



# 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 community is comprised of distinct neighborhoods, as shown on Figure 1-2, based upon geographic and historic subdivision patterns as well as resident and business involvement. Of these, the Golden Hill neighborhood and the South Park neighborhood are the most prominent, with 'A' Street marking the boundary between the two neighborhoods in the broadest sense.

Golden Hill'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 26th Street provides many outstanding views of Downtown San Diego, San Diego Bay, the Coronado Bay Bridge, the Coronado Islands, and Point Loma. Views from neighborhoods east of 32nd canyon provide similar bay views and also reveal the rolling hills of Encanto in Southeast San Diego and the distant Laguna Mountains.

Golden Hill is an urbanized community consisting of approximately 746 acres (inclusive of road and freeway right-of-way). The community is bounded by Balboa Park and Juniper Street to the north; 32nd Street between Juniper Street and Hawthorn Street, then along Marlton Drive and the 34th Street canyon down to Beech Street and State Route 15 on the east; State Route 94 on the south; and Interstate 5 to the west. Due to the proximity of Interstate 5 and State Highways 15 and 94, the community has excellent regional access within the metropolitan area.

As evidenced by the description above, Golden Hill is a community defined by natural features and topography, its central location and connectivity with adjacent communities and the region, and its proximity to Balboa Park. It is also a walkable 'streetcar suburb' with diverse demographics that evolved successfully over time, in part due to its community-serving activity nodes, and with a traditional fine-grained development that provides a variety of housing types and opportunities. Constraints to community livability and further development are posed by the adjacent freeways and the related air quality and noise effects, and by aging infrastructure. Additionally, the freeways and canyons create access and mobility constraints, and newer development within the community is often more auto-oriented than Golden Hill's historical development, which can detract from that traditional character. Conservation and enhancement of Golden Hill's historic and traditional character are important to the community.



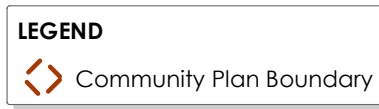
*Neighborhood identity is important to the community. Golden Hill and South Park are centrally located neighborhoods rich with San Diego's history.*



## FIGURE 1-1: SURROUNDING COMMUNITIES



FIGURE 1-2: NEIGHBORHOODS

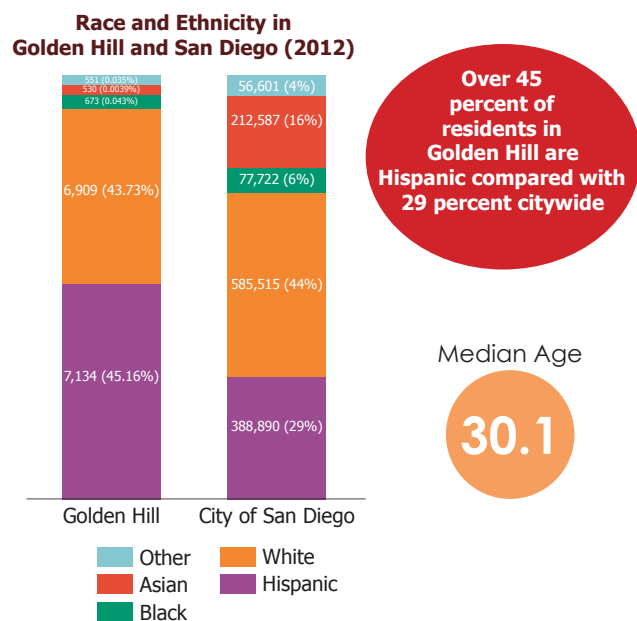


## POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS

Golden Hill's residents represent a variety of economic and ethnic backgrounds (see Figure 1-3). The community's population is approximately 15,800 residing in approximately 7,300 dwelling units. The median income of Golden Hill residents is approximately \$46,000, which is lower than the citywide median income of \$66,000. All data is from 2012 estimates by Sandag, the regional planning association.

At community plan build-out, the number of housing units in Golden Hill is expected to increase to approximately 9,215. Population is expected to increase to 24,010 people (City estimate).

**FIGURE 1-3: RACE AND ETHNICITY IN GOLDEN HILL AND SAN DIEGO (2012)**



## COMMUNITY HISTORY

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

The community's settlement largely began in the late 19th century. 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 highlighting the community's scenic virtues:

*"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."*

In the 1880s and 1890s, the community experienced two boom and bust periods related to the on and off proposal of an intercontinental railroad connecting to San Diego. In 1895, despite the fact that San Diego was slated to be the terminus of the railroad branch line from Los Angeles rather than the railroad's primary terminus, Golden Hill had become a fashionable place to live for mayors, senators, and judges. Development at that time reflected the characteristics of a suburban community similar to that of the "streetcar suburbs" in the eastern U.S.

In the early 1900s, a real estate developer named 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 neighborhood, Bartlett established the South Park and East Side Railway. The streetcar line started at the west end of Broadway and ended at Cedar (formerly Amherst) and 30th Streets.

Bartlett lost control of the South Park and East Side Railway to John D. Spreckles, who extended the line along 30th Street to North Park. The only visible remnant of the railway line is a diagonal open space incorporated into the site of a restaurant at Ivy and Fern Streets.

In the years preceding the Panama-California Expedition of 1915, residential development shifted to the northeastern portion of the community adjacent to Balboa Park. By the early 1920s, the portions of the community near Balboa Park were almost completely developed, and by 1930, most remaining lots in the community were built upon.

In the years following the Great Depression, the community experienced a period of decline and marked physical change. Responding to a chronic housing shortage in San Diego that began in response to industrial expansion related to World War II, City officials rezoned much



*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.*

of Golden Hill to accommodate high-density residential development. As a result, many of the neighborhood's large mansions were replaced with apartment complexes, while others were subdivided into multiple dwelling units. This resulted in the loss of many older and historically significant homes. The new multifamily development was often out of scale and character with the existing neighborhoods. Additionally, trolley service was discontinued when the automobile became the predominant mode of transportation after World War II.

In 2015, Golden Hill can best be characterized in terms of both demographic and architectural diversity. In addition to housing a variety of income levels and ethnic groups, the community features a built environment that is equally diverse. This eclectic built environment reflects the history of San Diego's development as many of the city's oldest and most stately mansions are located alongside more modest bungalows, apartment homes, and contemporary commercial buildings. The southern and western portions of the planning area, in particular, are characterized by a diverse built environment in terms of architectural style and building scale, while the northeastern portion encompassing South Park has retained a more cohesive collection of the community's early housing.



## 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. The community plan update started in 2009 with an intensive public outreach effort centered around community meetings that included Golden Hill's stakeholder committees and 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.

Golden Hill's community plan 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. While each community is distinctive in its own right, various attributes are common to each of the three communities at both larger and smaller scales, including urban design, historic preservation, open space, and mobility. These attributes created the opportunity to develop shared planning solutions with refinements appropriate to individual community and neighborhood contexts. However, Golden Hill lacks the higher intensity land uses found in North Park and Uptown and its context is overall smaller in scale.

Golden Hill, North Park, and Uptown are each 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 edges. These characteristics also provide a sense of seclusion from the surrounding city not uncommon for San Diego's neighborhoods but, importantly, support the interconnectedness between the three communities. Adjacent freeways reinforce the relationship between these communities as they have usually followed canyons and other low points around the

broad mesa, although freeways have also created negative effects and undesirable divisions within each community.

The three communities also surround regionally significant and historic Balboa Park. Early development radiated out from Downtown San Diego along streetcar lines, contributing to the formation of commercial districts along major streets with traditional storefronts uniquely suited to small and sole-proprietor businesses conducive to the trend in small business development. 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 created a breadth of building forms and architectural styles as well as historic resources in need of preservation. This history of ongoing development at varying rates has in some locations resulted in awkward scale transitions between buildings and juxtaposition of dissimilar building styles.

Also, the relatively intense concentrations of retail and employment uses nearby in Downtown and Mission Valley draw certain retail formats and employment uses away from these communities. More recently, this trend has some benefit for these communities, but increases the importance of safe and direct connections to retail and employment centers.

These communities developed prior to current Citywide public facilities standards and are faced with facilities deficits. Locating and financing new facilities, such as parks, is difficult due to lack of available land. Aging infrastructure installed when the communities were first developed needs to be upgraded and/or replaced.



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

## COMMUNITY VISION AND GOALS

Golden Hill's location, regional access, view opportunities, and historical characteristics are resources that have encouraged the community's initial development as well as reuse or redevelopment of various sites within the community. A main purpose of this community 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 tailored goals, policies, and recommendations for Golden Hill that will establish community priorities and guide future development. The overall community plan goals are shown at right. The Golden Hill Community Plan is informed by the overarching goals listed in the next page. Additional topic-specific goals, policies and recommendations are found within each element (section) of the community plan.



*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.*



*Access to the natural canyon system creates recreation and view opportunities important to the community.*



## KEY COMMUNITY GOALS

- Vibrant, successful and distinct neighborhoods that fit within the context of the community as a whole.
- Traditional, fine-grained neighborhood character preserved throughout the community by application of appropriate land uses and intensities, and by building designs compatible with the community's architectural character and scale.
- Retention of the community's long-standing heritage by preserving historically and architecturally significant resources individually and within Historic Districts.
- Quality housing opportunities, and a clean, safe, healthy environment for residents in all income and social groups.
- Thriving commercial areas that sustain small, independent businesses ,and function as community focal points and neighborhood centers.
- Establishment of neighborhood gateways and focal points through enhancement of existing built or natural features.
- Walkable neighborhoods and complete streets that accommodate bicyclists and pedestrians safely, provide adequate parking, and reduce vehicular travel speeds.
- Re-establishment of transit as an attractive and viable transportation alternative to the automobile.
- Provision of additional recreation opportunities to meet current and future community needs.
- Improvement of public facilities, services, and infrastructure to meet current and future community needs.
- Preservation of natural features including native habitats and canyon landforms as open space.
- Preservation and protection of view corridors.
- Improvement of environmental quality through reduction of undesirable noise and air quality impacts.
- Tree-lined streets with sufficient landscaping and preservation of heritage trees.



*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.*

## 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 boxed text). The 2008 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 of the General Plan 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.

The villages are formally identified in each community plan and reflect each community's needs and vision. Within the Golden Hill community, the mixed-use commercial districts and higher density neighborhoods along transit lines are candidate village locations (also refer to Land Use Element, Neighborhood Centers/Villages). The policies of the community plan should be used to prioritize needed investments in infrastructure, transit and other mobility improvements.

Regional and local investments that promote transit and bicycle use support the City of Villages strategy. Increasing transportation choices can reduce overall vehicle miles, which is a key component of 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 individuals as well as general public health can be achieved with a shift in favor of walking, bicycling, and transit use, including reductions in air pollutants.

### 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 this Community Plan. All development within the community must comply with regulations set forth in the LDC.

## AIRPORT LAND USE COMPATIBILITY PLAN

Golden Hill is within the Airport Influence Area for San Diego International Airport (SDIA), which is the boundary for the airport's Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan (ALUCP). The ALUCP is prepared by the Airport Land Use Commission (ALUC) for San Diego County, as required by state law, 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 Airport Influence Area is divided into two review areas. Review Area 1 is composed of the airport's noise contours, safety zones, airspace protection surfaces, and overflight areas. Review Area 2 is composed of the airspace protection surfaces and overflight areas outside of the airport's noise contours and safety zones. Golden Hill is affected by the overflight of aircraft which is addressed within the Noise Element.

The policies and criteria contained in the SDIA ALUCP are addressed in the General Plan (Land Use and Community Planning and Noise Elements) and implemented by the supplemental development regulations in the San Diego Municipal Code. Plan policies address airport land use compatibility issues consistent with the SDIA ALUCP and the policies and the regulations mentioned above.

## MULTIPLE SPECIES CONSERVATION PROGRAM

The Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP) is a comprehensive, long-term habitat conservation planning program 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 is within the MHPA. Open space lands within the MHPA are addressed in the Conservation and Recreation Elements of this community plan, in addition to the City's MSCP Subarea Plan.

## ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT

Pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the North Park/Golden Hill Community Plan Updates Environmental Impact Report (EIR) provides a programmatic assessment of potential impacts occurring with the 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.



## 1.4 PLANNING PROCESS

### PLANNING HISTORY

Prior to the 1960s, development in the 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 and the importance of 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, the adopted 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 1988 community plan. Although visible progress was made in the community since the past update to address the issues identified in the 1988 plan, many of the issues are still relevant, particularly as progress is uneven throughout the community. Additionally, the 2008 update to the City's General Plan provided more guidance 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 revisions generally fall into two categories: land use changes to reduce or increase 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.



*Community input helped develop the Community Plan, including discussions at the 3-day charrette.*

## 1.5 PLAN SCOPE & ORGANIZATION

The Golden Hill 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 for Golden Hill. 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 community plan is organized into eleven 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.

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 community plan policies and recommendations into effect through zoning, application of community plan policies, and capital and other improvement projects. A zoning implementation program was adopted concurrently with the community plan update. Guidelines for plan implementation are also provided in the Implementation section of the community plan. Review refers to the process of monitoring the community and recommending changes to the plan as conditions in the community change. The actual work of community plan implementation and review requires a sustained, cooperative effort of private citizens, City officials, and other agencies. As the City's officially recognized community planning group, the Greater Golden Hill Community Planning Committee is tasked with providing the continuity and oversight needed for an effective and relevant implementation and review program.



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

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