



chapter **one**

INTRODUCTION

About the Neighborhoods

Where We Are

From the time that we wake up in the morning to the time that we go to bed at night, even during our sleeping hours, we consume natural resources, many of which are scarce or cannot be replaced. We prepare ourselves for the day by showering, shaving, applying make-up, and arranging our hair. The water flows from our showers to the drain to the ocean outfall, which is polluted by the chemicals from the soaps, lotions, and makeup that we use. Even greater amounts of water are used and polluted when we flush our toilets, cook our foods, water our lawns and flowers, and clean our cars. Only when the winter snows accumulate in the Sierra and its runoff is carried hundreds of miles by canals and pipes to our local reservoirs, coupled with the relatively small amount of water that we capture by local groundwater basins, is the water resource replenished.

Many hydrologists contend that our water resource is limited and, if we continue to use it at the current rate, we will not have sufficient supply to meet the needs of our growing population. Not only is water scarce, but much of it has been polluted from our daily activities as well as our industries. Our pollution of the ocean and lakes is killing fish and reducing our food supply, as well as making them unsafe places for people to swim and recreate.

In the evening, we turn on the lights in our house. When it is cold, we turn on the heat, and when it is hot, we turn on our air conditioning. Unlike the early housing in San Gabriel, which was built from adobe that provided insulation from heat in the summer and maintained warmth in the winter, our housing is largely built with wood frames and minimal insulation, requiring us to use artificial heat and cooling. Our housing is not located on properties nor designed properly so that we can take advantage of solar energy, heating, or cooling.

Our energy demands are increased as we watch television and listen to our stereos for entertainment, use our computers for business and play, use washing machines to clean our dishes and clothing, cook in our electrical ovens or gas ranges, and use a myriad of food processors and other “gadgets” to simplify our lives. All of these use electricity and natural gas, resources that are diminishing in supply and increasing in cost. Their production often uses chemical processes that degrade our air quality.

Sustainability Plan

When we shop, our food and retail purchases are often enclosed in extensive packaging materials and placed in paper or plastic shopping bags. When we bring them home, we remove and dispose the packaging, along with our newspapers, magazines, plastic water bottles, soda cans, and glass bottles. While we have some effective recycling programs, we are producing wastes in greater quantity and most of these are discarded into landfills located in our foothill canyons. Over time these wastes are producing methane gas and other toxics on decomposition, degrading our air and groundwater basins.

We drive to our jobs, drop the children at school and their soccer games, visit our friends, shop for groceries and clothing, and travel to our entertainment and recreation. In most cases, we live far from the places that we go and drive hundreds of miles in vehicles that consume enormous amounts of gasoline and pollute the air.

As we have developed our communities in Southern California, we believed that we had unlimited access across the vast metropolitan region and were not concerned about separating the places that we live from the places that we work. Rapid population and employment growth in the region, however, changed this reality. Our freeways and local streets became congested and our air quality degraded badly. While a few of us take the option to walk and bicycle, the distance between our homes and the places we want to go make this very difficult. Our oil resources are finite and diminishing rapidly as world demands increase. While our regional air quality has improved, it is still degraded to a level that impacts the health of every resident.

An Opportunity to Change

As we look forward to the next 20 years in the City of San Gabriel and, specifically, in the Valley Boulevards Neighborhoods, we recognize that we can do things differently. We can locate our housing, jobs, and services close to one another to reduce the need to use our automobiles, at the same time increasing the economic viability of our businesses and benefiting the social interaction among our residents. When we do have to travel, we can provide alternative forms of transportation that reduce our gasoline consumption, air pollution, and noise.

We can build housing and commercial buildings that require less energy, consume less water, and result in less waste and pollution. We can landscape our streets and public places to make them pleasant places to walk. We can use landscaping that consumes less water. We can recycle our wastewater from our showers and dish and clothes washing and capture storm water runoff on our properties, reducing our need for imported water. These are our opportunities to make a more sustainable environment for us and our children. This plan is intended to achieve these objectives.

What Is the Valley Boulevard Neighborhoods Sustainability Plan?

The *Valley Boulevard Neighborhoods Sustainability Plan*, or *Valley Vision*, provides a road map of land use development, building and site design, transportation, infrastructure, and streetscape strategies that will be used to enable residents and businesses to more effectively meet the vital human needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs by preserving ecosystems and natural resources. This concept is referred to as “sustainability” and is based on a systematic, integrated approach that brings together environmental, economic, and social goals and actions directed toward the following four objectives:

1. Reduce dependence upon fossil fuels and extracted underground metals and materials.
2. Reduce dependence on chemicals and other manufactured substances that can accumulate in nature.
3. Reduce dependence on activities that harm life-sustaining ecosystems.
4. Meet the hierarchy of present and future human needs fairly and efficiently.

This plan recognizes that the current course of development practices will inevitably adversely impact the health of the environment, economy, and quality of life for our children and grandchildren unless corrective actions are undertaken in the short term. Importantly, it is grounded on the understanding of the inextricable relationship of environment, economy, and social well-being. A degraded environment with deficient resources to support human needs will affect business activity, increase costs, and impact the quality of jobs, life, and physical health of our community's residents.

An economy of marginal businesses will not sustain high quality jobs, contribute revenue to support community services and environmental conservation programs, or meet basic needs for shopping and services. Social well-being may not be sustained if residents do not have access to quality education and jobs, affordable housing, opportunities for interaction with their neighborhoods, places for recreation and culture, an environment free of toxins and pollution, and time for family and relaxation.



While the strategies defined by this Plan may be applicable to the entire City of San Gabriel, the Southern California region, and the nation, its focus is on the Valley Boulevard Neighborhoods. This area has experienced substantial reinvestment and change during recent years and is anticipated to continue to do so for the future. As such, there is a unique opportunity to re-think and re-direct these investments in a manner that will achieve the four sustainability objectives and enhance community livability.

Project Location

The Valley Boulevard Neighborhoods are defined to encompass the Valley Boulevard commercial corridor extending from the City of Alhambra in the west to the City of Rosemead in the east, the north-south arterials of New Avenue, Del Mar Avenue, and San Gabriel Boulevard, and the residential neighborhoods south of Valley Boulevard to the I-10 Freeway and north of Valley Boulevard to Alhambra Wash, as depicted on Figure 1-1.

Why is Sustainability Important?

During recent decades it has become increasingly apparent that the demands of a growing human population are exceeding the capacities of Earth's natural resources. Throughout the world we are experiencing increased air pollution, extinction of plant and animal species, global warming, severe degradation of the Earth's soils, loss of forests and woodlands, declining fisheries, and widening economic inequities. The American Planning Association's *Policy Guide on Planning for Sustainability* summarizes a number of key factors that contribute to unsustainability:

- Increases in the per capita energy and material consumption that exceed the growth in the world's population
- Continued population growth, as exemplified by forecasts for an additional six million people in the Southern California region by 2025
- Reliance on a host of substances that are not a part of nature's cycle of growth and decay, which, once exhausted, cannot be renewed
- The use of substances that accumulate in the ecosphere and are not part of nature's cycle causes pollution in various forms
- Development of cities and suburbs in patterns that diminish natural habitats, agriculture, and open space, rely upon the automobile for access, and reduce social interaction
- Depletion and degradation of water resources, coupled with land use practices that act to prevent groundwater recharge, create destructive runoff patterns, and destroy the treatment capacity of natural systems
- Traffic congestion and deteriorating air quality diminish the quality of life and health of the human population
- Disproportionate exposure of low-income people and people of color to environmental hazards
- Continued division of communities along economic and racial lines, both physically and socially

Figure 1-1 Project Location

About the Valley Boulevard Neighborhoods

Most of the Valley Boulevard Neighborhoods' land area has been intensively developed for many years. Valley Boulevard was constructed as a major east-west corridor providing regional transportation access across the San Gabriel Valley, while New Avenue, Del Mar Avenue, and San Gabriel Boulevard provided north-south access, whose traffic volumes significantly increased with the construction of the I-10 Freeway.

Typical of Southern California communities, retail and service commercial and office uses developed along these corridors serving highway users and adjoining neighborhoods. Initially, buildings were developed on the front and side property lines with parking provided along the street or, in limited cases, to the rear of the buildings. With the region's rapid growth following World War II and greater use of the automobile, street front parking proved to be inadequate and new commercial developments incorporated extensive parking on site, typically with the buildings located to the rear or side of lots with parking along the street frontage. This diminished the interaction among business and pedestrian activity, promoting auto-oriented single-destination uses and small multi-tenant centers.



During the later half of the twentieth century, retail markets evolved to large format individual businesses and multi-tenant centers, which required larger development parcels with extensive on-site parking. To accommodate these uses, parcels were aggregated and larger centers developed in a number of locations on Valley Boulevard, such as the Hawaii Market, San Gabriel Super Store, San Gabriel Square, Hilton Hotel, and Swiss Plaza. Many of these sites were intensified to capitalize upon the recent influx of Asian residents and have become so successful that they attract significant patronage from throughout the region. The remaining small and shallow depth parcels continue to be used or have been re-used for secondary, low volume and, in some cases, marginal commercial establishments. Their size, coupled with the need to acquire adjoining lands occupied by housing, restrict the ability to create sufficient land area to support high value commercial development.

Adjoining residential neighborhoods were among the earliest developed in Southern California and contain a mix of single family detached and multi-family, schools, and extremely limited parklands. The earliest housing reflected the region's historic agricultural heritage with small houses developed on comparatively large lots, often covered with citrus trees. Ensuing housing development typified patterns of inexpensive, small bungalows found throughout the San Gabriel Valley.

As land became more scarce in the latter half of the twentieth century, multi-family apartments replaced many single family dwellings. Their somewhat irregular pattern of development and cheap construction, often with little architectural character, significantly changed and degraded the character and quality of the area's neighborhoods.

Today, the infill and intensification of housing continues throughout much of the area. Apartments and townhomes are being constructed on properties zoned as "R-3" and second units on lots occupied by single family dwellings in areas zoned as "R-2." Additionally, escalating housing prices and land values throughout the region has resulted in the reinvestment and enlargement of many single family units. Many exhibit architectural design styles that are incompatible and are scaled out of proportion with the historic character of the neighborhoods. While the architectural design quality of recent construction has improved, the diverse mix of older and new housing and densities, coupled with the marginal maintenance of some properties, poor streetscapes, and lack of parklands, contributes to an overall poor visual and physical quality.

Let's Be Specific—What Is Unsustainable in the Valley Boulevard Neighborhoods?

In considering the above issues, many are global and apply to the world as a whole or entire regions, such as Southern California, and may be perceived to only generally apply to the Valley Boulevard Neighborhoods. However, there are many direct implications and challenges as illustrated by the following conditions within the Neighborhoods:

- Our land use patterns separate the places where we live from those where we shop, are employed, are entertained, recreate, and socialize with our friends. As a result, we use the automobile as our primary means of access with multiple trips daily that congest Valley Boulevard, Del Mar Avenue, San Gabriel Boulevard, and our neighborhood streets. These trips consume gasoline, generate air pollution and noise, and result in delays that diminish our quality of life and personal health.
- The amount of land developed for parking illustrates our dependency on the automobile. In fact, the businesses that appear to be the most successful in the Valley Boulevard Neighborhoods are those that have the largest and most convenient parking lots.
- At the same time, some of our residents and many from outside our community cannot afford an automobile and consequently must use public transit to access local businesses and travel to and from adjoining communities. However, our land use patterns and densities diminish the attractiveness and utility of public transit as an alternative to the automobile for those who have the option. From the transit stops, we are required to walk some distance to our housing and neighborhoods, particularly those to the south of Valley Boulevard, which are developed at comparatively low densities that provide insufficient population to support frequent transit use. Commercial properties located immediately adjacent to the transit stops are similarly not developed at densities that support transit use nor do they provide adequate parking for those that may choose this option.

- While the automobile is the dominant form of travel, many of our residents choose to walk in our neighborhoods, to schools and parks, and to restaurants, stores, beauty shops, and other places of business. This reflects the cultural heritage and lifestyle of some of our most recent residents. Yet, our streets are not attractive places to walk. It is a sterile environment of concrete and asphalt sidewalks, with little or no pedestrian amenities, standard street lighting and utility poles, and no trees for shading during periods of heat. The few landscaped areas on private properties along the streets become meccas for people to congregate.
- The amount of land and configuration of parcels zoned for commercial development along Valley Boulevard and the north-south arterials cannot be economically sustained in the marketplace, resulting in a number of underutilized and obsolete sites. With the exception of parcels at Valley Boulevard's intersections with Del Mar Avenue and San Gabriel Boulevard and a few others scattered along its length, most parcels are small, shallow in depth, and directly abut residential neighborhoods. These cannot physically accommodate retail or office buildings of the size demanded in the marketplace with code-required on-site parking and areas for truck deliveries. Further, the uninterrupted length of the commercial uses, over two and one-half miles cannot sustain an effective pedestrian environment aggravating the need for use of the automobile.
- The construction and design of our commercial buildings and housing result in high levels of electricity and natural gas consumption for heating and cooling. Building walls and roofs provide minimum code-required insulation for heat loss and gain. Structures are not adequately day lighted, they are not oriented to take advantage of and control solar access nor do they incorporate overhangs or other architectural features to reduce heat gain. Heating and air conditioning ducts are located in unconditioned crawl spaces that result in energy loss, and interior spaces and volumes do not provide adequate air circulation and ventilation.
- Commercial and residential developments continue to consume our diminishing water supply. While we have had considerable successes in reducing our per capita water consumption through the use of low-flow showerheads, toilets, and similar elements, growth and development coupled with lingering droughts in the Southern California desert climate exacerbate a growing problem of water availability. To date, we are not maximizing our opportunities to recycle and re-use waste water in our businesses, homes, parks, and public landscapes.
- We are also not taking advantage of opportunities to capture rainwater on-site and use it for irrigation and other purposes. Most of our developments are covered by impermeable surfaces for buildings and paving, with little area remaining for the percolation of rainwater into the aquifer. Stormwater drains off of developed sites into the City's drainage infrastructure and flows into the ocean. Toxics from streets, parking lots, and land uses pollute the stormwater, which, in turn pollute the ocean.
- Most of our businesses, housing, parks, schools, and public places contain landscapes that require frequent irrigation for survival, further diminishing our scarce water supply. Few sites contain native and drought-tolerant species or drip-irrigation systems that can reduce water consumption. In addition, we frequently use herbicides and fertilizers that pollute the groundwater or runoff into the storm drainage channels and pollute the ocean.

- Many of our older commercial and residential buildings in the Valley Boulevard Neighborhoods are being replaced by larger and more modern structures. In some cases, this has resulted in the loss of buildings that are reflective of our architectural and community history. Most of our newly constructed buildings have used non-renewable materials including wood, steel, and concrete and manufacturing and fabricating processes that consume extensive energy. A very small percentage of our recent construction has utilized recycled materials. In new construction and rehabilitation of existing buildings, the sustainable site design and the use of materials, design, and operating systems can reduce environmental impacts.
- At the same time, we use finishing materials in our buildings, such as paint, wall coverings, carpets, cabinets, and furniture, which contain chemicals and toxics that degrade and pollute both our indoor and outdoor air. Scientists suggest that this has adverse health and psychological effects on residents and workers, as well as contributes to global warming.
- While the housing in some Valley Boulevard Neighborhoods has been comparatively inexpensive in contrast to the Southern California region, prices are escalating. In the mid and long-term, this may reduce affordability causing residents and local employees to double up and overcrowd housing units or seek housing at greater distances, increasing vehicle commutes, traffic, noise, and air pollution. Additionally, it could homogenize the population, reducing its cultural and demographic diversity.
- Some of our neighborhoods are characterized by a mix of housing types that are incompatible due to abrupt changes in height and density, poor architectural design and construction, and lack of amenity. This degrades their identity and character, interaction and socialization among neighbors, and overall quality of life for residents.
- Most of the land within the Valley Boulevard Neighborhoods has been developed and parklands and open spaces are a scarcity affecting the quality of life of local residents. Vincent Lugo Park is located on the northwestern edge of the planning area, is the largest park in the City, and is extensively used. School playgrounds may also be periodically used for resident recreational activities.
- The Alhambra Wash was improved with a concrete bottom and sides to facilitate stormwater drainage into the ocean. As such, it does not serve to capture or percolate water into the groundwater basin or provide an attractive amenity for the community. Portions immediately north and south of Valley Boulevard have been covered with a concrete cap to provide space for parking for adjoining commercial uses.

How Can the Valley Boulevard Neighborhoods Become More Sustainable?

To address these issues and achieve the four sustainability objectives, the *Valley Boulevard Neighborhoods Sustainability Plan* defines an integrated approach to land use development, architectural design and site development, landscape, transportation and parking, and infrastructure. These are described in the ensuing sections of this Plan and their general characteristics include the following:

- A **more compact** community that concentrates major new commercial development at key centers along the corridors and re-uses intervening areas for residential and mixed-use structures that integrate housing with retail and office uses. This will reduce automobile use, energy consumption, air pollution, and noise, increase pedestrian activity, increase the customer base for local businesses, and spur economic activity.
- A **transit-oriented community** that expands transit opportunities and increases development densities and housing opportunities in proximity to major transit hubs and transit routes. As compact development, this will reduce automobile use, energy consumption, air pollution, and noise, and increase pedestrian activity and local economic activity.
- **Enhanced residential neighborhoods** where housing is maintained, upgraded, and better designed, new parklands developed, and new facilities established for community meetings and activities. This will sustain and improve the quality of life for all residents and economic value of the neighborhoods.
- **Walkable streets** in commercial and mixed-use corridors and residential neighborhoods that provide access among all uses and are pleasant places to be. These would be extensively landscaped with trees providing shade for pedestrians; incorporate native landscapes and attractive lighting, signage, and street furniture; integrate pocket parks and open spaces, and be paved with surfaces using recycled and permeable materials. An improved walking environment will reduce automobile use and its impacts on energy, air, noise, and resident quality of life.
- **“Green” buildings** that utilize materials, architectural design features, and interior fixtures and finishings to reduce energy and water consumption, toxic and chemical pollution, and waste. This can diminish our use of non-renewable natural resources.
- **Improved traffic mobility and use of alternative modes** through physical improvements, traffic control and synchronization, and driveway consolidation on Valley Boulevard and north/south arterials, use of alternative fuel vehicles, and expanded bicycle lanes. This will reduce congestion, energy consumption, air pollution, noise, and delays, improving the quality of life for local residents.
- A **vital and active community** where events are regularly scheduled to promote economic activity of local businesses, social interaction among local residents, and neighborhood improvement, as well as celebrate local history and culture. Such events can help in sustaining a healthy business environment that contributes revenue to support the community, the quality of life of residents, and be a basis for resident pride.

How Was the Plan Prepared?

The *Valley Boulevard Neighborhoods Sustainability Plan* was prepared under a grant from the state of California in order to advance the concept of sustainability in development and public investment in California.

The city retained a professional team of consultants with specialized expertise in sustainability planning to assist in the Plan's preparation. The consultants included the following:

- EIP Associates—land use planning, urban design, environmental resources, and public involvement
- Patricia L. Smith, ASLA—landscape architecture and streetscape design
- RNL Design—sustainable architecture
- Meyer, Mohaddes Associates—traffic and parking
- Keyser Marston Associates—market and fiscal economics
- Willdan—infrastructure
- Martin Eli Weil—historic and cultural resources

How Was the Public Involved?

Preparation of the *Valley Boulevard Neighborhoods Sustainability Plan* provided numerous opportunities for public discussion and input. Several methods were employed to engage residents, business persons, local developers and architects, and other stakeholders in the process of planning for the area's future. The effort was initiated with a series of interviews, which were conducted in English, Chinese, and Spanish during June 2003 with individuals and groups that represented the diverse interests of the Valley Boulevard community. The outreach process also included different kinds of publications that were also written in English, Chinese, and Spanish. These publications included:

- Newsletters
- Press releases
- Published notices

Two days of interviews were completed with input from business owners, real estate representatives, and homeowners among others. This effort was followed by a design charrette, or workshop, in August. The day-long charrette was held at the Board of Realtors Hall nearby to Valley Boulevard. Participants were asked to identify issues and ideas for the future of Valley Boulevard and the surrounding neighborhoods through creative mapping exercises.

With the input received, the planning team set about to develop strategies for creating a more sustainable and attractive Valley Boulevard. Several events were utilized to present sustainable strategies such as transit oriented development and green building technology to gauge resident interest in such strategies. The planning team set up displays at several Chamber of Commerce mixer events in January through April 2004. These displays illustrated sustainable development concepts that could be applied to future development of Valley Boulevard and provided mixer participants opportunities to indicate their agreement. The planning team also set up displays at the annual Chinese New Year Celebration event held on Valley Boulevard in January allowing residents and visitors to learn about the project and provide feedback on strategies.

From May through June, the planning team made presentations of the sustainability concepts to professional organizations in the community, including the West San Gabriel Valley Association of Realtors, the Chinese Chamber of Commerce of Los Angeles, the Chinese American Real Estate Professionals Association, and the Chinese American Construction Professionals Association. Additionally, a Design Forum was conducted in October to provide the opportunity for local architects and developers to review preliminary architectural design and green building concepts.

In all, several hundred people provided ideas and input into the development of *Valley Vision*, the *Valley Boulevard Neighborhoods Sustainability Plan*. Their involvement results in a plan that reflects the diverse needs of San Gabriel and enhances the unique character of the Valley Boulevard neighborhoods.

To receive information regarding the Valley Boulevard Neighborhoods Sustainability Plan, please send your questions or concerns to San Gabriel City Hall, Planning Division 425 South Mission Drive, San Gabriel, CA 91776, or you can call us at (626) 308-2806.

Para recibir información en español del plan para la Calle Valley, por favor mande sus preguntas u opiniones a: San Gabriel City Hall, 425 South Mission Drive, San Gabriel, CA 91776, o llame a la división de planificación al, (626) 308-2806.

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