow Road During AM and PM Peak Hours:
  - Chester St.
  - O'Keefe Ave.
- Signal Coordination:
  - Willow Rd.
  - Middlefield Rd.
  - University Ave.
- Reduced Lane Width/Edge Line:
  - Chester St.
  - O'Keefe St.
  - O'Connor St.
  - Gilbert Ave.
- Partial One Way Conversion (1 block) on Woodland Ave:
  - Chaucer St. to Menalto Ave.
  - Oak Ct. to Euclid Ave.
- Right Turn Restrictions
  - EB right turn on Durham St. at Menalto Ave.
  - WB right turn on Chaucer St. at Central Ave.



These "improvements" are designed to divert EPA residents away from Chester, Durham and O'Keefe.



Fig 2.b. Diversion of traditional EPA Willows traffic by turn restrictions on Chester, O'Keefe and Durham

NOW: Traffic from Willow Rd to the East Willows is shared by Chester, Durham and O'Keefe - a practical and redundant traffic pattern. The use of these streets by East Palo Alto residents is the root of the Willows "cut-through traffic problem".

**IMPROVEMENTS FOR VOLUME:**

- Gateway Signs:
  - Chester St. ●
  - Durham St. ●
  - O'Keefe St. ●
  - Gilbert Ave. ●
  - Middlefield Rd. ●
  - Woodland Ave. ●
- Left Turn Restrictions on Willow Road During AM and PM Peak Hours:
  - Chester St. ●
  - O'Keefe Ave. ●
- Signal Coordination:
  - Willow Rd. —
  - Middlefield Rd. —
  - University Ave. —
- Reduced Lane Width/Edge Line:
  - Chester St. —
  - O'Keefe St. —
  - O'Connor St. —
  - Gilbert Ave. —
- Partial One Way Conversion (1 block) on Woodland Ave:
  - Chaucer St. to Menalto Ave.
  - Oak Ct. to Euclid Ave.
- Right Turn Restrictions
  - EB right turn on Durham St. at Menalto Ave. ●
  - WB right turn on Chaucer St. at Central Ave. ●

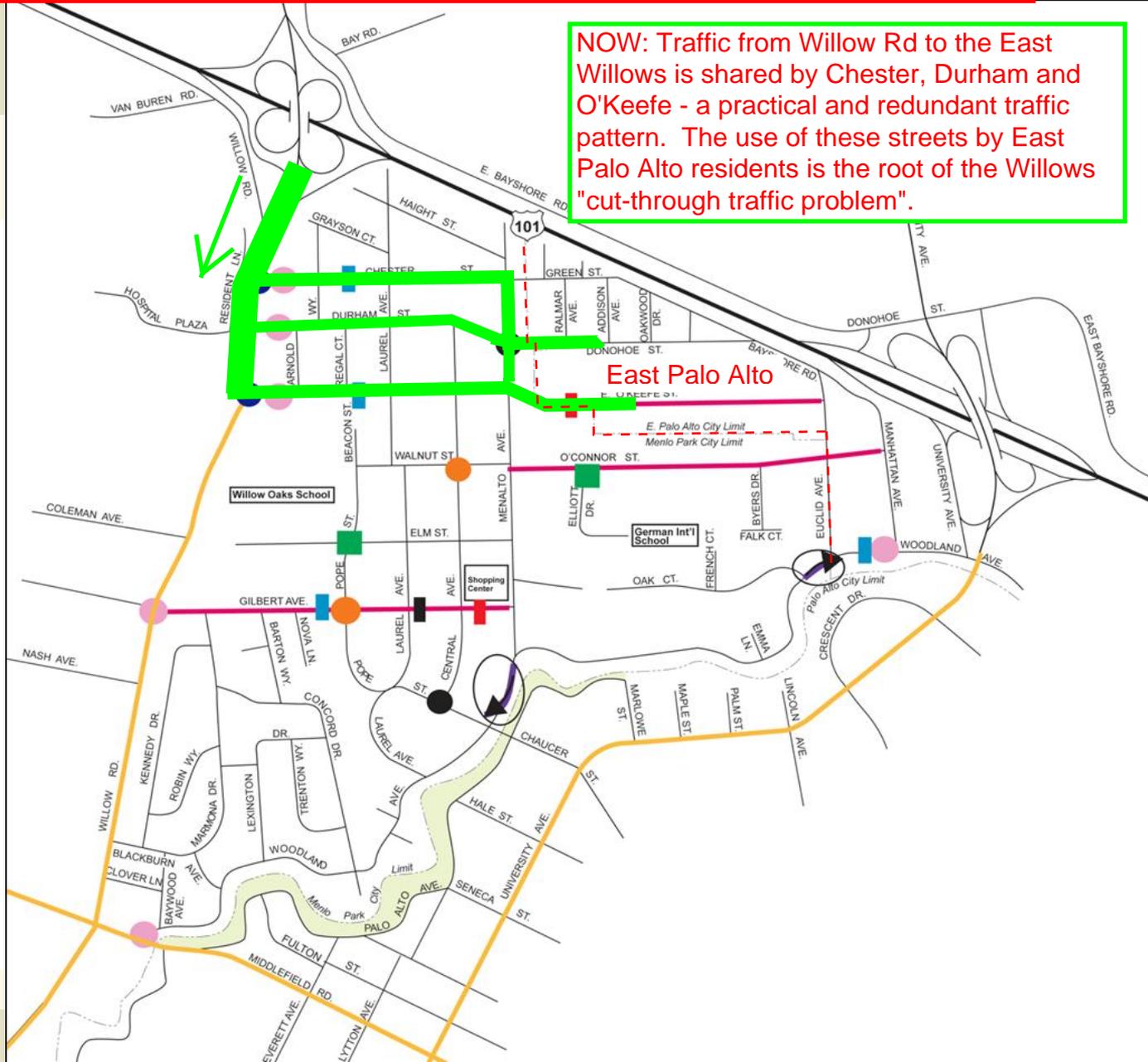




Fig 2.c. Diversion of traditional EPA Willows traffic by turn restrictions on Chester, O'Keefe and Durham

**AFTER "IMPROVEMENTS":** All traffic to the East Willows from 101 via Willow road will be routed to Gilbert, Pope, Laurel and Central.

**IMPROVEMENTS FOR VOLUME:**

- Gateway Signs:
  - Chester St. ●
  - Durham St. ●
  - O'Keefe St. ●
  - Gilbert Ave. ●
  - Middlefield Rd. ●
  - Woodland Ave. ●
- Left Turn Restrictions on Willow Road During AM and PM Peak Hours:
  - Chester St. ●
  - O'Keefe Ave. ●
- Signal Coordination:
  - Willow Rd. —
  - Middlefield Rd. —
  - University Ave. —
- Reduced Lane Width/Edge Line:
  - Chester St. —
  - O'Keefe St. —
  - O'Connor St. —
  - Gilbert Ave. —
- Partial One Way Conversion (1 block) on Woodland Ave:
  - Chaucer St. to Menalto Ave.
  - Oak Ct. to Euclid Ave.
- Right Turn Restrictions
  - EB right turn on Durham St. at Menalto Ave. ●
  - WB right turn on Chaucer St. at Central Ave. ●

