



# Introduction

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## 1.1 Community Profile

### THE GOLDEN HILL PLANNING AREA

Golden Hill is a community with a long-standing history located adjacent to Balboa Park and in close proximity to Downtown, North Park, Southeastern San Diego and City Heights Figure 1-1. The Golden Hill community is comprised of distinct neighborhoods based upon geographic and historic subdivision patterns as well as resident and business involvement. Of these, Golden Hill and South Park are the most prominent with 'A' Street the boundary between the two neighborhoods in the broadest sense as shown on Figure 1-2.

**IN** The community's gently rolling topography is geographically a series of marine terraces. There is a gradual increase in elevation from approximately 60 feet above sea level on the southwest to approximately 280 feet in elevation on the northeast. This gentle topography is broken by four steeply sloping canyon areas. Because of these topographical characteristics, spectacular views of the surrounding region can be found. The area west of 28th Street provides many outstanding views of downtown San Diego, San Diego Bay, the Coronado Bay Bridge, the Coronado Islands and Point Loma. View sites along the rim of the 34th Street Canyon reveal the rolling hills of Encanto in Southeast San Diego and the distant Laguna Mountains.

Golden Hill is an urbanized community consisting of approximately 745 acres (inclusive of road and freeway right-of-way). More specifically, the area is bounded by Balboa Park and Juniper Street to the north, 32nd Street between Juniper Street and Hawthorn Street, then along Marlton Drive to the 34th Street canyon to Beech Street on the east, State Route 94 on the south and Interstate 5 to the west. The community has excellent regional access within the metropolitan area by means of freeway access to Interstate 5, State Highways 15 and 94.

### COMMUNITY HISTORY

Golden Hill has a long and colorful history which is visible in the eclectic mix of architectural styles, many of which are today comparatively rare in San Diego. The distinctive qualities of these traditional buildings contribute to the overall scale, character, and identity of the community.

The community was settled in the late 19th century, and is largely significant with regard to its residential history. Initially marketed by real estate speculators as one of San Diego's finest districts, many of the city's most well-known citizens constructed their mansions atop the crest of Golden Hill near the turn of the 20th century.

The first land to be subdivided was in 1869, in the western section of the community. Golden Hill was then at the fringe of development in San Diego and offered large lots with views. During the early 1870s subdivisions spread eastward, but most construction continued on the far western slopes of the planning area. In 1887, the community received its name when Daniel Schuyler petitioned the City to name the area Golden Hill. Schuyler wrote the following poem which was published in the March, 1887 edition of Golden Era Magazine:

*"As the sun rolls down and is lost in sight, tinting the scene with its golden light, the islands dim and the fading shores, the ebbing tide through our harbor door. The drooping sails of an anchored fleet, the shadowy city at our feet. With the mountains' proud peaks so lofty and still, 'Tis a picture worth seeing from Golden Hill."*

FIGURE 1-1: SURROUNDING COMMUNITIES

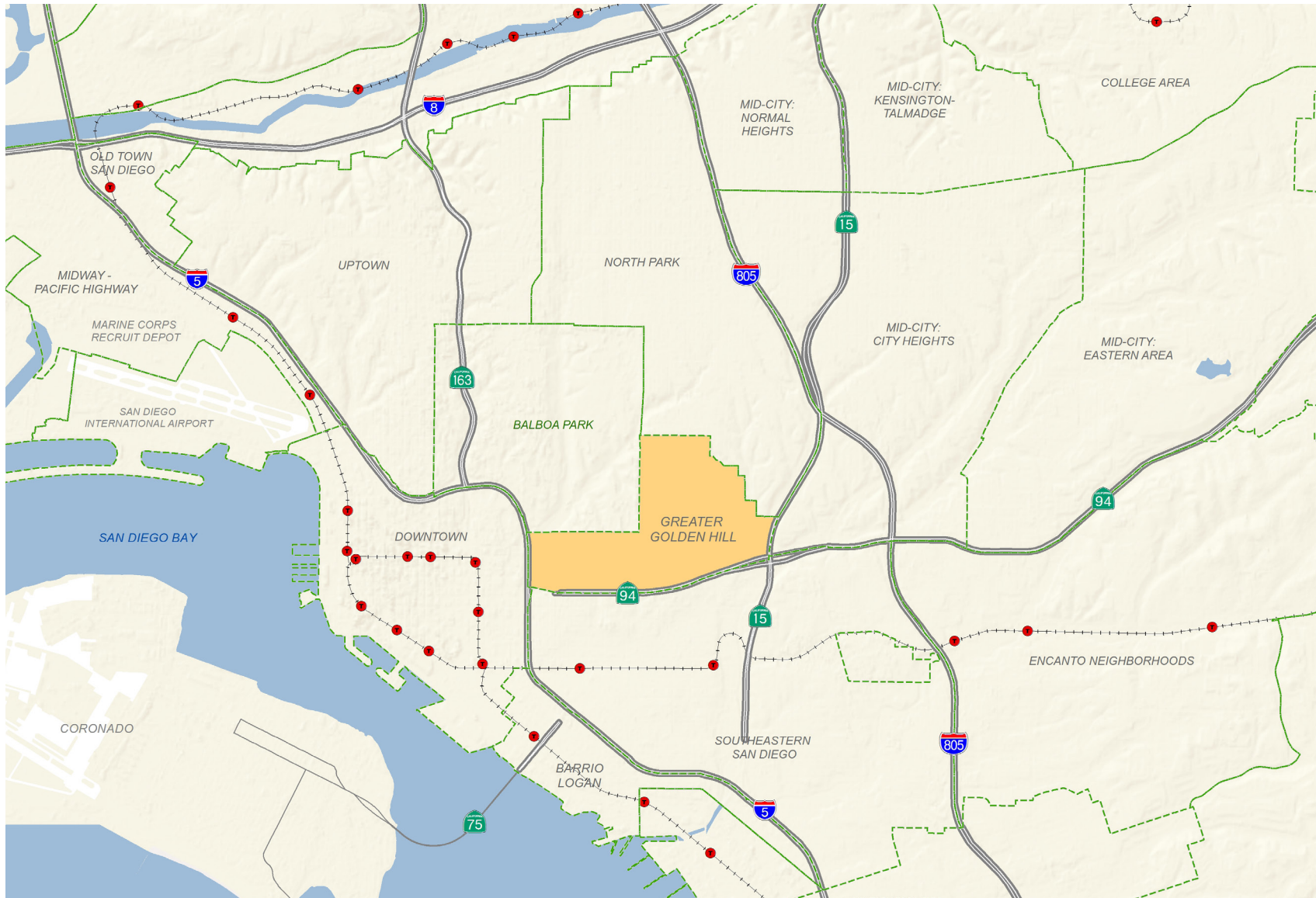


FIGURE 1-2: NEIGHBORHOODS



In the 1880s and 1890s, the community experienced two “boom and bust” periods directly related with the “on and off” proposal of a connecting intercontinental railroad. In 1895, despite the fact that San Diego was slated to be at the end of the railroad branch line to Los Angeles, Golden Hill had become a fashionable place to live for mayors, senators, and judges. Development at that time reflected a suburban community similar to that of the “streetcar suburbs” in the east.

In the early 1900s, E. Bartlett Webster formed the Bartlett Estate Company and began subdividing lots along the eastern side of City Park (now Balboa Park) with the goal creating a “high-class residential district” which he subsequently called South Park. As an incentive to buy a lot in the South Park, Bartlett established the South Park and East Side Railway and construction began in 1906. The line started at the west end of Broadway, continued through downtown and Golden Hill on to Beech (formerly Dartmouth) and ended at Cedar (formerly Amhurst) and 30th Street.

Bartlett eventually lost control of the South Park and East Side Railway to John D. Spreckles, who extended the line along 30th Street and on to North Park. The only sign today of the railway’s past is an open slice of land that diagonally bisects the block bordered to the south by Ivy Street and to the

east by Fern Street. A trolley stop was once located at this point. Trolley service along 30th Street was eventually discontinued as the automobile became the predominant mode of transportation.

Residential development accelerated, but shifted to the northeastern portion of the planning area adjacent to Balboa Park, in the years preceding the highly anticipated Panama-California Expedition of 1915. By the early 1920s, the area of Golden Hill adjacent to Balboa Park was almost completely developed. During the depression era growth slowed and little development occurred. Replete with single-family homes designed in an eclectic mix of architectural styles, the majority of the vacant lots in Golden Hill were built upon by 1930.

In the years following the Great Depression, the community experienced a period of decline and marked physical change. Responding to a chronic housing shortage which arose in San Diego at the height of World War II, city officials rezoned much of the planning area to accommodate high-density residential development. Due to the zoning changes, many of the neighborhood’s large mansions were replaced with apartment complexes, while others were subdivided into multiple units. This resulted in the loss of many older and historically significant homes to new multi-family development, which was sometimes out-of-scale and out-of-character with the existing neighborhoods.



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*Access to the natural canyon system creates recreation and view opportunities unique to Golden Hill.*



Today, Golden Hill is best characterized in terms of its demographic and architectural diversity. In addition to housing a wide variety of income levels and ethnic groups, the community boasts a built environment that is equally as eclectic. The built environment reflects the history of the community as many of San Diego's oldest and most dignified mansions are located here alongside modest bungalows, apartment homes and contemporary commercial buildings. In general, the southern and western ends of the planning area are characterized by a diverse built environment in terms of architectural style and building scale, while the northeastern section – which encompasses South Park – has retained a more cohesive collection of the community's early housing.

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*Views and proximity from Golden Hill's neighborhoods to downtown San Diego are characteristic of the community.*

## 1.2 Planning Framework

### SHARED PLANNING PROCESS

The Golden Hill Community Plan provides a long range guide for the future physical development of the community and was updated concurrently with the community plans for North Park and Uptown. A goal of the concurrent updates is to address key issues and propose solutions as they relate to attributes shared by each of the three communities. The updates started in 2009 with an intensive public outreach effort centered around individual community meetings that included stakeholder committees, neighborhood associations, workshops on key topics, a multi-day charrette and meetings of the Greater Golden Hill Planning Committee, the City's recognized community planning group.

Various attributes including those related to urban design, historic, preservation, open space, and mobility are common to each of the three communities at both larger and smaller scales leading to the development of shared planning solutions with refinements appropriate to individual community and neighborhood contexts. Each community is situated within a landform that is part of a broad mesa interspersed with many natural or semi-developed canyons allowing a distinctive combination of outward views and interaction with open space along most community edge points. These characteristics also provide a sense of seclusion from the surrounding city not uncommon for San Diego's neighborhoods, and importantly, support the interconnectedness between the three communities. Adjacent freeways reinforce this relationship as they have usually followed canyons and other low points in San Diego, although freeways have also created negative effects and undesirable divisions within each community.

The three communities surround regionally significant and historic Balboa Park. As development radiated out from Downtown San Diego along streetcar lines, later forming commercial districts along arterial streets and major crossings, a legacy remains of traditional storefronts uniquely suited to small and sole-proprietor businesses. A grid pattern of streets enhances connectivity and promotes walkability, yet traffic congestion occurs at many 'pinch points' where street widths narrow or access is 'funneled' due to canyon and freeway interfaces.

The three communities have also been part of one of the longest historical development periods in the region due to their central location and accommodative zoning which has left a breadth of building forms and architectural styles as well as historic resources in need of preservation. This has sometimes resulted in awkward scale transitions and juxtaposition of building styles as the rate of development has oftentimes been modest or uneven. The relatively intense concentrations of retail and employment uses nearby in Downtown and Mission Valley draw certain retail formats and employment away from these communities. As these communities developed prior to current citywide public facilities standards, locating and financing new facilities, such as parks, is difficult due to lack of available land as well as a limited rate of new development. Aging infrastructure often needs to be upgraded and/or replaced.

### COMMUNITY VISION AND GOALS

Golden Hill's location, regional access, view opportunities, and historical characteristics are resources that have encouraged the community's development as well as reuse or redevelopment of various sites. A main purpose of this plan is to ensure that future development will reflect the community's past and be sensitive to the older, established character, scale and design as well as preserve the community's natural features. This is accomplished by providing goals, policies and recommendations that will guide development and are consistent with relevant General Plan guiding principles.



*Golden Hill, Uptown, and North Park community planning areas share Balboa Park as a resource. The Golden Hill Community Plan Update process included public collaboration between all three communities to address shared concerns and opportunities.*





*Historic preservation is an important goal. Shown here, one of Golden Hill's homes from the Victorian era.*



*Commercial districts should also function as community gathering areas.*



*The building interface with the street (public realm) greatly impacts walkability and the attractiveness of a commercial area.*

## KEY COMMUNITY GOALS

The Golden Hill Community Plan is informed by the overall goals listed below. Additional goals, policies and recommendations are found within each element (section) of the Community Plan.

- Vibrant, successful and distinct neighborhoods that fit within the context of the community as a whole.
- Traditional neighborhood character preserved throughout the community by building design compatible with the community's architectural character and scale.
- The community's long-standing heritage retained by preserving historically and architecturally significant resources – individually, and within Historic Districts.
- Quality housing opportunities and a clean, safe, healthy environment for all income and social groups.
- Thriving commercial areas that function as focal points and neighborhood centers.
- Walkable neighborhoods and complete streets that accommodate bicyclists and pedestrians safely, and reduce vehicular travel speeds.
- Re-establish transit as an attractive and viable transportation alternative to the automobile.
- Natural features preserved as open space, including view corridors, native habitats, and canyon landforms.
- Public facilities and services provided to meet community needs.



## 1.3 Legislative Framework

### THE SAN DIEGO GENERAL PLAN

The General Plan sets out a long-range vision and policy framework to guide future development, provide public services, and maintain the qualities that define San Diego and contains a set of overall guiding principles (see inset). The recent update to the General Plan shifts focus from how to develop vacant land to how to design infill development and reinvest in existing communities. A key component guiding these efforts is the City of Villages Strategy which proposes growth be directed into pedestrian-friendly mixed-use activity centers linked to an improved regional transit system.

Regional and local investments that promote transit and bicycle use support this strategy. By increasing transportation choices, a reduction in overall vehicle miles traveled can be achieved which is a key contributor to broader sustainable development initiatives. Better mobility options are also needed for those who cannot drive, do not own a motor vehicle, or prefer to reduce their dependence on the automobile. Benefits to individual as well as public health can be achieved with any reduction in air pollutants as well as a shift in favor of walking.

These villages or activity centers are to be formally identified through the community plan update process. The mixed-use commercial districts and higher density neighborhoods along transit lines are candidate village locations within each of the three communities. The policies of each plan can be used to focus needed investments in infrastructure, transit and other mobility improvements.

### GENERAL PLAN GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- An open space network formed by parks, canyons, river valleys, habitats, beaches and ocean;
- Diverse residential communities formed by the open space network;
- Compact and walkable mixed-use villages of different scales within communities;
- Employment centers for a strong economy;
- An integrated regional transportation network of walkways, bikeways, transit, roadways, and freeways that efficiently link communities and villages to each other and to employment centers;
- High quality, affordable, and well-maintained public facilities to serve the City's population, workers, and visitors;
- Historic districts and sites that respect our heritage;
- Balanced communities that offer opportunities for all San Diegans and share citywide responsibilities;
- A clean and sustainable environment; and
- A high aesthetic standard.



## LAND DEVELOPMENT CODE

The City of San Diego Land Development Code (LDC) is part of the municipal code and contains regulations and controls pertaining to land use, density and intensity, building massing, architectural design, landscaping, storm water management, street frontages, lighting, and other development characteristics. The LDC implements the policies and recommendations of the Community Plan, including application of the Community Plan Implementation Overlay Zone, and all development within the community must comply with regulations set forth in the LDC.

## AIRPORT LAND USE COMPATIBILITY PLAN

The Airport Influence Area for San Diego International Airport affects the Golden Hill Community Plan. The Airport Influence Area serves as the planning boundaries for the Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan and is divided into two review areas. Review Area 1 is composed of the noise contours, safety zones, airspace protection surfaces, and overflight areas. Review Area 2 is composed of the airspace protection surfaces and overflight areas. The Airport Land Use Commission for San Diego County adopted the Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan to establish land use compatibility policies and development criteria for new development within the Airport Influence Area to protect the airport from incompatible land uses and provide the City with development criteria that will allow for the orderly growth of the area surrounding the airport. The policies and criteria contained in the Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan are addressed in the General Plan (Land Use and Community Planning and Noise Elements) and implemented by the supplemental development regulations in the Airport Land Use Compatibility Overlay Zone of the San Diego Municipal Code. Planning efforts need to address airport land use compatibility issues consistent with airport land use compatibility policies and regulations mentioned above.

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## MULTIPLE SPECIES CONSERVATION PROGRAM

The Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP) is a comprehensive, long-term habitat conservation planning program that is designed to preserve native habitat for multiple species. This is accomplished by identifying areas for directed development and areas to be conserved in perpetuity, referred to as the Multi-Habitat Planning Area (MHPA), to achieve a workable balance between smart growth and species conservation. A portion of the open space lands within Golden Hill adjacent to North Park are within the MHPA. Open space lands within the MHPA are addressed in the Conservation and Recreation Elements of the Golden Hill Community Plan and are implemented by the City's MSCP Subarea Plan.

## ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT

Pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the Golden Hill Community Plan Environmental Impact Report (EIR) provides a programmatic assessment of potential impacts occurring with the realization and implementation of Community Plan policies and recommendations. Potential impacts were anticipated during preparation of the Community Plan, and many of the policies were designed to reduce or avoid such impacts.



*The community's topography consists of a series of sloping marine terraces shown here as well as larger canyon landforms.*

## 1.4 Planning Process

### PLANNING HISTORY

Prior to the 1960s, development in the Golden Hill community was guided by the City's zoning and the policies of the General Plan. Golden Hill was subsequently split between two community planning areas. Planning for the area south of A Street began in 1965, as part of the Southeast San Diego Planning Program. Planning for the area north of A Street began in 1966 as part of the Park North-East Planning Program. As the impetus for downtown redevelopment increased, so did the concerns of the citizens of Golden Hill for a special planning focus because of their proximity to downtown, views, freeway access and nearby recreational amenities. The Golden Hill Precise Plan was adopted by the City Council in 1979. Zoning implementation was subsequently adopted in February 1980.

However, zones did not universally conform to the residential densities or open space recommendations proposed by the Precise Plan. Therefore, an update to the Precise Plan was initiated in 1985. This resulted in approval of the 1988 Golden Hill Community Plan which addressed key issues including preservation of single-family and low-density neighborhoods through appropriate land uses densities; the appropriate scale and character of new development; achieving conformance between zoning and community plan land use designations; elimination of land use conflicts; revitalization of commercial areas; and preservation of open space.

### COMMUNITY PLAN UPDATE

The City prepares its community plans with an expected 20-30 year period of relevance. This community plan update was initiated in 2009 and supersedes the previous Golden Hill Community Plan adopted on April 5, 1988 by Resolution No. 270679. The community plan update process evaluated issues identified with the previous community plan. Although visible progress was made since the past update to address the issues identified in that plan, many of the issues were still relevant, particularly as progress was uneven throughout the community. Also, the City's General Plan places more focus on how to design infill development and reinvest in existing communities.

The distribution of planned land uses generally follows that of the 1988 Community Plan with several revisions. These generally fall into two categories: land use changes to reduce density, and land use changes to reflect existing uses (or zones) where necessary, including a refinement of the mapped open space boundary to remove existing developed areas.

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Community input helped develop the community plan, including discussions at the 3-day charrette.



## 1.5 Plan Scope & Organization

The community plan provides a statement of development policies intended to inform land use, development form and public resource decisions within this planning area. The community plan is a component of the General Plan and both documents should be reviewed for land use and planning direction in this community. While the community plan addresses specific community needs, its policies and recommendations remain in harmony with the General Plan. Specific General Plan policies are referenced within the community plan to emphasize their significance in the community, but all applicable General Plan policies may be cited in conjunction with the community plan.

This plan should not be considered a static document. Subsequent to plan adoption, two additional steps follow: implementation and review. Implementation is the process of putting plan policies and recommendations into effect. A zoning implementation program was adopted concurrently with the community plan update. Guidelines for implementation are also provided in the plan. Review refers to the process of monitoring the community and recommending changes to the plan as conditions in the community change.

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Historic homes and traditional architecture are community character elements. Shown here are homes in South Park and Golden Hill reflecting some of the diverse architectural styles.

The actual work requires a sustained, cooperative effort of private citizens, City officials and other agencies. As the City's officially recognized community planning group, the Golden Hill Community Planning Committee is tasked with providing the continuity and oversight needed for an effective and relevant implementation program.

The community plan is organized into twelve sections that include nine elements, an implementation section and appendices as outlined in the table of contents. Each element contains an introduction intended to establish overall vision, purpose and context. A table of key General Plan related cross-references is included in some elements for ease of use. The goals within each plan element or section are succinct statements of the community's vision. The policies and recommendations address specific topics or issues and direct implementation decisions.



Neighborhood identity is important to the community. Golden Hill and South Park are centrally located neighborhoods rich with San Diego's history.