

Encanto Neighborhoods



Community Plan Update

Southeastern San Diego



Community Plan Update

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW SUMMARY REPORT

January 2013

City of San Diego

Prepared by

DYETT & BHATIA
Urban and Regional Planners

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1 Introduction

This report summarizes the process and results of interviews with community stakeholders for preparation of the Southeastern San Diego and Encanto Neighborhoods community plan updates. This is the first outreach activity undertaken for the planning process.

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

Consultants for the community plan updates interviewed community leaders, decision-makers, and representatives of organizations and businesses from the neighborhoods. The purpose of the meetings was to provide an opportunity for stakeholders to identify major issues, ideas, and concerns facing Southeastern San Diego and Encanto Neighborhoods. Interviews were conducted on December 5 and December 6, 2012 in person and on December 21, 2012 by telephone. A total of 14 individuals participated. (See section 3 for a list of interviewee names and organizations.)

Although all residents, employees, and visitors, are “stakeholders” in the neighborhoods’ long-term future, these initial meetings targeted individuals representing a diversity of interests and organizations to explore a range of issues and needs. The individual/small group nature of these discussions enabled participants to be more candid and in-depth than they otherwise might be in a larger community forum. Moreover, discussions could be focused on the topics important to each individual.

The stakeholder meetings are one component of the larger community visioning process, which includes several other activities: meetings with the two community planning groups, workshops, a project website, and a community survey.

PLANNING PROCESS OVERVIEW

The current Southeastern San Diego Community Plan provides a framework to guide development in Southeastern San Diego, including the Encanto Neighborhoods. The Plan was prepared in 1987 and has undergone several amendments since that time.

The community plan update process will result in two new community plans: one covering Southeastern San Diego and one for the Encanto Neighborhoods. The process to update the plans will include:

- Taking stock in what has been constructed and understanding demand for new uses;
- Analyzing changes in demographics that may affect land use and community needs;
- Working with community members and stakeholders to determine key issues of concern, desires, and preferences to establish a vision and objectives; and
- Ensuring that policies and recommendations are consistent with the General Plan and other citywide policies.

2 Findings

This section summarizes key findings overall and by topic. Many of the topics discussed by stakeholders addressed both planning areas—Southeastern San Diego and Encanto. Comments addressing just one area are clearly specified.

2.1 Overall Summary

The bullets below summarize key assets and areas of improvement identified by the majority of stakeholders in one or both of the planning areas.

<i>Planning Area(s)</i>	<i>Key Assets</i>	<i>Key Areas of Improvement</i>
Both	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversity of people and land uses • Family-oriented • Affordability of housing and commercial space • Proximity to local neighborhoods, and the region • Access to freeways and Orange Line Trolley 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More employment opportunities • Need for community appropriate housing—affordable, larger-sized given households with children • Increased transit service, bicycle facilities, safe pedestrian facilities, traffic calming (e.g. through medians, landscaping, on-street parking), and narrowing roadways • Improved sidewalks (repairs and construction where missing) and more street lighting, especially around bus stops • Education and support for low-income youth and families • Community health and safety
Southeastern San Diego	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commercial corridors on Imperial and National avenues • Proximity to Downtown 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More parks and recreation facilities • Improved compatibility between land uses • Local high school to keep up with growing youth population
Encanto Neighborhoods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open spaces and views • Parks and recreation facilities • Low scale of development/rural character so close to Downtown 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More retail services, including restaurants, grocery stores, and daily services • Imperial Avenue as a neighborhood commercial corridor

2.2 Ideas and Issues by Key Topics

CELEBRATE DIVERSITY AND HISTORY

Stakeholders overwhelmingly agreed that the diversity of people is one of the key assets and characteristics of both communities. These communities are family-oriented with substantial youth population, and represent a diversity of ethnicities. Several stakeholders supported celebrating the community with banners, public art, and gateway buildings and signage. Stakeholders agreed that this diversity and history should be celebrated as the communities develop. Closing one or two key streets once a week to automobile traffic for fiestas, and encouraging strolling were some of the ideas advanced.

Historic and potential historic resources have been maintained and improved, especially in the Sherman Heights/Grant Hill areas, as owners have purchased properties and taken advantage of tax incentives, such as the Mills Act. This has in turn enhanced the neighborhood and property values, and more could be done to encourage the same elsewhere.

PROVIDE COMMUNITY-APPROPRIATE HOUSING

The Southeastern and Encanto Neighborhoods are some of the more affordable areas in San Diego, and are uniquely situated proximate to downtown, with direct trolley connections. Their location also enables businesses to capitalize on workers who live in Tijuana. Given the demographics, income, and household sizes, stakeholders would like to see housing that is affordable, can accommodate families, and is adaptable to open air, community-oriented lifestyles where neighbors interact with one another. Row houses (or townhomes) were often mentioned. Even at higher densities, they provide adaptability and some access to personal yard space. Several stakeholders also mentioned the idea of townhomes on the perimeter of the block, with higher density housing within the block (as was proposed for the Grant Hill Hospital site). Some stakeholders also thought multi-family housing was appropriate in locations with good access to trolley and other transit.

Stakeholders had mixed opinions about affordable housing. Some felt that both planning areas have already taken on more than their reasonable share of subsidized housing in the city. Others thought that more affordable housing was needed, although opinions differed about whether affordable housing should be rental or ownership. Lastly, several stakeholders stated that any residential development must be accompanied by appropriate increases in public services and facilities, including schools and parks.

PROVIDE MORE RETAIL COMMERCIAL USES

In Encanto, stakeholders lamented the lack of retail businesses and commercial centers. Food 4 Less is the only grocery store within the Encanto Planning Area, but primarily serves people in the western portion of the Planning Area. Therefore, residents must travel outside the area—and often outside the city—for grocery shopping, restaurants, pharmacies, and other stores. Stakeholders expressed a desire for a range of commercial uses including:

- Mixed use to reduce the need for driving and improving accessing to daily services

- Retail services, such as movies, shopping (e.g. hardware and sports stores), pharmacies, and grocery stores (Encanto)
- A local directory providing information about local businesses (e.g. plumbers, handymen, shoe repair, etc.)

On the other hand, Southeastern has more grocery stores and retail options, including successful big box stores (such as Home Depot and Costco), Northgate Market in Southcrest, and active retail streets (such as National and Imperial avenues). The Northgate Market in Barrio Logan and Walmart Grocery in Logan Heights, which are under construction, are envisioned to further support grocery shopping in and near Southeastern's western neighborhoods and create new jobs. Several stakeholders mentioned redeveloping Imperial Avenue between 61st and 69th into a true commercial corridor.

PROVIDE MORE EMPLOYMENT-ORIENTED USES

In both communities, job opportunities are limited, so residents must leave the area for work. Stakeholders would like to see the community plans support business development for retail and light industrial uses. Stakeholders mentioned the following potential locations: Gateway Center West, on sections of Market Street, and along freeways (for example, on Federal Boulevard), where they would not conflict with residential neighborhoods. They also suggested that these areas take advantage of federal programs, such as Enterprise Zone status and New Market Tax Credits to encourage development. Others mentioned developing incubators to make starting and maintaining a business more streamlined and developing a center for non-profits to share space and resources. Several stakeholders mentioned the Jacobs Foundation as a unique model that allows community members, who have the capital to invest, to share in the profits of the development of the community.

In Southeastern, for industrial businesses, the trolley line on Commercial Street provides access for employees to get to work. As stated by stakeholders, business owners have expressed a willingness to improve facades and even to move elsewhere if lease rates were viable.

PROMOTE LAND USE COMPATIBILITY AND COMMUNITY HEALTH

At the same time, stakeholders expressed concerns about the types of employment uses currently located in the community. Specifically, they referred to recycling facilities, junkyards, and industrial businesses with potential air quality, aesthetic, and noise impacts, as well as potential hazard in the case of fire. Stakeholders agreed that industrial uses in the community should be non-polluting. In terms of existing uses that are potentially hazardous, stakeholders suggested developing partnerships to improve communication and negotiating with property owners to move their businesses to other parts of the city.

Some stakeholders also mentioned that the community is challenged by obesity due to a prevalent of fast food and lack of grocery stores (Encanto). Another stakeholder suggested consolidating parking and otherwise designing new development to encourage and allow for more walking.

ENSURE APPROPRIATE DENSITY AND SCALE OF DEVELOPMENT

Stakeholders supported the scale of development and expressed a desire that future development fit in with the existing context. Stakeholders typically preferred development that was two to three stories along the commercial corridors although others felt that heights should be four or five stories, or even higher near the trolley stations to take advantage of access to transit. Stakeholders generally agreed that existing heights should be preserved within residential neighborhoods. In Encanto, stakeholders enjoy the community's rustic and natural character that results from the many canyons and the low scale of development.

DEVELOP AND MAINTAIN OPEN SPACE AND PARKS

Stakeholders identified Southeastern San Diego as severely lacking in parks, recreation, and open space. Adding recreation facilities to existing parks could help meet these needs. Stakeholders expressed a strong desire for safe, family-friendly gathering space which, given lack of land availability may include more innovative solutions. Ideas suggested were as follows:

- Closing off certain streets in the summer for community events
- Widening sidewalks and curbs to create gathering space
- Capping freeways (as planned in Downtown) to improve connectivity and reduce visual impact of the freeway
- Cleaning up and making improvements to Chollas Creek, as planned and underway, to better connect communities
- Improving trails in the canyons, including signage, safety, lighting, and access

Encanto was generally seen as having adequate open space and access to parks, though stakeholders were hopeful that planned Chollas Creek improvements would continue to be developed by Groundworks and other agencies. Still, a few stakeholders remarked that providing a funding source for ongoing costs for maintenance and improvements—such as the existing Market Creek amphitheater or for potential streetscape improvement projects—need to be considered in the community plan updates, through assessment districts or other measures.

IMPROVE STREETS AND STREETSCAPES

Most participants mentioned that streets in the planning areas are in disrepair, making the area seem neglected and contributing to actual or perceived crime. Specifically, sidewalks are missing, streets are sometimes unpaved, and lighting is inadequate.

In Encanto, many streets suddenly dead end (e.g. Hilltop Drive, Radio Drive, and Wynette Street), often due to topography and old “paper streets,” (streets that were mapped but never built) which restricts connectivity. While most stakeholders would like to see improvements in the quality of roadways and connectivity, they also admitted that there is a portion of the population that does not want to see improvements. Instead, some residents said they wanted to maintain the informal and rural character of the neighborhoods.

ENHANCE TRANSPORTATION AND CONNECTIVITY

Stakeholders tended to praise certain aspects of the communities' connectivity—particularly the trolley, road, and freeway access—while lamenting others—infrequent bus service, dead end streets (Encanto), wide roads, truck traffic and high vehicle speeds. Public transportation, walking, and biking are particularly important in these communities because they often a less expensive mode of travel compared with driving.

In terms of public transit, stakeholders overwhelming thought that bus shelters were limited, lacking in lighting, seating, and garbage bins. A few stakeholders expressed a desire for an additional trolley stop between 32nd and 47th streets—either in the Mt. Hope area or at I-805, connecting to the planned bus rapid transit stop.

Biking was identified as dangerous and bike lanes and routes as lacking. At least a couple of stakeholders wanted the plans to consider the possibility of improving bicycle and walking access through the canyons and cemeteries, so that these large spaces could provide access instead of acting as barriers.

In terms of walking access, several stakeholders mentioned the importance of alleyways as part of the pedestrian network. Freeways bisect several neighborhoods, so underpasses are also a necessary part of the transportation network and need to be pedestrian friendly. Imperial Avenue, east of 60th Street, was identified as a particularly challenging street to cross, with the presence of a frontage street (Akins Avenue), the culvert of Chollas Creek, the trolley line, and Imperial Avenue itself. Given that many trolley riders access the 66th Street trolley station on foot, this corridor presents a challenge to pedestrians. Several stakeholders suggested that some of the wider streets in commercial areas and around schools be narrowed to reduce vehicle speeds and make walking safer.

ENHANCE SUSTAINABILITY AND CONSERVATION

Several stakeholders mentioned the importance of ensuring adequate infrastructure as new development is built in the community. This includes maintaining adequate sewer and water capacity and supporting good water management practices in new development and renovation projects. Some stakeholders expressed that landscaping should be required as part of new developments and should include native trees and drought-tolerant planting to reduce maintenance costs and needs.

SUPPORT KIDS, FAMILIES, AND SCHOOLS

Stakeholders identified both communities as family-oriented, with lots of children and schools (particularly in Encanto). However, in Southeastern, stakeholders expressed concern that thousands of students leave the area each day to attend school outside the Planning Area, in part because there is no high school serving Southeastern residents. Several stakeholders mentioned wanting to see a new high school in Southeastern and to improve overall school capacity in order to meet the needs of both existing and future students as the Planning Area grows. Stakeholders also recommend that youth and neighborhood schools be involved in planning processes.

PREVENT AND REDUCE POVERTY

The community suffers from extensive poverty and low education, particularly in the Southeastern Planning Area. Stakeholders remarked that this dynamic contributes to the community's lack of political power and a need for investment in both public infrastructure and private homes and businesses. Some stakeholders expressed a need to enhance family stability so that parents and families can help themselves. Community facilities, such as the Jackie Robinson YMCA, Boys and Girls Club, and Malcolm X Library, were identified as playing important roles in providing education, sports, and wellness programs for youth, adults, and seniors. Likewise, schools, education facilities, and affordable health care opportunities (e.g. King Chavez Health Center) were seen as essential to improving community health, education, and job opportunities. Leveraging these non-profit, faith-based and other organizations to advance community cohesiveness and provide outlets for youth is important for both households in poverty and higher income families.

At the same time, stakeholders stated that low-income households fear gentrification—that they will be priced out of their homes if the community starts to look too nice, as a result of street improvements and new construction. Stakeholders agreed that engaging all community members about the purpose of and opportunities available in the community plans will be an essential part of the update process.

IMPROVE SAFETY AND REDUCE CRIME

Stakeholders agreed that safety is essential, but tended to disagree about the presence of crime, drug use, gang activity, and turf wars—some felt that safety had improved, while others believed it had gotten worse. Most stakeholders supported improvements in lighting and the availability of alternate activities and business opportunities as ways to reduce crime. In addition, a few stakeholders mentioned the importance of maintaining communication between businesses, community members, the Police Department, gang members, and non-profit groups. Stakeholders agreed that security of businesses and homes is important to attracting retailers and development opportunities.

2.3 Development Opportunities

Stakeholders identified a range of locations where new development or parks/open space could be constructed. A few stakeholders lamented that there are a lot of small vacant sites that are difficult to build on because of the high costs of development. Aside from a few large vacant or underutilized sites scattered in the communities, development opportunities were primarily identified along commercial and mixed-use corridors.

SOUTHEASTERN

- Commercial Street, especially around trolley stops
- Imperial & 32nd Street (near trolley station)
- Ocean View (3100 Block)

- National & 35th Street
- Martin & 33rd Street
- 252 abandoned corridor
- Market at 28th (near underpass)
- Cesar Chavez near Julian Avenue
- 43rd and Epsilon streets
- Highland Street near Planning Area boundary
- Grant Hill Hospital site (Albert Einstein Middle School is trying to purchase one or both buildings)
- Market Street industrial business park
- Gateway West

ENCANTO

- 66th Street and Skyline Drive
- Imperial Avenue, just east of I-805 (gateway to Encanto), east of Euclid, and between 61st and 69th streets
- Market Creek Plaza: successful, but opportunity to be more pedestrian oriented
- Logan Avenue, near Euclid
- Euclid Avenue

In addition, stakeholders expressed a desire for façade improvement grant programs to help property owners rehabilitate their properties. Such programs should include both residential homes and mobile home parks, as well as business and industrial uses (e.g. Commercial Street, Imperial and National avenues, and Market Street business park uses). Several stakeholders mentioned that the City can help facilitate development by reducing the need for permits for small improvements to structures and private alleys, providing tax incentives, and reducing environmental requirements that go beyond what is required by State law.

3 List of Stakeholders Interviewed

SAN DIEGO CITY COUNCIL

Councilmember David Alvarez

Councilmember Marti Emerald

Marisa Berumen, Deputy Chief of Staff, Councilmember Marti Emerald

Drew Ector, Consultant, Councilmember Marti Emerald

Martha Zapata, Community Representative, Councilmember David Alvarez

RESIDENTS, BUSINESS OWNERS, AND OTHER COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Michael Brunner, Jackie Robinson Family YMCA

Charles Davis, Jacobs Family Foundation

Roman de Salvo, Resident

Kurt Krasne, Business Owner

Kathleen MacLeod, Resident

Ken Malbrough, Encanto Neighborhoods Community Planning Group

Maria Riveroll, Southeastern San Diego Community Planning Group

Louise Torio, Resident

Eva Vargas, Resident

DYETT & BHATIA
Urban and Regional Planners

755 Sansome Street, Suite 400
San Francisco, California 94111
☎ 415 956 4300 📠 415 956 7315