

ENHANCING WHITTIER BOULEVARD

THE COMMUNITY REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY OF THE CITY OF LOS ANGELES
TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PANEL

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ON THE COVER: A Metro bus rapid shelter on Whittier Boulevard.

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FEBRUARY 2010

Summary of Findings and Recommendations



While infrastructure improvements are costly, the time is right for the CRA/LA, the City of Los Angeles, and private sector developers to work together to create a unified destination within the subject area of Whittier Boulevard that responds to the needs and desires of residents, businesses, and visitors in Boyle Heights.

The panel suggests a number of existing opportunities which will improve the livability and image of Whittier Boulevard and would, as the panel puts it “build the future within our community through education, youth and family.”

This report presents the panel’s findings and recommendations in market potential, planning and design, and implementation as summarized below:

Findings

The panel finds Whittier Boulevard’s physical characteristics are a barrier to fulfilling the extent of its potential. The corridor lacks identity to set it apart from other destinations and the intersection of major highways.

Although the economic downturn and state budget crisis pose tremendous challenges to development today, the panel thinks the overall market potential for Whittier Boulevard is positive. Whittier Boulevard’s location near Downtown Los Angeles, access to freeways, community commitment, and the continued population growth of Los Angeles are indicators of Whittier Boulevard’s future market potential.

Planning and Design

The panel believes a few design interventions can alleviate the existing challenges and help the corridor reach its fullest potential. Based upon the panel’s findings, the existing uses, freeway location, and community needs and desires, the panel produced the following planning and design concept recommendations.

Their approach concentrates on four nodes of activity and development within the Whittier Boulevard Corridor:

Soto and Whittier

An educational superbloc that will provide additional recreational facilities and job training centers.



Lorena and Whittier

An enhanced neighborhood serving commercial center with new retail buildings and residential development.

Boyle and Whittier

A gateway into Whittier Boulevard which signifies entry into a unique cultural destination and smooths the transition from residential uses to commercial uses.

Indiana and Whittier

A gateway providing a monumental landmark with façade improvements to the existing medical office buildings to create a “Main Street” appeal.

Transit Development Strategy

Whittier Boulevard's success depends on its ability to coordinate with other transportation improvements in the area, specifically with the Metro Gold Line rail extension on First Street. In addition, the panel encourages the CRA/LA to invest in pedestrian amenities which will enhance the corridor's walkability and safety, and increase activity in the area. These interventions will assist in creating safe connections for Rapid passengers, as well as Metro traffic on cross streets.

Housing Development Strategy

Housing demand in Boyle Heights will continue to increase as population growth in Los Angeles continues and demand for urban living near the business core grows. Whittier Boulevard should hone in on the growing needs and offer a variety of housing types, including: multi-family, mixed-use, workforce, and senior housing.

Implementation

Leveraging Transportation Investments

The Whittier Boulevard Corridor should leverage financial opportunities associated with the expansion of the Gold Line Extension through Boyle Heights.

Beautification

The CRA/LA should prepare for a streetscape plan that addresses landscaping, lighting, and other sidewalk improvements along the corridor. The streetscape plan should include branding elements that will help to create a clear and unified identity.





PART I

Introduction: The Assignment

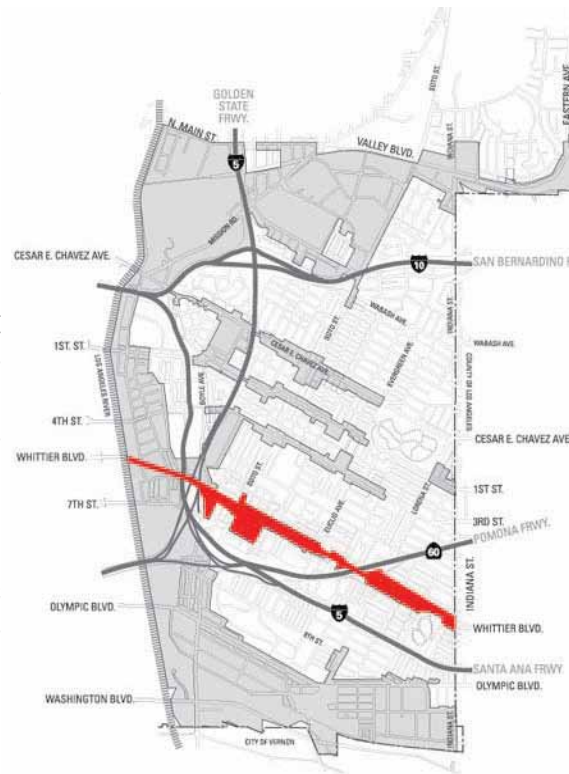
“Boyle Heights is steeped in history, rich in resources, and deep in family traditions.” - Councilmember José Huizar.

Boyle Heights lies just east of the LA River and Downtown Los Angeles. Boyle Heights has established itself as a gateway community which has contributed to a rich and diverse cultural history for which the area is known for today. Today, over 95% of residents are of Hispanic origin according to the US Census and ESRI forecasts.

Whittier Boulevard is renowned as the commercial “Main Street” of several predominantly Latino communities in eastern Los Angeles County, including unincorporated East Los Angeles, Montebello, Pico Rivera, and Whittier. By contrast, the segment of Whittier Blvd. within the City of Los Angeles is less clearly defined.

As the Gold Line extends through Boyle Heights on First Street, the Whittier Boulevard segment in the Community Re-development Agency of the City of Los Angeles (CRA/LA)’s Adelante Eastside project area has the opportunity to differentiate itself with the rest of Whittier Boulevard. The Gold Line Extension will connect Boyle Heights to Downtown LA, Pasadena, San Fernando Valley, South Bay, Long Beach and dozens of points in between. The Gold Line may spur public and private investment and Whittier Boulevard has the potential to leverage key transportation infrastructure investments.

Much focus and planning has revolved around plans along First Street, thus the CRA/LA engaged ULI Los Angeles to provide industry expertise in improving Whittier Boulevard



Subject Area

to ensure the corridor is not overlooked. The CRA's goals are to create a planning framework that can guide redevelopment activities and identify opportunities for investment.



The CRA/LA Eastside Region engaged the Los Angeles District Council of the Urban Land Institute (ULI LA) to convene a Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) to advise on a vision that establishes an identity for Whittier Boulevard in Boyle Heights and maximizes the future opportunities as a neighborhood serving corridor, and to provide recommendations for implementation.

The following report presents the findings and conclusions of the Urban Land Institute Technical Assistance Panel (ULI TAP) of the Los Angeles District Council regarding its initial perception of the future opportunities and constraints facing Whittier Boulevard. The TAP, comprised of a group of planning and real estate professionals who volunteered their services for a one-day charrette to study the Boulevard, were initially provided a briefing document that included land use information covering the Boulevard and demographic materials for the community.



The Panel gathered additional information from interviews held with local planning officials, private real estate owners, active in the local area, and toured the corridor in order to better understand its physical character and evaluate existing conditions. Following these intensive reviews, they proposed a series of ideas that would promote positive change in support of the CRA/LA's stated goals and objectives.

The Panel members are all based in southern California, very knowledgeable about local conditions, and most are intimately familiar with the Boyle Heights community. In this regard, they recognize Whittier Boulevard in other areas symbolizes the thriving Latino Community, of which this segment of the Boulevard can build upon.

The objective of this report is to assist the CRA/LA in its determination of appropriate land uses and investment opportunity sites to promote and enhance amenities for local residents.

TAP Process and Objectives

Upon the submission of the TAP request, ULI representatives met with the CRA/LA to determine the scope of the panel assignment. The panel was selected based upon their ability to address the land use, design, and market conditions of Whittier Boulevard.

The CRA/LA provided background materials that were distributed to the Panel in advance. The Chair of the Panel and the TAP Committee were briefed on issues by

Julia Stewart, City Planner, CRA/LA and Josh Rohmer, Assistant Project Manager, CRA/LA.

On June 26, 2009, the panel convened for the one-day panel. The panel began with a tour of the site and a briefing with Joshua Rohmer, Assistant Project Manager. Representatives from the Office of Councilman Jose Huizar, Metropolitan Transportation Authority, and a stakeholder group organized by the East LA Community Corporation participated in a short interview session. Panel members engaged in informal discussions regarding issues and opportunities.

The Panel's Assignment

The CRA/LA requested that the ULI LA Technical Assistance Panel consider strategies and investments to enhance the commercial environment of Whittier Boulevard. To this end, the CRA/LA identified the following major components that the TAP should consider while addressing the future of the Boulevard:

- Propose land-use recommendations by identifying commercial clusters, residential zones, or potential mixed-use districts
- Identify opportunity sites for future development, including rehabilitation, expansion, and new construction
- Make recommendations regarding the potential development of design guidelines
- Make recommendations regarding possible public improvements
- Make recommendations to improve access to existing community facilities such as parks and recreation centers
- Make recommendations regarding the viability of CRA/LA assistance to existing businesses and attracting new businesses
- Given a thoughtful assessment of Whittier's role in the outlying communities, are there successful strategies/projects for strengthening commercial clusters that bear replication or adaptation in Boyle Heights.





PART II

FINDINGS

After discussions with key stakeholders, a site tour guided by the CRA/LA, the Panel found a number of limitations to the enhancement of the corridor and opportunities to leverage.

Issues

- **Lack of identity.** A key challenge Whittier Boulevard faces is a lack of unifying character. Contributing factors include varying uses, topography grade changes, a poorly defined street wall, and a lack of distinctive streetscape features.
- **Throughway.** The Panel observed that Whittier Boulevard serves as a shortcut for trucks and other traffic from the various nearby freeways. The amount of through traffic, especially that created by trucks, has created a perception of danger for pedestrians, especially at crosswalks. The CRA/LA should consider streetscape improvements that will enhance pedestrian safety and experience, such as landscaping, bus shelters, lighting, and improved crosswalks.
- **Freeway.** The existing freeways currently bifurcate the corridor and serve as a barrier to developing a cohesive identity and defined plan.
- **Topography/Different grades.** The varying grades detract from the opportunity to create a unified streetfront.
- **Shallow lots.** Shallow lots serve as a barrier to development and detract from the ability to create projects with the density to support a vibrant neighborhood center.
- **Need for diversified housing types.** The community and the panel believe that the area needs to offer housing that serves the needs and demographics of the community, i.e. senior housing, units to support larger families, and mixed-income.
- **Lack of jobs.** The area currently lacks the jobs necessary to support the housing and the retail in the area.



Entrance to Boyle Heights Recreation Center off Whittier Boulevard.

Opportunities



- **Commitment to the community by stakeholders.** Boyle Heights has great community energy. Residents and stakeholders are committed to seeing the betterment of their community. The panel believes that many young professionals that have left the area have an interest in moving back to Boyle Heights if there were quality affordable housing options in the area.
- **Location.** Proximity to Downtown Los Angeles is a great advantage to the area. As demographics change, the panel recognizes increased desirability for baby boomers and young professionals to live in urban areas near work and entertainment.
- **Vibrant local businesses.** The panel identified the advantage of numerous mom and pop shops. Small businesses and entrepreneurial endeavors will help Whittier Boulevard to create a unique identity.
- **Visible Education Cluster.** The location of a number of key educational assets on Whittier Boulevard is a great opportunity to provide amenities to residents and also to create job training centers.



Market Potential

The Residential Market

Given the persistent demand for housing in the Los Angeles area and the increasing costs of sprawl, infill housing is a favorable prospect for Whittier Boulevard. In addition, its location near Downtown Los Angeles is an advantageous characteristic of the corridor.

The panel suggests a variety of housing types that reflect the current neighborhood demographics and stated desirables of community groups. Whittier Boulevard should support mixed-income, mixed-use, senior, and large family housing. There is also a need for workforce housing product that would not only meet the



interests and needs of professionals commuting to downtown but would also provide product for the move-up market of young professionals who want to stay or return to Boyle Heights.

Due to the current economic downturn, significant housing production is unlikely in the near term, the CRA/LA should prepare by developing the amenities and infrastructure required and desired by new communities.

The CRA/LA should also determine the levels of affordability of current residents and the potential market.

The Commercial Market

Currently the commercial market on Whittier Boulevard is characterized by small family-owned businesses. The Panel believes retail construction is very unlikely in the next five years, but economic development plans should be put in place to assist businesses in the future.

The Panel recommends that auto uses be limited, incubator opportunities be enhanced, and incentives for uses with an educational focus be created.

Public and Institutional Uses

The Panel sees great potential for educational uses that leverage existing community partners.

Infrastructure and Public Investment is Key

In summary, the current market conditions impede private investment. The panel believes market conditions will not improve quickly. In the meantime, to ensure a successful transformation of Whittier Boulevard, the public sector should invest in infrastructure to set the stage for new development in the future.

New residents and businesses will likely move to Whittier Boulevard if the appropriate amenities are present. The panel recommends the CRA/LA plan for the following:

- park and recreational facilities
- transportation infrastructure
- pedestrian amenities





M Metro

18 MONTEBELLO STATION

Welcome Aboard

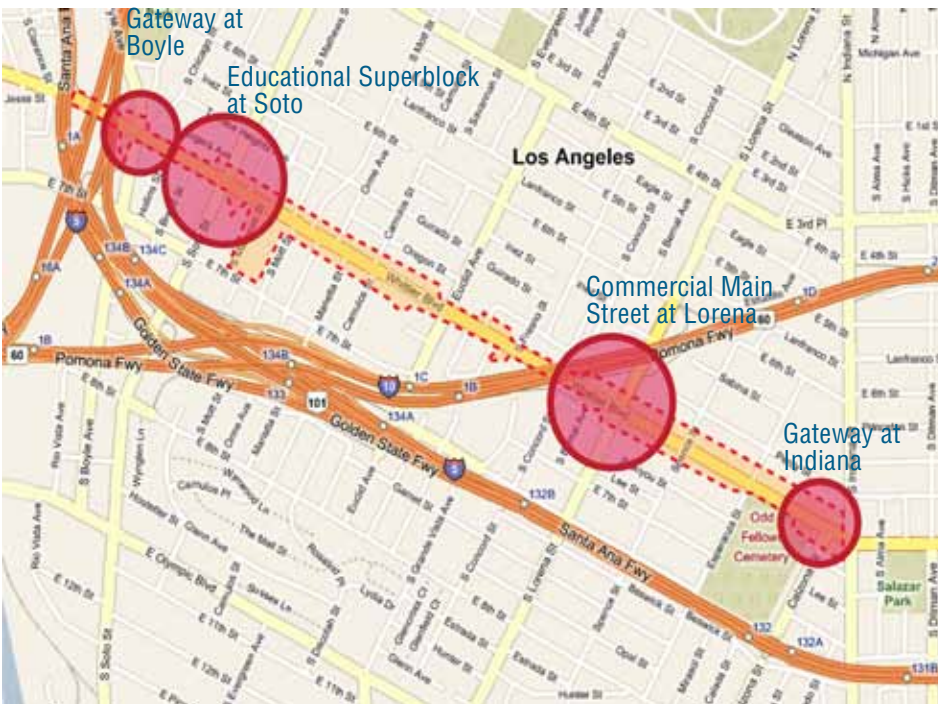
LABS
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PART III

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based upon Whittier Boulevard's strengths and weaknesses, the Technical Assistance Panel prepared a number of recommendations to assist the CRA/LA revitalize Whittier Boulevard and improve the quality of life of its residents. The panel suggests the following recommendations:

1. Develop an educational superblock at Soto and Whittier utilizing existing educational institutions.
2. Create a main street commercial superblock at Lorena and Whittier
3. Create gateways into Boyle Heights at Boyle and Indiana Avenue.
4. Improve the pedestrian environment
5. Build a variety of housing options along the corridor



The Panel recommends focusing investments and physical interventions at four nodes; Gateway at Boyle, Educational Superblock at Soto, Commercial Main Street at Lorena, and a Gateway at Indiana.

Educational Superblock

The Panel suggests building upon existing educational facilities to create an educational superblock. The superblock would integrate the park and school facilities with the neighborhood and provide additional job training facilities.

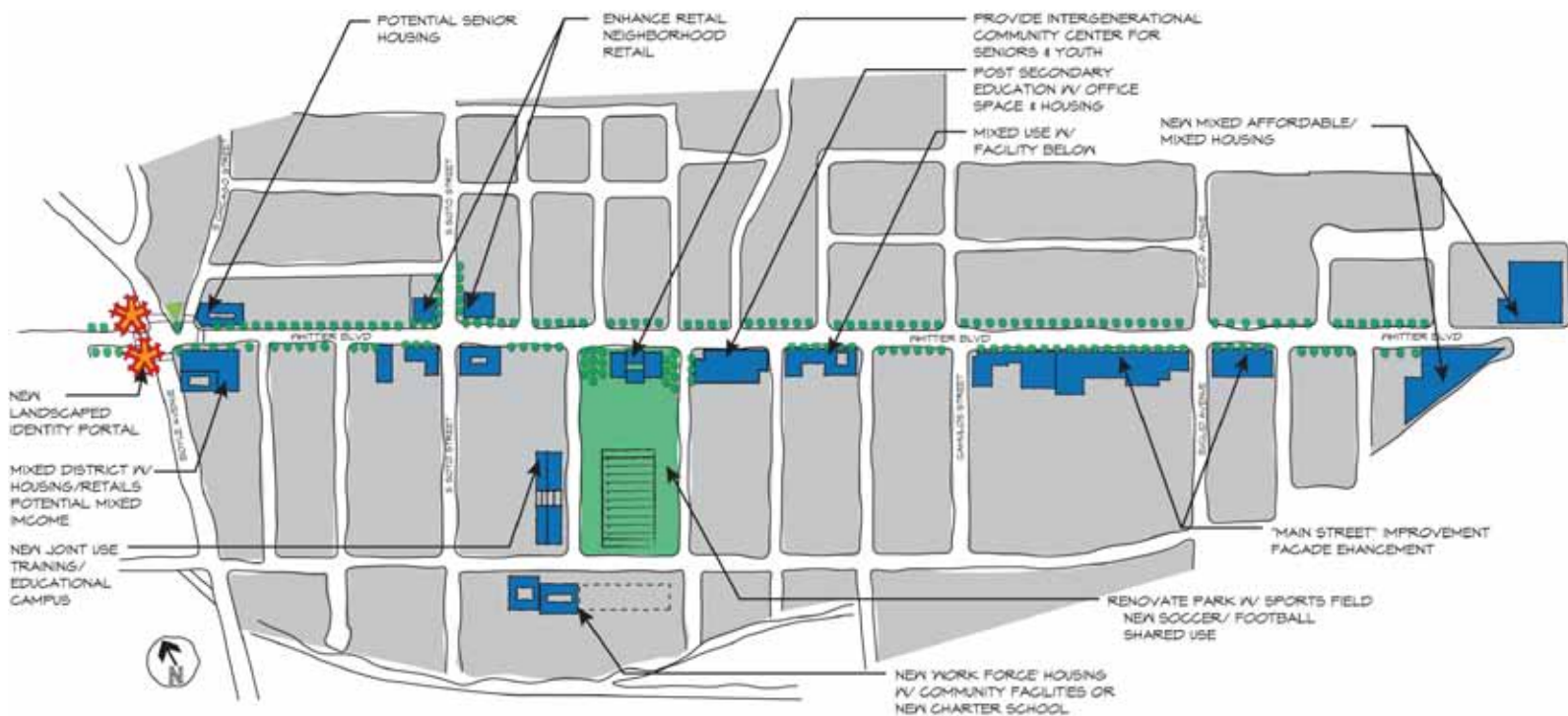


To encourage usage of the Boyle Recreation Center, the CRA/LA should consider improving the facility's frontage along Whittier Boulevard. A new intergenerational community center would increase the attractiveness of Whittier Boulevard, increase visibility of the park as an asset, and improve the perception of safety for users.

The Panel suggests sharing recreation facilities between Salesian High School, Santa Isabel, and Boyle Recreation Center to increase access to residents.

The educational superblock would include job training facilities to complete the educational focus and could connect well with job sites in the downtown business core.

The Panel suggests façade improvements between Camulos Street and Dacotah Street. This street segment is currently home to the YMCA and KIPP LA Charter School and has the potential for a “main street” pedestrian-friendly environment.

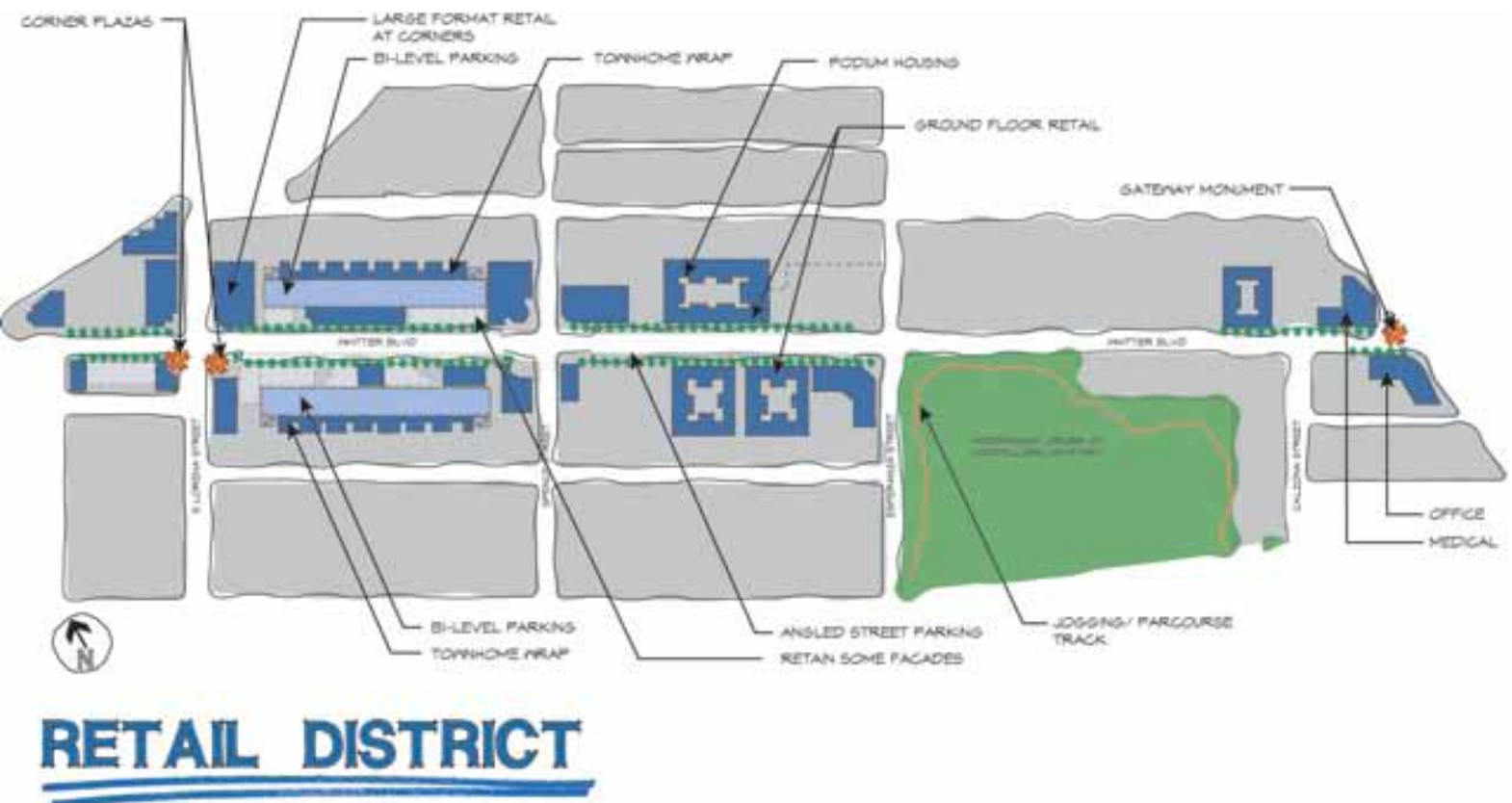


EDUCATIONAL DISTRICT

A neighborhood serving retail center would complete the educational superblock and fulfill the needs of users in the area. The ideal site would be at the intersection of Whittier and Soto and would incorporate new neighborhood serving retail buildings.

Commercial Main Street

The Panel suggests the enhancement of a second node be to the east of the 60 Freeway which currently serves as a neighborhood serving corridor with a well used grocery store and a national bank center.



The Panel's vision for this area is to enhance the commercial district with infill commercial buildings and new residential development.

This vision would be grounded by redeveloped intersections at Lorena and Spence. The current land uses of the intersections are automobile-centric with parking fronting the street. The panel sees these intersections as underutilized parcels which have the potential for a large format retail building on one corner and two corner plazas encouraging pedestrian appeal and usage.



Between Lorena and Spence, the Panel proposes a building with bi-level parking flanked by commercial retail on the Whittier Boulevard side and townhomes lined along the alley.

The Panel also sees potential for mixed-use buildings between Spence and Esperanza taking the place of existing parking lots. The buildings would create a continuous street frontage improving the pedestrian experience. Retail should be encouraged on the ground floor whenever possible.

Gateways

To address the lack of unified character, the panel suggests enhancing the gateway nodes at Boyle and Indiana.



6th Street Bridge.

Boyle and Whittier Boulevard - The Boyle intersection should be enhanced to signify an entrance into the district using a new landscaped identity and introducing architectural details in new housing products in the future. The design features should support the identity of the corridor but also provide a land use transition into the residential area. The entrance should also draw inspiration by monuments at the nearby 6th Street Bridge.

Intersection at Indiana - At Indiana and Whittier Boulevard, a new monument at the small triangle parcel would create an inviting entrance into Boyle Heights as well as the City of Los Angeles. To enhance the appearance of the node, façade improvements should be encouraged to add architectural details to the existing medical office buildings.



Intersection of Whittier and Indiana.

Housing

The Panel emphasized that current residential development opportunities have been undermined by the current economic trends. However, the panel believes the residential market and construction will come back - Given the persistent demand for housing in the Los Angeles area and the increasing costs of sprawl, infill housing is a favorable prospect for Whittier Boulevard. Its location near Downtown Los Angeles is an advantageous characteristic of the corridor.

Flexible plans to encourage desired types of development when the market allows for new construction are needed. The panel suggests various housing types should be encouraged on Whittier Boulevard, such as: multi-family, mixed-use, mixed-income, senior units, entry-level housing, and large family units.

Mixed-income, workforce, mixed-use, senior, and large family housing would satisfy the changing demographic populations and the interests of the community.

The panel suggests a number of new residential opportunity sites:

- Near the 5 Freeway at Boyle Avenue
- Sites along the freeway – potential affordable housing sites
- City owned land abutting 7th street –workforce housing
- Senior, mixed-use, or mixed income just west of the 60 Freeway
- Existing parking lots in the retail district at Lorena and Whittier
- Adjacent to new existing commercial retail between Lorena and Spence



PART IV

IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation

Financing



In the second half of 2008, the finance world began a period of major upheaval. The credit crunch and financial meltdown of the global market have affected the timing of all current and future real estate development transactions. This reality means obtaining financing today is extremely difficult. Despite this reality, this financing obstacle can be mitigated through various nontraditional sources. The following outline indicates various alternatives for consideration beyond the resources currently available to the CRA.

In the short term, the CRA/LA should leverage the Gold Line Extension. They could pursue:

- Metro Call for Projects
- Metro Linkages Program (Measure R)
- City/DOT DASH (Prop A)
- Community Reinvestment Act
- Tax credits (most viable financing)
- Public-Private Partnerships
- Federal Stimulus Funds

Projects

To attract investment and future development, the panel suggests the following opportunities:

- Better Pedestrian Management
- Encourage pedestrian activity by creating prominent enclosed bus shelters for Metro Bus Rapid Transit
- Benches at the nodes
- Streetscaping Improvements
- Traffic calming measures at the nodes
- Limit truck and trailer usage to non-school hours
- Trash receptacles
- Widening sidewalks
- Replace canopy trees with more vertical trees that enhance the visual scale
- Underground overhead utilities where possible
- Unified street light design



Panel Members

Ernesto Vasquez, AIA
Panel Chair
Vice President, MVE Partners

Parking lots can become urban villages, and decaying streetscapes can be revitalized to frame urban places, if the right urban design and master planning is applied - so contends Ernesto Vasquez.

Far from begrudging the political process attendant to urban revitalization, Vasquez embraces interaction with tenant groups, voters and homeowners, housing and transportation authorities, redevelopment agencies and school districts, to bring the goals of the community to fruition and improve the final product. Vasquez deeply honors the principles of smart growth, promoting the use of public transit, sidewalk communities and mixed-use developments. He creates environments that are socially and environmentally responsible, as well as economically viable - and his enthusiasm is usually the best ambassador from developers to community.

Amitabh Barthakur, AICP
Principal, Economic Research Associates

Based in ERA's Los Angeles office, Amitabh Barthakur serves as the Global Practice Leader of the firm's Economic Planning and Real Estate Practice. He has conducted a wide range of studies in the area of fiscal and economic benefit analysis, land use economics analysis, and public facilities analysis for numerous public and private sector clients. He is currently

engaged in leading the ERA team as part of a larger consulting effort to prepare a redevelopment strategy for the Jordan Down's public housing complex in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles.

Vanessa Delgado
Director of Development
Primestor

Vanessa Delgado is responsible for managing Primestor West Coast projects through the development cycle, community and government relations and marketing. Prior to joining Primestor, Ms. Delgado consulted for a number of public and private clients, including the Community Redevelopment Agency of the City of Los Angeles. She also worked in redevelopment for the cities of Anaheim, Downey, and Pico Rivera. Ms. Delgado received her undergraduate education at Stanford University and completed a Masters of Public Administration at the University of Southern California (USC). She received additional training in Real Estate Finance and Development at UCLA and through the Ross Program at the Lusk Center at USC.

Xavier Gutierrez
Senior Vice President, Capital Markets, Phoenix Realty Group

Xavier A. Gutierrez is Senior Vice President, Capital Markets at Phoenix Realty Group, LLC (PRG), a national real estate investment company that manages private equity funds to

invest in middle-market residential, mixed-use, and commercial development in urban and infill areas throughout the United States. Mr. Gutierrez is responsible for the creation, capitalization and management of PRG's real estate private equity funds. Mr. Gutierrez joined PRG as Vice President of Real Estate Acquisitions in June 2003, and now serves as the company's primary conduit to institutional investors and the capital markets. Prior to joining PRG, Mr. Gutierrez worked as a Corporate Attorney in the Silicon Valley office of the law firm Latham & Watkins, LLP. While at Latham, Mr. Gutierrez worked primarily with private equity and venture capital funds. In addition, Mr. Gutierrez has worked as a financial analyst in the Public Finance Group of the investment bank Lehman Brothers, Inc., the New York law firm Skadden, Arps, LLP, and in the League Office of the National Football League.

Pablo Leon
Managing Partner
Golden Pacific Partners

Pablo H. Leon, Managing Partner of Golden Pacific Partners, is a fifteen year veteran of the housing industry in Southern California, having held senior management positions at Phoenix Realty Group, D.R. Horton, and John Laing Homes. He is an active member of the Urban Land Institute and the Building Industry Association. Mr. Leon graduated from Cal Poly State University at San Luis Obispo with a degree in Construction Management.

Golden Pacific Partners specializes in urban infill mixed-use and residential developments. Golden Pacific Partners employs a comprehensive approach to real estate development that encompasses substantial community outreach, careful interaction with city staff, and on-going discourse with civic leaders and elected officials. Consequently, Golden Pacific Partners has developed strong relationships in numerous cities that are eager to partner with the company to address their housing and redevelopment needs.

Adriana Martinez
President, Adriana Martinez Group

Adriana Martinez is formerly the Director of the LA Business Team and Associate Director of the Office of Housing

and Economic Development for Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa. In this capacity, her main charge was to retain, grow and attract quality businesses, jobs and tax revenue to the City of Los Angeles. Her responsibilities included proactive outreach and service to the Los Angeles business and development community. Previously she was Councilman Antonio Villaraigosa's economic development deputy as well as field director in Boyle Heights.

Kevin Tyrrell
Principal
Quatro Design

Kevin Tyrrell approaches architecture as an urbanist with a socio-environmental perspective, and is a firm believer that at its best, architecture can embody our nobler nature. He is a LEED™ Accredited Professional with over 2 million square feet of LEED™ Certified construction completed, and formed the QDG Sustainability Workgroup, a forum dedicated to the discourse and exploration of sustainable strategies.

Kevin brings over twenty years of experience on a wide range of project types. While his primary focus as Principal is the oversight of education, civic and urban design projects, his knowledge of housing, mixed-use and commercial projects is broadly utilized. On each project, he is heavily involved from initial design concepts to the smallest details, working closely with clients throughout the process.

Acknowledgements

ULI Los Angeles and the panel members wishes to thank Steven Valenzuela, former CRA/LA Adelante Eastside Regional Administrator and Councilmember José Huizar, Council District 14 for their vision and focus on reinventing Boyle Heights, especially Whittier Boulevard.

The panel also wishes to thank Josh Rohmer, Julia Stewart and the rest of the CRA/LA Adelante Eastside Project Area Office for their wonderful work in preparing the briefing materials, conducting the tour, and providing the information and data that made this panel a success.

The panel also thanks Ana Cubas, Chief of Staff, Tara Devine, Director - Planning & Economic Development, and Edel Vizcarra, Planning & Transportation Deputy of Councilmember Huizar's office for sharing their plans and ideas for Boyle Heights.

Thanks also to Diego Cardoso, Executive Officer - Transportation Development & Implementation of the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority.

Many thanks to the East LA Community Corporation, especially Maria Cabildo, Paola Ruvalcaba, and the community stakeholders for sharing their experiences and knowledge with the panel.

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CRA/LA
TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PANEL

Technical Assistance Panels, or TAPs, are conducted by the local District Council level of ULI. ULI Los Angeles has been at the forefront in creating the TAP program, offering the expertise of local ULI members to local government and nonprofit entities through one or two day panels. The TAP Program guidelines are the same as those that govern the entire Advisory Services Program.

To date, ULI Los Angeles has conducted Technical Assistance Panels for the City of Beverly Hills, City of Culver City, City of Pasadena, City of Whittier, University of Southern California, the Los Angeles Conservancy, the Ports O'Call Village, First United Methodist Church of Los Angeles, and The Canaan Group, among others.

A key strength of the program is ULI's unique ability to draw upon the knowledge and expertise of its members, including land developers and owners, public officials, academics, representatives of financial institutions, and others.

In fulfillment of the Urban Land Institute's mission, this TAP report is intended to provide objective advice that will promote the responsible use of land and in creating and sustaining thriving communities.

For more information about how a ULI Los Angeles Technical Assistance Panel could benefit your city or nonprofit organization, contact Christine Aure, Project Manager, at Aure@uli-la.org or Jonathan Curtis, ULI TAP Committee Chair from Trevear Holdings, at Joncurtis@sbcglobal.net.

For more information about ULI Los Angeles, a District Council of the Urban Land Institute, contact Katherine Perez, ULI Los Angeles Executive Director, at Perez@uli-la.org, or the ULI LA website, www.uli-la.org.