

**The Development of the San Fernando Valley:  
A History of Natural Resource Issues and  
Prospects for the Future**

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## **Introduction**

As the San Fernando Valley resident passes through their unique landscape during rush hour, they will not have the time to notice just what is missing, open land. They will not notice the lack of parks not four-cornered by asphalt avenues until the weekend, when they want to take their families away from the city but must drive at least one hour to do so. What they will notice is congested freeways, polluted air, and high monthly water bills. They will succumb to each, usually not ever knowing how life in the valley came to be this way. The valley resident often moves there to escape the nuisances of the greater Los Angeles city life, but in reality, the valley is the city; an annexation politically, a partner economically, and a “stepchild (Jorgensen 122)” ecologically. This relationship has never come naturally, and current Southern California residents live the consequences of the actions taken by land developers and politicians from the turn of the century. Some, especially outsiders, view Los Angeles and Southern California in general as a lost cause, but as this city has already proven, with innovation and forward thinking, this twentieth century metropolis can implement changes that make economic, political, social, and environmental sense.

## **Chapter 1**

### **A History that Gave Way to Natural Resources Challenges**

#### **The Geography of the San Fernando Valley**

The San Fernando Valley is a valley in the truest sense of the word. It was once a flat region with sections existing under sea level, a part of the Los Angeles Basin. Gradually over millions of years, the valley became encircled first by the emergence of the San Gabriel Mountains, then by the Santa Monica Mountains, and last by the Santa Susana Mountains. At this time, it was an inland sea, receiving water from what are today the San Fernando and Santa Susana Passes, and sending water to the ocean by way of the Cahuenga and Verdugo Passes. Eventually, these waters stopped flowing, and only the Verdugo Pass remained as an exit for water as the bed of the Los Angeles River. Meanwhile, the mountains around the inland sea began to erode, and the subsequent landslides raised the valley from the sea. This turbulent era of land and water movement was just the beginning of the valley’s chaotic youth (Jorgensen 16-17).

The San Fernando Valley today still has some of its own water sources. Approximately 20 miles out of the valley, the San Gabriel Mountains serve as the major stream source of the Pacoima, the Little Tujunga, and the Big Tujunga. At the opposite west end of the valley, Bell Creek flows from Simi Hills and the Santa Susana Mountain Range. However, aside from these, the waters moving through the valley are intermittent at best, and are normally seen only after a rare wet cycle. Land developers have covered up most small creeks with eroded mountain sediments of rock, sand, gravel, or clay, in an effort to sell real estate property. When the wet cycle comes inevitably in the winter, uninformed and unsuspecting homeowners have to deal with foundation cracks and flood conditions, dumfounded that five months prior they were being warned to conserve water amidst the summer drought (Jorgensen 18).

The San Fernando Valley now consumes five hundred square miles of Southern California. It covers twenty-four miles from the east to the west and twelve miles from the north to the south, experiencing elevations from 450 feet to 1500 feet above sea level. The southeast corner of the San Fernando Valley is marked by famous Griffith Park, where the Los Angeles River flows from Verdugo Pass. To the east, the Verdugo Hills connect with the Santa Monica Mountains from the south. The Santa Monica Mountains separate the valley from the Los Angeles basin and the Pacific Ocean. Out of the north and carrying into the west, the San Gabriel Mountains, still called the San Fernando Mountains by long time valley residents, serve as a 10,000 foot, sometimes snow capped, border. In the west, the Agoura Hills, Simi Hills, and Santa Susana Mountains are visual proof of the valley's division from Ventura County (Jorgensen 15-17). The San Fernando Valley, rectangular in shape and surrounded by ever eroding mountains, slopes towards the southeast into "The Narrows." This is a one mile wide opening through which the eroded mountain materials travel in the river. However, more sediment remains in the old inland sea than is carried out to the ocean. The resulting porous nature of the valley ground absorbs this silt and water underground, creating a reservoir that inches towards The Narrows. The result is a slow flowing underground river that is pressurized, because only so much material can physically pass through The Narrows at once under natural conditions. This is what is known as the source of the Los Angeles River, and this is why the Valley was so important to the City of

Angels in the beginning years of the twentieth century (Jorgensen 19). It is fair to assert that the rapid growth and success of Greater Los Angeles would not have been possible without the annexation of the San Fernando Valley.

### **Spanish and Mexican Rule**

The Valley is not only unique geographically, but it has a history that it shares only with the Southwestern United States. Ownership of San Fernando Valley land has a deep-rooted history that began before the California territory belonged to the United States. In 1769, Spain held the title to California land, and Gaspar de Portola served as the area's first governor and commander. When his expedition party left San Diego, they followed a coastal route until they came across what are today Sepulveda Boulevard and the San Diego Freeway. Here, old Indian trails led them to the ridges from where the San Fernando Valley was in full view, and this began the modern settlement of San Fernando Valley land. Portola first named the plain the "Valley of Santa Catalina de Bononia de los Encinos." By 1776, Juan Bautista de Anza had arrived in the valley from Sonora, the first White man documented in the area, and a priest, Francisco Garces, had created routes to the valley from the Mojave Desert and the San Bernadino Mountains in the west, and also from the San Gabriel Mountains above the valley. There was no grand plan to the settlement of the valley, and property was simply bought and sold at the discretion of the two investors. When the missionary fathers set their sights upon Reyes Rancho, belonging to Francisco Reyes, mayor of the small Los Angeles town, he resigned his permit to the land, cornfields, beans, melons, and Indian ranch hands to the missionary cause. What remains today as the San Fernando Mission was then named "San Fernando Rey," for King Ferdinand III of Spain. The mission was established in September of 1797, and surrounding California missions sent livestock to help its progress. The crops were irrigated from the same springs that allured the Indians to the valley, and the missionaries built a small dam and reservoir to feed their crops. As livestock and crop yield increased in number, so did the number of Indians being baptized. The valley was quickly developing around San Fernando Rey (Robinson 3-7). Today, the Mission stands in the City of San Fernando, symbolizing a rich Latino past with which most of the population still identifies.

Throughout the 1820's, while Mexico revolted against Spain, the San Fernando Valley thrived as region where priests taught Indians to grow grains, harvest fruits, raise livestock, prepare hides, make wine, as well as the skills of masonry and carpentry. The Mexican revolt against Spain increased the amount of trade being done between California and other countries. The rancho hides and tallow products increased California commerce, which in turn increased the value of California real estate (Nadeau 8). The once secluded valley was developing an agricultural and merchant based identity, one that tied it to the outside world and would soon be the story told by the majority of California communities. The Secularization Act of 1803 from Mexico placed the missions under civil administration, and the remaining priests served only ecclesiastical functions, while the Indians were then on their own. The first land boom hit California as one mission after another morphed into a cattle ranch, and Los Angeles County became an area of 70 ranchos (Nadeau 13). In 1834, the widespread move to secularize the Spanish missions reached San Fernando Rey, and as the Mexican government began to manage mission property, the Indian population dwindled, as did the number of livestock. By the time Juan B. Alvarado of Mexico marched to Southern California from Monterey in 1837, the mission defenders were too few in number to resist his claim to the San Fernando Valley. In another unplanned land transaction, the valley and Los Angeles yielded to the revolutionary leader. In 1842, California experienced its first gold rush, albeit more of a gold sprint, but it was enough to draw people to the valley once again. Miners in the Placerita Canyon earned a couple of thousand dollars per year on gold valley nuggets before exhausting the source. Secularization, the revolt by Alvarado, and this minor gold rush shadowed the old missionary life, the only sign of it being the mission edifices themselves and one priest. The Mexican government then leased the valley land for a nine-year term to Andres Pico and Juan Manso, the same commissioners assigned the task of inventorying the mission estates. Later in 1845, after a battle over Cahuenga Pass, Governor Micheltorena surrendered to General Castro's rebel Californians, and the brother of Andres Pico, Pio, was appointed Governor of California (Robinson 7-11).

### **The Valley Goes on the Market as Statehood Approaches**

In 1846, Governor Pio Pico, with authorization from the Mexican government, sold the San Fernando Valley to Eulegio de Celis, a Spanish native and resident of Los Angeles since 1836. De Celis paid \$14,000 for 13 square leagues, and the deed to the land read for

“Rancho Ex-Mission de San Fernando.” Normally, Mexican grants of a rancho were gifts from the government, however, De Celis was willing to buy and Mexico needed the money to fight the American naval and military forces that were beginning to occupy California. The inevitable was nearing despite the Governor’s efforts, as John C. Fremont led American soldiers with Indian allies into the San Fernando Valley in 1847. After taking the valley, signed over to General Fremont by General Andres Pico, Mexico had no choice but to relinquish the California territory to the Americans in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 (Robinson 12-15). By 1850, California entered the union as one state, although there was a clear division in landscapes, attitudes, and interests between the northern and southern halves of the state. These divisions would come back to haunt Californians as they began to battle over land titles and water rights.

### **From Quaint Spanish Mission to Subdivided American City**

It would not be long after California became a state that the serious businessmen would arrive with serious money and grand ideas for real estate ventures. In 1862, Andres Pico sold his portion of the valley to brother Pio, who turned around and sold it to the San Fernando Farm Homestead Association in 1869. The price was \$115,000, a long cry from the \$15,000 Andres Pico paid just over a decade prior. Two men from San Francisco were the spine of the Association, Isaac Lankershim and Isaac Newton Van Nuys. It took only a few months for the Association to bring an action of partition against the heirs of Eulegio de Celis, in which the title to the entire 60,000 southern acres of the valley were transferred to the northerners. Subsequent drought years killed thousands of valley livestock, so Lankershim and Van Nuys, owning what is today Van Nuys, North Hollywood, Reseda, and Canoga Park, turned the southern half of the San Fernando Valley into a wheat ranch, with England as their crucial market (Robinson 21).

As for the northern part of the valley, Senators George K. Porter and Charles Maclay set their sights upon it, but for very different reasons. Porter was a rancher and saw the valley as the “Garden of Eden,” while Maclay saw maps and colonization. Luckily for both men, the De Celis heirs were eager to unload their remaining property. That spring, Porter obtained three fourths, while Maclay took one quarter. The following fall of 1874, Maclay traveled to the Los Angeles County Recorder with a subdivision map. This was the first

time a developer came to the San Fernando Valley with a plan for its space. The map had 25-foot lots, streets named for men of the time, a railroad and depot, and even a hotel. Maclay called it the map of the city of San Fernando. The train from Los Angeles brought people to the valley daily to visit the mission; however, property speculators rode for half price. What they came to see were town lots priced from \$10 to \$25 or farming lands ranging from \$5 to \$40 per acre. This promotion, combined with the completion of the San Fernando tunnel in 1876, marked an era that would see rapid growth in the valley. The physical isolation of the valley ended as the Southern Pacific Railroad connected San Francisco and Los Angeles (Robinson 24-26).

The Los Angeles Farm and Milling Company, organized by the San Francisco speculators, succeeded the San Fernando Farm Homestead Association. Lankershim, Van Nuys, and the other stockholders of the old company saw to it that both the north and south regions of the valley became fields of wheat and barley. This of course led to the lucrative business of flour milling. In the southern valley, milling operations took place in the Van Nuys Ranch, Rancho Encino, Workman Ranch, Shadow Ranch, Patton Ranch, Kester Ranch, and Sheep Ranch. Each ranch served as a superintendent's home; barns, messhalls, heads of stock, and 20 to 500 acres all-inclusive with a wooden fence. In the northern valley, the property was divided between three men, each obtaining 20,000 acres. Senator Maclay, eager to subdivide more space and sell real estate, bought the valley region to the northeast of the railroad and east of Pacoima Creek. Benjamin Porter became sole owner of the west region, which was later found to be oil rich, and the original Porter, George K., gained title to the center region (Robinson 26-29).

A real estate fever struck California in the 1880's, and the effects were strongly felt in the San Fernando Valley. Isaac Lankershim's new Ranch Land and Water Company bought 12,000 acres of the valley from the Los Angeles Farm and Milling Company. The directors of the company subdivided the purchase into various sized and priced lots, from \$5 to \$150 per acre. The resulting town became Toluca, then Lankershim, and now it is North Hollywood. In the north, George K. Porter did the same thing with his new Porter Land and Water Company. He deeded much of the San Fernando town and Mission to the company, and the land was divided into 10 to 40 acre lots. Porter even provided for an



irrigation system to supply 4,000 acres, a hotel, a 170-acre navel orange grove, and a street railway. At the same time, Senator Maclay moved to subdivide the part of the valley east of Pacoima Creek. The Maclay Colony was an area of farm lots with soil fertile enough to grow citrus fruits, olives, figs, grapes, peaches, and even walnuts and almonds. Meanwhile, Benjamin F. Porter sold most of his western valley property to the San Fernando Valley Improvement Company, and in 1888 that area came to be known as Chatsworth Park. The ex-Mission de San Fernando evolved into the valley of separate communities we recognize today by the late 1880's (Robinson 29-33).

### **Thirsty for Fresh Water**

From 1892 to 1904, the state of California experienced a drought that would be the impetus for the most bitter water war in American History. Northern Californians are still embittered toward Southern Californians and vice versa over the ordeal, and since this time, Arizona and Colorado have also been drug into the saga. During this decade, the Los Angeles population reached 200,000, city parks and residential lawns dried up, and irrigation canals were diverted to supply drinking water (Nadeau 161). It would seem that aesthetics would from hereafter take a backseat to necessity. Not even five years into the 1900's, it was apparent that Los Angeles would have to take drastic measures in order to secure a more permanent source of water to supply all the rapid growth. The Valley, which was at this point a dry farming area almost completely dependent on intermittent rains, was in dire need as well. In 1903, the Government Reclamation Service surveyed Southern California for water resources, and it found the Owens Valley to the north to be a potential source. In June of 1905, a plan for the Los Angeles Aqueduct was announced to voters, at a cost of \$150 per capita (Jorgensen 121, 127). Only six weeks later, the voters of Los Angeles approved a \$23,000,000 bond issue to build the aqueduct that would supply water from the Owens Valley 250 miles away to the north (Robinson 35). The Owens Valley, slightly south of Long Valley, would serve as the aqueduct site. William Mulholland and Fred Eaton, self-educated engineers, saw that the Owens River would first drain Long Valley before entering into the high tableland between the two valleys. What the Los Angeles voters did not know, allegedly, is that the aqueduct would end 30 miles north of them, in the San Fernando Valley, and that those owning property there could potentially benefit the most (Jorgensen 128).

This, of course, was not the intended plan, but Los Angeles would find a way to make the aqueduct work in their favor by 1915.

Several measures had to be taken before the aqueduct could be built and before Los Angeles would prosper from it. First, Fred Eaton had to purchase the grazing land of the Owens Valley and Long Valley from Thomas Rickey. Fortunately for Eaton and Los Angeles, Rickey did not know about the plans for the aqueduct and all its implications, and he was eager to sell Eaton a two-month option for \$450,000. Los Angeles now owned the Owens Valley, and Eaton kept Long Valley for himself and what would be his lucrative Land and Cattle Company. Second, Senator Flint of Los Angeles introduced the Aqueduct Bill to the U.S. Congress that would give his city priority to obtaining in fee simple aqueduct access and reservoirs on public lands. With the assurance from William Mulholland that the water would be used for domestic purposes only, the Bill passed both House and Senate. There was no prohibition against using Owens River water for San Fernando Valley irrigation, however (Nadeau 165). Third, Angelenos wanted to guard their land against the problem of homesteaders. Washington D.C. designated 200,000 acres of treeless forest in the Owens Valley, and federally named "forestland" prohibits homesteading. Fourth, Eaton realized that the time had come to take options on the ranches and farms with water rights to ditches, streams, and the Owens River, because the land had no value without the water rights. He used a checkerboard system of purchase, in which every second ranch was passed over. The ranch in the middle was happy to have no neighbors until they realized that they were responsible for maintaining the ditches on either side of them as well as their own. Being fooled by Eaton, as was Rickey, they often had to sell their new property for an incomparable price. Lastly, the Owens Valley had to be itself developed before the aqueduct could go up. This involved a branch line of the Southern Pacific Railway traveling to it, water pipe lines, powerhouses, transmission and telephone lines, camps for workers, and new roads (Jorgensen 129-130). Beginning in 1908, William Mulholland and Fred Eaton completed their Los Angeles Aqueduct five years and millions of dollars later in 1913 (Robinson 35).

The aqueduct would be able to supply 420 cubic feet of water per second, amounting to a quarter billion gallons in one day. However, at this time in 1913, the city only needed one-

tenth of the aqueducts' flow. The one-tenth sales to the citizens could not absorb the cost of interest on the bonds, nor could it pay for the new hydroelectric plant. Developers would need to create a market for the water in order to pay for their engineering feats (Jorgensen 121-122). It happened that one acre of irrigated orchard land needed the same amount of water as one acre of property divided into fifty foot units with homes built on them. Luckily for Los Angeles, their San Fernando Valley neighbor housed hundreds of orchards. Even sweeter, the valley would be obligated to give back one-third of the water for which it paid. Also, a natural connection already linked the waterways of the Valley and Los Angeles, because the Los Angeles River flows, both above and below ground, from the Valley to the greater City through the one-mile wide "Narrows." For three gallons of water used in the San Fernando Valley, one gallon flows underground to the tunnels of Los Angeles to be claimed and used a second time (Jorgensen 122). However, before Los Angeles could profit from its neighbor in order to pay its debt, it would have to first claim the rights to the water in the Owens Valley and then make the San Fernando Valley its own in order to justify the need for all the water.

## Chapter 2

### The Modern Development of the San Fernando Valley

#### Valley Annexations Lead to Land and Water Rights Purchases

Following Spanish and Mexican Rule, Statehood, an agricultural explosion, and a revolutionary aqueduct, the next chapter in the story of the San Fernando Valley's land allocation is about its annexation to Greater Los Angeles. If the San Fernando Valley had not been developing quickly enough on its own, it certainly would once speculators from Los Angeles set their sights upon it. The Los Angeles Suburban Homes Company was created in 1909, was 30 in member size, but was controlled by five powerful "Angelenos." They were Otto Brant from the Title Insurance and Trust Company, vice-president of the *Los Angeles Times* Harry Chandler, president and publisher of the *Los Angeles Times* Harrison Otis, suburban railway builder M.H. Sherman, and subdivider and builder H.J. Whitley. Timing proved to be everything once again in this valley land transaction, for the Van Nuys patriarch was in failing health and the family favored selling their wheat farming property. Legal advisor and option writer, Henry O'Melveny, had his sights set upon valley annexation

to Los Angeles and viewed this as a step in the right direction. In 1909, Harry Chandler obtained the option to buy 47,500 acres deeded to the Van Nuys' Los Angeles Farm and Milling Company for \$2,500,000. What followed was the greatest subdividing effort to ever strike the valley and perhaps to ever strike Los Angeles (Robinson 37).

The deed was issued to B.F. Elliott, the nephew of Otis Brant, and as trustee, he conveyed the land title to the Title Insurance and Trust Company for the 30-member Los Angeles Suburban Homes Company. V.J. Rowan was hired as surveyor of the purchase, Tract 1000, which was divided into various sized lots best suited to serve as small farms. To promote sales to the public, the Company sponsored free excursions, barbeques, automobile races, and most importantly, the promise of more fresh water to come. The five "Angelenos," however, kept some of the land to themselves. Sherman took the 1000 acres now Sherman Oaks, Otis took the 550 acres now Tarzana, Brant took 850 acres at the intersection of Ventura and Topanga Canyon Boulevards, and Chandler and Whitney took the smaller properties at Sherman Way and Van Nuys Boulevard. The Title Insurance and Trust Company also laid out the townsites now called Van Nuys, Marian (Reseda), and Owensmouth (Canoga Park). In 1911, William Whitsett became the sixth key player in the Company, buying half interest in Van Nuys and assuming its sales and promotion (Robinson 37-38). All this development was made possible by the City's friends in the Owens Valley and their water.

Before elections in 1915, the Los Angeles voters campaigned to annex the prospering San Fernando Valley to their city. Annexation would bring the Owens Valley waters to them at fixed rates by Los Angeles and would also provide the funds needed to pay the taxes of Los Angeles on its municipal water project. The measure was approved in May of 1915, and therefore, 170 square miles of the valley, the greatest part, were annexed to Los Angeles. Following were Owensmouth (Canoga Park) in 1917, West Lankershim in 1919, Chatsworth in 1920, and Lankershim (North Hollywood) in 1923. At this point on into today, precisely who was benefiting more from this union was a matter of opinion. In addition, under Spanish law, Los Angeles was successor to the pueblo rights and had prior rights to the Los Angeles River waters flowing through pueblo boundaries. The courts found that the needs of the townsmen grew with the valley annexations, and although these were not part of the

original pueblo, priority was legitimized and secured by Los Angeles. Complicating matters was the fact that the Los Angeles River sources were in the San Fernando Valley and its surrounding hills. The river's water, in addition to the aqueduct's supply, allowed for the creation of even more orchards, cultivated fields, and new homes in the San Fernando Valley between 1916 and 1923 (Robinson 38, 40). The power of Los Angeles converted the San Fernando Valley from a grain-raising region into a rich agricultural community, thanks to the aqueduct. All the Valley communities, except what are today San Fernando, Burbank, and Glendale, joined the City. Raising the population of Los Angeles to include the Valley residents ensured the City rights to Owens River water and residents to pay the bills. Los Angeles was the largest city in the world at this point, but it had pushed its boundaries so far that representatives put a ban on annexations in 1927, because of another water shortage. This was when the City was forced to buy out the Owens Valley farmers and ranches for their water rights, losing millions of dollars. In 1925, for approximately \$6,000,000, the City purchased all land tributary to Owens Rivers, the Owens Valley canal in 1929, and the Owens Valley cities of Bishop and Big Pine for \$12,000,000 in bonds in 1930. These purchases were tantamount to admitting that the City, including the San Fernando Valley, had done Owens Valley a great injustice. Correcting its most costly mistake, the City bought the Long Valley property from Fred Eaton's successors, built a dam in the Owens River Gorge, and created a site for annual water storage in Crowley Lake. Today, Owens Valley exists as a stock grazing community and rural getaway, and it thrives off Angeleno tourist dollars (Nadeau 167-180).

### **Sacrifices by a City for Development**

The Progressive movements of the 1900's manifested themselves in Los Angeles in the form of city and regional land use planning firms. The County Regional Planning Commission, created in 1923, concerned itself with the citywide zoning laws passed in 1908. By 1923, 62,548 building permits were issued by Los Angeles for \$200 million, and in 1925, over 600,000 subdivided lots stood on the market, to be sold during the postwar boom (Scott 91-93). However, all this private development was not providing for sustainable landscapes, and the City that lured tourists with its climate and outdoor recreation opportunities was also allowing those commodities to degrade. One urban design firm, Olmsted Brothers and Bartholomew and Associates, submitted their plan for the Los Angeles Region to the

Committee on Parks, Playgrounds, and Beaches. One section read, “the beaches...are suffering from the rapid encroachment of private use; the wild canyons are fast being subjected to subdivision and cheek-by-jowl cabin construction, the forests suffer annually from devastating fires, the roadsides are more and more disfigured by sign boards, shacks, filling stations, destruction of trees (Scott 160-161).”

Dana Bartlett, Methodist Minister and progressive reformer, wrote in his book, The Better City, about the connection between social welfare and the proximity of people to nature. He was the product of a movement that preached about social hygiene and the vices that accompany life in cities. Inherent in this idea was Bartlett’s conviction that parks were necessary for social uplifting to occur, “...the fairer the city, the nearer to Nature’s heart the people are brought; the more easily they are governed (Hise and Deverell 11).” In 1910, Griffith J. Griffith reinforced Bartlett’s sentiments in his own book, Parks, Boulevards, and Playgrounds. Also a progressive reformer, Griffith, who gifted to Los Angeles a five square mile park that bears his name, declared that parks could be tied to the city planning process, had the power to relieve class tensions, and were safety valves for cities. In Griffith’s mind, a pastoral life and an urban life could manifest themselves into boulevards adjoining parks and thoroughfares. Boulevards and parks were supplements to each other for him, and in a city, one was incomplete without the other (Hise and Deverell 13-17).

It appears that in the progressive spirit that filled the air in Los Angeles a few short years into the twentieth century, the Olmsted Brothers Firm of Brookline should find secure clients. However, it was not a done deal to get the firm that was a national authority on landscape architecture and environmental reform movements to expend its effort on Southern California. With a savory reputation comes a price tag, and Los Angeles was a city in transition swallowing up funds. Citizens were paying for an aqueduct with a magnitude the world had never seen before, and it was also annexing portions of its San Fernando Valley. The city quadrupled in size between 1900 and 1913, and although it desperately needed a plan for development, it could not afford the likes of the Olmsted Brothers Firm. Los Angeles city planners coveted the firm’s services from 1895 to 1920. What Los Angeles could afford was to have the Olmsted Brothers Firm produce a report for just one of the city’s most dismal features, traffic. It is somewhat comforting to know that history even

repeats itself in Southern California, but at the same time wholly frustrating that nearly eighty years after the Olmsted Brothers Firm and Bartholomew and Associates produced “A Major Traffic Street Plan for Los Angeles,” the city’s residents still form co-dependent relationships with their automobiles and subject themselves to the now five-laned monsters. By the time the firm familiarized itself with downtown Los Angeles, the city decided to go all the way and commission them to produce “Parks, Playgrounds, and Beaches for the Los Angeles Region.” The report justifies the inevitably expensive public works projects by emphasizing the dependency of the region’s economy on tourism. If the city wanted to capitalize on tourism, it would have to use its climate and geography to its advantage, and this meant an extensive system of appealing parks, playgrounds, and beaches (Hise and Deverell 18-23).

The Olmsted Brothers and Bartholomew and Associates Firm found that Los Angeles spent more than any comparable American city to advertise its assets, but it also spent the least to maintain and enhance them, that Los Angeles did not meet the minimum recreation facility number, that the Los Angeles River was serving as a sewer for industries rather than as a clean water source, and that dozens of the City’s parks should be condemned due to their filthy and unsanitary condition. Charles Mulford Robinson, of the City Beautiful Movement, noted the same problems 20 years prior in 1907 in his report to the Los Angeles Municipal Art Commission. The developers ignored the advice of city officials to designate parklands for their subdivisions, and by 1928, parks took up a mere 0.6% of the City. There were two main reasons why parks did not fit into the grand scheme. First, the City was still using revenue from taxes to pay for the grand Los Angeles Aqueduct. Second, the prevailing attitude of the residents, especially of the powerful homeowner’s associations, was that they preferred purchasing land from which they could profit personally to having a share in the park system (Scott 160-162). This included residents of the Valley. Land was so valuable in the Valley that homeowners saw an annual appropriation from the gas tax fund for removing their front lawns in some areas. Besides a backed up telephone service, an insufficient sewer system, and classroom shortages, the Valley was most hindered by the lack of a decent road system. The Valley, about the size of the city of San Francisco at this time, was trying to operate with country type dirt roads. First, in 1947, a freeway over Cahuenga Pass connected Hollywood and the San Fernando Valley, and then Ventura Boulevard was

widened. Neither of these satisfied the number of Valley residents commuting to downtown Los Angeles. Today, not even the Ventura and San Diego Freeways can keep the traffic moving (Nadeau 277-280).

### **Valley Evolution through Adversity and Its Claim to Modern Prosperity**

The smaller towns of the Valley that were annexed to Los Angeles benefited from the water supply that the greater City brought to their doorsteps. The fruit orchards once threatened by frequent droughts could now not only operate throughout the year, but could also be suitable for cultivating a wider variety of fruits and vegetables. The success of the ranches also grew, as they could accommodate more livestock. The Valley became Los Angeles' window into the era disappearing from their own city; an era where life depended upon farms and ranches and dirt roads were not yet a thing of yesterday. The rural haven that resembled more a community in the Midwest than one on the West Coast, however, would soon use its water for other purposes than to feed crops and quench barn animals.

Reliably sunny days, barely-there winters, and a pace that is just a touch behind that of Los Angeles bless the Valley. Early into the 1900's, people outside the Valley recognized these attributes and began to move in. As they normally are predictably opportunistic, the stars produced by the 1920's film industry became understandably "smitten with the Valley (Roderick 87)." To name a few that youngsters today may even have heard of, Clark Gable, Lucille Ball, Roy Rogers, Howard Hughes, Walt Disney, and Charlton Heston frequently worked, visited, or even made their homes in the Valley. Following ranching and subdividing, the motion picture industry became the third largest industry in the Valley by 1930. Farmlands were quickly converted into movie studio lots, including those operated by Republic Pictures, Columbia Pictures, Disney, and Warner Brothers (Roderick 87-89). The weather and aesthetics of the Valley can be single-handedly thanked for this and for the conversion of groves into the golf courses and polo fields most often enjoyed by the stars seeking cover from the behemoth of Hollywood.

The honeymoon would be over, or at least postponed, when the Great Depression showed itself in the Valley. Studios accepted losses from their productions, relief camps opened in parks, and Communist Party members were frequently arrested whilst passing out flyers.



Valley residents rallied, however, and the results were artistic ventures such as murals painted on public buildings and art deco styled infrastructures. Even small airfields, the Grand Central Airport, the Metropolitan Airport, and the Griffith Aviation Park, emerged in-between the now fragmented farm and ranch lands, and the Boeing Corporation set up shop in the United Airport in Burbank. Later, Lockheed Aircraft overtook the United Airport, and today it is known as the Burbank-Glendale-Pasadena Airport, serving as a welcome alternative to Los Angeles International Airport for Valley residents (Roderick 103-105). The Los Angeles Aqueduct alone did not fuel all this development. By 1936, the Southern California Gas Company fueled the City, and Los Angeles controlled the electric power business within its city limits. Boulder Canyon power, from Colorado, had arrived to Los Angeles from the longest high power transmission line in the world. Also, the Colorado Aqueduct strengthened the Los Angeles municipal water and power system. In turn, Los Angeles proved itself to be the ideal site for the nation's largest industries, including auto assembly, rubber product manufacturing, chemicals, electronics, and of course, aircraft and missile assembly for World War II (Nadeau 191-192).

It turned out to be a serendipitous string of events that the Valley acted on its affinity for the aircraft industry. The San Fernando Valley was 112,000 in population strong by 1940, and at the same time, the United States was taking off to fight World War II. Aircraft factories emerged near the Valley's airfields, and residents caught in the Great Depression limbo became welders, assemblers, and designers for warplanes and machinery. Lockheed alone initially employed 2,300 Valley residents, and after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, that number grew to 90,000. This relatively small community mobilized to join Civilian Auxiliary Police forces, bomb squads, firefighting forces, and evacuation teams. Eventually, the war actually became real to the Valley. The men enlisted in the Army, and the women were left in the factories. When President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, the Japanese Americans living in the San Fernando Valley and maintaining what was left of the farms fell prey to the racial fears that plagued the whole nation. When they were forced to leave their homes and entered into internment camps, the farms on which much of the Valley's economy depended were left to the mercy of the elements, until women and teenage boys took over the task. When the war ended in 1945, the population of the Valley had already surpassed 175,000 (Roderick 108-113). The people who adopted the Valley as their home at

the height of the war kept the region alive during what could have been an extremely dismal time, which of course gave the GI's even more reason to return. There isn't much more appealing than a quiet, suburban home with a crisp green lawn and a sparkling blue swimming pool after spending months in the trenches.

Los Angeles experienced severe growing pains, and with an ever-expanding population, the land of the great City and its San Fernando Valley neighbor was far too valuable for farming and ranching purposes. By 1950, these lands became tract homes, offered to residents for low terms and prices, as the City became the first to remove wartime rent controls. This tract boom resulted in the construction of tens of thousands of new homes, going to young couples in the postwar era that were just starting out, trying to create a new life. Following the homes were the establishment of churches, school, and service clubs. The San Fernando Valley alone contributed the most to this growth; its population being 850,000 after the war, while that of Los Angeles was 2.5 million.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Forward Thinking and Prospects for the Future**

##### **The Floodwaters and the Concrete River They Borne**

Just in case Los Angeles could not depend on the Owens Valley for water, it could depend on unpredictable Pacific Ocean storms that collide with the relatively warm San Fernando Valley air. The result in March of 1938 was a flood that exposed the Valley's physical vulnerabilities like nothing had before. The entire County of Los Angeles suffered, but the Valley alone experienced damages totaling \$12.4 million (Gumprecht 216). The slopes of the Santa Monica, Santa Susana, and San Gabriel Mountains were already water-soaked from a winter of rain, and when they couldn't possibly absorb any more water, the runoffs began. The Valley collected the initial waters in the Pacoima Canyon and Big Tujunga Canyon Dams, which were built specifically for this reason, and residents were confident that these infrastructures would protect them. However, the Big Tujunga Dam floodgates had to be opened to relieve the immense pressure on it, and as a result, the Valley's insignificant creeks overflowed, the mighty Los Angeles River sacrificed it's own banks, and nearly 100 people lost their lives (Roderick 8-9). Residents carelessly forget that Los Angeles, in the simplest

terms, is a metropolis in a desert, and when it rains in the desert; there are few places for the water to go when the soil is shocked to be receiving moisture.

Just after an equally devastating flood in 1934, a presidential committee endorsed an appropriation of \$19.3 million for assistance under the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act created by Congress during the Depression Era (Gumprecht 205). Understandably so, Valley residents and developers engaged in massive public works programs in order to ensure that this type of natural disaster never plague them again. The initial plan was to build a dam that could succeed in fighting floodwaters where the Big Tujunga failed. The Hansen Dam was erected in 1940 to house the flow from the Little and Big Tujunga washes, and as an added bonus, Hansen Lake was created to serve as a recreation area. This dam, however, was believed by many to not be enough to counter the next impending flood, and so the Army Corps of Engineers obtained a court order to expand and pave over the Los Angeles River. Necessary for this was first the construction of the Sepulveda Dam in 1942. Following this feat, which eradicated 1,000 acres of the southland's farms and ranches, the Army Corps of Engineers made the Los Angeles River wider, deeper, and lined it with concrete for the finishing touch (Roderick 10). Initially, the project took effect between Lankershim Boulevard in North Hollywood to Elysian Park, which was 11.5 miles. Channel capacity, depth, and flow were all increased by these efforts, and levees, drainage basins, and debris basins were also incorporated to manage the waters in flood years. The floods and the concrete river also proved healthy for an economy of a city suffering from Depression Era effects; the public works projects employed 17,000 people (Gumprecht 206).

### **From Concrete Gray to Green Again All around the Nation**

The exhuming and paving over of the Los Angeles River was finally completed in the late 1950's, taking almost two decades. Today, the River is concrete over 94% of its 52-mile length (Gumprecht 235). It wanders through the City, a shadow of what it once was; a vital water source and healthy habitat. Now, the River is encased by 30 foot walls, chain linked fences, and it often serves as a mural for graffiti artists, a backdrop for film sets, and a landfill for whoever needs an extra garbage can. So, in addition to serving as a flood control basin in years of particularly wet winters, the River is a receptacle for urban waste that accumulates from storm drains (Gumprecht 236).

In 1980, Lewis MacAdams moved to Los Angeles from Northern California, where he was a poet, a ditch digger for the local water district, served on the board of the Bolinas Public Utility District, and successfully protested against the construction of a sewage system to be built by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. From the first time MacAdams saw the river, he knew he would be a part of its rejuvenation. Inspired by the three soft bottomed portions of the River and the trees and bird life that still flourished there, MacAdams began an environmental group and named it Friends of the Los Angeles River, or FoLAR, in 1985. With only himself and a handful of artist type friends, FoLAR began drawing attention to itself and to the River with just a few homemade theatrical performances and river walks. By 1986, the group was incorporated as a nonprofit organization. Today, FoLAR is one of the most outspoken environmental organizations in Southern California (Gumprecht 250-253).

Friends of the Los Angeles River, today, is not alone in its mission to restore the River to its former glory. Local and national, private and public agencies have submitted proposals for projects aimed at restoration and human use of the River. These groups include American Rivers, the Trust for Public Land, the Sierra Club, Heal the Bay, the California State Coastal Conservancy, and the National Park Service. The result thus far of the efforts of these organizations has been the construction of bike paths along the River's banks, parks are being built, and trees are being planted. The River itself will remain encased; however, the goal here is to regreen its banks and surrounding areas. What is happening in Los Angeles is also taking place around the United States. Since Earth Day 1970, there have been massive efforts to clean up urban rivers and implement more strict environmental regulations on water quality and treatment. There are several noteworthy examples that deserve mention. Other U.S. cities face the same challenge as Los Angeles, and the outcomes have been promising. The flagship river project took place in San Antonio, Texas. In 1929, the work began to create *Paseo del Rio*, which is today a shaded walkway through a network of shops, coffee bars, restaurants, and hotels. The walkways line both sides of that River, bridges were erected, trees were planted, and an open-air theatre and amphitheatre were built. The city of Denver, Colorado, was founded in 1859 and since then was plagued by a polluted South Platte River. In recent years, a greenway has been constructed along that River that includes hiking and biking paths, parks, boat chutes, and even an amphitheatre. In San Jose,

California, \$138 million has been spent to create Guadalupe River Park, with the help of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The project's intent is to serve as flood control and provide the city with a 2.6-mile linear park with 10 miles of trails. Last, the city of Chicago, Illinois, has quadrupled the number of fish species in the Chicago River since their \$3.7 billion project began. Where that River once served as a basin for raw sewage, today Friends of the Chicago River sponsors river swimming races, hikes, canoe races, and cruises (Gumprecht 256-258). In Los Angeles, critics frequently question why it has taken planners so long to address the barren Los Angeles River. However, they may not be aware of the facts, that the recommendations of the Olmsted Brothers and Bartholomew Firm were not implemented by Los Angeles decades ago, because the nation was struggling through the Great Depression and then World War II. In addition, the proposal lacked the technical support to address the flood control that was so desperately needed. Today, it is far more economically feasible to make these improvements.

### **The Impact of FoLAR**

Friends of the Los Angeles River has very defined goals, all aimed at what is being termed “regreening” the Los Angeles River. These goals are ambitious and extensive, and they would provide for more green space in Los Angeles. However, they require cooperation from local municipalities, nonprofit organizations, and even the federal government.

FoLAR's goals include

- The restoration of the River's natural habitat,
- The development of recreational and commuter bikeways, pedestrian paths and horse trails on the riverbanks; and places for canoeing and kayaking in the River,
- The application of flood-protection technologies that emphasize the restoration of a healthy ecosystem,
- The reforestation and re-vegetation of the River's watershed to control seasonal flooding and debris flow,
- The creation of educational programs which bring students to celebrate and study the River to explain the importance of the River, its tributaries, and its watershed,

- Fostering efforts to monitor and improve water quality in the River and its tributaries, and to control toxic pollution from dumping and storm drains,
- Coordinating community-based clean-ups and graffiti removal along the River in cooperation with other groups and agencies,
- Creating a L.A. River Conservancy to coordinate public management of the River, enacting land-use ordinances and zoning laws to manage development in the riparian corridor,
- Placing the L.A. River bridges on the National Historic Registry, and protecting and enhancing their historic and aesthetic value, and
- Encouraging appropriate uses of reclaimed water for irrigation, recharging the aquifers, and promoting sustainable development.

For the past fourteen years, FoLAR has been the most active environmental nonprofit group working to restore the Los Angeles River. Together with scientists, engineers, and political leaders, FoLAR has initiated two landmark studies. The first was a biological inventory of the River, conducted by the County Museum of Natural History. The second was an engineering feasibility study to turn a railroad yard just outside downtown Los Angeles into a flood-retention basin and park. FoLAR also began the commuter bikeway that exists along the River's banks and leads quarterly bike rides through Glendale Narrows. This nonprofit group also held four major river conferences between 1997 and 1998, in Long Beach, downtown Los Angeles, and two in the San Fernando Valley. Several hundred citizens attended to hear FoLAR present plans and designs for the future of the River. FoLAR also organizes workshops for teachers who use the River as a natural classroom, leads a volunteer effort called RiverWatch that places one volunteer per mile of the River to monitor water quality and with that information publishes the annual *State of the River Report*, conducts monthly river walks that include speeches about the natural and historical aspects of the River, and each Spring FoLAR leads *La Gran Limpieza*, or the Great Los Angeles River Clean-Up. In 2001, approximately 2,000 people showed up at ten sites along the River, and FoLAR cleared the River of 25 tons of trash and was able to recycle half of it (FoLAR 2002). The group that began with a hippie-poet leader, his artist friends, and a vision has had the single largest impact on the greening of the Los Angeles River, all powered by citizen outreach and action.

## **The Trust for Public Land Works for a Greener Los Angeles**

Community ownership of the River regreening efforts is crucial to its transformation from an ignored drainage ditch to the celebrated heart of a new California urban state park, according to Joanna Miller of the Trust for Public Land. In 2000, Governor Gray Davis designated the Los Angeles River Parkway as a state park and allocated \$88.5 million from the 1999 \$2.1 billion parks bond for its creation. The designation was a landmark move in regreening the urban waterway. In 1996, the Los Angeles County's L.A. River Master Plan called for bike paths, walk ways, a 65 acres park in northeast L.A., a 20 acre park in Long Beach, pocket parks, rest areas, historic displays, shops, restaurants, tree plantings all to be created along the River's near 52 mile stretch, and this funding can help make the plan a reality. Larry Kaplan, director of the Los Angeles Trust for Public Land field office, says that "the region has great swaths of open space, but millions of people, particularly low income people, never see them because they can't get to them." The Trust for Public Land, therefore, is committed to providing green space in 13 cities along the River that constitute some of the most dense urban communities in California. The Los Angeles River Parkway is intended to rival San Francisco's Golden Gate Park and New York City's Central Park (Miller 2000).

The budget bill signed by the California Governor includes funding for two massive park projects in particular; Cornfields in central Los Angeles and Wrigley Heights in Long Beach. The Cornfields property is 32 acres large and will be the first state park, open space, and recreational facility that downtown L.A. has ever seen. The Wrigley Heights property is 40 acres large and will create the largest park along the River south of downtown L.A. The River begins in the San Fernando Valley and ends at the Pacific Ocean just after passing through Long Beach, and these parks will serve 13 cities with a place to recreate. Communities will be revitalized and cleaned-up when residents have the ability to recreate where they work. The Trust for Public Land's River Greenway Program is underway to create urban parks. Some of the completed spaces include Elysian Valley Gateway Park, Steelhead Park, Julia Russ Asmus Neighborhood Park, Ralph Dills Park, and the Maywood Riverfront Park will be open soon.

### **Today's Challenge and the Greenprinting Solution**

Los Angeles today must move forward and take the actions necessary to become part of the network of elite cities that have provided their citizens with open spaces. According to the Trust for Public Land's California office, "This new parks initiative for Los Angeles will engage public, private, and civic partners in a process to identify park-building opportunities that focus on community revitalization and link open space to improvements in housing, schools, businesses, and transit. The Greenprinting Los Angeles initiative will build on the momentum of the extraordinarily diverse coalition of environmental, community, civil rights, religious, and business interests that have come together to create urban parks.

Greenprinting is the Trust for Public Land's process offering policy makers, agency representatives, community activists, nonprofit organizations, and private developers a shared opportunity to evaluate the city's park and open space priorities and opportunities, and plan interrelated systems of parks, trails, gardens, and public spaces. The Trust for Public Land (TPL) aims to use Greenprinting Los Angeles to envision community space and recreational opportunities within a quarter mile of every family in densely populated areas of Los Angeles, offering expertise in planning, public finance, land acquisition, design, and development, to facilitate the process (TPL 2002)." In conjunction with programs such as those underway by FoLAR, the Trust for Public Land's greenprinting efforts create and identify opportunities for parks and open spaces in Los Angeles County. The efforts are aimed at improving the quality of life of citizens here and fostering economic growth, by combining open spaces with other residential and business community improvements.

#### *The Trust for Public Land's Assessment of the Need of Los Angeles Citizens for Open Spaces*

- Most of the city's parks and open spaces are located in the group of city, regional, state, and national parks in the mountains separating the Los Angeles basin from the San Fernando Valley, mostly inaccessible to a large percentage of L.A. residents.
- Los Angeles is more than 50% below the parks-to-people ratio of 10 acres per thousand residents recommended by the National Recreation and Park Association.



- Although overall Los Angeles has 4.2 acres per thousand residents (the national average for high-density cities), in neighborhoods where a majority of the population has a household income less than \$25,000 or for which a majority of the population is non-white, the density of parkland falls to as low as 0.3 acres per thousand. The issue is one of equity since all residents want and need access to parks.
- Last November's Proposition 40, the largest natural resource bond in U.S. history with hundreds of millions of dollars for urban parks, was supported by over 70% of Latino and African American voters throughout the state, further demonstrating the support for park creation and revitalization.
- Following the civil unrest in 1992, a report by Rebuild L.A. found that 77% of the people surveyed listed improved parks and recreation facilities as "absolutely critical" or "important" to restoration of their communities.

*The Trust for Public Land's Strategy for Greenprinting*

- Build awareness of the need,
- Build alliances with local political, community and business leaders,
- Work with the community to identify specific neighborhoods throughout Los Angeles most in need of open space, relative to population density, age, income, ethnicity, and other factors,
- Focus on community revitalization,
- Use leverage investments that link more open space to improvements in housing, schools, businesses, and transit; that optimize the use of scarce land, money and public resources coordinates network of pocket, neighborhood, community, regional, county, state and national parks, beaches, and the community and joint use of parks and school playgrounds,
- Identify existing funding sources while also creating new ones, and
- Engage in real estate transactions, acquire land for new parks, create joint-use agreements, design and build park infrastructure, and create long-term community stewardship tools for new parks

*The Greenprinting Process*

New technologies and 21st Century tools that can identify the sections of the city with the greatest needs for parks, recreation, and open space must be used, printed, and distributed to all organizations and agencies working towards regreening Los Angeles. As of yet, this has not been done, as Bob Scott and Bruce Ackerman of the Economic Alliance of the San Fernando Valley have expressed. Part of the problem is that no such database exists; there is no clear definition as to what constitutes a park, or open spaces for that matter. The capabilities of GIS software, especially of those such as ArcView, are far reaching. With them, organizations could accomplish

- The creation of a map detailing where parks are needed, including a variety of information such as population density, age, income, race, and ethnicity, using the latest Geographic Information System (GIS) technology,
- The addition of information to the map showing opportunities for new parks, and
- The addition of more information showing possible public, and private, financial support sources.

With these maps, all the involved organizations and agencies can choose the sites to be converted into parks, present parks that need improvements, identify funding sources, and secure long term maintenance for these projects. Creating parks in Los Angeles will build community unity and promote participation of residents in their City's improvement (TPL 2002).

The population in Los Angeles is expected to increase by 2 million by 2012, and since Los Angeles residents are already underserved by open space and recreational resources in high density, low-income neighborhoods, there is no way to cushion the expected growth unless action is taken. This is why the Trust for Public Land is launching its first major metropolitan greenprinting initiative in Los Angeles. "Greenprinting is a collaborative, multi-disciplinary approach to land conservation through which park making and community renewal can measurably improve the quality of life for residents in urban neighborhoods underserved by parks and recreation opportunities (TPL 2002)." The Trust for Public Land

claims that Greenprinting addresses open space and broader "quality of life" needs for a community such and education, leverages funds from public sources with new sources of funding including private philanthropy, corporate funding, and foundation support, utilizes "best practice" case studies from around the nation, highlighting cost-efficient, successful park programs that involve local input, engages a diverse group of community leaders, activists, and residents in designing and developing playgrounds and open spaces, and involves community members in becoming stewards of their parks and by extension in issues affecting quality of life in their neighborhoods (TPL 2002). The Trust for Public Land secured \$36 million in California State funding in 2002 to launch the Greenprinting Los Angeles Program. The ultimate goal of the Trust for Public Land is to provide the citizens of Los Angeles with a park within a ten-minute walk of their residence (TPL Fall Issue 2002).

### **Nature as an Economic Incentive and Human Healer**

Greenprinting should not be thought of as a way to simply make a city look more aesthetically pleasing to tourists. There are positive economic and social repercussions for greenprinting; for having parks and open space incorporated into every neighborhood. This assertion will be discussed as a means of defending the fact that billions of dollars are being spent throughout the country to create user-friendly parks, walkways, and other outdoor recreation facilities.

According to an article that appeared in *Contemporary Economic Policy* by Margot Lutzenhiser and Noelwah Netusil, entitled "The Effect of Open Spaces on Home's Sale Price," the proximity of a home to some type of open space or park facility carries implications for the sale price of the home. Lutzenhiser and Netusil's study included a data set comprised of single-family home sales in Portland, Oregon, in Multnomah County between 1990 and 1992. Homes within 1,500 feet of a park that were 50% covered with natural vegetation experienced the largest increases in sale price. Lutzenhiser and Netusil wrote that in 1998, voters in 26 states approved 124 open space ballot measures, and all over the nation, local, state, and federal agencies are implementing programs that will increase the amount of land preserved as open space. Lutzenhiser and Netusil also cite other researches, who all

experienced similar results. In 1984 Frech and Lafferty estimated that actions taken by the California Coastal Commission to preserve open spaces raised home values anywhere from \$990 to \$5,043. In 1995, Do and Grudnitski found that homes adjacent to a golf course, which constitutes open space in some cities, had increases in sale price of 7.6%. Lastly, in 2000, Bolitzer and Netusil found that in Portland, homes within 1,500 feet of any open space sold for \$2,262 more than homes outside the 1,500 feet. Natural area parks require the largest acreage to maximize home sale price, and for every zone studied by Lutzenhiser and Netusil, natural area parks have a positive and statistically significant effect on home sale prices (Lutzenhiser and Netusil 2001).

Urban water-based parks in California were the subjects of several studies in 1970's. The methods used to estimate property value impacts that could be attributed to parks amenities included the distance of the property from the park and the quality of the park. One Oakland park contributed from \$9.3 to \$76 million to property values, varying on whether the property was a vacant lot, single unit to four unit dwelling, or apartment. In San Diego, the low and high estimates of property value impacts from a reserve reservoir were \$.14 and \$2.8 million respectively. In Columbus, Ohio, properties facing an adjacent park sold for an average \$1,130 more than comparable properties located one block from the park (Geisler and Daneker 2000).

In addition to the positive and direct effects that open spaces have on property values, open spaces also enhance the quality of life of residents, which is severely lacking for the low-income population in Los Angeles today. For centuries, transcendentalists and conservationists alike have emphasized the fact that the human relationship with nature is one component of good health. According to Dr. Howard Frumkin, a researcher at the Rollins School of Public Health, clinics, hospitals, nursing homes, and prisons that incorporated natural elements demonstrated higher rehabilitation rates. The concept of healing gardens dates back to 12<sup>th</sup> Century England, where the interaction with nature, even a simple 20-minute walk, resulted in improved health of patients; decreased blood pressure and hypertension, and reduced risks of coronary heart disease, colon cancer, osteoporosis, arthritis, and non-insulin dependent diabetes. One must therefore wonder what open spaces could do for the human psyche and neighborhoods plagued by crime. City planners and

representatives would definitely take the parks issue more seriously if it were taken as gospel that open spaces and a relationship with nature reduces violence, in addition to improving environmental quality (Lyman 2002).

Implications like this one could drive the way communities are planned in the future. The new designs of urban landscapes and the choice to save and restore natural areas will result in the emergence of more compact and walk-able communities, which would improve both the mental and physical health of residents. A growing number of eco-psychologists claim that our artificial environments contribute to the stresses and neuroses city residents suffer from, thus the recent popularity of Greenprinting Los Angeles. Dr. John Stigloe, a professor of environmental studies at Harvard University, claims that collaboration between medical, design, and environmental specialists could provide a much needed health tonic for a public desperately seeking well being. Already, real estate developers are conducting their own studies to evaluate public preferences. According to Francis Kuo, a researcher and environmental psychologist, the city of Chicago, Illinois spent \$10 million in tree planting efforts after the results of her study for the Chicago public housing department showed that people with views of trees exhibited less aggression and better coping skills (Lyman 2002).

Susan Ives, vice president and director of communications at the Trust for Public Land, recently spoke with former mayor of Bogotá, Columbia, Enrique Penalosa. He served as Bogotá's mayor from 1998 to 2001, gaining international acclaim for redesigning the city's transportation system and placing parks and open spaces at the forefront of his political agenda. Bogotá today is a statistically safer city than Baltimore, Washington D.C., Caracas, or Rio de Janeiro, in part thanks to Penalosa's efforts that added thousands of playgrounds, parks, libraries, public plazas and miles of bike paths and trails and thoroughfares for both pedestrians and mass transit to the city. Penalosa is representative of the Progressive Era thinkers, such as Dana Bartlett and Griffith J. Griffith, who sought to resolve urban blight with open spaces and community involvement. Penalosa spoke with Ives about the challenges of reviving a city in a third world country, and the former mayor's conversation is optimistic and inspiring. He discusses how in dense cities such as Bogotá, people have little opportunity to interact with each other in nature and they lose the chance to play outside safely. This addition to the other problems facing poor cities can lead to other social

problems; violence and extremism. Penalosa is sure that equally important to food and housing for survival are the needs associated with happiness, and a physically healthy city, one with parks, provides this kind of happiness. If Bogotá, being in a third world country, could accomplish what it has for the urban landscape, surely Los Angeles, the fifth largest economy in the world, can make the same improvements. This is a testament to the fact that the open space shortage in the Valley and in Los Angeles has less to do with costs than it does with poor leadership and a general lack of creativity in the planning departments. Former Mayor Penalosa's success came from simply thinking differently about what a city should look like and whom a city should serve. He decided that a city built to serve pedestrians would allow for more parks, thoroughfares, and a better public transportation system. He received the 2000 Stockholm Challenge Award for implementing car free day, where every Sunday, 120 kilometers of streets are closed to motor vehicles for 7 hours. In addition to the environmental benefits, car free day also accomplished social integration, because, people who normally would not interact, people of different social classes for example, are brought together on the walkways and on the bus. He believes that parks also provide this type of social equalization; there are no bosses and employees, no waiters and customers, rather everyone is equal. There are no barriers to race, disability, or income at parks; everyone can belong. All of Penalosa's efforts resulted in a different attitude of citizens towards their city; there was a reduction in crime and people were willing to pay for the improvements in taxes.

### **What the Government has to do with the Environment**

I have already explained what the environment has to do with people and the health of a city, but what remains in our discussion here is what the government has to do with the environment. As I illustrated with the Bogotá, Columbia tale, what that city needed was a fresh leader with new ideas. This is precisely what the San Fernando Valley needs today. What would facilitate resolving the lack of open spaces in the Valley and in Los Angeles is a change in government structure. In a conversation with former California state assembly speaker Robert Hertzberg, he stated the fact that 487 subdivisions of government exist in Los Angeles County today, which of course includes the San Fernando Valley. Mr. Hertzberg expressed his ideas that the size and spread of the city warrants a new system of governance; that "people are yearning for a sense of community." What Los Angeles lacks

is an involvement of communities with their government, and perhaps what Angelenos need is a rejuvenation of progressive movement ideals, at least those of decentralized government. In the Valley, these ideals have of recent manifested themselves into what is referred to as the borough system. According to Mr. Hertzberg, this system would allow for the kind of small government that is necessary in order for people to be heard. He suggests that districts of 50,000 constituents would allow representatives to know whom they actually serve. For the Valley and Los Angeles, this would entail nine districts; those of the West Valley, Northeast Valley, Mid-Valley, Westside, Mulholland, Eastside, Midcity, Centercity, and South Harbor. Each district would have five part time representatives, who are elected by approximately 50,000 to 80,000 people. Of the five, one person of each district is also elected president, replacing the city council, and these nine presidents would go downtown to make the great decisions. Besides carrying various implications for more rapid city services, small government also means greater community involvement, and as I have already discussed, this is beneficial for the environment. When people have a sense of community, they are more likely to contribute to its sustainability, and parks and open spaces necessarily provide for that. Even Los Angeles city council woman Wendy Greuel, at the November 14, 2002 Pat Brown Institute Conference on Building Civil Societies, stated that especially since the secession debate gained momentum, there has been increased attendance and participation at city council meetings. Although secession of the San Fernando Valley was not voted in, it was widely popular in the Valley portion of Los Angeles County, indicating a readiness on the part of Valley residents to take a more active role in the government. The time is ripe for change in the Valley, and what I hoped to have accomplished with this report is enough justification for the fact that along with attention being paid to housing, urban villages, and town centers in the Valley, equal attention must be paid to creating more parks and open space. This requires a collaborative effort between government leaders, citizens, and planners. This is a large undertaking, but it should be thought of as an opportunity to accomplish something legendary; what the Olmsted Brothers and Bartholomew Firm envisioned for Los Angeles decades ago.

## **Conclusion**

After a lengthy and convoluted story, we find our way back to the valley resident stuck in rush hour traffic. The sight has not changed much in a half century. When they retreat to the mountains surrounding their San Fernando Valley or to the beaches over the canyons in the west, they do so while grumbling that even on their weekend they commute. They have to, because incorporating open space into the Valley communities has not been a priority of Los Angeles County planners. Decades ago, it looked like Southern California would be destined to be a desert forever. With creative engineering, however, Los Angeles accomplished what seemed to be then an impossible feat; they secured a water supply and brought it to the City. Today's challenge is equally daunting, but again, with a focus on the future and sustainable communities, Los Angeles may start looking more like the place people would want to live, rather than place people just want to visit.



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