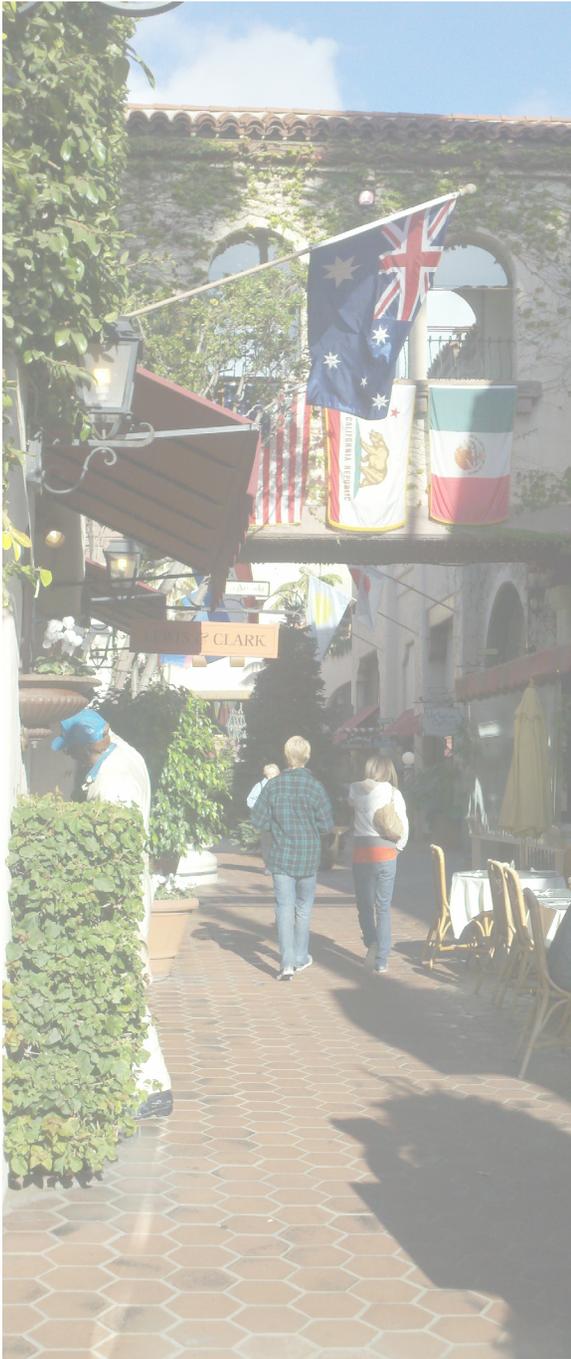




*Your Community — Your Vision*

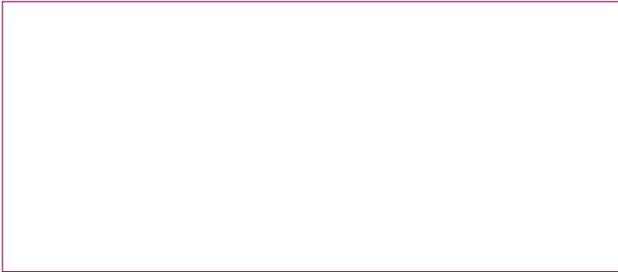
# NORTHRIDGE VISION





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## Summary & Overview

The Northridge of tomorrow offers an ever-increasing array of shopping, dining, and recreational opportunities. Reseda Boulevard provides a backbone for a well-balanced cluster of amenities, retail outlets and dining opportunities. Mixed-use planning and transit-oriented development hold great promise for the future of town centers, relieving congestion and reducing pollution. They provide a means of accommodating population shifts without significantly impacting the existing community. The blending of commercial and residential uses contributes to an improved quality of life by offering a more pedestrian-oriented and desirable main street corridor: “University Village.”

The community of Northridge is a place of tremendous potential and opportunity. This fact was reaffirmed in an extensive series of meetings and roundtables hosted by the residential and business community, the Northridge Vision team, and by the nationally-acclaimed American Institute of Architects, San Fernando Valley, Urban Design Assistance Team (UDAT).



This study is the culmination of a demanding series of charrettes and working meetings over many months—providing a foundational document and vision for the community and neighborhoods of Northridge. It combines best practices, good planning and community development principles with extensive input from stakeholders, leaders and experts.

## Vision

Northridge Vision analyzes the major strengths and assets of the community and its neighborhoods, identifying areas of need and opportunity. It provides concepts and strategies that can be implemented, and tools that can be utilized to realize Northridge’s future as a great place to live, work, play and learn.

Tools and concepts presented are intended for inclusion in future iterations of the Northridge Community Plan. Beyond that, these and other navigational documents will guide community planning efforts on five, ten, and twenty-year planning horizons. For future efforts, the community will be empowered to develop plans and zones in order to coordinate land uses and make Northridge a more pleasant and cohesive living environment.

Over the course of the visioning process, hundreds of community surveys were completed, and dozens of planning meetings and stakeholder roundtables were conducted, providing spirited discussion and thoughtful input. This willingness of existing leaders and stakeholders to participate, augurs well for a revitalized Northridge in the years to come.

The majority of the land in Northridge is single-family residential. The visioning roundtables made it clear that residents are not anxious to see this change in any substantial way. While there is general resistance to change and growth, most realize that some amount of change is inevitable and—as this vision process would suggest—desirable. The preference is to focus changes along main thoroughfares, in business districts and centers, and in the buffer zones between CSUN,<sup>1</sup> the commercial corridor, and single-family residential properties. Much of this could come in the form of Vision-friendly mixed uses and transit-oriented development.

Current zoning and land use planning in the Northridge area will benefit from a much more proactive and visionary approach. Central to this plan is the cultivation of streetscape and economic development in the commercial strips and centers of Northridge—particularly the Reseda Boulevard corridor. A unified and motivated group of stakeholders will serve as the catalyst, cultivating a built environment that more fully reflects the promising inner potential of the community.

Over the next several decades, this vision will provide a framework for events, activities and the development of supplemental materials. The strategies presented are intended to provide a roadmap for community implementation.

<sup>1</sup> Cal State University Northridge

## Neighborhood Empowerment

The origin of the Northridge Vision project goes back more than a decade. There are many dedicated leaders, some of whom are listed in this study, who have worked tirelessly for many years to make Northridge a great place to live, work, play and learn. The current project builds on what has gone before, and is intended to help guide Northridge over the next several decades.

The Northridge Vision committee and team have been assisted in their efforts by the San Fernando Valley Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. The AIA's national-award-winning Urban Design Assistance Team (UDAT) has donated hundreds of hours and participated in an extensive series of design charrettes to help Northridge realize its future.

During the course of collaboration and planning sessions, challenges cropped up at almost every turn. But participants were in agreement that implementing a true vision will include more than simply doing what is easy. As noted futurist Arthur C. Clarke puts it, "The only way of discovering the limits of the possible is to venture a little way past them into the impossible."<sup>2</sup> The first step to achieving anything is to be able to visualize it—what we refer to as "planning beyond the possible."

Once this plan is established, the next challenge is to clearly and credibly articulate that vision to those who can contribute

to making it a reality. Implementation resources may come in the form of leadership, investment, creativity or entrepreneurship. But, the all-important ingredient comes from cultivation of community support for "Vision-friendly" projects and initiatives. The degree to which Northridge Vision succeeds will depend on the level of support received from community leaders and stakeholders.



Northridge Vision is an ongoing process. This Concept Plan is intended to be a "living document" rather than a static report. Digital versions, updates, and exhibits are all integrated with the text. Supplements—including maps, updates and references—are readily available online. Scan or click the QR code, or simply enter the URL address in an Internet browser.

This link provides access to the digital version of *Northridge Vision - Concept Plan 2012*.

[www.NorthridgeVision.org](http://www.NorthridgeVision.org)



<sup>2</sup> Arthur C. Clarke's Three Laws, Law Number Two

## Northridge, CA

Northridge is home to over 80,000 residents. It is located in the geographic San Fernando Valley, an urban-suburban region of nearly two million, geologically defined by mountain ranges on all sides, and bordered on the south by Mulholland Drive, a scenic highway that traverses the ridges of the Santa Monica Mountains. Although the City of Los Angeles comprises 65 percent of the Valley's land and 80 percent of its population, the San Fernando Valley Statistical District<sup>1</sup> also includes the cities of Glendale,

Northridge is not a city, but one of 82 named communities situated in the City of Los Angeles, California.<sup>2</sup> There are six cities in the San Fernando Valley Census County Division:<sup>3</sup> Burbank, Calabasas, Glendale, Hidden Hills, Los Angeles and San Fernando. The cities of Agoura Hills and Westlake Village are situated to the west of Calabasas between the Valley and the Ventura County line. When the Valley was annexed by the City of Los Angeles in 1915 as part of an expanding water system, Northridge was included.

### *Our People - Who we are*

Northridge residents live in everything from post-WWII bungalows and higher-density multi-family complexes to sprawling ranch style estates. Overall, we can conclude that Northridge residents cherish their single-family neighborhoods and suburban lifestyle. Originally built as higher-end housing, many of Northridge's mid-century neighborhoods feature large homes set on estate-sized lots. But, some outdated images linger, and roundtable discussions revealed residents' desire to temper the area's "bedroom community" reputation and see Northridge become a somewhat more regional destination. There is a general consensus that enhancement of the main thoroughfares, corridors and commercial centers is a key strategy to bringing in new jobs, prosperity, and visitor activity. Residents would like to shorten the distance they have to travel to access a full array of amenities, and to enjoy a variety of shopping, dining, recreation and entertainment opportunities locally.

Communities like Northridge change over time, and risk decline and obsolescence if they lack a vision or lose their sense of direction. Northridge stakeholders are enthusiastic about enhancing their community. The key, they all agree, will be in collaborative implementation: coordinating existing assets and opportunities, maintaining dialog with one another, and focusing on the Vision. They are united in the goal of creating a more vibrant, welcoming, and interconnected Northridge.



Burbank, San Fernando, Hidden Hills and Calabasas. To many, it is simply referred to as "The Valley," and in this role has developed an iconic status for its entertainment industry and pop culture roots.

<sup>1</sup> California Government Code, Section 11093

<sup>2</sup> Scott, Robert L., Town Councils of Los Angeles: a concept for democracy through decentralization, Presentation to the Milken Institute for Jobs & Capital Formation, January 24, 1997

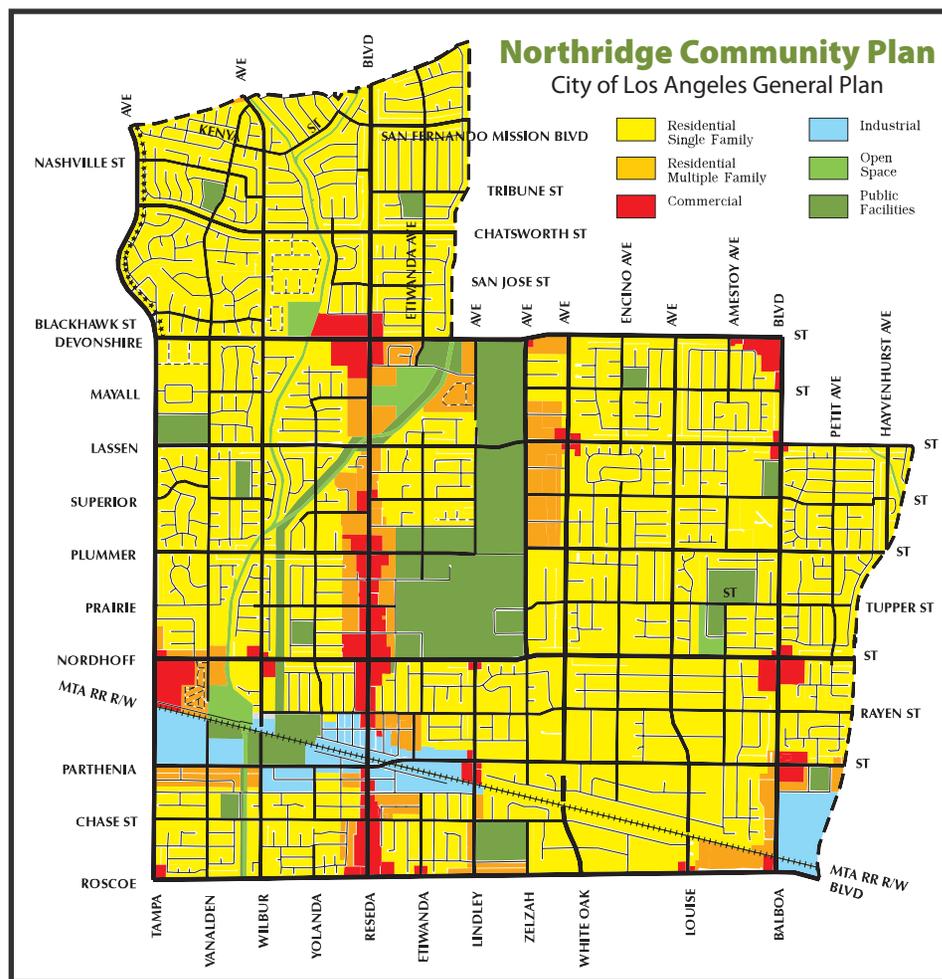
<sup>3</sup> CCDs and equivalent entities are statistical geographic entities established cooperatively by the Census Bureau and officials of state and local governments for reporting census data that have stable boundaries and recognizable names.

## Demographics

One of the biggest changes to the community is the nature of its residents. Those who have remained in Northridge tend to be older, and those who have come to the community more recently tend to be a more diverse group—many being first-generation immigrants of Latin and Asian derivation.

At a mere 14 percent, Northridge has a smaller Hispanic/Latino population than the Valley as a whole at 42 percent. The African American population at six percent is greater than the Valley generally at only four percent. Asian population Valley-wide stands at 11 percent contrasted to 18 percent in Northridge—making this a noteworthy enclave for Asian residents and businesses. These demographic trends add to the rich tapestry of life in the Northridge community. Incomes tend toward the upper-middle range, including many entrepreneurs, professionals and managers.

With the demographic shifts of the last several decades also comes changes in the social and economic fabric of each neighborhood. Differing cultures, lifestyles, preferences and needs place ever-changing demands on suburban centers. In some—particularly poorer—neighborhoods this results in crime, clutter and deterioration. These conditions leave an unavoidable impression on passing observers, and more importantly, drive down the morale of residents in the adjacent community.



## The People of Northridge

The people of Northridge tend to appreciate living in the San Fernando Valley, and few have any intention of relocating. They are proud of their heritage as being at the heart of this great post-WWII region. Their homes and properties are generally larger than others in the region, and have held onto their value as a result of a high

ratio of owner-occupancy. The pride this engenders leads to greater care and more attractive neighborhoods. Some of the most appealing neighborhoods in the San Fernando Valley are situated in Northridge, hearkening back to the days of the Northridge celebrity ranches, and a rich equestrian history. In spite of some of the problems that come with any aging urban/suburban community, the people of Northridge are reasonably well to do, and have an enviable community life.

There are few things that aren't just minutes away, and Northridge residents have reasonably good access to culture, education, entertain-

ment, recreation and any number of world class attractions. One of the goals of Northridge Vision is to make certain that the business districts and public areas of Northridge complement the strengths of the broader community.

## Challenges

Planned in the late 1950s as a much-needed freeway for the west Valley, the 4-lanes of Reseda Boulevard are congested daily with commuter traffic. Reseda struggles to serve both purposes, as a north/south commuter corridor, and as the “main street” of Northridge—the core of its Central Business District.

The street vegetation is overgrown and unattractive in many areas due to a lack of a system for routine maintenance. The planters from the Northridge Oasis Business Improvement District have unfortunately lost their charm. Many plantings have wilted and died, and many of the containers have become ad hoc litter receptacles. Boulevard tenants appear loosely mismatched at best, and the corridor lacks a systematic approach to clustering related businesses or the establishment of themed districts.

Northridge would not be considered “blighted” by today’s standards, but like any aging community, it suffers from pockets of obsolescence, deterioration and deferred maintenance. Nevertheless, while not technically blighted, areas within the community are aging and becoming commercially and functionally obsolete. Neglected features of the streetscape, such as broken furniture and trashed planters, need a regular program of clean up, maintenance and renovation.

Many older communities suffer from power line overload, which locals have generally learned to filter out. The visual effect of overhead power, cable and utility lines

cannot be ignored if the business district is to be attractive, and the quality of life in the neighborhoods is to be improved. Stakeholders agree that dramatic improvement needs to be made in the aesthetics of the community. This can be accomplished by working with utility companies to place lines underground.

Northridge coffee shops and fast food restaurants had a solid 50 percent majority of the community feeling they were “good,” with another 20 percent weighing in for “excellent.” On the other hand, only 41 percent felt that the fine dining category was “good” or “excellent,” suggesting that the area could support more quality “white tablecloth” establishments.

One of the most important keys to a pedestrian-oriented district (POD) is the ability to generate customer traffic, and to serve as many of the needs of its patrons as possible. This is also the place where startup businesses and entrepreneurs have



When signage in a commercial area is too aggressive, passers by are assaulted rather than impressed. Colors, sizes and styles are all lost in a visual fiasco.

the best chance to succeed. While they may be unable to qualify as “credit tenants” for space in a shopping mall or center, they provide a welcome eclectic complement in the town center setting where independent inline storefronts are able to co-exist with major chains and franchises.

In outlying suburban edge communities such as Northridge, a full array of amenities may be available, but are often poorly grouped or inconveniently situated. Forty-eight percent of those surveyed rate the amenities in the community good or very good. Patrons today have much higher expectations than they did in prior decades. There is a definite preference for “park-once” shopping, entertainment and service opportunities. Many existing inline stores lack adjacent parking. Unfortunately, when the original zoning was established for Northridge, it was common to have large commercial structures built with little or no parking being required.

Automobile traffic is definitely a mixed blessing. Too much, and it will drive patrons away. Too little and local businesses can wither. Most businesses surveyed (63 percent) felt that the traffic on the street was important to the success of their businesses. This is why businesses pay a premium for choice locations on major thoroughfares. As a practical matter the quality of traffic is far more important than the mere quantity. Part of the strategy of what is referred to as “traffic calming” is to slow down the flow, filter it, and attract more “destination” traffic—deflecting excess commuter and pass-through activity to other arterials.

The majority of businesses felt that anchor stores are important. But, a surprising 36 percent felt that such attractions were unimportant. Half of the businesses polled felt it was important to be near Cal State Northridge, placing great value on their relationship and proximity to the student and faculty markets. This is an important indicator that the best locality for intensification of commercial, mixed-use, transit- and pedestrian-oriented districts, is in areas closest to CSUN.

Of those surveyed, those going outside of Northridge to do business mostly preferred finding more of everything in one location. The service in Northridge does not seem to be an issue, nor is pricing. Quality, brands and selection are more important. It should be noted that volume and product turnover have significant impacts on the

quality and selection of products at the retail level. In addition to better product turnover, people are simply more attracted to places where other people are.

Desolate centers ward off patrons, and businesses suffer when districts are not kept clean and in good repair. Two-thirds of respondents rated cleanliness and maintenance of the business district as “fair” to “poor.” One of the most serious problems facing aging communities is visual blight and a lack of vigilance in the upkeep of public areas. Safety and security are extremely important issues. The stigma of fear plagues many of the business districts in the city. It is certainly one of the hardest perceptions to live down.

Sixty three percent of respondents felt the area could use more professional and



Unattractive, wide open main street lacking landscape, walkability, stores or bike lanes.



office space. While scarcity drives up the short-term market, there is no question that low vacancy rates indicate a vital economy and encourage local investment. In the final analysis, high demand commercial areas, tend to be the most prosperous for tenants and landlords alike.

Visitor traffic is known to have one of the highest economic multipliers of any category, bringing outside dollars to a community. Seventy-two percent of businesses surveyed also felt that local dining and entertainment was important to their business. Northridge is in an excellent position to promote its hospitality, dining and recreational sectors. Hospitality properties are in short supply in Northridge. According to the Los Angeles Visitors and Convention Bureau (LA Inc.), most of the San Fernando Valley market is what is known as “friends and family”—not necessarily tourism related. Valley tourism has not been well defined or aggressively promoted.

## Lessons Learned

In 2001 the City of Los Angeles was encouraging the establishment of Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) along main streets in the city. They were also staking these efforts with \$75,000 per BID to allow them to hire professional consultants to facilitate the process of adoption. BIDs are an economic development and renewal tool established by statute in the State of California. The statute empowers city councils to adopt ordinances for local businesses and property owners to form an assessment district. They are then able to assess fees and create a dedicated account entirely for the improvement and promotion of their respective business districts. Property-based BIDs have to be renewed every five years.

The Los Angeles City Council established the Northridge Business Improvement District in 2001. The process was dubbed “Rediscover Northridge” and the final BID was designated “Northridge Oasis” paying homage to the legendary spring that existed in the community, which was a resource for the indigenous Chumash Indian tribes. Many of the grand expectations had not materialized by the time the Northridge BID came up for renewal. Stakeholders were disappointed. Without the necessary support for renewal, it was allowed to expire in December 2006. The balance of its account, \$252 thousand was refunded to the stakeholders. Unfortunately, this left the BID improvements without a benefactor or a maintenance resource. They have since fallen into disrepair, except where community volunteers stepped in to help out.



Shuttered fast food restaurant across from the new Valley Performing Arts Center

It bears noting that the BID concept has fared better in other locales. The Northridge Vision Committee can benefit from direct experience as well as adopting best practices from programs in other areas.

## Changing Fortunes

The now-aging suburbs of the broader Valley region were originally insulated from the woes of the urban core. But, with the centrifugal migration of an economically and socially diverse group of urban residents, communities like Northridge are now beset with challenges once confined to the inner city. Unfortunately, these suburbs lack the resources and civic infrastructure to adequately address some of the new challenges. These once homogenous areas tended to be inwardly focused, deriving their strength from a common civic ethos. They have now become socially and economically diverse—with groups headed in new directions.

But with massive population shifts, as seen in Southern California, the demographic analyses become skewed. When average skill levels and literacy rates decline, income gaps are magnified. The data suggests ever-widening divisions between upper and lower income groups, when, in fact, the majority of new immigrants are making dramatic progress toward median income levels. This makes strengthening the centers of these emerging communities all the more important—helping to build a new civic, economic and social infrastructure.

Misperceptions of income gaps and achievement disparities also affect the marketing decisions of private investors and entrepreneurs, who might otherwise provide resources needed for the growth and development of an area. Paradoxically, while an affected area draws increasing support from the public sector, private investment in redevelopment and renewal often shrinks. As well-intended as government leaders may be, there simply are not enough public resources to solve these problems. Communities need private investment from external sources and from within the community itself. This is best developed through strategic civic intervention in the form of visioning, planning and cultivation of leadership.

Southern California is infamous for its traffic congestion, and this is borne out in the 82 percent of business respondents who felt that easing traffic circulation was a problem. In its role as the main street of Northridge, Reseda Boulevard must serve more as a destination rather than simply

as a conduit to accommodate an endless procession of commuter traffic.

## Prior Opportunities

Northridge is situated on the northern edge of the City of Los Angeles, and as a result, service delivery can be compromised. The suburbs are less prone to crime and other problems than the inner city, and can suffer on deployment of police and fire personnel. While this may make some sense numerically, it inevitably leads to longer response times and some unfortunate compromise of security.

In the combined survey of community, business and other stakeholders, a majority did not shop regularly on Reseda Boulevard, the community's main street. Only a third felt it was a good place to shop. Even the Northridge Fashion Center mall did not fare well with 64 percent of those responding disagreeing that it was a "good place to shop." Businesses not on Reseda Boulevard also did not garner the expected share of patronage. Sixty-five percent of the stakeholders surveyed did not regularly do business in the greater Northridge area.

While there is an excellent view from Nordhoff Street, one driving down Reseda Boulevard would have no idea that they were passing within one block of one of Los Angeles' most significant institutions, Cal State University Northridge, a massive complex of great regional significance. There is little or no connection between the commercial corridor and the University. Further, people currently driving through the area likely have no idea what the Northridge

Oasis theme is all about even if they recognize the signs.

Northridge has a stop on the Metrolink line, virtually hidden in an industrial zone with limited intermodal connections. The Metrolink rail running east-west through Northridge provides an opportunity to discuss transit-oriented development (TOD). Focusing exclusively on transportation, however, can overlook land use planning goals. This raises the timeless question "Should all development be concentrated around transit...or should transit be extended to serve existing and new suburban business districts that currently lack transit service?"<sup>1</sup> Successful corridors need vigilant management.<sup>2</sup>

Northridge business stakeholders have also re-affirmed their long-held concerns that current taxation and regulatory processes in the City of Los Angeles and the State of California, are generally not competitive with other jurisdictions, and not conducive to business retention or attraction.

The pressure to locate in friendlier jurisdictions continues to rise. With governments under unprecedented fiscal stress, short-term reforms seem unlikely. National and global competition threaten the Valley's hold on biotech, aerospace, and entertainment industries.

<sup>1</sup> Geoffrey Booth et al., *Transforming Suburban Business Districts*, (Washington, D.C.: ULI-the Urban Land Institute, 2001), 52

<sup>2</sup> Nat Wilson, AIA UDAT

# Planning Philosophy

## Concept Plan

### *Providing a Starting Point*

Northridge Vision is a “Concept Plan” that includes various options and scenarios, not one strict set of rules or certain set of outcomes. It is intended to serve as a guide for the future, to provide implementation steps for local stewardship and community initiatives. As community-based volunteers, we lack the direct control found in private or government projects with fixed funding, and cannot predict highly-specific outcomes.

The purpose of visioning is to provide a variety of ideas and alternatives—a “toolbox” with a wide range of applications to take advantage of opportunities as they arise. We are in a position to encourage and cultivate the type of improvements we envision through our determination and with the power of our good ideas, creative programming, and best practices.

We have attempted to respect a wide range of ideas and attitudes, and to reflect the fundamental outlook of the community. *Absolute* agreement among all of the participants is not a realistic outcome to expect from such a broad and inclusive process.

Proponents are hopeful that with the passage of time, this vision will spark more collaboration, ideas and concepts for implementation, and that it will encourage greater investment in the community. This may take shape as revitalized residential areas,

clean-up of public spaces, enhancement of cultural offerings, recognition of history, updated commercial spaces, development of jobs and careers, cultivation of industry clusters, and advanced educational programming.

### *Community Collaboration*

The project team, working with the American Institute of Architects, San Fernando Valley, and the Mulholland Institute, set the stage initially by reviewing prior initiatives and historical trends in the area. Given the importance of history and continuity, recent studies and reports have provided a base upon which to build this vision. The group considered economic, social, housing, transportation and employment issues, as well as indicators identified in the *Vision2020: San Fernando Valley* project.

Outreach and planning meetings were especially helpful in gathering information and data in order to develop a profile of the area. The team assembled information and data relating to the economic, social, civic and demographic characteristics of the local area and the overall region from which economic activity can be derived. They reviewed existing commercial and industrial clusters where Northridge has a distinct advantage—clusters that may be candidates for further cultivation. At the core are economic activities that will complement the Performing Arts Center at CSUN. These have tremendous potential for leveraging investments, and therefore warrant special attention.

Northridge Vision leaders conducted an intense series of Stakeholder Round-

tables for various groups, including residents, neighborhood councils, government, businesses, property owners, the University, manufacturing and industry. The leadership of Northridge and the north San Fernando Valley have engaged in an aggressive campaign to establish a vision. The visioning group has incorporated community goals, the existing Northridge Community Plan and local and regional demographics, to identify opportunities for community enhancement and revitalization.

### *Approaching the Task*

Understanding community needs is important to the visioning process. In setting the stage for the future it is essential to identify any “liabilities” that might impact prospective projects. Reseda Boulevard is a perfect example. The community needs to encourage improvements that are “Vision friendly”—that contribute to the Vision. While an industrial or auto-related use might be appropriate in one location, it can also interrupt the flow of foot traffic when located in a pedestrian district—breaking up the retail continuity and walkability. This is not to suggest trying to force change on current users, but rather, through the Vision’s 20-year horizon, to cultivate Vision-friendly uses in the natural turnover of properties. The process involves input from various factions of the community: residents, businesses, and leadership, working thoughtfully and collaboratively.

[Link to Vision2020  
Version 2004](#)



The relative success of other plans in Los Angeles and the San Fernando Valley is a helpful indicator for what tactics will most likely succeed in Northridge. Although the prior Business Improvement District was not renewed at the end of its first term, it did demonstrate a strong desire on the part of the business community to work together to improve the corridor. The property owners and businesses are still on board, and still have an overriding financial incentive to make the business district as attractive and successful as possible. This can best be accomplished with the partnerships created through Northridge Vision.

Northridge needs to look no further than to its most distinctive and unique asset to find a theme for its regional image and branding. Nothing comes close to the notion of developing a “college town” or “university district” personality with focus on the Cal State University Northridge campus as its hub. It is quite clear that the greatest opportunity lies in the synergy between walkable village areas, CSUN and the University’s new Valley Performing Arts Center. The University campus and its \$120 million theatre are huge anchor attractions for the entire region. These are Northridge’s defining points of difference—assets that easily set them apart from the two dozen other Valley communities.

With changing times and priorities, upcoming generations and families are more likely to seek out “integrated live-work-shop places that are exciting, aesthetically

pleasing, and pedestrian friendly—places that offer a wide choice of transportation options.”<sup>1</sup> Planning for a well-situated co-location of wants, needs and amenities can assist Northridge in shedding its image as being solely a “bedroom community.” Reducing the need for long commutes and extended retail trips is a sure way for residents to improve their quality of life.

## Planning Criteria

The Northridge Community Plan with approximately 6,350 acres or 10 square miles of land area, is one of 35 such plans that make-up the City of Los Angeles. The City of Los Angeles General Plan Framework provides the narrative and overarching planning policies for the entire city, but individual sub-areas each have community plans that map land uses and strive to express the distinctive character and vision of each neighborhood. Community plans can be complemented by any number of overlays, specific plans and other specially-tailored planning areas. This visioning process will feed directly into future Community Plan updates, as well as providing guidance for special districts and design overlays.



CSUN Zelzah Gateway

<sup>1</sup> Booth et al., *Transforming Suburban Business Districts*, 3

General Plans are mandated by state law, and are required to contain certain “elements” relative to the built environment and future development of each city. Most notable are the land use and circulation (transportation) elements. The land use map illustrates the current zoning designation of parcels in each community plan area. Although the community plan areas are clearly defined on generalized land use maps, the boundaries of named communities have historically been fluid and open to interpretation by their residents. Northridge communities are mostly contained within the ZIP Codes of 91324 to the west, 91325 to the east and 91326 to the north.

As a result of these geographic gaps, the suburbs of Los Angeles have also become civically and politically self-sufficient. They tend to be less trusting of planners, and have reduced expectations when it comes to relying on public services. This independence also translates into resistance to anything that they believe intrudes on their neighborhoods, and rejection of locally undesirable land uses.

In older automobile-based planning models, the purpose of planning was to avoid or buffer incompatible uses, putting commercial as far from residential as possible. In the last several decades, the movement has been to bring these uses closer together, so much so, that mixed-uses have become very much in vogue. Essentially, the trend is toward in-fill housing, and the creation of much more vertical communities.

The Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) Compass Blueprint project, which began in 2000, concluded with a strategy referred to as the “2% Strategy”—by demonstrating that all of the projected growth and changes for the next several decades could be accommodated on only two-percent of the available land in the region.

There is a renewed focus on town centers and public spaces. The focus of transportation planning efforts is shifting from a strictly departmentalized approach that narrowly considers transportation, to a more inclusive, community-serving, qualitative approach that considers factors beyond simple quantitative traffic throughput.

The Project for Public Spaces puts this point rather clearly: “If you plan cities for cars and traffic, you get cars and traffic. If you plan for people and places, you get people and places.” Our conclusions focus on the latter—creating a destination for people. While it is fine to create efficient traffic flows, it should not occur at the expense of our town centers and public spaces.

The business district must address certain critical issues that include:

- Character and form of development
- Employment
- Retail uses
- Residential product types
- Infrastructure
- Regulatory reform
- Neighborhood relations
- Implementation

## Walkability

The “walkable” town center needs to include:

- Most things within a 10-minute walk of home and work
- Pedestrian friendly street design
- Buildings close to street; porches, windows and doors
- Tree-lined streets
- On-street parking
- Hidden parking lots with garages under or in the rear
- Narrow, meandering slower speed streets
- Pedestrian streets free of cars in special cases

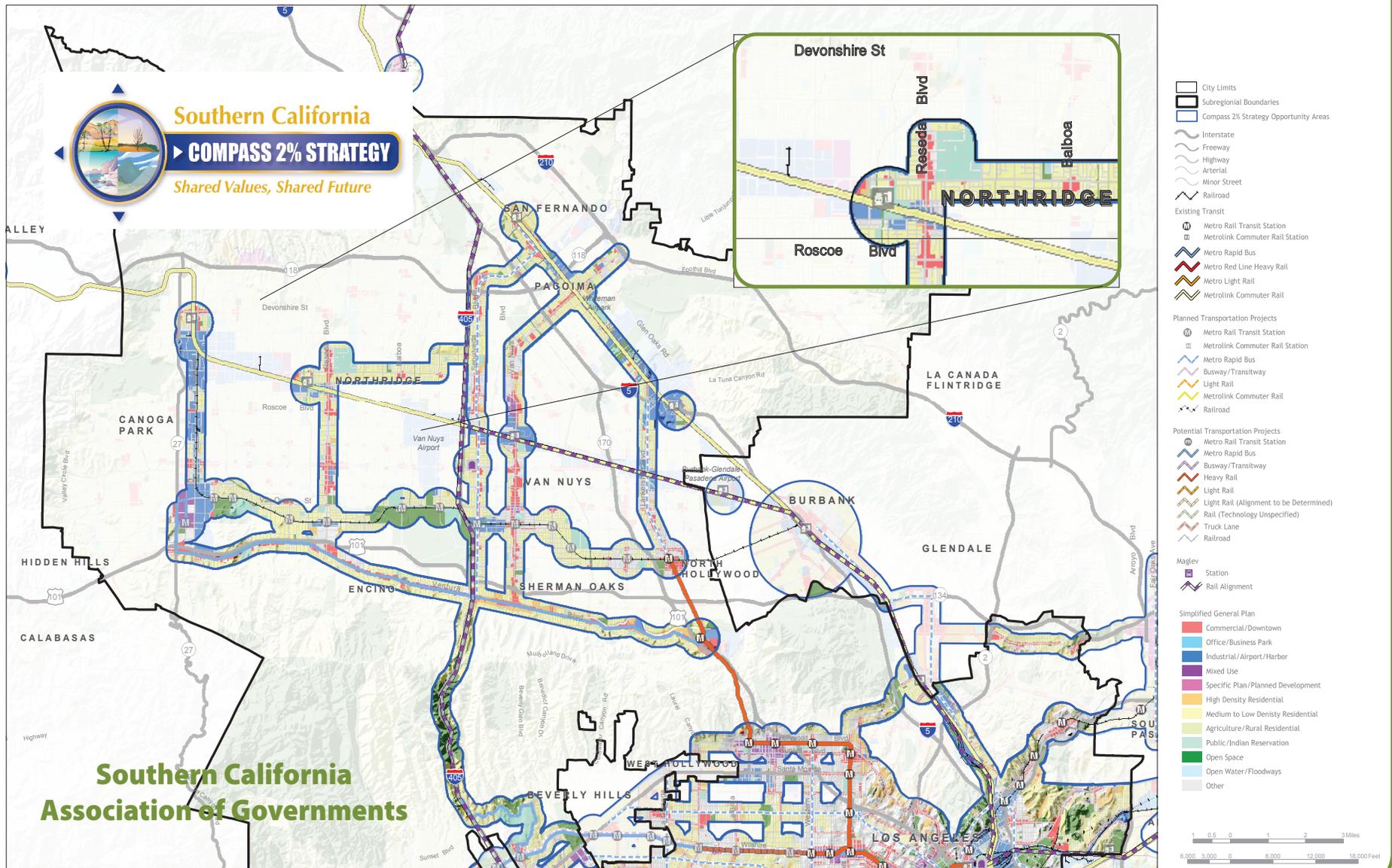
“Shopping Malls can embrace main streets. The Valencia Town Center in Santa Clarita, California, was a trendsetter as the first retail establishment to reintegrate Main Street and the mall.<sup>2</sup> The Valencia case provides an excellent example of leveraging commercial assets to increase sales and drive up rents.

“Newhall Land and Farming Company consulted Victor Gruen to use retail on Main Street to connect pedestrians to the shopping mall. Instead of docking in the vast oceans of surface parking surrounding the mall, local residents could walk down Main Street, eat and do some window shopping, then enter the mall.

“Opponents argued that displaced parking and residents doing all their pur-

<sup>2</sup> Booth, Transforming Suburban Business Districts, 120

# "Opportunity Areas" in the San Fernando Valley



chasing on Main Street before they even reached the mall. The Newhall company answered these arguments by (1) funding a parking structure, (2) focused all pedestrian linkages toward the mall, (3) designed a landscaped plaza to connect the mall to Town Center Drive.

“Newhall focused on creating a complementary commercial tenant mix on Main Street and within the mall so the merchants would not perceive one another as competitors but as supporters.

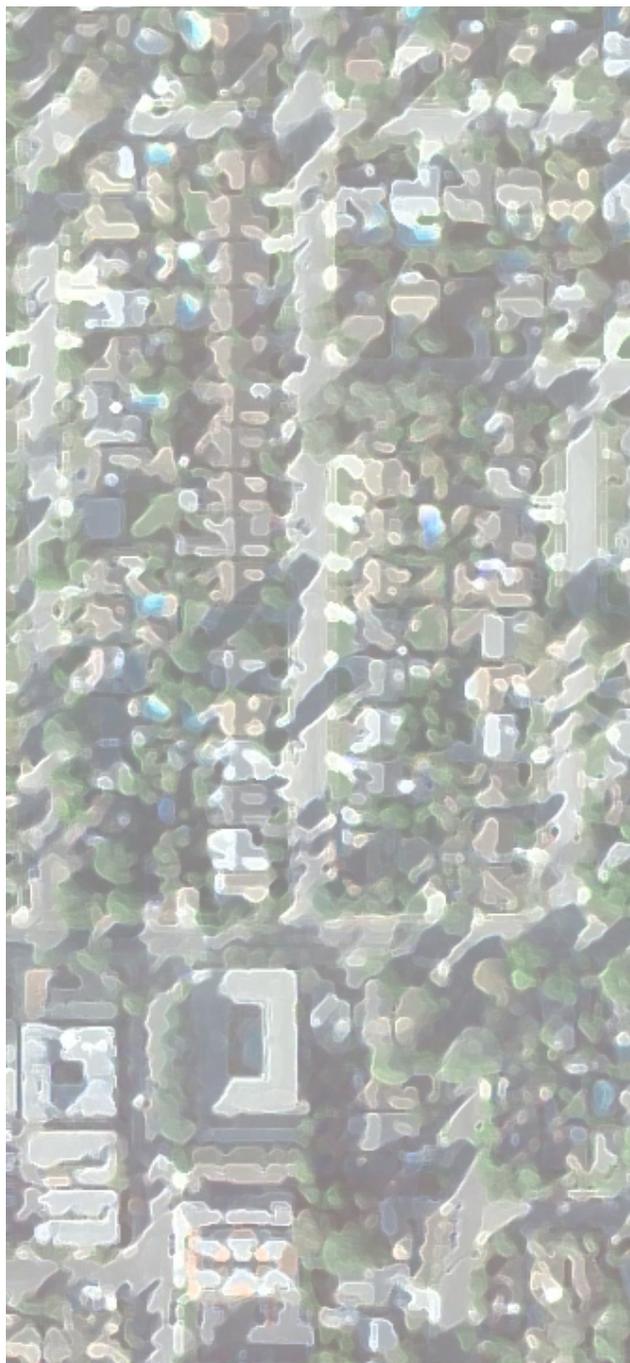
“Newhall also launched a marketing and promotion program to host civic events including the Santa Clarita Film Festival and the Bella Via—Valencia Italian Street Painting Festival to position the town center as what Ray Oldenberg has called a ‘third place’ for the community; neither home nor work, third places are informal public gathering places.”<sup>3</sup>

### *The “G” Word - Growth*

Northridge, like all other communities in the state, will need to accommodate residential capacity under the California State Housing Element Law. Localities are required to accommodate the need for housing by income categories as part of the periodic Regional Housing Needs Assessment/Allocation (RHNA) process.<sup>4</sup> SCAG projects the population of Southern California to increase by six million by 2035 and each will need a place to live. The 19 million Californians populating this six-county

<sup>3</sup> Booth, Transforming Suburban Business Districts, 120-21

<sup>4</sup> California’s Housing Element Law (Government Code, §§ 65580 et seq.)



SCAG region represent the 17th largest economy in the world.<sup>5</sup>

Recent state laws are requiring local agencies to plan for closer proximity of origins and destinations. Planning strategies for future population increases must also comply with AB32 and SB375 Sustainable Communities Strategy requirements.<sup>6</sup> Passed in 2006, AB32 requires the California Air Resources Board to reduce greenhouse gas emissions while SB375 provides a more detailed approach to reduce greenhouse gasses through the planning process; the idea being to reduce vehicle miles traveled, bringing origins and destinations (such as housing and jobs) closer together. The Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) is the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for a six-county Southern California Region. Their planning provides information and guidelines to cities and counties to improve and coordinate their efforts toward sustainable community development.

The last several decades have seen marked changes in approaches to cities’ community planning. In times past, zoning was a fairly simple affair. Planning was centered more on practicality than public opinion, with less controversy than today. Most types of growth and economic development were welcomed by communities. More recently planning has become much more involved as rules become more

<sup>5</sup> “SCAG General Fact Sheet,” Retrieved 17 June 2011

<sup>6</sup> See California Greenhouse Gas Reduction, Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006, AB32 and Regional Planning Coordination SB375 (Steinberg)

complex and local residents become more engaged in the planning process. They are legitimately concerned about the quiet enjoyment of their suburban neighborhoods, preventing increased congestion and having their infrastructure compromised.

Unfortunately, the clash between development and local interests often produces bizarre results. A great deal of change in communities occurs by exception to plans rather than adherence to them. This suggests that the community is best served by promoting a balanced and visionary planning philosophy. If civic leaders plan for a reasonable level of growth and future investment, it is they, and not just the developers, who will control the planning template. Local stakeholders need to work with officials to responsibly manage change. Often it is rancor, miscommunication and misunderstanding that win out over sound policy.

## Smart Growth

“Smart Growth” strategies consider the big picture by relating the development of one block to its effect on other blocks, and by taking into account the vital nexus between land use and transportation planning. Smart development is proactive, looking ahead to a larger framework where land uses fit into purposeful arrangements. As planners and the public learn from the lessons in London, New York, and Paris, we can expect transportation budgets to increasingly reflect greater balance among transit modes providing an enhanced level

of services and a greater range of transportation options. Choice reduces congestion and contributes to livability.”<sup>7</sup> Smart growth tends to relieve pressure on single-family neighborhoods by concentrating new housing more vertically along corridors.

## Quality of Life

What defines quality of life? Certainly the lifestyle, safety, and variety of recreational opportunities of a place factor into the equation. The Project for Public Spaces created a “Public Space Bill of Rights”<sup>8</sup> that can spark our thinking on improving the quality of life in the Northridge area.

Everyone should have the right to:<sup>9</sup>

1. Walk and stroll in comfort
2. Sit down in nice, comfortable places
3. Meet and talk—by chance and by design
4. Enjoy pleasant places to go and comfortable places to stop
5. Look at attractive things along the way
6. See places that are interesting
7. Feel safe in a public environment
8. Enjoy other people around them

## Streets and Public Spaces

According to a majority of survey respondents, the quality of life in Northridge does not appear to be on the upswing. Nonetheless, thirty-seven percent did feel that “life in Northridge is improving.” This is an impressive finding for an evolving urban/suburban community of this type.

While there are some positive indicators, there remains much to be done to re-establish and maintain the community’s historical standing as a collection of desirable upscale neighborhoods. The fact that 66% of respondents reported being residents of Northridge for more than ten years, suggests that tenure may, in some cases be more a matter of habit than choice.

<sup>7</sup> See Booth et al., *Transforming Suburban Business Districts*, 35

<sup>8</sup> *Streets as Places: Using Streets to Rebuild Communities*, Project for Public Spaces, Inc. (2008) p. 11

<sup>9</sup> Booth et al., *Transforming Suburban Business Districts*

# Opportunities Abound

## Local Assets and Attractions

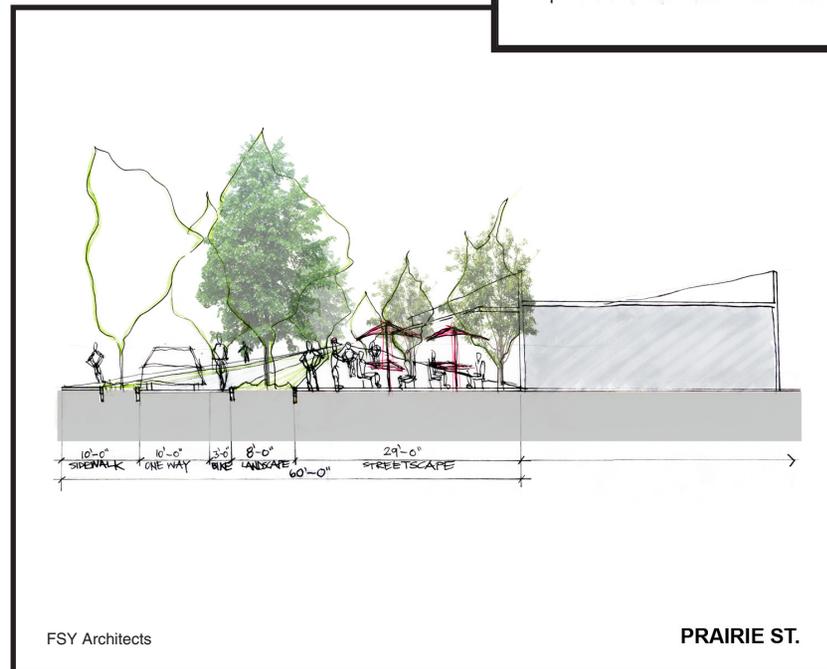
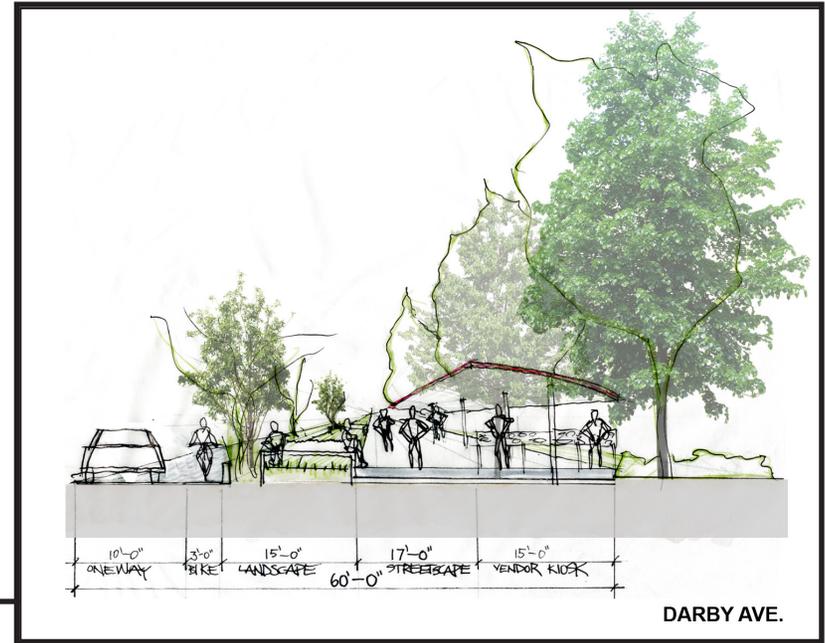
In this era of increased health care demand and career opportunities, Northridge is fortunate to have an emerging health and wellness campus in the area surrounding Northridge Hospital Medical Center. In addition to the University and the hospital, there are less concentrated economic drivers and commercial nodes that include Northridge Fashion Center shopping mall, 170 stores and restaurants including Macy's, JC Penney, Sears, and a 10 screen stadium-seating theater.

On balance, the community of Northridge has the residential, educational, business, and recreational resources to flourish, but there will always be some challenges. Civic organizations and neighborhood councils are ideally situated to exercise local stewardship, to maintain an inventory of assets, to track developments, and most importantly, to promote and maintain the Northridge Vision.

Northridge has a rich heritage of farming and ranches, and was one of the last Valley areas to undergo the transition to suburban housing. The community has a very strong connection with its single-family residences, and is generally resistant to anything that would alter the fundamental character of their neighborhoods. This is especially true because Northridge has an extremely high ratio of owner-occupied properties.

Community pride was not in short supply as 2010 saw the centennial celebration of the rich history of Northridge as one of the oldest communities in the San Fernando Valley.<sup>1</sup> The portable Northridge Museum offers mobile displays with interactive timelines to celebrate 100 years of Northridge history.

While residents are generally happy with the Northridge community, it hardly goes unnoticed that some adjacent mid-century neigh-



borhoods are trending toward obsolescence and decline. Over the last 50 years many key properties in the Valley's downtown areas have deteriorated, and others have come under the control of absentee owners. Where community planning strategies have been lacking, or where there has not been strong community development and investment, prominent properties and flagship centers have declined markedly from their highest and best uses.

Of those who are planning to relocate out of Northridge, most actually do like their Valley location but some are concerned

<sup>1</sup> "Northridge Centennial Celebration 2010." <http://www.northridge100.org/>, Retrieved accessed May 25, 2011

about a persistent decrease in quality of life, with increased traffic density, and all the problems that accompany such change. One respondent noted, "We are concerned about some of the declining areas in the Valley. We would like to live in a smaller community and want a town with charm... small storefronts and street cafes."

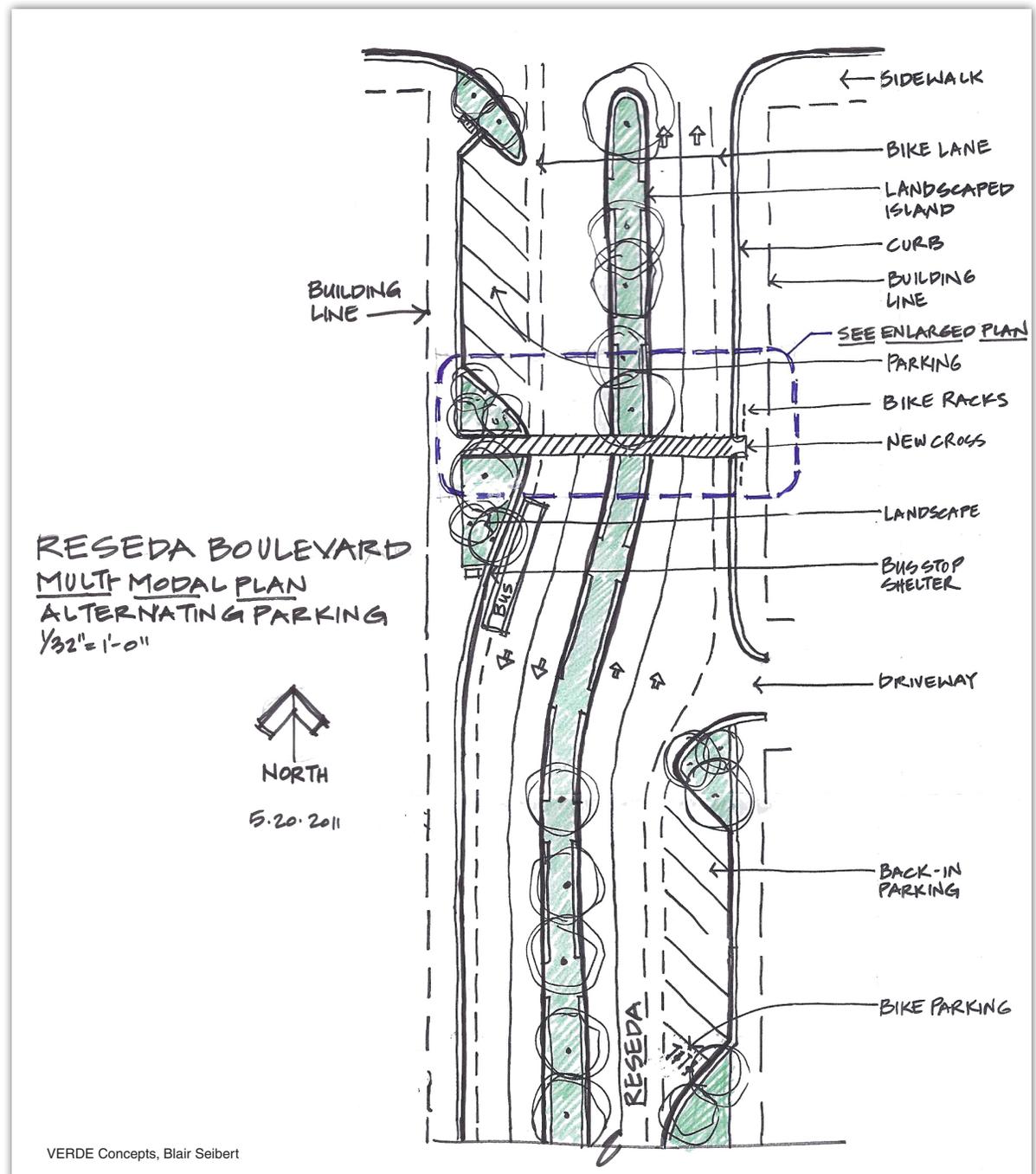
In many areas of Northridge, the mix of commercial tenants lacks a theme or coherent strategy. This makes it difficult to compete with centers where a patron can park at one location ("park-once districts") and visit multiple shops, stores, restaurants, and entertainment venues.

Northridge is home to the North Valley YMCA which is the largest nonprofit, community service organization in the San Fernando Valley. They meet health, education and childcare needs for more than 40,000 men, women and children yearly.<sup>2</sup> The Dodger Dreamfield,<sup>3</sup> is part of a special program sponsored by the Los Angeles Dodgers organization to provide facilities for youth baseball.

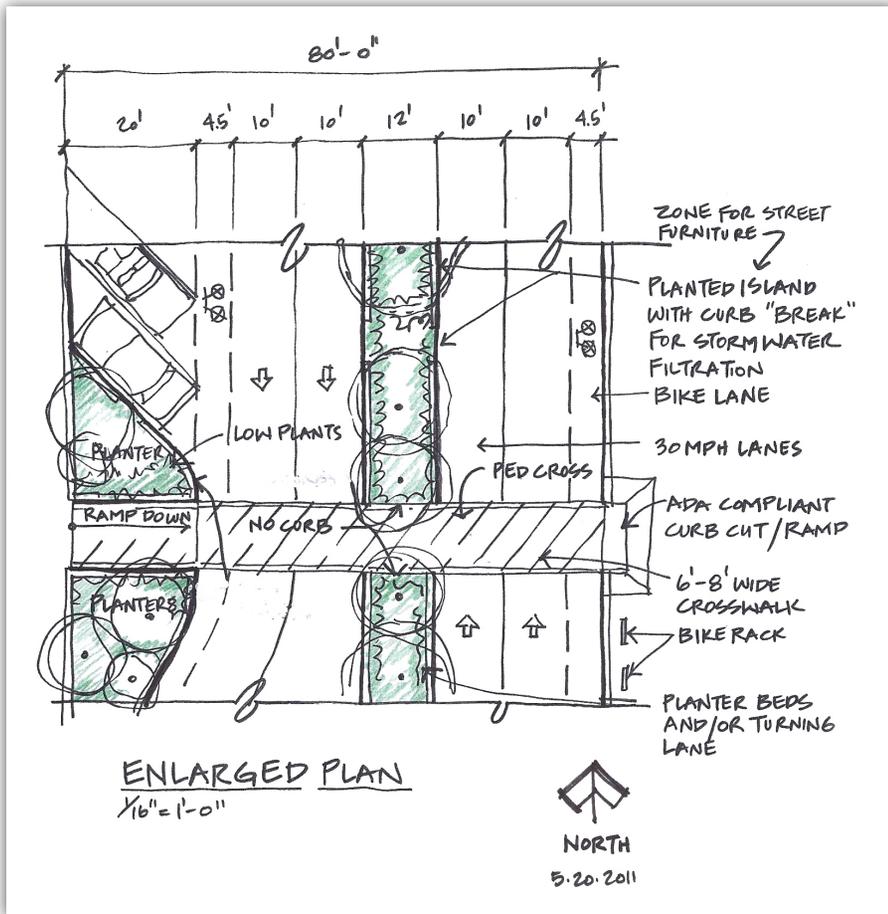
The schedule of area-wide cultural events in Northridge could benefit from some additional community activities. The Los Angeles Department of Recreation &

<sup>2</sup> At a glance: The North Valley Family YMCA at Porter Ranch, <http://www.yocala.org/assets/document/304.pdf> (accessed May 11, 2011)

<sup>3</sup> The Dodgers Dreamfields program is the Foundation's signature initiative. The Foundation has completed 15 Dreamfields including one at the Northridge Recreation Center, dedicated on February 15, 2011. The LA84 Foundation, was established to manage Southern California's share of the surplus from the highly successful 1984 Olympic Games. It supports programs serving millions of youth in the eight Southern California counties of Los Angeles.



VERDE Concepts, Blair Seibert



VERDE Concepts, Blair Seibert

Parks currently hosts annual Salute to Recreation Family Festival involving fireworks and musical performances. Residents celebrate the North Valley Heritage Festival in June, presented by the Kiwanis Club of Northridge. This family-friendly festival includes live music, food, games, and carnival craft booths to celebrate the Old West.<sup>4</sup> The Valley Performing Arts Center, which opened its doors in January 2011, is a huge addition to the community, and will certainly breathe new life into the cultural offerings of Northridge.

Much has happened and there is plenty to celebrate in the years since the devastating 1994 Northridge Earthquake. Many Northridge assets and properties have been renewed and renovated. The Reseda Boulevard business district is clearly the key to the renewal process, and there are a great many opportunities to develop and properly showcase the area's distinct personality.

In 2001, business leaders made a noble effort to revitalize and enhance the commercial district around a "Northridge Oasis"

theme. They were successful in establishing a Business Improvement District (BID) that allowed for local imposition of fees on properties and businesses for area enhancement. The merchants were somewhat discouraged with a theme that was not readily identifiable to visitors—one that under-delivered in making substantive or lasting improvements. Most of the streetscape features and furniture remain



The welcome sign and street furniture at this gateway intersection are not properly scaled and are barely visible.

<sup>4</sup> "27th Annual Salute to Recreation Family Festival," <http://www.laparks.org/salute/index.htm> Retrieved June 1, 2011

on the boulevard, and in retrospect may not have been the best choices in scale and theme.

The BID fell short of expectations and was not renewed at the end of its first term. There are lessons to be learned from the BID, both positive and negative, in order to avoid similar pitfalls in the future. Northridge Vision demonstrates the community's resolve, continuing our work to enhance its neighborhoods and business districts.

## Recreation and Amenities

Northridge and the surrounding area offer some unique recreational assets and local amenities. Of special interest are those features that make Northridge unique, such as the new Valley Performing Arts Center at CSUN. Large assets such as the Northridge Fashion Center mall and the Cal State University campus are, distinguish Northridge in the entire Los Angeles region.

Northridge is traversed from the northeast to the southwest by Aliso Creek as it winds its way to its confluence with the Los Angeles River. The creek runs about 10 miles in total from its headwaters in Aliso Canyon Park below Oat Mountain. The creek flows freely through the park area, before being channelized in its role for flood control. Most of its run is shared with flat perpendicular banks.

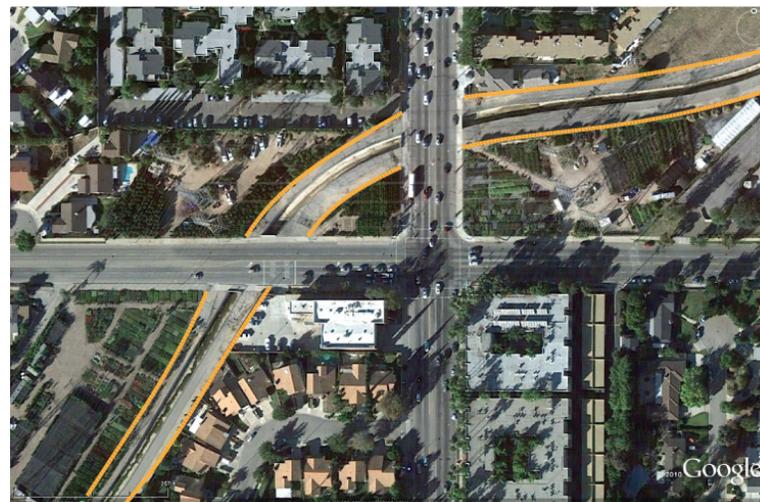
Aliso Creek joins the main Los Angeles River channel several miles to the south. Aliso Creek merges with the Wilbur Canyon Wash, and to the south merges with Limekiln Wash.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Source: U.S. Geological Survey Geographic Names Information System: Aliso Creek (Los Angeles County); Site Description: *Friends Of Vast Industrial Concrete Kafkaesque Structures*; Google Maps; Wikipedia

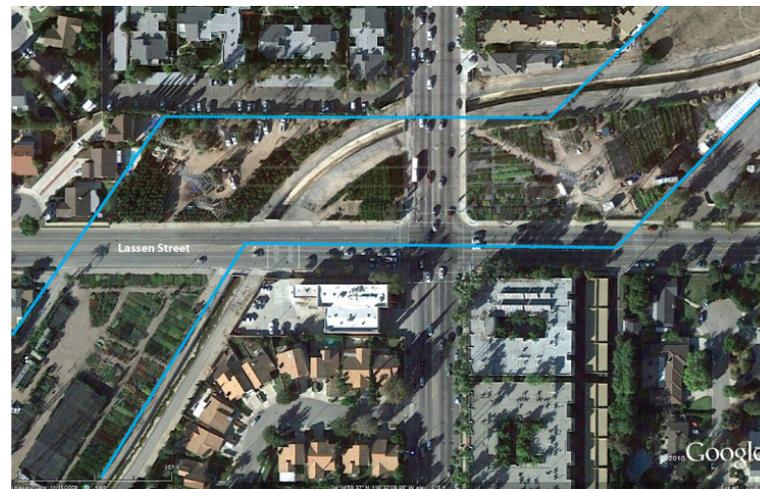
Special features like Aliso Creek and rights-of-way along the Department of Water & Power's transmission lines, offer opportunities for innovative re-purposing. Northridge is dotted with parks, historic sites, shopping centers, recreational facilities, and schools. Trail connections between these assets would do much to enhance their recreational value.

The development of trails, pocket parks and the other spaces, can be a problem since all of the property in Northridge is accounted for. Often, government entities have surplus properties that can be re-dedicated for public use. In some cases the park or open space may be a complementary use to the government purpose for the property. An excellent example of this is the Japanese Garden at the Donald C. Tillman Water Reclamation Plant in the Sepulveda Basin.

Surplus and underutilized properties may be acquired from public agencies and even private benefactors. In virtually every case, green spaces and open areas literally have to be created out of existing uses. The land for the parks may be taken from surplus government lands, unbuildable private lands,



The banks of the Aliso Creek flood control channel can be converted into parkways, providing much-needed green spaces for recreation, walking and cycling.



Rights of way beneath power lines must be kept open, with possible uses involving continuous pathways through the community.

be donated, or in some cases acquired through the permitting process as mitigation for project entitlements. It is commonplace for developers to include green spaces in mixed-use projects where commercial sites are being combined. Creativity can also play a hand, using techniques such as tunneling, bridges, rooftops, or capping stormwater channels where they abut major streets—using them as mini green spaces and parks.

Major Southern California assets, such as Los Angeles International Airport, Bob Hope Airport and Van Nuys Airport, serve Northridge, along with the Ports of Los Angeles, Long Beach, and Hueneme.

## Business and Economic Development

Nowhere is Northridge's diversity more evident than in the business districts, and the Central Business District along the Reseda Boulevard corridor. With its eclectic mix of shops and restaurants, the boulevard is a showcase of retail, culinary, and ethnic diversity. You can enjoy a gourmet taco, Chinese wontons, Mediterranean Shawarma, or even a good old American cheeseburger at one of over 200 food service establishments in the area.

Commercial properties certainly involve more than retail, but it is the retail corridor that serves as the gateway to the community. This is the first impression of Northridge, how visitors and passers-by judge it—and what might attract them to return, to visit, to shop and to spend time in

Northridge. This, in turn provides jobs, vitality and economic prosperity for local residents and businesses.

In Northridge there is excellent potential for redevelopment through community and private-investor partnerships. As a sizable public stakeholder, CSUN can partner with private builders to revitalize its interface with the local community. Working in advance with local residents and organizations such as neighborhood councils, those interested in investing in community renewal and commercial development are able to develop invaluable allies to assist them in the entitlement process.



The biomedical and technology sectors have taken root in the Valley region. Medtronic manufactures a diabetes related line of products.

## Industry and Manufacturing in Northridge

Industrial development should reach beyond the immediate Northridge area bringing dollars to the region in the form

of jobs and resources. Northridge can play a much larger part in strategies for the entire San Fernando Valley. Entrepreneurs will evaluate Northridge on its offerings of talent, quality of life, and access to regional resources. The Valley's main industrial corridor runs along the former Southern Pacific railroad tracks that stretch from Chatsworth to Glendale and beyond.<sup>6</sup> The entire corridor is best viewed as a single industrial and manufacturing cluster—a wellspring that is vital to area jobs, careers, and prosperity. The main industrial corridor of Northridge occupies a portion of this corridor, running along the rails for a mile and a half, from Tampa to Lindley Avenue. High-end manufacturing industries dominate in Northridge, and because of the Valley's brain trust, the potential for expansion into more green and clean tech industries is excellent.

Because the value of production of goods and services is positioned high-up on the economic food chain, industrially zoned land should be protected, preserved and expanded if possible. Unfortunately, with the square foot value of industrial property being at the low end of the scale, developers often base strategies on up-zoning to simply make their land more valuable. But, it is possible to include industrial preservation and development in community plan strategies. Industrial uses can even be included as part of a balanced mixed-use project entitlement. This not only helps the jobs-housing

<sup>6</sup> *Great Corridors, Great Communities: The Quiet Revolution in Transportation Planning*, Jay Walljasper ed., (New York: Project for Public Spaces, 2008), 6

balance, but provides desirable higher-paying careers. Unfortunately, the City of Los Angeles has lost 20% of its industrial land in the past 15 years. With it goes the opportunity for well-paying jobs and careers. One of the largest tracts of industrially-zoned land in the city is situated in Chatsworth, immediately to the west of Northridge. This places jobs very near to housing, reducing the number of vehicle miles traveled (VMT).

Industrially speaking, there are some powerful Northridge-based tenants. Unlike many other parts of LA County, a complementary industrial infrastructure still exists in Northridge that can make a richly diverse commercial tenant mix possible.

The Valley International Trade Association represents international businesses in the San Fernando Valley<sup>7</sup> and the locally situated Van Nuys Airport serves Valley business transportation needs.

The recession following the 2008 housing market crash has caused struggling businesses to take a greater interest in new ideas—seeking ways to maintain their stake in serving the local community.

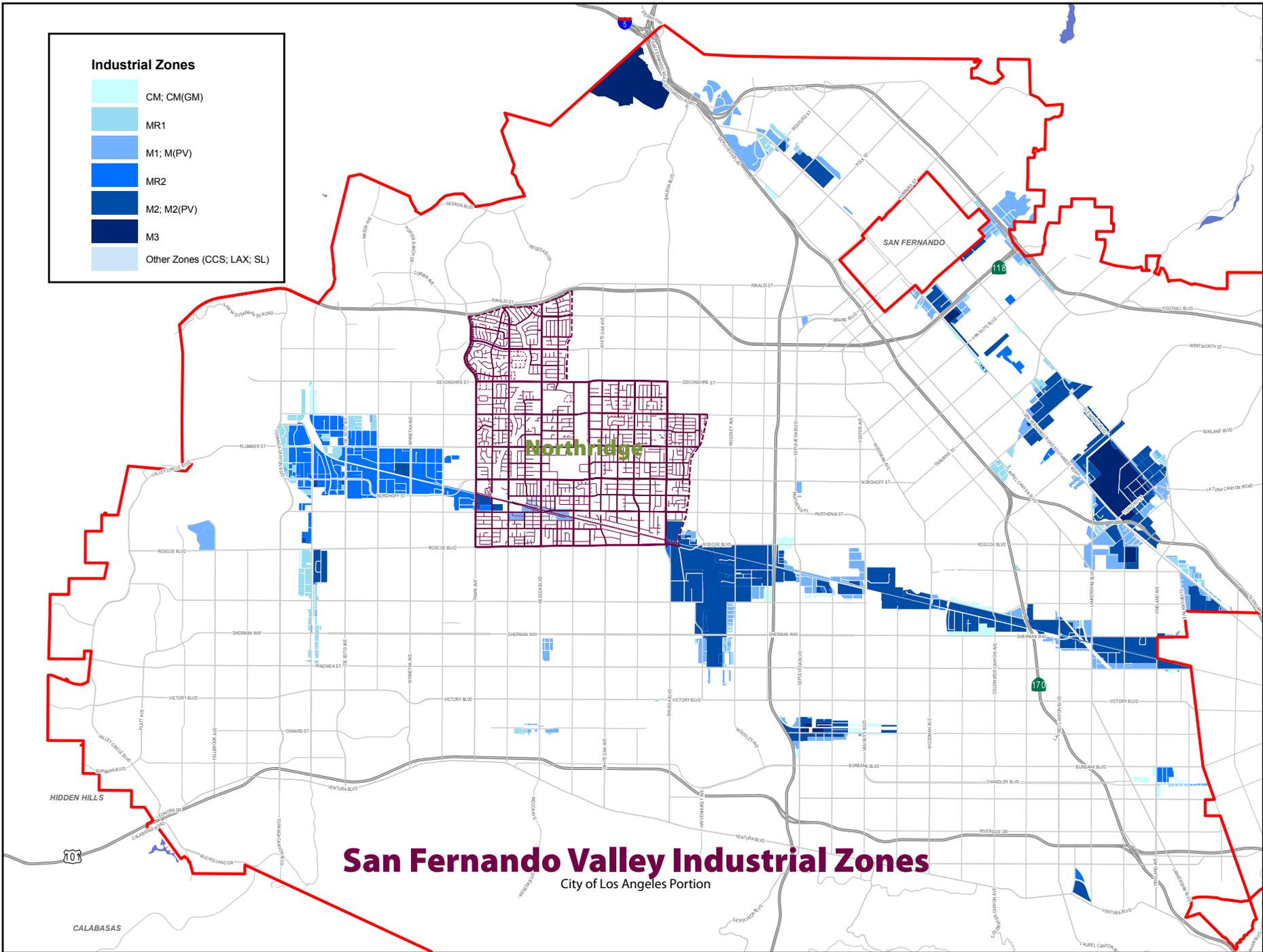
Any workable economic strategy will require “balancing the needs of residents and visitors, automobiles and pedestrians, living spaces and working spaces, along with public spaces and private spaces.”<sup>8</sup>



<sup>7</sup> About Vita International, <http://thevalley.net/businesses/vita/about-vita-international> Retrieved June 7, 2011)

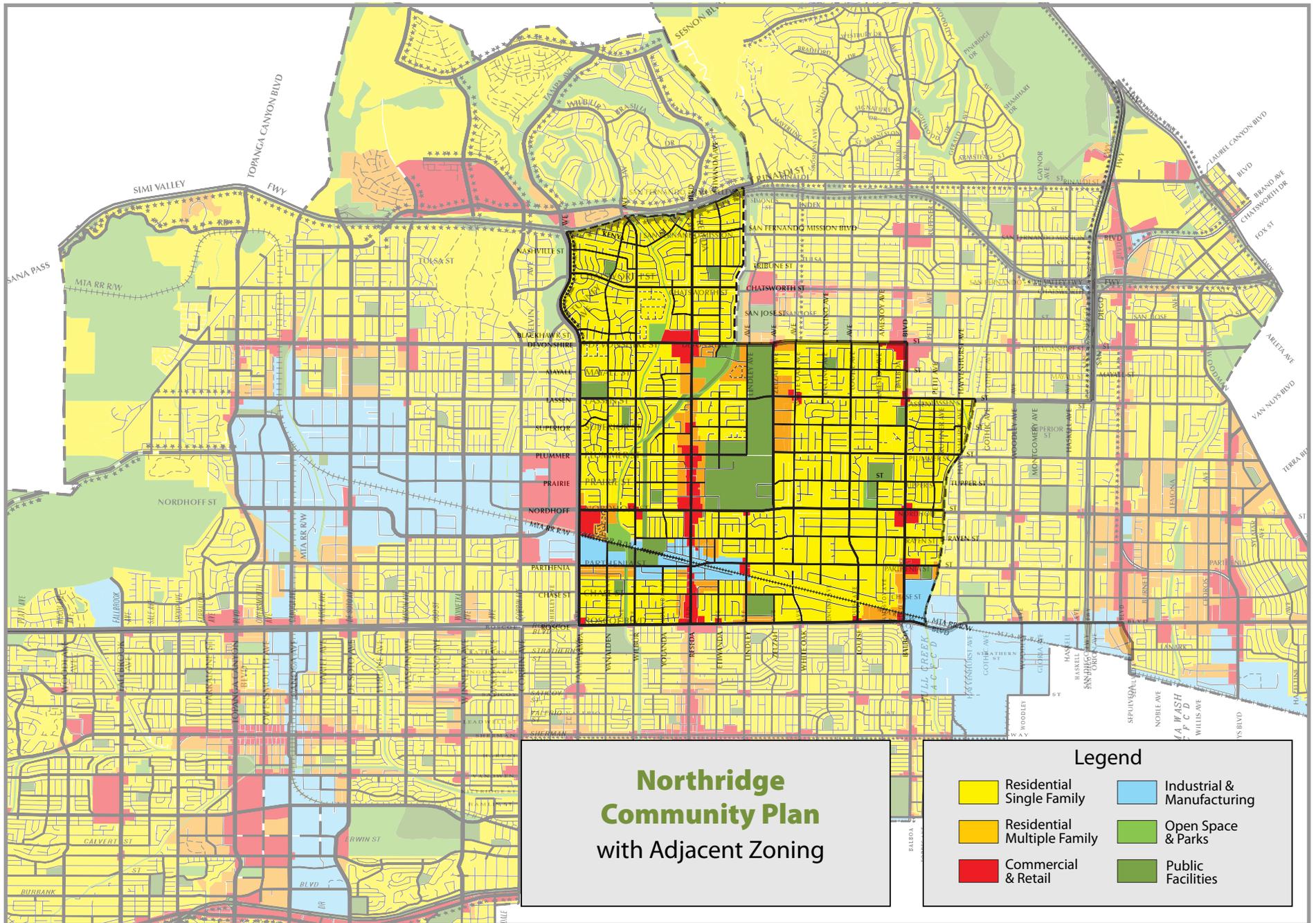
<sup>8</sup> Charles C. Bohl, *Placemaking: Developing Town Centers, Main Streets, and Urban Villages*, (Washington DC: ULI-the Urban Land Institute, 2002), 6

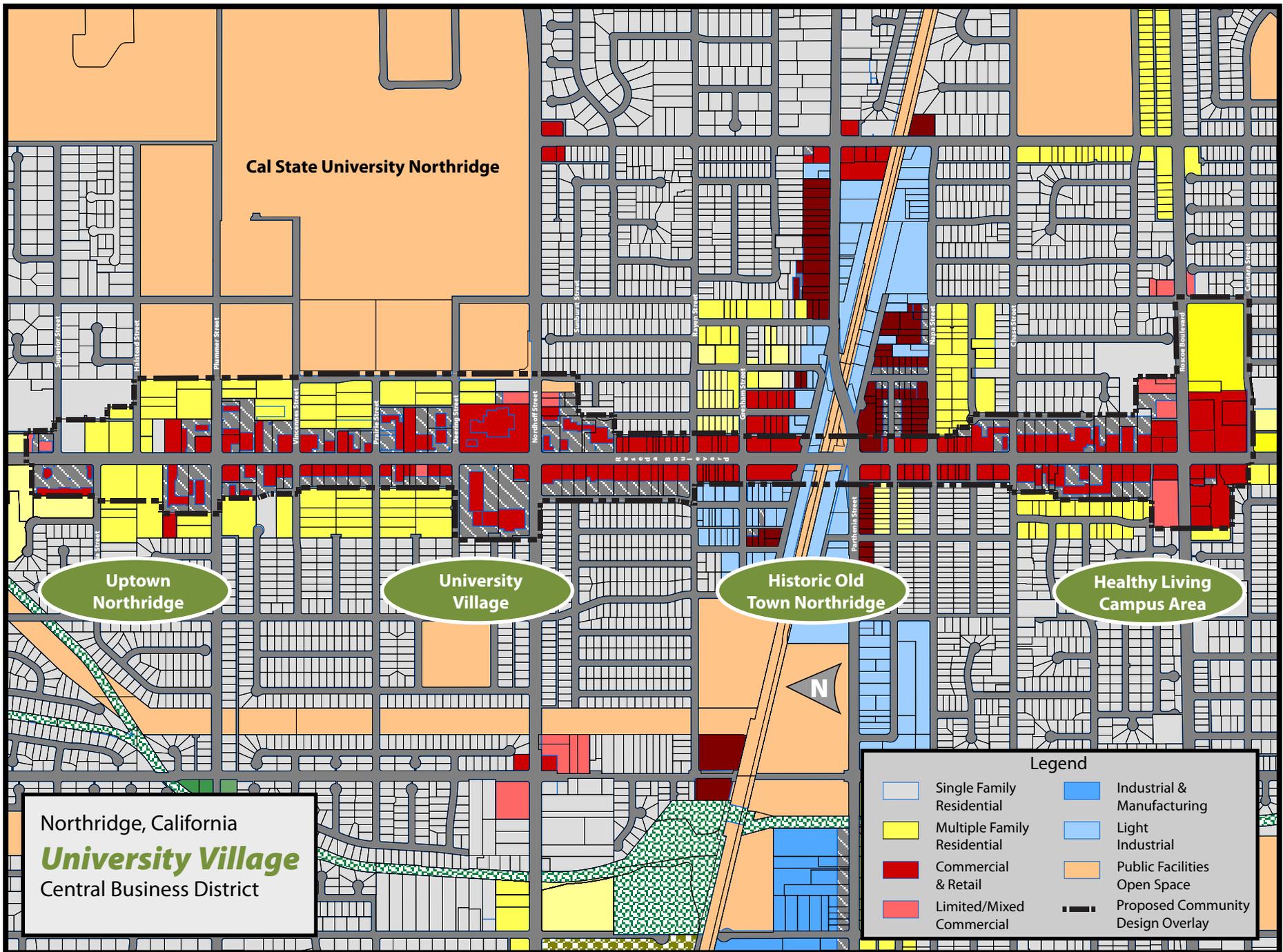
Industrial Zones	
	CM; CM(GM)
	MR1
	M1; M(PV)
	MR2
	M2; M2(PV)
	M3
	Other Zones (CCS; LAX; SL)



# San Fernando Valley Industrial Zones

City of Los Angeles Portion





## Cal State University, Northridge

California State University Northridge (CSUN) is situated on 356 acres of land lying at the center of activities in Northridge. The University occupies a significant amount of the total land adjacent to the downtown area. We recognize the central role of CSUN not only as a key stakeholder, but also as a unique and significant community asset, increasing potential for sustained prosperity and future advancement. CSUN has a population of nearly 36,000 students and more than 4,000 faculty and staff. It is primarily a commuter campus, and as a result, thousands of people use the roadways and pass through the business districts on a daily basis. As the San Fernando Valley's only public university it is a flagship institution.

The CSUN campus is a city within a city, offering a number of one-of-a-kind attractions. The publicly accessible, yet out-of-the-way, duck and turtle pond at CSUN brings the natural world to the community. Massive green spaces, fountains and a botanical pond area punctuate the southeast corner of the campus. Visitors can enjoy the natural space, beautiful walkways, a 270-foot meandering stream, a natural spring, and an ever-expanding botanical garden with over 1,200 species of plants. The area is inhabited by dozens of red-eared slider turtles, koi and goldfish—in a habitat accented by a variety of colorful flowers including water lilies and water hyacinths. The University also maintains a

high-tech, fuel cell-based rainforest, and has installed highly efficient photovoltaic arrays over many of the parking areas

Just south of the water feature lies one of the last working orange groves in the San Fernando Valley. The grove's more than 400 orange trees serve as a reminder of the region's agricultural past. Citrus groves were ubiquitous in the first half of the 20th Century, from the time that the Los Angeles Aqueduct opened in 1913, bringing a virtually unlimited supply of water to the city.

Among the dozens of meeting facilities on campus is the Orange Grove Bistro at the University Club. The Bistro is adjacent to the pond, is open to the public and offers space in Northridge for meetings and receptions.<sup>1</sup>

Certainly one of the brightest lights in town is the new 1,700-seat Valley Performing Arts Center (VPAC) at Cal State Northridge, that is attracting patrons from much of Southern California. With a market radius of more than 75 miles, this regional asset serves as a centerpiece for Northridge's renaissance, regional attraction and growing pedestrian orientation.

<sup>1</sup> "Orange Grove Bistro at the University Club," <http://www.csun.edu/orangegrovebistro/> Retrieved May 26, 2011)

## Education

The public schools that serve Northridge offer a number of options. A rookie team from Granada Hills Charter High School won national recognition in 2011 when they won the U.S. Academic Decathlon. In a repeat performance, they also won the California title in 2012. Cliff Ker, LAUSD coordinator for the Decathlon, said "It's really unusual—there's a history of teams going to nationals for the first time and doing well, but not winning the title. These guys came and not only won the Rookie of the Year Award but the national title as well." The Daily News reports "the school, which for the last seven years has been building a decathlon dynasty to join the ranks of the powerhouse schools in the San Fernando Valley, beat out 35 other teams."<sup>2</sup>

Northridge Academy High School opened in 2004 as a unique partnership between the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) and CSUN. Currently serving 1,070 students in grades 9 through 12, Northridge Academy is approximately one fourth the size of the average LAUSD high school, allowing teachers to devote more personal attention to students.<sup>3</sup> Holmes Middle School is a California School to Watch, California Distinguished School, and a Title I Achievement Award recipient.

<sup>2</sup> C.J. Lin, "Granada Hills High wins U.S. Academic Decathlon in first-ever appearance," *Daily News*, 30 April 2011, [http://www.dailynews.com/education/ci\\_17962897](http://www.dailynews.com/education/ci_17962897) Retrieved 11 May 2011

<sup>3</sup> "About Northridge Academy High School," [http://www.lausd.net/Northridge\\_Academy\\_HS/about.htm](http://www.lausd.net/Northridge_Academy_HS/about.htm) Retrieved 7 May 2011; Semee Park, Northridge Community Assessment, MPA 642D, May 7, 2010, p.3

# Planning Analysis

## Overall Strategy

Northridge Vision has developed a very promising working consensus. We must realize that we are not starting with a blank sheet of paper. Visioning has to begin with an awareness of existing assets, and an assessment of challenges currently facing the community.



The immense campus of Cal State University Northridge, with over 40,000 students and faculty, is an extraordinary regional asset with huge potential for increasing the visibility of the Northridge community. On its next update, the Northridge Community Plan<sup>1</sup> can enjoy a great deal of leverage and support by coordinating with, and capitalizing on CSUN's 2005 *Master Plan Update, Envision 2035*.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Community Plan is the part of the City of Los Angeles General Plan that describes and details land uses at the parcel level.

<sup>2</sup> California State University Northridge, *2005 Master Plan Update, Envision 2035*

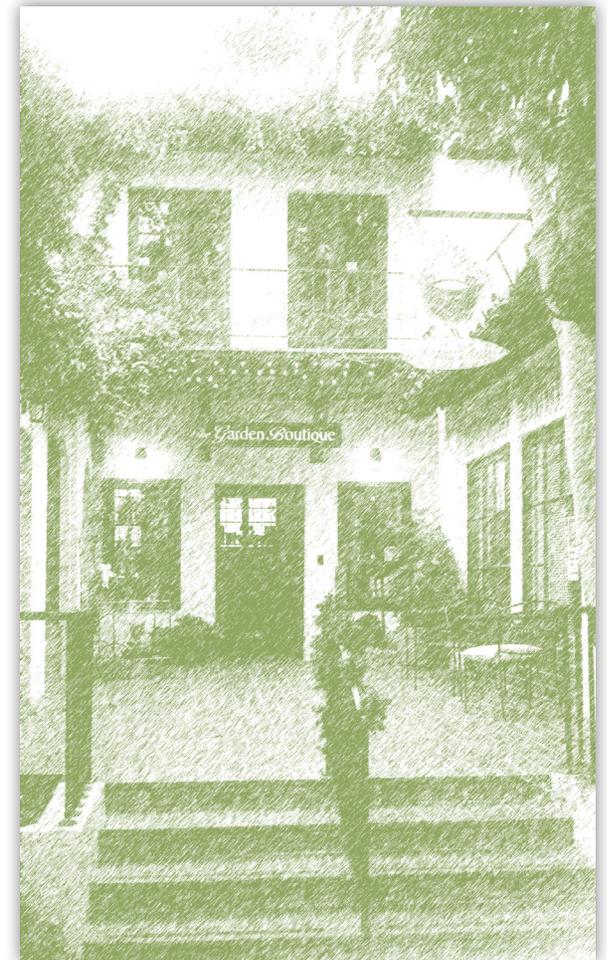
CSUN's new Valley Performing Arts Center is a unique and incredibly valuable regional asset. As a focal point for a new "University Village" initiative, VPAC has the potential to enhance economic prosperity in the community, and to dramatically enrich its artistic and cultural environment.

The Northridge Hospital Medical Center is another major regional asset that sets the community apart, both as a regional resource and as a local economic engine. Future Community Plan updates will provide opportunities to cultivate and enhance the medical center. Strategic planning and zoning will also prove useful in supporting the surrounding healthcare cluster.

Private investments are not easy to come by, and community groups only have a handful of tools that they can use to affect changes and revitalize their town centers. Often overlooked is their ability to work with governing agencies in planning and zoning, in a proactive rather than reactive fashion. Recognizing that change is inevitable, it is within the power of the stakeholders to promote change for the better.

Residents would like improved mobility within the Central Business District including pedestrians, cyclists and public transit. Streets are the backbones of our communities. They are the key to livability and ought to be for everyone, whether young or old, motorist or bicyclist, walker or wheelchair user, bus rider or shopkeeper.

The wildlife and pond areas adjacent to the orange grove serve as a reminder of



the region’s agricultural past. These and other “vital assets need to be linked together in ways that encourage walking, biking and other non-motorized forms of active transportation. ‘Complete Streets’ are foot and tire friendly. But too many of our streets are designed only for speeding cars, or worse, creeping traffic jams.”<sup>3</sup>

Reseda Boulevard has signs upon signs, all competing for the attention of passersby. Commercial tenants often lack marketing sophistication. Unfortunately, sign wars tend to be a losing battle for all. The discordant mix of colors, styles and sizes has the effect of deflecting rather than attracting the gaze of prospective customers. In the absence of a local set of standards—a coordinated theme for the area—signs are under minimal regulation. In any case, local sign enforcement is practically non-existent, especially on weekends. Ad hoc signs have the worst effects. Hastily scrawled “Sale” signs, promotional inflatables, banners and other attention seekers only end up cluttering the landscape and making centers unattractive to prospective patrons. The city simply lacks the resources to enforce signage ordinances. Creating a theme as part of the planning process is one way to alleviate these sign wars.

State Street in Santa Barbara and Main Street Ventura are excellent examples of attractive tenant mix. Northridge can work toward this sort of pedestrian-oriented district by offering zoning and permitting incentives for complementary, Vision-friendly businesses. As Northridge evolves into a

<sup>3</sup> Complete Streets Coalition, [www.completestreets.org](http://www.completestreets.org)

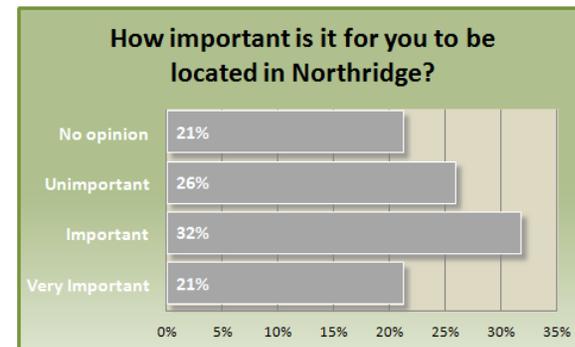
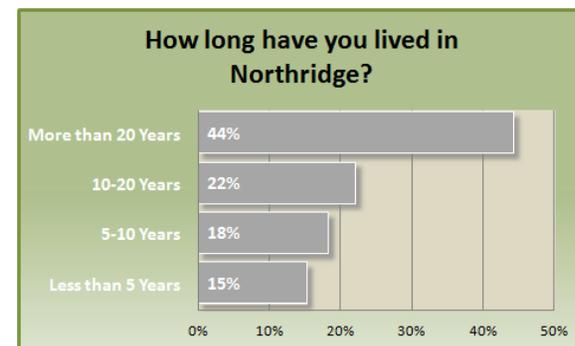
destination market, patrons will visit more frequently, stay longer and shop more.

Successful destination markets not only make the shopping experience more enjoyable for customers they also increase profits for businesses. Tactics as simple as decorating businesses in a coordinated fashion, or planning of unified events and promotions, can help to build an identity. Many of these coordinated programs and improvements to the community image require only nominal investment.

In order of practicality and priority, Reseda and Roscoe boulevards figure prominently. The area along Reseda immediately adjacent to CSUN (between Nordhoff St. and Devonshire St.) holds the greatest potential for leveraging investments.

Although it is possible to re-imagine Northridge in entirely new ways, one of our goals in this process is to improve the aesthetic relationships between the commercial district and the University. CSUN’s *Master Plan* provides an excellent starting point for Northridge renewal. The University has enhanced its local profile in recent years with a number of campus edge and gateway expansion projects on tributary streets. Investments in the University can easily translate into improvements for the entire community. If we build on these investments, we can create unprecedented opportunities for the surrounding community.

Over the next few years, Northridge stakeholders will need to be more proactive in providing input to the planning and governing process. We need to articulate



not only what we are opposed to, but what we are willing to say “yes” to. The Vision gives direction for what the community will look like as it evolves over the decades. Stakeholders need to build a working and actionable consensus—and support the use of planning incentives that encourage Vision-friendly development. This approach is one way that wise leaders can capitalize on opportunities and leverage investment in visionary projects.

Some of the strategies used to attract capital could include “envelope entitlements” that allow mixed-use flexibility and the trade-off of setbacks, amenities and aesthetics for height and density.

These concessions are not a zero-sum game, and thoughtful planning and collaboration can result in an improved streetscape and pleasant human-scale boulevards. It is easy to see how an increase in economic practicality, provides incentive for investors to privately redevelop and renew targeted properties. These higher and better uses will enhance the area’s offering of goods, services and amenities.

## Commercial Revitalization

Economic stagnation is the primary reason why communities decline, especially in their commercial areas. The reason is simple: residents and visitors are repelled when an area is not well maintained or unsafe. Decline breeds further decline, and the soul of the community gradually slips away.

*Consider a building with a few broken windows. If the windows are not repaired, the tendency is for vandals to break a few more windows. Eventually, they may even break into the building...or consider a sidewalk. Some litter accumulates. Soon, more litter accumulates. Eventually, people even start leaving bags of trash... or breaking into cars.<sup>4</sup>*

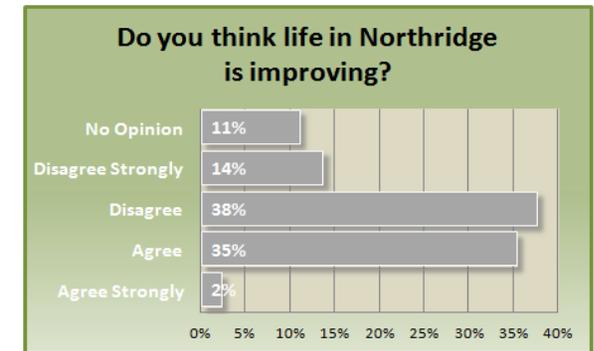
Aesthetic decline is easy to recognize, and it makes a statement about the larger community—one that drives away customers and visitors. We have all seen people cringe at the thought of visiting certain run-down communities. The same effect applies to those who might invest in Northridge or locate businesses here. They are less likely to invest in a community that appears to be declining.

Enlightened decision making is the key to exercising this power for the betterment of the overall community. Not all decisions are easy, and most involve some sort of trade-offs. Location is “everything” in real estate, and the more wisely we can use properties

<sup>4</sup> James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling, “Broken Windows” *The Atlantic Monthly*, (March 1982)

near existing assets, the better. The greatest potential for attracting investment and improvement in Northridge is at the edges of the University and in the areas surrounding Northridge Hospital Medical Center.

Although the Northridge Vision surveys show a high degree of satisfaction overall, some negative perceptions still exist. Stakeholders will need to heighten their level of local stewardship and treat the public areas of Northridge the same as they would their own front yard.



Northridge is situated along the Southern Pacific Railroad (Metrolink) right-of-way that was originally developed and zoned as the main industrial corridor for the San Fernando Valley. The SP industrial cluster extends from Chatsworth to Glendale. It includes those key business sectors in which the region excels: entertainment, aerospace and technology. While Northridge does not have the concentration of industrially-zoned property of its neighbors—Chatsworth to the west and Van Nuys to the east—it is situated in the heart of

the SP corridor, and could benefit greatly by increasing its participation in emerging regional industry clusters.

Although no longer as dependant on rail as it once was, this manufacturing corridor supports high-wage service and production employment for many local residents. In spite of losses to U.S. manufacturing, the County of Los Angeles and the San Fernando Valley still have strong industrial bases. Even in times of economic recession, the regional industrial real estate market is robust, with a vacancy rate at 3.1 percent in Q4 2011, down from 3.3 percent a year earlier.<sup>5</sup>

The healthcare and biotechnology industries are gathering steam as the leading edge of the “Baby Boomers” begin to join the ranks of senior citizens. Northridge Hospital Medical Center is one of the largest employers in the area. They anticipate expansion to accommodate an ever-growing demand for their health care and wellness services. Aside from providing an important array of regional services, the center also provides a wide range of professional careers and allied employment.

<sup>5</sup> *Los Angeles County Business Scan*, The Kyser Center for Economic Research, LAEDC, Overall Outlook - Retrieved 25 October 2011

## University Village

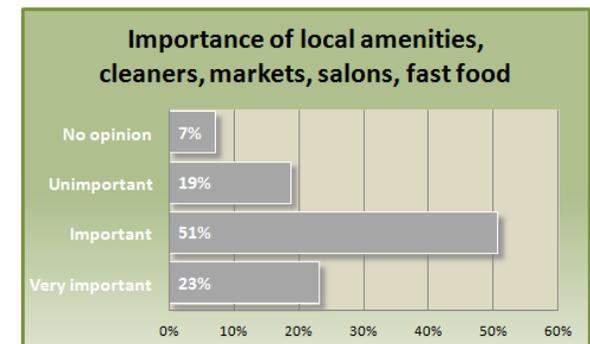
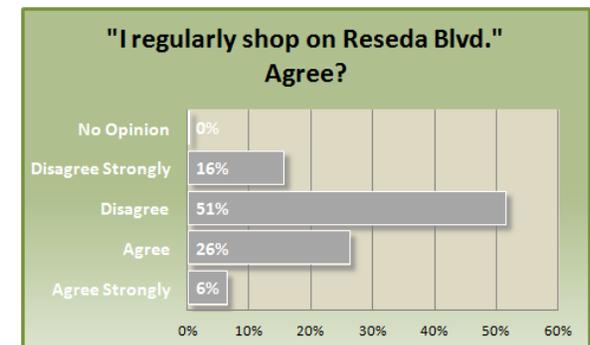
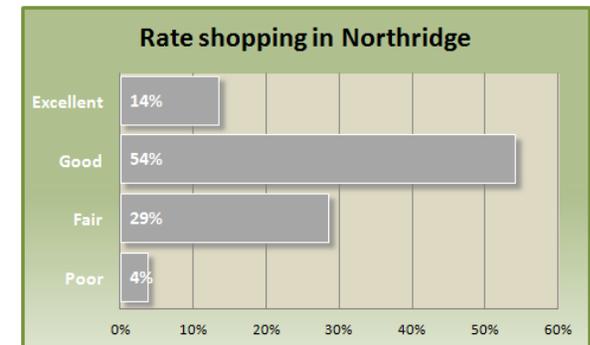
CSUN is undoubtedly one of the most recognizable and significant landmarks in the region. But, it is situated just off of Reseda Boulevard and nearly invisible to north-south traffic. One of the most important strategies is to capitalize on the University by increasing its visibility from downtown Northridge.

Much of this can be accomplished by re-branding the village area adjacent to the University. This means bringing the University identity and design elements out to the main street. Visual cues between University Village and CSUN are key to creating this enhanced identity.

Instead of competing themes, the Village area can leverage university assets. Signage, monuments, design elements, street furnishings, street trees and landscape can all benefit from the adoption of the university theme.

Reseda Boulevard, the main street of Northridge, is proposed to be designated as “University Village.” Residents and visitors need a clearly identifiable and attractive center—one with a stronger, more inclusive community atmosphere, more reflective of the unique assets in Northridge.

Rather than having Reseda Boulevard function as a regional highway who’s only purpose is to push traffic through as quickly as possible, we need to take back this important public space. The key is the creation of a living space—changing the main thoroughfare into a town center.



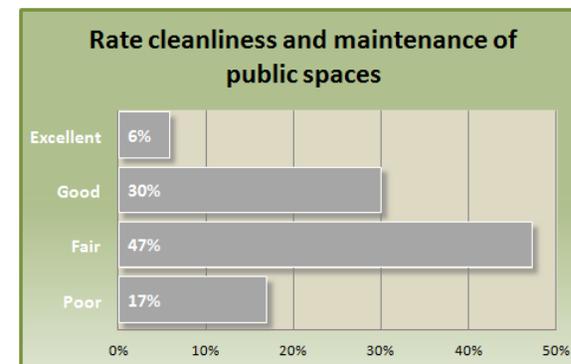
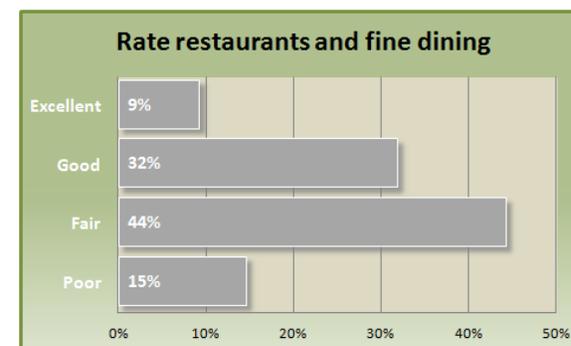
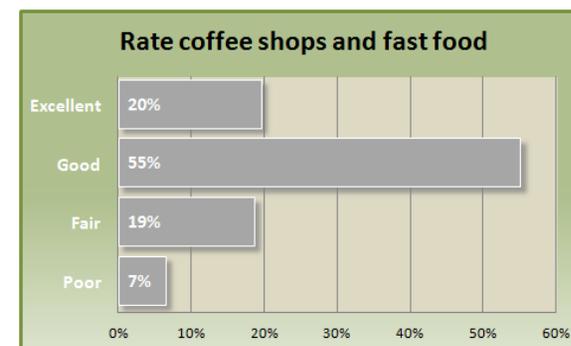
Programs that will allow the business district to project itself into the public spaces, sidewalks and boulevards are incredibly valuable. The predecessor Business Improvement District did just this. It provided the stakeholders access to the common areas. This opens up opportunities for tying together business district themes and streetscape, as well as extending the appeal of storefronts and restaurants. It also increases the potential of adding credible regional assets and travel destinations including hospitality, entertainment, galleries, eclectic shopping and upscale restaurants.

The “Northridge Oasis” monument at the north end is a perfect example. It could easily be changed into a “University Village” monument. Bookending it with another monument to the south would provide a pleasant visual cue, and help visitors to understand when they are entering and leaving Northridge Village.

Northridge’s newest asset, the Valley Performing Arts Center, is of special interest. By enhancing the sub-area in the immediate vicinity of the VPAC, theatre patrons will be treated to complementary cultural offerings—”making a night of it”—enjoying fine dining, heading off to the theatre, and possibly finishing off at a local bistro. A more colorful, walkable town center is called for, one offering extended hours, with more cafes, coffee shops, fine dining and gathering places.

A huge part of feeling secure is the visual upkeep of the community. Graffiti,

broken windows, or abandoned furniture are the harbingers of crime, blight and economic deterioration. The community would feel safer and more secure with an increase in activities in the pedestrian-oriented nodes along the boulevard. The presence of students, shoppers, diners and other visitors will provide more of a sense of well-being. Stakeholders polled associated clean and aesthetically pleasing commercial areas with safety.



## Concept Plan - University Village

Immanuel Kant described the eyes as “windows on the soul.” Similarly, our community’s business districts provide us with a window on the soul of each unique neighborhood—telling us much about who lives there, and their lifestyle. A clean, secure and prosperous business district not only signals success and prosperity, but it also provides the local residents with an identity, self-respect and pride in their community and culture.

This Northridge Vision project is intended to develop and implement successful strategies—to act as a catalyst, leveraging private and public capital, developing information, and creating teaching and communications tools to assist this vital urban/suburban center in becoming “University Village.” As a result, aging and underserved pockets will be empowered to re-invent themselves, recapturing the energy and vitality from which they originally sprang.

### The Toolbox Implementation Tactics

#### Website

[www.NorthridgeVision.org](http://www.NorthridgeVision.org) website is providing ongoing access to the Northridge Vision Concept Plan, resources, collaborative works, graphics and updates of value to stakeholders. The website has been used extensively for outreach and collaboration while allowing hundreds of visitors to par-

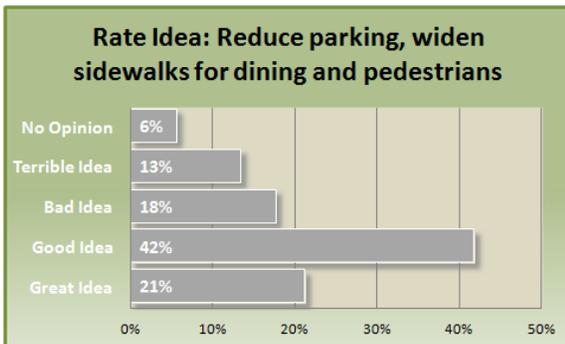
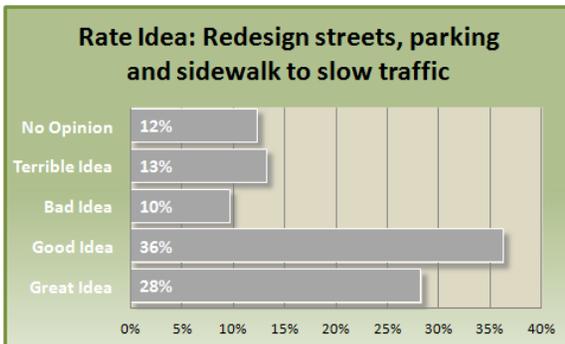
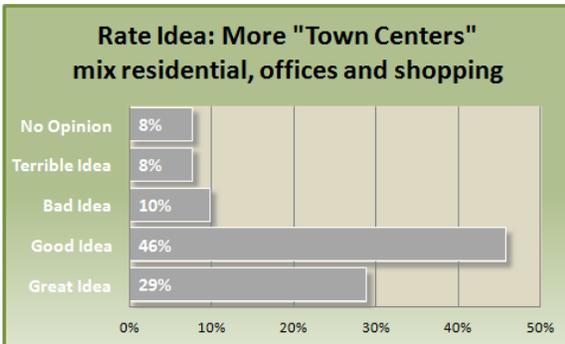
ticipate in seven different community and business surveys.

The surveys sought opinions on challenges and opportunities in Northridge as it stands today. Participants were then given the opportunity to weigh-in on several dozen proposals, and share their personal views on how Northridge can be improved over the long term. The online surveys were further validated with a randomized telephone survey reaching out to a wider audience of local residents.

Local needs were assessed to realistically and critically determine improvements, actions and resources needed to enhance the viability of the community and more specifically, the business district. Aesthetic evaluation—a key component of this assessment—has resulted in practical recommendations for dealing with Reseda Boulevard as the main street of Northridge.

#### Neighborhood Councils

In the last decade, a new tool emerged to allow citizens to have a stronger voice and wield more influence in local governance. “Neighborhood Councils” were created in a new Los Angeles City Charter to serve as a vehicle for residents to interact with their local government. Besides their engagement in elections, public meetings and support of charities, Northridge residents have a direct *official* role in local government through the Northridge East, South and West Neighborhood Councils. These councils are mandated by the Los Angeles City Charter. They allow community leaders to manage change from within, rather than having planning imposed on them.



This has provided an interesting twist, as neighborhood councils often work directly with property owners, builders and developers and become involved with projects at much earlier stages. Councils are made up of volunteers, with each taking different approaches based upon their respective communities.

Potential investors can be intimidated at what they see as an extra, and very unpredictable step in an already oppressive bureaucratic process. It is important for us to show leadership and wisdom, encouraging investments that will improve the community, managing growth and change in positive ways.

Northridge's Neighborhood Councils have the opportunity to be the vanguard for implementing this vision. Informed and enlightened leadership is key to cultivating the type of improvements and atmosphere that Northridge needs to remain a vital, successful and livable community.

## American Institute of Architects

### Urban Design Assistance Team

The San Fernando Valley Chapter of the American Institute of Architects fielded their Urban Design Assistance Team (UDAT) to focus on the Northridge project. These architects, engineers planners and design professionals volunteered their time and skills to assist the community of Northridge in creating its vision for the future. The UDAT convened an extended series of charrettes

and work sessions, contributing hundreds of hours of time and energy to the process.

This "Concept Plan" includes actionable steps to redirect the future development and evolution of commercial districts in ways that maximize the synergy between the districts and existing local assets. Recommendations are made on how to strengthen the tenant mix to appeal to pedestrian orientation and create a "village" setting where visitors are encouraged to park once, stay longer, enjoy the ambiance, and patronize multiple local businesses—often in conjunction with university activities.

The Concept Plan embraces principles of "New Urbanism." It promotes the creation and restoration of diverse, walkable, compact, vibrant, mixed-use communities composed of the same components as conventional development, but assembled

in a more integrated fashion, in the form of complete communities. These contain housing, work places, shops, entertainment, schools, parks, and civic facilities essential to the daily lives of the residents—all within easy walking distance of each other. New Urbanism promotes the increased use of transit, trains and light rail, instead of more highways and roads.<sup>1</sup>

### Re-capturing the Public Spaces

It is not uncommon in the sprawling megalopolis that is Los Angeles—America's second largest city—to think of main streets as nothing more than channels through which to pass as many vehicles as quickly as possible. To some extent this is true. But this singular notion has had devastating effects on business districts throughout the city. There is a trend of increasing citizen

<sup>1</sup> Yenez, Arturo, AIA, UDAT Presentation, 2011



resistance to interstate-era community designs...resulting from sprawling development.<sup>2</sup>

Techniques such as signal synchronization might help move traffic through a central business district more quickly—but what is more important to healthy town centers is to move traffic at a slower and more consistent pace, e.g. “Signals Set to 25 mph” signs at the entrance to the retail district. “Traffic calming” allows drivers to take note of the area they are passing through, and possibly find businesses they wish to visit.

Traffic at a consistent and continuous flow even at 20 mph is permissible as long as a reasonable volume is accommodated. Rather than cast in stone, “selection of a target Level of Service (LOS) is a policy decision and is based on a particular philosophy on whether to do everything possible to avoid any traffic congestion.”<sup>3</sup>

Think of suburban villages as destinations not pathways to “greater” destinations. Designate and dedicate them to this use. Don’t gloss over them and relegate them to being mere strips and sign posts along the way. This is partly why deterioration occurs. People have to “arrive.”

The following proposed strategies are patterned after a successful collaborative effort to help revitalize the El Camino Real (US-101) corridor:

- A partnership between all the entities with an interest in the corridor: the Communities of Northridge, Porter Ranch, Reseda, Chatsworth, Granada Hills, the City of Los Angeles the County of Los Angeles, departments of transportation, public works, commercial associations, residents, business owners and other stakeholders,
- Creation of a task force that meets on an ongoing basis to share information and make policy recommendations,
- Diagnosis of assets and challenges through community workshops and

- research of these conditions,
- Adoption of “Vision, Challenge Statement and Guiding Principles” for the corridor as a whole that guide municipal master plans and other planning efforts,
- Awards to recognize exemplary projects and plans that support the Vision and Guiding Principles,
- Significant federal funding for demonstration projects,
- A public information campaign through a series of reports, promotional materials and a website.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> *Great Corridors, Great Communities* at p 17.

<sup>2</sup> *Great Corridors, Great Communities* at p 3

<sup>3</sup> Gary Toth and Herman Volk, *A Citizen’s Guide to Better Streets: How to Engage Your Transportation Agency*, (New York: Project for Public Spaces Inc., 2008), 50



What to do with existing traffic is a major question of competing interests. Traffic calming can be the best solution to streets that were poorly designed in the first place. Calming recognizes that drivers respond, even subconsciously, to their environment. The Project for Public Spaces makes this point best: “Communities and transportation professionals who seek to create streets where drivers will respect the local context—both residential and commercial—should design these streets using narrow lane widths, street trees, gentle curves and very small, if any, shoulders.”

What has been successful is to give the vibrancy of the business district priority along portions of the main boulevard. Creating a “place” called Northridge—making certain that visitors realize they are in a town center, and not just passing along a nameless, faceless, cluttered strip of disjointed commercial buildings. This is where place making efforts will dovetail with “a growing appreciation among community leaders, planners, and developers of how town centers, main streets, and urban villages can put communities ‘on the map’ and establish a strong identity for residential developments.”

Traffic calming “is founded on the idea that streets are places for people to walk, stroll, gaze, meet, play, shop, and even work alongside, but not be dominated by, cars. Narrow streets slow down cars. Vertical elements including features like trees or bollards (small posts) can reduce the optical width of streets as well.”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *Traffic Calming 101*, Projects for Public Spaces, (2012)



## Transit-Oriented Districts

The bulk of density planning should occur along transit corridors and near transit centers in an effort to keep traffic down. Valley residents are very passionate about preserving their single-family neighborhoods even though this lifestyle is a highly auto-oriented traffic generator. Because of the sprawling way the region has evolved, there are many areas for which public transit is too remote to be practical. Transit planners have had difficulty coming up with efficient means of covering the “first mile” and “last mile” of transit—the distance from home to the trunk line, and from the line to the destination.

From a social perspective, there is a gap in the Valley’s lack of frequent, reliable and safe public transportation forcing residents to rely almost entirely upon automobile travel. The transit-dependent walking public is physically isolated from the passing driving public. Thus, a sort of economic and social divide exists.

This phenomenon has a human toll, but more important is the toll it takes on the area’s suburban centers. Lack of interaction and patronage results in economic erosion, which, in turn, discourages new investment. Without investment in maintenance and renewal, the commercial cores deteriorate. As failures compound, areas become stigmatized—off-limits to visitors and patrons.

The San Fernando Valley has the dubious distinction of being the nation's "alpha model" for suburban sprawl. With the removal of the 1,100-mile Pacific Electric interurban/streetcar system in the 1950s and 1960s, and replacement with a massive freeway system, residents became addicted to private automobiles and mostly independent from public transportation.

They were now able to live and locate virtually anywhere. As a result, there is no city in the world more dependent on the automobile than Los Angeles—explaining, in part, the area's endless network of strip malls and convenience stores. And the 1.8 million resident Valley suffers the disadvantage of being physically removed from its ostensible center by 30-90 minute commutes and a major mountain range.

Cohesive communities require approaching the planning of transportation and communities as two parts of the same process rather than two separate processes.<sup>6</sup> There are already transportation assets in place to serve Northridge, yet the challenge remains to coordinate them in ways that best serve the community and encourage their use.

The Southern Pacific rail right-of-way cuts through the center of town and serves both Metrolink trains and Amtrak, accessing destinations from San Diego to San Luis Obispo. There is a Northridge Metrolink station<sup>7</sup> at Parthenia Street and Wilbur Avenue, but being a half-mile off of Reseda Boulevard, it is not highly visible.

<sup>6</sup> See *Great Corridors, Great Communities* at p 3

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.ladottransit.com/dash/routes/Northridge/northridge.php> (accessed 11 May 2011).

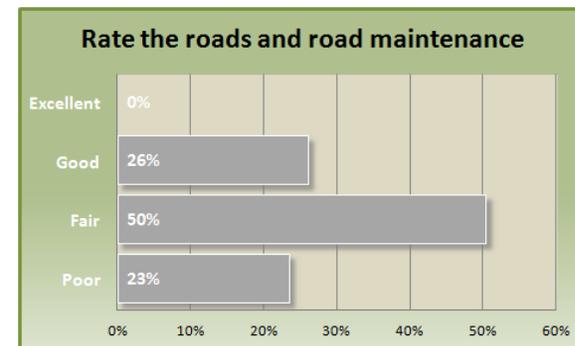
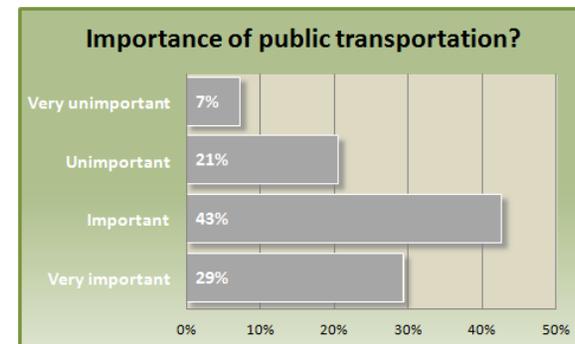
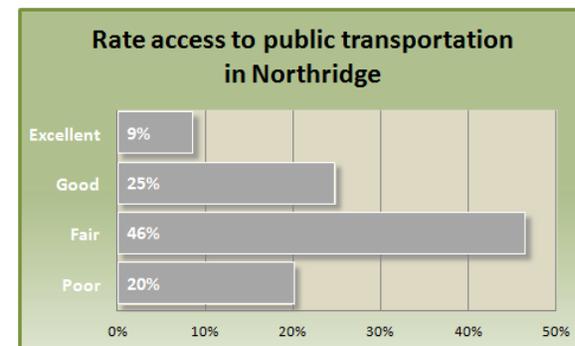
Increased consciousness and transit accessibility from Northridge would encourage residents to avoid driving downtown. Dependable and consistent transit serving the Reseda Boulevard corridor would also increase local ridership demand. This could come in the form of a rider-friendly trolley system. Rails tend to give riders confidence in the routing and reliability of transit conveyances. Currently, the Northridge DASH bus circulates around the Northridge Area with convenient stops including the Metro-link Station.

To the south, Reseda Boulevard intersects with the Orange Line Bus Rapid Transit line at its intersection with Victory Boulevard. 2012 will see the opening of the Canoga Avenue leg of the Orange Line dedicated right-of-way, providing additional points of access to the west. On the Orange Line, it is a quick hop to the Red Line Metro-rail subway with unimpeded access to Hollywood and most of Los Angeles.

Rather than focusing exclusively on how quickly Reseda Blvd. can move cars, this report seeks to identify and develop more places along the way for drivers to visit. This approach runs contrary to the conventional wisdom of transportation and realizes that "what matters is not how fast vehicles move, but how many places people can reach within a given time period."<sup>8</sup> Planners are increasingly aware that:

- Transportation benefits our sense of place by connecting communities
- Our sense of place benefits

<sup>8</sup> *Great Corridors, Great Communities* at p 5





Reseda Boulevard is no longer pedestrian friendly as it has lost its ability to accommodate people over time. So-called Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) does not solve the problem, since buses are usually mixed into the congested flow. Frustrated drivers have also made bicycling and walking less attractive. We face a diminishing quality of life and a more vulnerable local economy, with fewer economic opportunities, unless we pursue a new transportation vision.

Places with a concentration of local services and higher-frequency transit generate fewer vehicle trips than single-use districts with limited transit. Freeways, streets and parking are expensive to construct. Building a new parking structure costs about \$30,000 per space in 2009 dollars—and over \$40,000 underground. A surface space can be even more expensive, when including the high cost of land. It would appear wiser to spend this money on public transportation.

Another important strategy is to create a Transportation Demand Management (TDM) District. Acceptable traffic levels can be sought with TDM and demand pricing for parking. A TDM District looks at the modes of transportation not as an engineer would, but as an economist might, putting incentives in place to optimize use of scarce transportation resources.

TDM is used to manage a multi-modal smart transportation network that is pedestrian friendly. The goal of a multi-modal transportation district in Northridge would be to minimize and, where possible, eliminate

pollution and motor vehicle congestion. The goal is to ensure safe mobility and access for all without compromising the ability to protect public health and safety.

## Walkable Districts

The elements that make an area “walkable” start with a feeling of security. Security is more instinctive than it is objective. People like to be where other people are. They are made uncomfortable if high speed automobile traffic is too close. Patrons don’t like dirt, dust or disturbing noise levels. Most of all, they clamor to interesting areas where they can park once and engage in multiple activities, all in one contiguous area.

Seventy-one percent of users rate Northridge sidewalks and sidewalk main-

tenance as fair to poor. In order to have a desirable and walkable district, the sidewalks have to be safe and attractive. The first step is the periodical removal of soil and stains. It is easy for locals to become accustomed to these defects, and subconsciously filter them out, even in the best of districts. But visitors and patrons *do* notice them.

Sidewalks are the most underrated elements in a town center. In many cases, the sidewalk rights-of-way are very narrow. No matter the width, there is always a benefit to be gained by switching up the pedestrian pathway. The same right of way can be used but reshaped through the addition of streetscaping features, plantings, or even something as simple as changing colors and textures. The visual and psychological



effects of a meandering sidewalk can have an amazing effect on pedestrian traffic. A slight curve here and a rise in elevation there, make a stroll much more pleasant.

This is where curb extensions and sidewalk widening really pay off. By “bulbing” out the curb at crosswalks and intersections, you create a visual cue and entranceway to the block. It provides a place for street furniture, trees, landscaping and infiltration basins. What is more, a pair of bulb-outs can shorten the crosswalk by 16-20 feet and make crossing the street much safer and less threatening. These extensions can be used intermittently in mid-block areas as well. Diagonal parking provides more extension opportunities and the midblock extensions can provide a stage for any number of streetscape features, from benches to balustrades, and planters to lampposts.

If the right-of-way for the street is sufficiently wide, diagonal parking can be introduced on both sides of the road. If not, one side can be used, and the roadway can be made to gently curve midblock giving way to diagonal parking on either side of the street. This is a particularly attractive aesthetic configuration. It tends to “calm” traffic, and reduce speeds, without necessarily having an effect on capacity.

In creating these “destination” areas, the community is, for all intents and purposes, taking back its main street for local use and enhanced livability. This also changes the perception of the main street for commuter and through-traffic. In some cases, impatient drivers may find another route more to their liking.

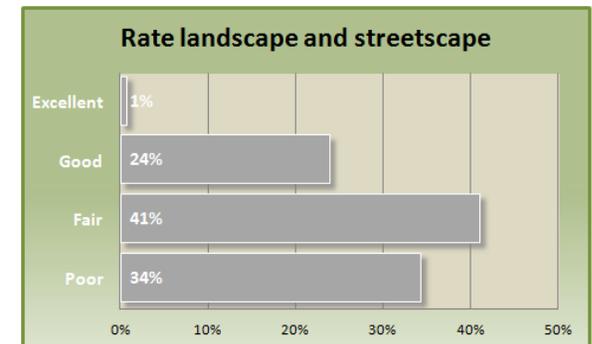
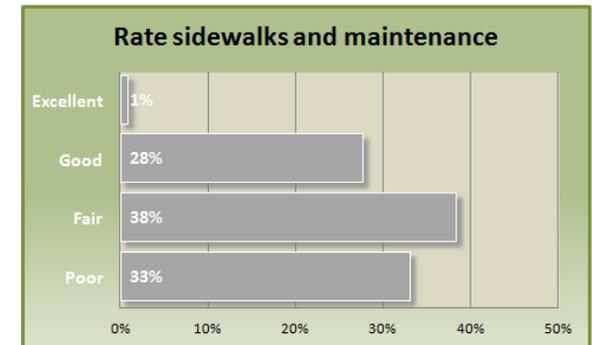
### **Coordination of Origins and Destinations**

Economic strategies may follow an increasing trend to locate more jobs in sub-urban areas. With increased technological capability, workers are less willing to make time consuming commutes. One strategy could involve working with industrial and commercial job centers to create jobs in closer proximity to residential areas.

Unfortunately, industrial zoning does not provide the best return on investment, so there is tremendous incentive to rezone industrial property into almost any other use, moving industry further out. Speculators who are aware of this tend to run-up the bidding on industrial with just this in mind.

The urban fabric at the intersection of Reseda and Parthenia is a major problem for Northridge. The rail lines and underpass effectively divide Reseda into north and south zones. It is possible to turn this challenge into an opportunity.

In transit-oriented districts where there are transportation options, densities can be increased to eight or nine stories. Convenient access to light rail and transit is a win-win for any kind of development. It has been suggested that the Wilbur and Parthenia Metrolink station may be in the wrong location. The current location was probably the least expensive lowest first-cost place to put the station.



However if the Metrolink station was relocated to Reseda and Parthenia there would be a number of benefits:<sup>12</sup>

- At grade and above grade Pedestrian connections north and south on Reseda.
- Below grade transit center for buses going north south on Reseda and east west on Parthenia.
- Rezone adjacent land for multi-story commercial and residential
- Create at-grade retail area. See example of way to address rail noise that really works.
- Create below grade parking that is used by retail, metro and residential and has bicycle parking and flex cars.

The new Illinois Institute of Technology McCormick Tribune Campus center is situated below the light rail. It was the first building designed by architect Rem Koolhaas within the United States. It is a single-story 110,000-square-foot building.

## Parking & Streetscape

Streetscape is virtually non-existent in the Central Business District—except for the features added by the Business Improvement District, that are being maintained by a handful of diligent community volunteers. Where it exists, there is nothing unique or appealing in the configuration of the streets, curbs, parkways, trees or landscape vegetation.

There is nothing to tie the commercial properties to each other, or to the boulevard. The look and feel of Reseda Boulevard runs from neutral to hostile for use by pedestrians, bicycles and other “active transportation” modes. Seventy-five percent of those surveyed rated the landscaping/streetscaping fair to poor.

Featureless ribbons of sidewalk, without shade or landscaping, tend to repel pedestrian traffic. Pedestrians want a navigable path, but variations in height and direction make walkways far more appealing for their use. Bland uniformity and massive paved expanses are the hallmarks of streets built solely to maximize the flow of traffic. The sameness of an uninviting streetscape can be mitigated by switching up the direction and demarcation of the right of way.

The addition of medians, curb extensions, rumble strips and landscape provide visual cues that one is passing through a pedestrian-oriented district. This affords a welcome break in the travel tedium. The addition of meandering sidewalks and pavement variations will, in almost all cases, result in more pedestrian activity in the business district.

When building lines are set back, and traffic lanes are narrowed, more right-of-way for pedestrian activity is created. Human-scale spaces, sidewalks, landscape and bikeways can be increased, along with outdoor dining, diagonal parking, and the addition of greenery to soften the image and create a more welcoming environment.

Medians, the extension of curbs, bulbouts between parking spaces and at crosswalks, provides a basis for landscape, hardscape, street furniture and the creative projection of businesses, such as restaurants, out into the public space. With the inclusion of trees, street furniture and bollards, they improve aesthetics, provide protective barriers, and reduce the distance that one must traverse in order to walk across the street.

Currently parking on the main street of the Central Business District is all standard, unimaginative parallel parking. There are many drivers who find it difficult or impossible to parallel park. It is also quite dangerous to access a vehicle, bodily risking life and limb when stepping into a traffic lane.

Diagonal parking is a popular choice for suburban and rural villages. The configuration is more relaxed, and tends to help calm traffic. Parking is simplified and it can also provide a greater margin of safety by removing individuals physically from the traffic lanes.

A trend catching on is known as reverse-angle diagonal parking, where the vehicle is parked by backing into the space, nose out. The maneuver is safer and simpler than parallel parking, beginning from the same position in the adjacent traffic, but with a single turn of the wheel.

The big difference is that on departure, the driver is in the safest possible position to re-enter the traffic flow. From his position toward the front of the vehicle and facing forward, the driver has a maximum field of

<sup>12</sup> Source: Wilson, Nathaniel, AIA, AICP, Architect and Environmental Planner, Cal State University Northridge

vision to avoid bicycles and other vehicles that might be missed in any other situation. Contrast this to a swift sharp pulling out or backing out into traffic.

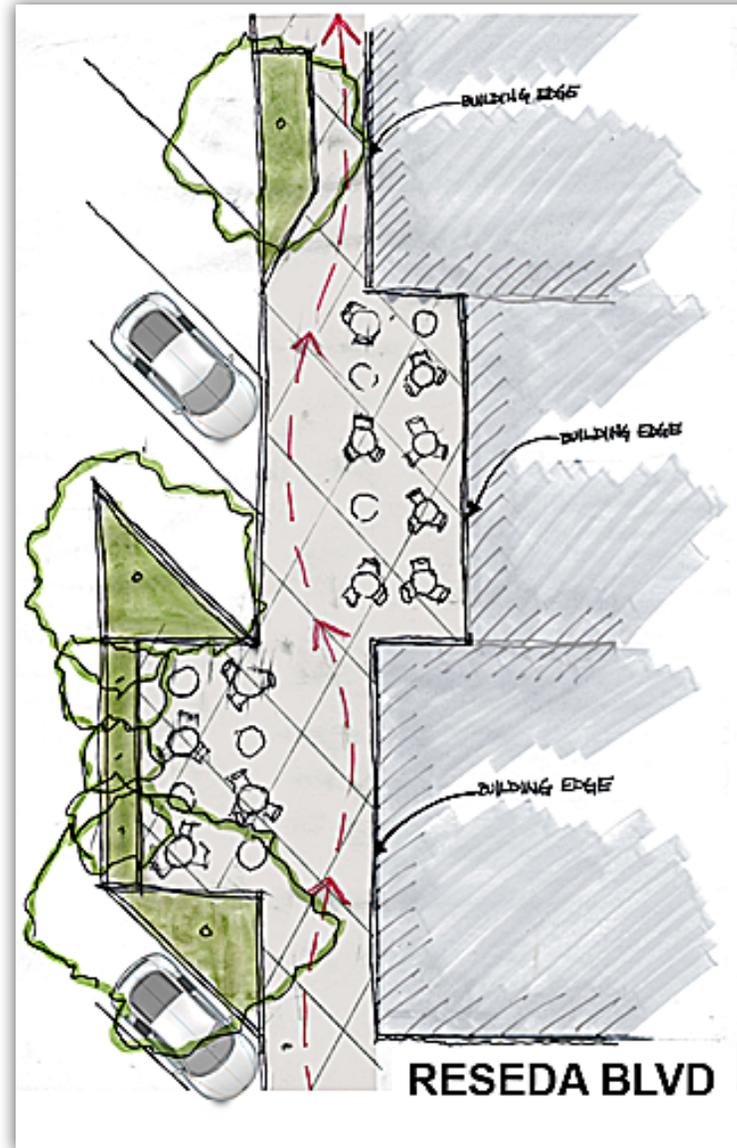
Another benefit of reverse-angle is that all of the parked vehicles ports—doors, trunk, hatchback, etc.—are open to the sidewalk rather than to the street. This is a special benefit where young children are in the car. The car doors actually shield passengers from the traffic.

It may be necessary to narrow or eliminate one or more traffic lanes in order to implement diagonal parking on one or both sides of the street. Many consider this a benefit in pedestrian-oriented town centers—as an adjunct to a traffic calming strategy. In some circumstances, even this can be offset by reverse-flow lanes.

Reseda Boulevard is the main thoroughfare that connects the various nodes along the Northridge Central Business District. In changing the aesthetic of the business district, and establishing a “village” ambiance, the single most important tool is the restructuring of the backbone and calming of traffic passing through.

Those driving, walking or biking through the University Village area, have to slow down and “smell the coffee.” The area must re-think its priorities. Businesses have to showcase the personality of this commercial area as a destination rather than just another nameless strip of suburban highway.

## Diagonal Parking & Reverse Angle Parking



FSY Architects

We have to reduce the presence of pedestrian “dead zones” especially on big corners. Create pedestrian quads and walkable areas, avoiding centralized, auto-oriented stores with peripheral parking.

Human-scale shopping will encourage alternative transportation and walking among shops and stores. Lessons learned from other suburban centers have shown the value of an aesthetic transformation.

Dramatic changes can take place when a commercial strip is transformed into a village—when the look and feel is changed in a way to make visitors take notice. These types of changes are not beyond the reach of Northridge.

## Start at the Beginning

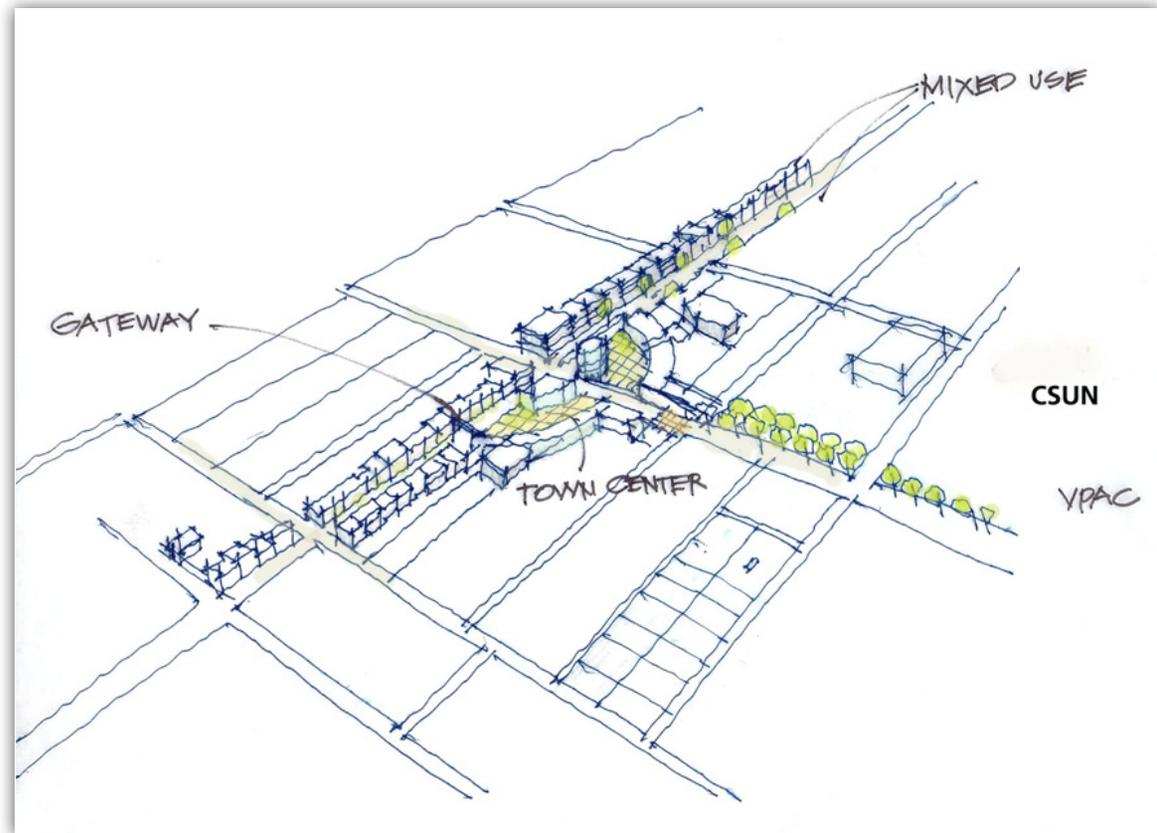
Recognizing Northridge's existing assets and built environment, the project team developed visions and tools for four distinct concept areas.

**I. University Village** is that stretch of the Reseda Boulevard corridor adjacent to Cal State University Northridge, generally recognized as Northridge's town center. Taking existing momentum and the new transit center at CSUN, the area presents an obvious choice for a mixed-use, pedestrian, and transit-oriented district. An ideal configuration would involve re-inventing the key intersection of Nordhoff Street and Reseda Boulevard as the gateway to Northridge. With dining and open spaces a short walk from the Valley Performing Arts Center, the stage is set for a one-of-a-kind pedestrian-oriented arts and theatre district.

**II. Historic Old Town** is ideally suited for public-private partnerships and the development of a vertically mixed-use area, with housing and a full array of local amenities. The existing Metrolink station and transportation center provides an added incentive for situating housing near the Parthenia and Reseda Boulevard intersection.

**III. Healthy Living Campus** area is anchored by Northridge Hospital Medical Center as a medical, healthcare business and professional district in the vicinity of the Roscoe and Reseda Boulevards intersection.

**IV. Uptown Northridge** is a lower intensity area with a mix of multi-family housing and commercial uses. The area is suitable for a more horizontal mixed-use transition.



FSY Architects

# “University Village” Concept Area

## The Town Center

The commercial area along Reseda Boulevard between Lassen and Nordhoff is particularly ripe for the development of a walkable village. Pedestrian traffic already exists, and with the Valley Performing Arts Center nearby, this activity and the related spin-off activities will only increase. In this age of electronic communications, it is a welcome relief to actually have personal contact with friends and colleagues in the public square. Seeing familiar faces reinforces a sense of place within urban environments.

Commercial tenant mix similar to Santa Monica’s renowned Third Street Promenade avoids unimaginative and unattractive frontage. The Promenade preserved 80 feet of overall mall width, but added go around plazas, “concrete islands landscaped with big, whimsical topiary statues of dinosaurs,



fountains, fanciful newsstands and abundant seating.”<sup>1</sup> Rich commercial tenant mix should primarily include retail, restaurants, coffee houses, entertainment, galleries, shopping, and pedestrian amenities.

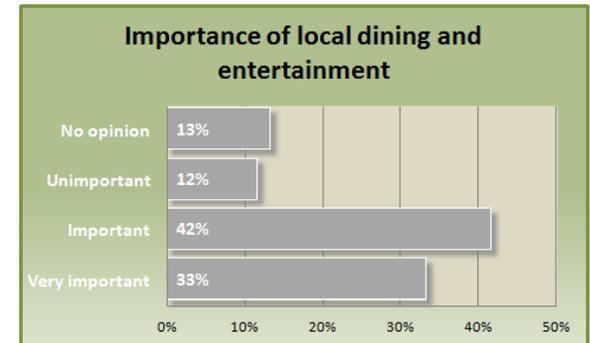
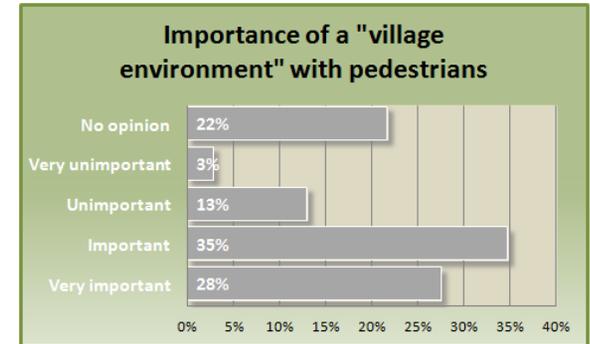
## Commercial Gateways to the University

These can increase communications between businesses and university students, to the benefit of both the community and the University. A commercial gateway to the University works both ways: to invite students out into the local market on Reseda Boulevard and to attract community members into the campus market.

Westward Commercial Gateways - Plummer, Vincennes, Prairie, and Dearborn Avenues are all candidate streets to serve as inviting commercial gateways to the University. Properties on Plummer and Prairie are relatively less costly to investors as well. CSUN has a plan for a palm-tree-lined grand gateway on Prairie. This should be welcomed by students who are looking for more lively activity on streets that connect to the campus. In Berkeley features like flowers, lighted trees, bistros, and cafes invite students to spend time and money at local businesses.

Especially as one heads south on Reseda Boulevard, the “campus feeling”

<sup>1</sup> Streets as Places at p 57



dissipates rapidly. Students are gathering almost exclusively at one or two locations, not circulating on the boulevard. Community leaders may not fully realize how many underutilized assets and opportunities exist.

Southward Commercial Gateways - Aside from a small and underdeveloped strip center at Nordhoff and Lindley, the current land uses position the Performing Arts Center on one side of Nordhoff and single-family residences on the other, do not serve the needs of either. Residents normally seek peace and quiet, while the VPAC benefits most from high-profile activities and events. The residential uses are a vestige of the rural days of ranches and unpaved roads—the early days when CSUN was just a minor state college.

Acquiring nearby properties over the long term to create a buffer zone would improve the southward gateways to the

University. Rezoning from residential to commercial in areas adjacent to the Performing Arts Center, and promoting mixed-use development could create a synergistic gateway. Remaining residents would need to be protected with landscaped buffer zones. Creating a pleasant walkway between the Valley Performing Arts Center and Reseda would go a long way toward bringing the two zones together.

## Regional Market Development

The strength of visitor venues such as the Third Street Promenade in Santa Monica and Old Town Pasadena is their ability to attract patronage from the greater region. These are popular attractions for out-of-town tourists as well. In order to attract business from outside the local market, the offerings have to have regional appeal, and be unique in their offerings. Building a successful regional market often takes a multiple-offering complex—a complementary cluster of interesting and welcoming businesses and points of interest.

The Northridge Community Plan provides a definition of the community, but it is not clear to visitors where Northridge begins and ends. Wayfinding and identification signage should be strategically placed to let people know where they are at any given moment, and where the important assets, such as CSUN and

Northridge Hospital Medical Center, are located.

Publishing a profile or descriptive directory of existing businesses within the community would give an overview of the existing commercial tenant mix to potential investors and to current business owners. As manufacturing in the United States becomes increasingly specialized and sophisticated, the manufacturing base already present in Northridge could expand.

There is some openness to heavier manufacturing and the jobs it produces, so long as it is not disruptive to the community. There is commercial real estate space available but most is not zoned for manufacturing, which is otherwise concentrated in the south and east Los Angeles areas. Perhaps suggesting that neighborhood councils embrace and protect industrial property is a way of encouraging them to be more proactive about planning. Neighborhood councils can educate the community on the holistic approach to planning that includes a wide range of uses in each community.

There is room for improvement in the exchange of information relating to the Valley business community. Perhaps organizations such as the Valley Green Team can facilitate improved communications. The focus of planners on the Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA) should not obscure the opportunity for a complementary business needs assessment to study the obstacles to economic development, to investigate why businesses are relocating and how to make the region more competitive on a national and global scale.



Sketch of Mixed Use

## Valley Performing Arts Center

### *Nucleus of a Vibrant Theatre/Arts*

#### *District*

The 1,700-seat, state-of-the-art Valley Performing Arts Center at CSUN is an exciting beacon of positive Northridge community development. Making the VPAC an instantly recognizable Northridge icon can increase its value to the community. This community asset exerts a 75-mile draw, but by itself may not be sufficient to stimulate area-wide economic development. That requires a broader strategy.

The \$120 million center is an economic engine—potentially creating a huge boost to the local economy. In this case, not just the direct multiplier effect brought about by jobs and commerce, but the indirect effects of prestige and identification, along with priceless cultural benefits. The businesses in closest proximity to the VPAC currently are not highly complementary to serving the needs of its visitors. Franchise and chain operations are unlikely to directly benefit from their adjacency to CSUN and the VPAC. Capturing synergies between complementary land uses requires thinking beyond each individual parcel—to cultivating a unique and somewhat eclectic visitors' district.

Patrons trekking to the VPAC need a walkable district with restaurants and attractions in the immediate vicinity. The surrounding area needs to focus on this to

fully take advantage of the singular identity that VPAC provides to Northridge. Commercial developments such as a “restaurant row” will need the confidence of investors and support from surrounding communities in order to realize their full potential. Increased support for locally-owned restaurants can ensure that they compete with the larger operations and chains. A plan is also needed to market the VPAC through the surrounding community businesses. A local restaurant association would be helpful in creating cross-promotions, sponsoring shuttles and the distribution of the theatre guides and tickets at retailers.

#### *Galleries*

Stakeholders were very enthusiastic about galleries and art walks, like the ones in northeast Los Angeles and Canoga Park.<sup>2</sup> Participants in these art events are served refreshments and hors d'oeuvres, and given guide maps with addresses of galleries and other art-related venues. They wander from one venue to the next where they make new friends and contacts, appreciate local art, and sometimes even win prizes. The somewhat out-of-the-way CSUN art gallery could benefit with more promo-

<sup>2</sup> “NELA Art,” <http://www.nelaart.com/> Retrieved 11 May 2011

tion, tying into arts projects, or by moving more into the public spaces. With increased pedestrian circulation, the public could better enjoy and appreciate this asset along with offerings located on the main street of Northridge.

#### *Upscale Shopping*

A stroll down Reseda Boulevard reveals the need for more attractive shops and boutiques. CSUN provides a ready market for a variety of retail and hospitality offerings for students and visitors. But the inviting, walkable connection from CSUN to Reseda has not yet fully materialized.

The commercial district along the boulevard needs to move from the mid-century template of cars in front, and stores hidden well to the rear, to a newer



pedestrian-oriented template of stores and landscape lining the sidewalks with automobiles parked underneath or in the rear. The implementation group should identify landlords and businesses who will pioneer these efforts, who are willing to set the precedent for this new model.

Distinctive color schemes can break through the dull sameness currently seen along much of Reseda Boulevard. Situated on the cusp of the community plan area; the Northridge Fashion Center mall, has a strong regional presence. But retail is undergoing a transformation by moving away from the traditional department store-dominated shopping malls of the second half of the 20th century.

The mall may indeed be moving closer to the main street model, as big-box retailers and enclosed shopping malls decentralize into more unique boutiques and live-work-shopping places.<sup>3</sup> Alongside a trend toward big-box diffusion is an around the clock operation that finds welcome reception among younger shoppers. In 2011 there were 237 Home Depots, 1,298 Walmarts, and four Staples in the US that are open 24 hours a day.<sup>4</sup>

## Hotels

Although hotels exist in the surrounding areas of the San Fernando Valley, few rooms exist in the Northridge community. As the area continues on an upward path of economic development, demand for hotel

<sup>3</sup> See Booth, *Transforming Suburban Business Districts*, 104

<sup>4</sup> *Infra* at p 105



services will increase. The San Fernando Valley market has traditionally been defined primarily as “friends and family.” With its extensive industrial base, the Valley also plays host to quite a few business travelers. With its lower rates, it can also be a destination for some of the general tourist market. With urbanization, and an increase in sophistication and attraction, this market is changing to more of destination market for tourists and visitors. The economic climate and extended market for a hotel property in the vicinity of Cal State University Northridge is quite promising.

Northridge is not without a history. It has the potential to become a “destination” market to neighboring communities from throughout the region. The Oakridge Estate is one of a number of historic sites that pays homage to Hollywood and serves as a landmark for the Valley.

The CSUN campus is also an attraction that can be complemented by a youthful, university-oriented business district. With its parks and recreation centers, Northridge Hospital and the nascent Healthy Living Campus, Northridge is establishing itself as a singular community in the Valley—a community with a unique vision and purpose.

## Healthy Living Campus Concept Area

For the south end of the district, residents expressed interest in further cultivation of a Healthy Living Campus around Northridge Hospital. The area's commercial focus is on the rapidly growing medical sector. Northridge, as a whole is the beneficiary of this huge regional asset, that offers security and resources to the community along with numerous professional careers. The hospital and surrounding commercial properties present an opportunity to combine the healthy living and a world-class healthcare complex with specialties such as gerontology, assisted living and childcare needs.

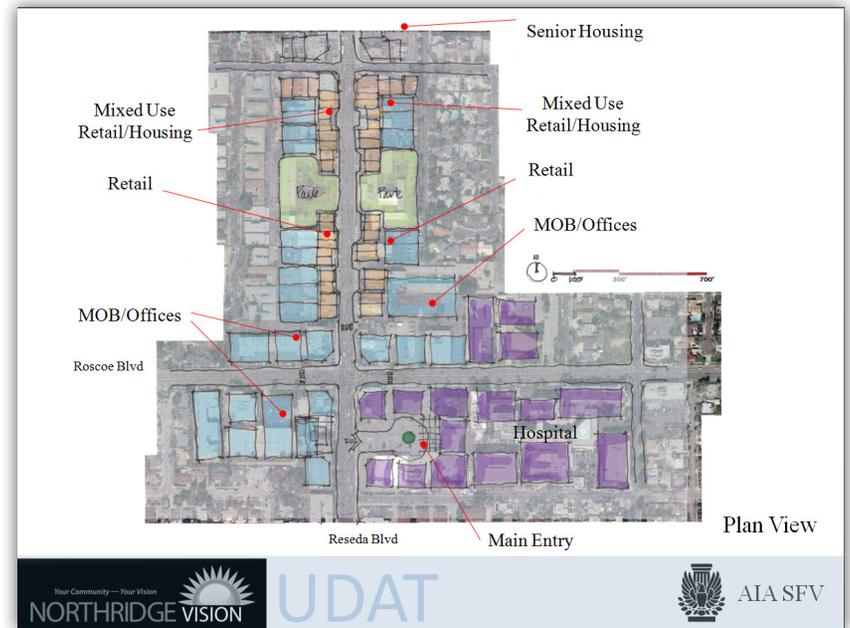
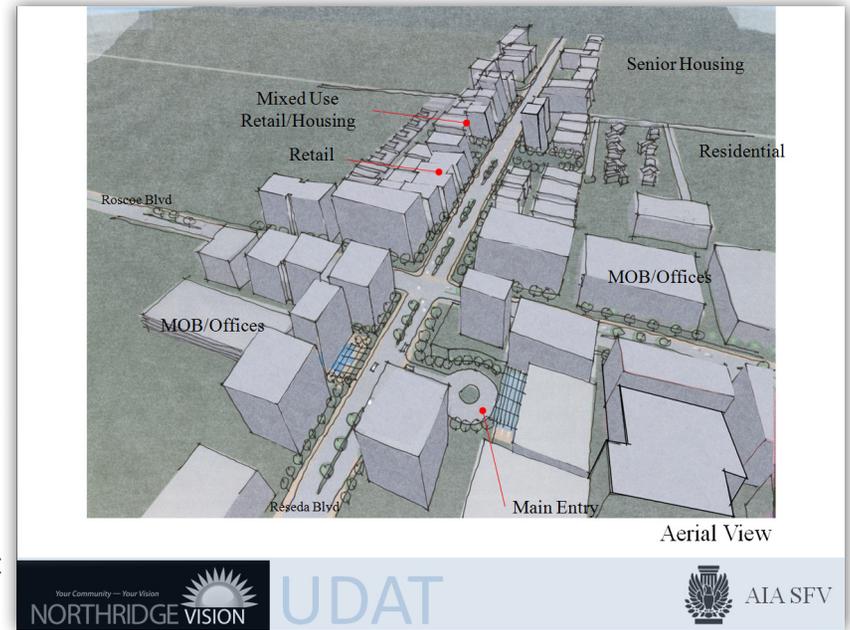
The hospital area also has strategic value owing to its core assets. The 411-bed hospital is one of the largest employers in the area. The hospital employs approximately 2,000 persons and has 800 physicians with admitting privileges.

They are looking to expand to accommodate more activities, bringing with them related healthcare professions and careers. The nascent Healthy Living Campus area extends from Cantara Street on the south to Chase Street on the North. Nearby CSUN has also made a commitment to serving the health needs of the Northridge community through its Institute for Community Health and Wellbeing.

The future trend in medical practices is for an increasing number of group practices. It is reasonable to assume from these

standards that the number of employees related to the physician practices tied to Northridge Hospital ranges from approximately 2,500 to a median closer to approximately 3,500 employees. In total, we can reasonably estimate that approximately 6,300 employees are directly related to the hospital and its physicians. The indirect economic impacts of this center represent a significant opportunity.

Visitors to the hospital and medical office buildings plus personnel related to services tied to the operations of their buildings can be added to the impact of the hospital. Other health care businesses that exist or could potentially exist in the Health District are: laboratories, pharmacies, imaging, physical therapy, medical supplies and professional practices such as podiatry, dentistry, ophthalmology, outpatient surgery centers, psychiatry, counseling, wellness centers and other health related enterprises.



Additionally, skilled nursing, elder care, and senior housing are facilities that benefit from proximity to an acute care hospital. It is clear from the numbers of employees and related businesses and practices that the hospital generates that Northridge Hospital is a major economic engine in Northridge.

Yet, over the years the area surrounding the hospital has lost surrounding restaurants and businesses that directly served the hospital and its visitors. The location of Facey Clinic on the corner of Roscoe and Reseda Boulevards, for example, was originally the site of a coffee shop that was heavily patronized. Other than medical offices and some fast-food outlets, there are few non-medical services related to the hospital and the thousands of employees, physicians, visitors and patients who traffic the area daily.

The future of this area will, in all likelihood, be driven by the hospital with the support of the community. The viability of the hospital and its facilities from a long-term vision is dependent on its ability to expand and replace itself on its very limited campus. That ability is constrained by the existing zoning which evolved from an explosion of affordable housing in an area that had been agricultural. Since the potential of the hospital district is closely aligned with the viability and long-term survival of the hospital, a vision for the Community Design Overlay is an opportunity to modify the limiting conditions of existing zoning restrictions to support the Hospital's long-term role and benefit to the community.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Joel Jaffe, AIA, Excerpt from the work of the Urban Design Assistance Team



Well-planned group housing and facilities can enhance the aesthetics of the community

## Healthy Living Lifestyles

As with many mid-century communities, there is an expanding group of homeowners interested in retiring and downsizing. Forty-four percent of Northridge residents have lived in their homes more than 20 years, and 66 percent more than 10 years.

While generally wanting to continue to live in Northridge, there was also a desire to sacrifice some space for “place.” This supports the cultivation of mixed-use housing within the community but closer to services and amenities, ideally in pedestrian-oriented districts. An added benefit is co-location of such housing in the area adjacent to the Healthy Living Campus area.

Situated adjacent to Northridge Hospital Medical Center, this area is convenient to the growing cluster of medical services and healthcare facilities that surround it. Village-style settings can provide a more compact form of housing and minimize the need for driving and car trips. This works especially well in areas served by comprehensive public transportation systems.

## Recreation and Trails

Stakeholders expressed an interest in increasing the number of bicycle lanes, trails and paseos. Hiking trails abound in the mountains to the north, with many of the trailheads in the Porter Ranch area. Since vacant properties are virtually non-existent in the Northridge Community Plan area, the most obvious location for establishing any kind of new trails in the short term would be the easements under existing power lines and along the banks of the Aliso Creek tributary to the Los Angeles River.

With paving or hardscape or mixed surfaces, these could be used for off-road bike paths, jogging or walking. It is also possible to create paths and trails on which electric carts could be used for a more serene form

of transportation among different areas of the town. Increased accessibility through interconnected paseos would help relieve dependence on cars for shorter trips.

The City of LA-managed Northridge Recreation Center offers an 400 person capacity auditorium, barbecue pits, lighted baseball diamond, lighted indoor basketball courts, lighted outdoor basketball courts, children’s play area, community room, indoor gym, picnic tables, outdoor heated seasonal pool, lighted soccer field, and lighted tennis courts.<sup>1</sup> This is also the site of the annual (budget-permitting) Salute to Family Recreation Festival, and the Dodger Dreamfield.

<sup>1</sup> Northridge Recreation Center, City of Los Angeles Department of Recreation & Parks, <http://www.laparks.org/dos/recreation/facility/northridgeRC.htm> Retrieved 11 May 2011



Sketch-Senior Housing



Northridge Metrolink Station at Wilbur and Parthenia



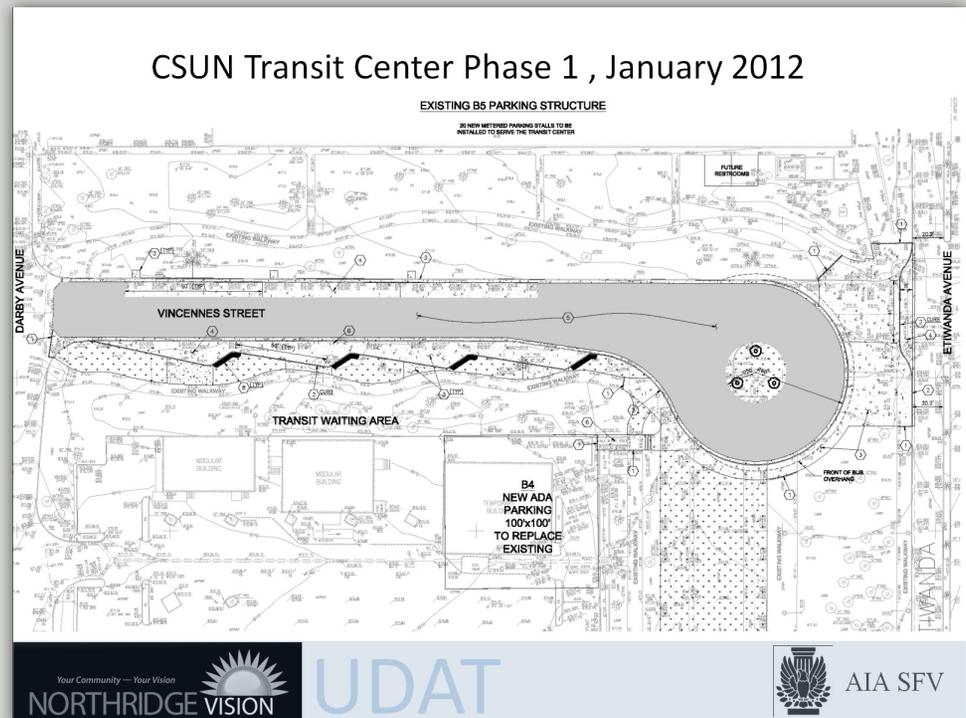
Meridian Place Apartments - Larger Scale Development

## Transit-Oriented Districts

The Metrolink station at Parthenia and Wilbur would likely serve better if it were moved out to Reseda Boulevard. With a higher profile, it would be more of a regional transportation hub. It provides access and convenient public transportation to all of Los Angeles and Southern California.

The new CSUN transit center on Vincennes Street is located within two blocks of the Meridian Place Apartment project, making this an ideal location for future transit-oriented development. This is the place where regional planners suggest higher densities belong.

Given the lower intensity of development in the Uptown area to the north, many of the properties are underutilized, providing opportunities for more mixed-use projects. Consideration should be given to remodeling and renovation of existing structures in ways that would conform to pedestrian orientation—and to the addition of retail and entertainment venues.



## Historic Old Town Northridge Concept Area

The area of Reseda Boulevard between Chase and Parthenia Streets is conceptually referred to as Old Town Northridge. This area is an excellent place to co-locate senior housing and assisted living facilities. With ready access to a transit system, shuttles, and being walking distance from medical care, it is an ideal candidate for a transit- and pedestrian-oriented district. This will require the preservation and improvement of existing assets, along with the development of interesting cultural resources, restaurants and retail stores.

Converting to mixed or residential uses shouldn't present a challenge for properties that are already located in commercial zones. Another advantage including residential zoning is that the floor area ratios could be increased to make investments more feasible; and it is less likely to impact adjacent residential areas.

In order to inspire the type of investment needed, envelope entitlements could also be offered to make these Vision-friendly uses attractive in this section of the community plan. In all cases, aesthetics are the community's reward, and substantial frontage setbacks, landscaping and streetscaping need to be part of the plan and conditions for new structures—in conformity with the community design guidelines.

## Uptown Northridge Concept Area

The Uptown Northridge planning area is located between Lassen and Devonshire Streets and is a quieter, more pastoral setting. The uses are somewhat mixed, but more in a horizontal layout. Multi-family housing, apartments and condominiums co-existing side by side with commercial, offices and retail. While the uses in this area are less intense, they do blend into the University Village area, and have seen the advent of higher intensity commercial and mixed use, such as the five-story Meridian Place Apartment projects.

In order to inspire the type of investment needed, envelope entitlements could also be added in this portion of the Community Plan update. In all cases, substantial frontage setbacks, landscaping and streetscaping need to be part of the plan and conditions for new structures—in conformity with any Community Design Overlay.

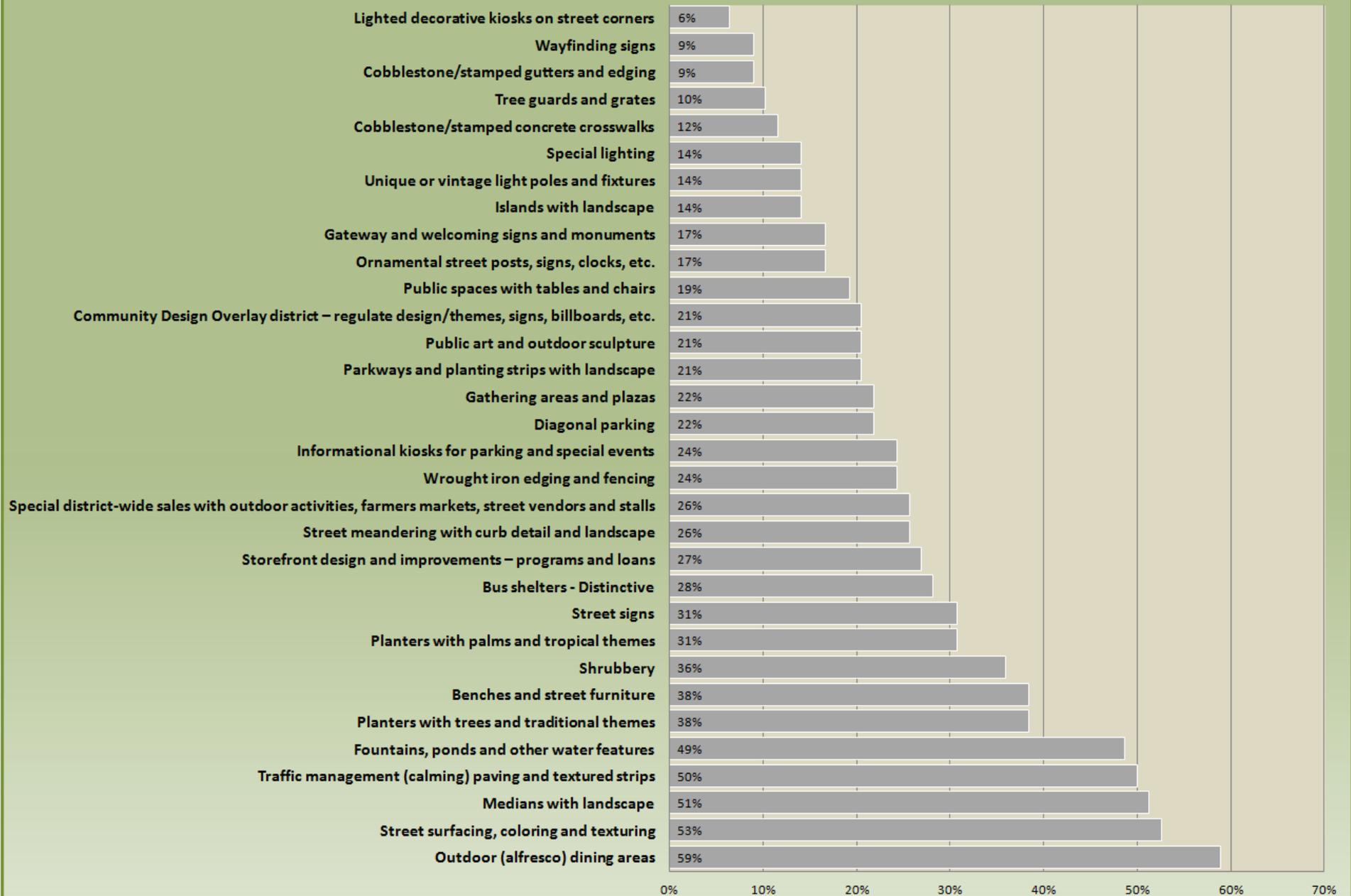
Restaurants, coffee shops, cafes and bistros are found at the core of nearly every pedestrian-oriented district. In the case of coffee houses like Starbucks, even a single establishment can often create its own pedestrian-oriented district. Extended hours cafes, coffee shops and sports bars can build pedestrian uses by catering to students and faculty who study and work around the clock. Increasing the “college town” feel of Northridge is the key. For the theatre crowd, there is also a need to increase the number of white-tablecloth restaurants in the vicinity of the Valley Performing Arts Center.

Some restaurants and specialty stores do exist that connect CSUN and Reseda Boulevard. It may serve to create a restaurant or merchants association that ties restaurants together and communicates to students, what they offer and how long they stay open, maintaining consistent hours.

It must be remembered that more than 50% of Valley residents speak a language other than English at home. That opens a whole world of opportunity for developing an internationally-themed restaurant area adjacent to CSUN—blending dining with a learning experience. Similar to an art crawl, business can host a “Taste of Northridge” event in the Village. Distinctive offerings and specials are useful in pulling consumers into the Central Business District and creating a cultural exchange.



## Worthwhile Improvements to the Business District



## Initiatives

### *Primary Steps for Implementation*

Most studies and plans fall short from a lack of follow-through. What becomes of them after they have been presented to the community and target audiences? Unfortunately, many excellent ideas and strategies—and the hundreds of hours of work that go into them—end up gathering dust on a shelf.

Northridge Vision proponents have resolved not to let this happen. Distribution, outreach and follow-up plans are needed that cover at least three years of activities after this plan is introduced. In the case of the Vision collaborative group, the participants already meet on a regular schedule, and this should continue. Each month, another element of the study should be focused on and discussed in some finer grain of detail.

We presently have little or no funding for investment or implementation, and there is no predicting with certainty what resources might become available. We also cannot know at this time, precisely how fortunes may change and what opportunities will present themselves. But we can rely on history, to be assured that opportunities do come along, and when they appear we have to be prepared to move decisively to make the most of them.

The role of the project team is to be faithful to the Vision, and to have strategies ready to maximize situations as they arise. They may be in a different part of town,

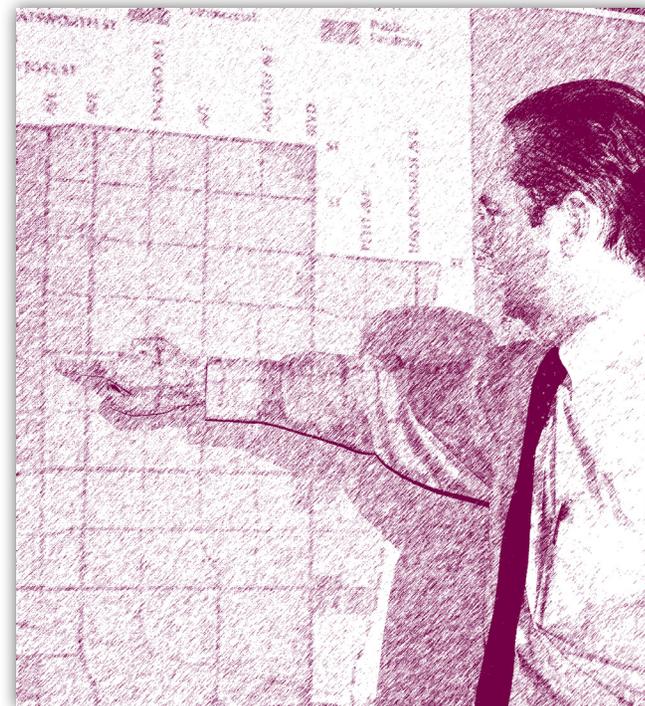
or for a different project element than we expect. But, so long as the endeavor fits within the principles and the basic concept of the Vision, the team should be prepared to seize the opportunity. This is the nature of civic intervention.

In the shorter term, early-stage implementation involves taking advantage of the “low-hanging fruit” as it is identified. This might involve coordinating with investors or businesses who are opening businesses. In some cases property owners may already be in the process of revitalization, landscaping or other improvements. These isolated cases can often be folded into and coordinate with the larger plan—sharing the Vision, and possibly coordinating some of the group’s activities with them.

It may be as simple as appropriating trees at no cost from the city, the University or a non-profit organization, and making arrangements for planting and ongoing maintenance. It is certainly within the reach of volunteers to find out what is available through various programs and organizations that might further our goals and objectives.

### *Collaborative Initiative*

The Collaborative Initiative for Northridge Vision is the main coordinating committee whose primary task is long-term continuity. As we learned with the Northridge Oasis Business Improvement District, persistence is key. Follow-up and continued



engagement for the planning horizons of five, ten and twenty years will be necessary to fully realize the goals of the Vision.

1. Continuity of Collaboration for Northridge Vision - Maintain an ongoing committee with a broadly-supported mission statement and fail-safe succession plan.

a. Develop and enhance centers and strips to provide an appropriate range of shopping, service, dining and entertainment amenities. Work toward “park-once” walkable districts.

b. Improve the regional “brand” recognition of Northridge Village and coordinate marketing strategies to establish it as a regional destination.

c. Conduct regular monthly meetings where goals and objectives are revisited and reaffirmed. Carefully monitor events and track progress.

d. Engage stakeholders through continual communications and occasional roundtables.

e. Periodically re-visit concept plan elements and make certain principles are being adhered to. Include neighborhood councils and city officials.

f. Maintain a high profile with a diligently maintained newsletter/contact list and appoint envoys to cultivate Vision-friendly businesses, investors, bankers and builders.

## University Village Business and Property Owners Association

Because the commercial corridor approaches two miles in length, it has been divided into four concept planning areas for visioning purposes. They may be collectively referred to as “University Village.” Businesses and property owners in the district need to establish an association/group that is focused entirely on the Reseda Boulevard corridor.

2. Business and Property Owners Association - Reseda Boulevard Initiatives

a. Sponsor a very strict cleaning and maintenance program. There should be zero tolerance for trash, dying or untrimmed landscape, unattractive objects in the public space, harsh or unprofessional signage, and unnecessary bars or gratings. Maintain an ongoing architectural/aesthetics team to monitor of maintenance and cleanliness.

b. Work with property owners and real estate brokers to cultivate a complementary tenant mix that provides a full range of amenities, shopping and entertainment opportunities. Create and maintain a tenant mix map of the University Village corridor.

c. Recruit individuals with artistic and architectural skills to develop facades, themes, planning districts, and design overlays, and to conduct architectural assessments. Establish a user-friendly approach to reach out to businesses and property owners.

d. Interface with chamber(s) of commerce and business organizations.

e. Use of the public space adjacent to businesses can act as an incentive for constructing and maintaining improvements such as street furniture, dining amenities, landscaping, etc. Use such public-private programming to gain access to the public spaces and create livable, walkable thoroughfares.

## University Village Planning Initiative

The planning group will work in concert with investors, developers, builders, civic leaders and elected officials to implement the Community Plan initiatives of the Vision. They will maintain liaison with the neighborhood councils to deal with permitting issues, development agreements and to monitor entitlements.

### 3. Planning Initiative

- a. Develop overall themes and strategies for the four concept planning areas of Northridge Vision. Publicize plans, communicate ideas and seek input.
- b. Conceptualize and cultivate an Arts & Theatre District with the Valley Performing Arts Center as its centerpiece. Adopt best practices and tenant mix models from other theatre districts.
- c. Explore opportunities and strategies for mixed-use projects in and around the commercial corridors and centers.
- d. Consider improvement of pedestrian accommodations, and seek ways to develop transit-oriented destinations to take full advantage of the CSUN Transit Center and Metrolink station.
- e. Coordinate streetscape and landscape with CSUN, the City of Los Angeles and other resource agencies and organizations. Encourage and offer assistance to Vision-friendly development.

f. Work with CSUN on campus edge strategies to create synergistic opportunities.

g. Monitor and assist in enhancing the Healthy Living Campus area in the vicinity of Northridge Hospital Medical Center.

h. Assist in developing Community Design Overlays and other planning devices to coordinate themes and designs in the Central Business District. Consult with stakeholders on Community Plan compliance and ongoing plan revision strategies.

i. Coordinate special districts, parking programs and traffic mitigation measures.

j. Develop programs where businesses, organizations, fraternities, etc. can sponsor and take responsibility for individual planters, street furniture and other streetscape elements.

## Fundraising & Resource Initiative

It is possible to reach some of the Vision goals using the power of good ideas, government resources and volunteer time. But physical improvements such as streetscape, maintenance and professional staffing will require funding. Funded organizations tend to fare better than those without an operating base. The ability to host meetings, develop reports and organize volunteers are all enhanced by the availability of resources.

### 4. Fundraising Initiatives

a. Assign team members to identify public and private grants, foundations, city programs and other resources to fund improvements.

b. Seek local benefactors and those who are already invested, who will take a hand in maintaining and enhancing the community.

c. Organize local campaigns, events and fundraisers to provide seed funding for the operations of Northridge Vision. These activities provide sustaining logistic support and a resource to grow participation.

d. Coordinate with government agencies to place Northridge in the queue to attract and participate in improvements and programs to the public spaces.

## Sustainable Industries and Economy

Many of the economic development issues are being dealt with by regional and county-wide organizations. Nonetheless, because of its location in the far north of the City of Los Angeles, it is important for Northridge to continually assert itself as a full participant. Northridge (and environs) needs to maintain an inventory of existing industries, emerging clusters and the strengths that sustain them. It is important to determine what can be done locally to develop jobs and careers and to foster economic growth.

### 5. Sustainable Industries, Emerging Clusters and the Economy

a. Develop core support to sustain existing industries, to grow emerging clusters and to attract new industries and technologies.

b. Involve the community in economic development through communications and with opportunities to participate in the ongoing visioning process.

c. Develop the Cal State University Northridge “brain trust” identifying strengths and cultivating advancements.

d. Provide incubation for entrepreneurs, with support for promising technologies and innovation. This could take place in partnership with CSUN.

e. Encourage and facilitate technology transfer and the marketing of local inventions and creations.

f. Organize and provide communications and support for Northridge industries that create, trade and export goods and services—including foreign or domestic export.

g. Monitor, anticipate and respond to local and regional economic trends.

h. Promote strong working relationships with chambers of commerce and regional business organizations.



Saint Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church located on a Northridge hilltop

## Livable Communities

At the core of Northridge Vision is the improvement of quality of life for those who reside here. Where land use, planning, and governance are concerned, change is usually an incremental endeavor. Ongoing relations with leadership, and positive proactive approaches to community stewardship are keys to achieving goals. By establishing public-private partnerships and working proactively, stakeholders can strengthen the local community and improve their quality of life.

### 6. Livable Communities - Quality of Life Initiatives

a. Cultivate and strengthen Neighborhood Councils to take a proactive role in the long term implementation of Northridge Vision.

b. Refine the Community Plan through far-sighted and enlightened updates. Promote the benefits of adherence to a common plan by facilitating communications among residents, businesses, property owners and developers.

c. Accommodate and manage growth and change in ways that benefit the community and its economy.

d. Assist in the planning and development of parks, recreation and trails—seeking to acquire green spaces for public use.

## Commercial Tenant Mix

e. Support the development and use of public transportation when feasible.

f. Encourage the transformation of streets and highways to make “Northridge Village” more attractive, walkable and inviting. Install and maintain streetscape, trees, parkways and other quality of life features in our public spaces.

g. Help to educate and encourage participation in environmental protection, water conservation, alternative power, responsible waste management and the cleansing and re-capture of storm water runoff.

h. Encourage the development of senior facilities and assisted care accommodations

i. Promote the quality and efficient delivery of essential government services.

There is presently no association in Northridge to focus on commercial tenant mix. The elements of a good tenant combination involve locating tenants complementary to the existing offerings so as to balance retail, dining, services, entertainment, and other amenities in a way that allows visitors to park once, and keeps them in the district for more than one activity. A big part of the “park-once” equation is creating the right sense of place. Themes and design overlays can contribute mightily to creating a pleasant and walkable ambiance.

A strong presence of “Indian, Chinese, Filipino and Korean” communities owning locally-serving businesses adds to the diversity of the current tenant mix on Reseda Boulevard. It would be helpful to interview business owners to help identify other trends and highlight certain categories of tenants moving in and out of the area. Operators of large shopping malls can provide the model. Their marketing usually focuses on a theme, a design concept, a prime location, and most of all their anchor tenants.

The anchor stores and attractions define a shopping center and create the draw of customers for all of the adjacent stores and services. The preferred approach would be to establish a merchants’ association for the corridor. A key element of this strategy is the education of property owners in the importance of renting to the “right” tenant—one who will be successful, and who can complement the existing mix. This, in turn will provide increased sales per square foot, better return on investment and longer term tenants.

Under the current practice, vacancies are often filled by the first business who comes along, willing to pay rent. All too often, the landlords are absentee owners with little knowledge or concern for the overall community. This becomes worse as the community ages.

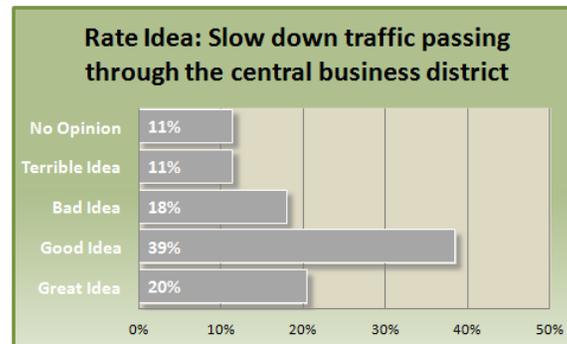
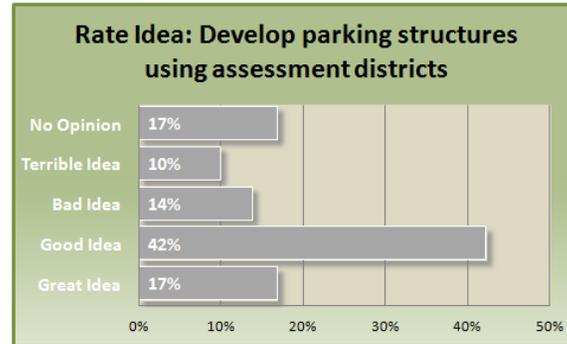


A simple system for tracking vacancies can begin almost immediately, and have major results in three to five years. Instead of replacing non-contributing tenants<sup>1</sup> with the first renter to come along who will pay the asking price, the visioning team can assist the landlord and his agents in determining what is needed to improve the local tenant mix, or at the very least, what won't have a negative effect. Once done, they can provide technical assistance for locating such tenants—using the same strategies that Planned Unit Developments (PUDs) and shopping malls use.

When surveyed, seventy percent of businesses attached a high degree of importance to interdependence on their neighbors. A healthy business environment is a shared responsibility. It is most important to cater to better tenants. The tenants themselves can be their own authority and formalize their agreement by signing a Participation Agreement.<sup>2</sup> This higher quality tenant mix is precisely what creates the success of larger mixed-use shopping centers and complexes. As an alternative to strictly commercial, industrial, or residential uses, “mixed use helps to create critical mass and a sense of place by afford-

<sup>1</sup> Non-contributing tenant: a business or entity that does not fit a human scale, does not provide goods, services or amenities normally found in a pedestrian-oriented district—or that otherwise does not support such a district.

<sup>2</sup> *Great Corridors, Great Communities* at p 28



ing the community a wider range of goods, services, and experiences at one location, thereby increasing connectivity and choice and reducing trip generation rates.”<sup>3</sup> Mixed-use also diversifies a district’s income stream making it less vulnerable to economic fluctuations.

<sup>3</sup> Booth, *Transforming Suburban Business Districts*, 224

## Approaches to Commercial Property Owners

Survey results suggest that commercial property owners and businesses in the Central Business District are willing and, indeed eager to improve their properties and the surrounding public spaces. They need the assurance that the Vision is real and viable, and that they will not be alone in their efforts. While some concern was shown over the termination of the Northridge Oasis Business Improvement District, this was not seen as insurmountable.

In areas like Northridge, one of the biggest problems is the wide range of ownership, and relatively small average parcel size, resulting in fragmentation of the land in the commercial district. This makes land assembly quite difficult in the absence of a Community Redevelopment Agency<sup>4</sup> or similar strategy. Recently Land Assembly Districts (LADs) have been proposed as a possible alternative.

Michael Heller and Rick Hills argue that “eminent domain for economic development is both attractive and appalling.” They believe that “states need the power to condemn because so much land in America is inefficiently fragmented. The economic and moral intuition underlying LADs is simple: when the only justification for assembly is over-fragmentation of land, neighbors should be able to decide collectively whether their land will be assembled.

<sup>4</sup> Community Redevelopment Agencies were discontinued in the State of California in early 2012

Our legal theory solution is equally simple: use property law to retrofit communities with a condominium-like structure tailored to land assembly. Let's try giving those burdened by condemnation a way to share in its benefits and to veto projects they decide are not worth their while."<sup>5</sup>

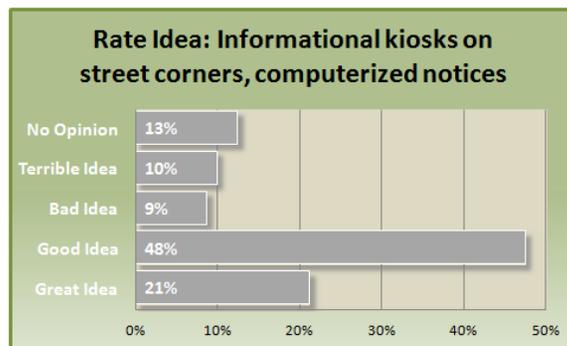
Another solution, proposed here, would be a voluntary subscription of adjacent landowners to an optioning syndicate that doesn't activate until a predetermined threshold is reached. Property owners would have to sign-on before a buyer was found, reducing the holdout schemes common to land assembly—being able to deliver a group of properties as a package, and equitably increasing the return for all the present owners. Arrangements of this type could be facilitated by the Northridge Vision or other public, private or non-profit organization.

With commercial properties throughout the region having been zoned and constructed in shallow strips, a number of problems arise in addition to over-fragmentation. Trying to conform to parking requirements becomes an issue for businesses where the more successful they become, the worse the parking congestion they create. Among the objectives for a pedestrian-oriented district is to have as many visitors as possible staying as long as possible. Another

<sup>5</sup> See Heller, Michael and Rick Hills, *Land Assembly Districts*, 121 Harv. L. Rev. 1465 (2008)

is the attraction of restaurants, food courts and coffee houses—which traditionally have the highest demand and requirements for parking.

The approach used in high-intensity applications such as the Third Street Promenade in Santa Monica, or Old Town Pasadena, is the construction of multi-level parking structures to complement the demands of higher density districts. These can be above or under ground and actually provide a source of revenue to the local agency. They usually provide free or moderately-priced parking to patrons who might otherwise be put off by parking difficulties. There are a number of ways to finance such projects, including parking districts and in the shorter term, privatized or general fund projects. This opportunity provides an incentive for existing landowners to participate in the district's developmental strategies.



## Increased Values and Tenant Success

Attention to creating meaningful places yields what urban planner Geoffery Booth calls a place-making dividend, “the pride and satisfaction that accrues to the community when districts possess a strong sense of place that in turn results in high levels of repeat visitation and increasing rents, retail sales, leasing demand, and real estate capital value.”<sup>6</sup>

Traffic counts are important considerations for tenants and owner-occupied businesses. In situations like Northridge, there is a high percentage of pass-through traffic. These drivers are likely to be oblivious, for the most part to businesses along their commute. The quality and aesthetic appeal of the business district, and the calming of traffic passing through, will have a much more profound effect on business attraction than sheer volume.

Property values will increase in concert with an increase in rental values and inversely to vacancy rates. But it is not always the case that new development will increase the supply and decrease rents. An area that is improving and replacing out-moded uses will generally be seen as more desirable, creating an economic updraft effect. Triple-A tenants tend to cluster in popular districts, and mom-and-pop tenants are anxious to follow. They leverage the AAAs as anchors in the same way shopping

<sup>6</sup> Booth, *Transforming Suburban Business Districts*, 3

malls play off of their anchor stores. The per-square-foot revenues are almost always higher in well-organized shopping centers and malls. Part of the charm of commercial strips can be the eclectic mix of tenants. But, when the tenant mix is unattractive or discontinuous, the effect can be lost on targeted patrons.

## Contacts for Implementation

The best starting point for outreach and intervention is with the largest property owners. They tend to have the most at stake, and the most to gain. They generally have access to capital and are sophisticated enough to understand the strategies being proposed. Not only are they apt to participate, but can even turn out to be the strongest advocates for the Vision.

There is a tipping point on private redevelopment initiatives—and it doesn't have to be much more than about ten percent. Thus, getting some of the larger owners on board can be a real boost. Smaller owners and businesses tend to have more trust in the initiatives if they see the big ones taking the first steps. Notwithstanding that, a large group of enthusiastic stakeholders can also be very effective. What cannot be achieved with money, can often be accomplished with elbow grease—and an enthusiastic cadre of issue champions.

Local banks and financial entities are also important to bring into the equation. Much of what needs to be accomplished will take a combination of private and public capital along with debt financing. Banks with an inside understanding of the project, and the objective external ability to place goals into workable financial terms, can identify the financial products needed to carry plans into reality.

## CSUN as the Hub of Northridge

At this time when CSUN is in the process of implementing its *Master Plan*, the town of Northridge has a special opportunity to dovetail their efforts with CSUN's goal of morphing from a commuter campus to becoming more of a residential campus. The University is committing fully to student life by taking steps to make the campus more of a "24/7" destination. The new campus recreation center encourages students to spend more time on campus for purposes other than studying.

There is a precedent for public university-led neighborhood revitalization efforts and CSUN can seize this opportunity. As a destination for both students and community members, there are any number of ways the University can establish communications with residents and businesses already in the area.

- Host Valley Workforce Development sessions.
- Foster mentorships from senior and retired community members to retain intellectual capital.
- Recruit retired business leaders to give guest lectures in business classes.
- Encourage interaction by projecting CSUN into the community with informational kiosks.
- Develop exchange with the Village

area in marketing to students.

- Offer Research and Development opportunity partnerships between CSUN and local businesses. CSUN currently has a partnership with UCLA in Regenerative Medicine that is preparing stem cell researchers.
- Centralize parking to place businesses within walking range.

Community events hosted by the University such as a distinguished speaker series through the CSUN library can also play a role in enhancing relationships with the larger civic community. The University should seek out and adopt best practices that are currently working for other institutions, such as technology transfer, incubators and cultivation of entrepreneurship.

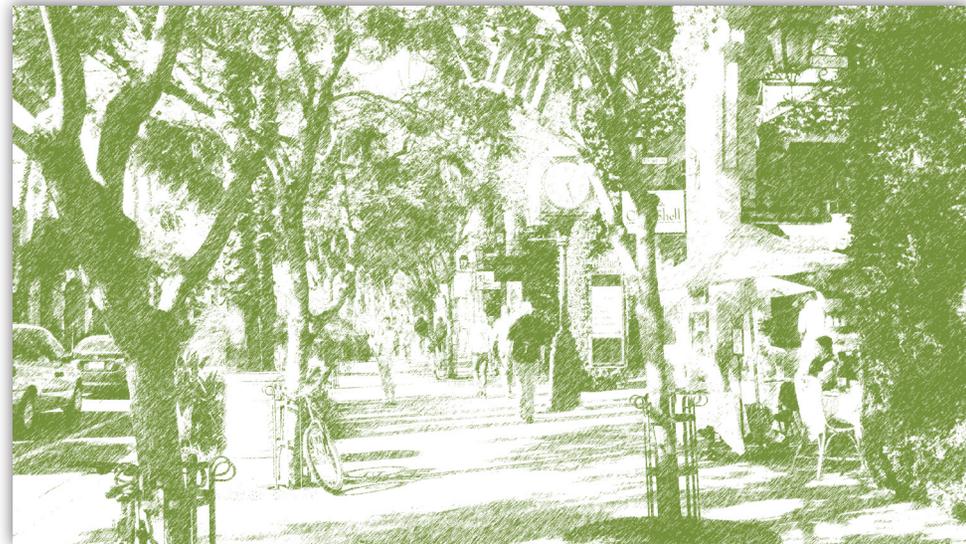
Education resources can bring together families and students. Outreach can close the gap between industry and education—capturing the potential for incubator-type partnerships to invest in core competencies and green technologies. An example of outreach could involve creating an entrepreneur lab or incubator conceived, engineered, and built along one of the CSUN gateway avenues, where students, faculty, and industry take projects from start to finish and students learn cross-disciplinary collaboration.

CSUN has the ability to plug-in to the city's transit system and link students to the region's infrastructure. Northridge residents benefit from having this transportation demand within their market area. It leads to increased frequency and quality of transit services.

One of the unfortunate associations people make with college towns is boisterous, disruptive student life. Fraternity and sorority housing has to be viewed from the community perspective. Protocols are needed to foster this segment of American life, but the housing and associated activi-

ties need also to be buffered from stable neighborhoods to prevent disruption.

Opportunities for the 40,000 CSUN students and faculty to participate in a vitalized "University Village" are virtually unlimited. The school is an incredible core market for goods, services and activities. They are also a powerful resource for cultural events in the community. Additional programs might involve displaying student art in local galleries, and showcasing musical talent in local venues.



## Main Street Magic

Main streets provide access to businesses, residential roads and other nearby properties. Main streets serve pedestrians, bicyclists, businesses and public transit, with motorized traffic typically traveling at speeds of 20 to 40 miles per hour. Main streets give communities their identity and character, they promote multi-modal transportation, support economic growth, and may have scenic or historic value.<sup>7</sup>

### Reducing the Number of Lanes

Reducing the number of lanes can provide space for features such as wider

<sup>7</sup> See *Main Streets: Flexibility in Design and Operation*, (Caltrans, Sacramento, CA - 2005) pp 8-13

shoulders, bicycle lanes, sidewalks, and medians, or the addition of left turn pockets or parking. Reducing the number of lanes may reduce the potential for collisions or may decrease speeds and smooth traffic flow. However, reducing the number of lanes may also reduce the vehicular level of service, which may or may not be acceptable to the community.

### Reducing Lane Width

Wider lanes tend to improve driver comfort. However, on highways that serve as main streets, particularly those that operate at lower speeds, lane widths narrower than the standard 12 feet may be

appropriate. Reduced lane widths, used in combination with other traffic calming measures may encourage slower speeds, which is desirable for an active main street. Where existing right of way is limited, reducing lane widths can provide additional shoulder width to accommodate bike lanes, sidewalks and alternative parking configurations.

### Visual Cues

Visual cues help drivers recognize that they are entering an area of increased pedestrian, bicycle or other non-motorized activity, and in combination with other traffic calming measures may help reduce vehicle speeds. Visual cues encourage motorists to park, and to experience the main street amenities. Examples of visual cues that can reinforce this transition include:

- Gateway treatments, which are typically signs or monuments
- Sidewalks, typically accompanied by curb and gutter, to designate portions of the roadway for motorized and non-motorized users
- Raised medians or traffic islands, typically installed as an access management technique and to provide a pedestrian refuge area or accommodate landscaping
- Landscaping in medians, sidewalk planting strips and planters



- Ornamental lighting, planters, benches, trash receptacles, light poles, traffic signals, overhead banners, artwork, bus shelters and other street furniture
- Pedestrian signs
- Textured crosswalks, rumble strips or intersection pavement
- Limit lines set back from crosswalks
- Transportation Art
- Roundabouts

Many communities are beginning to recognize the traffic calming effect of properly designed and strategically located circular intersections. Although their use has been promoted primarily to improve safety, the modern roundabout can provide numerous advantages over conventional intersection traffic control treatments.

- Roundabouts can reduce the number and severity of collisions for all highway users. Additionally, roundabouts help to address other benefits such as those described above<sup>8</sup>
- Reduce speeds of vehicles—calming traffic
- Improve access and traffic circulation, maintaining a more constant

<sup>8</sup> Additional information on roundabouts can be found in Caltrans Design Information Bulletin (DIB) No. 80-019 and the FHWA publication: *Roundabouts: An Informational Guide*, March 2000

- throughput
- Reduce delay by replacing stoplights
- Reduce the number of through and channelization lanes
- Provide more space for bicycle and pedestrian facilities
- Improve pedestrian mobility
- Reduce fuel and/or energy consumption with less stop and go
- Lower vehicle emissions with less stop and go
- Provide unique opportunities for landscaping and other aesthetic treatments
- Have the unique ability to serve as a physical and operational gateway

### Lower Speed Limit

Speed reduction can be achieved with limit signage or by creating a transition area using design elements and/or traffic control devices that will naturally reduce the speed of the motorist.

### Synchronized Signals

Speed is not necessarily the key to traffic capacity. An unbroken flow at 25 miles per hour may provide more throughput than a 35 mile per hour street with poorly coordinated signals. On most arterials, the “effective speed” is far less than the posted speed. It’s the “jackrabbit” phenom-



enon of racing from signal delay to signal delay that fosters inefficiency. A series of intelligently-synchronized traffic signals can maintain the vehicular Level of Service (LOS) and still facilitate throughput even at reduced speeds. Computerized systems are best, to accommodate changes in the traffic flow and demand that occur throughout the day.

### ***Raised Median Islands***

Raised median islands have multiple functions: they provide pedestrian refuge, reduce the scale of the main street, and with added landscaping, make the public space aesthetically more pleasing. Raised medians also channelize left turn pockets and create a unique visual identity for the corridor. Raised median islands help reduce conflicts between pedestrians and vehicles by allowing pedestrians to cross only one direction of traffic at a time.

### ***Parking Configuration***

Parking is necessary to support business and main street uses, and may also have a traffic calming impact. Caution must be used to protect bicyclists traveling on the roadway and pedestrians or disabled persons who may not be tall enough to be seen above a parked vehicle.

Diagonally-angled parking will accommodate more parking spaces on the main street. Angled parking can be forward (nose-in) or reverse (back-in). It can create problems due to the varying length of vehicles and sight distance limitations associated with backing up against oncoming traffic, a maneuver that is also required for parallel parking.

### ***Broad Sidewalks***

The preferred sidewalk width in a downtown environment is a minimum of 10 feet. This width allows pairs of pedestrians to walk side by side or to pass comfortably. More width is desirable to accommodate

high volumes of pedestrians, bus shelters, streetscape, sidewalk cafes and other outdoor uses. On-street parallel parking and landscaped sidewalk planting strips can provide a welcome buffer between pedestrians and moving vehicles.

### ***Unique Pedestrian Crossings***

What applies to pedestrian crossings also applies to other types of non-motorized crossings, such as equestrians and bicycles. Pedestrian crossings include: markings, signing, overhead signing where the main street displays numerous business signs and other distractions, raised islands for pedestrian refuge, and traffic control systems (e.g., flashing beacons with warning signs or in-roadway warning lights).

### ***Intersections***

Pedestrian crosswalk markings are installed to channelize pedestrians into a preferred path at intersections and give visual cues to drivers. They may be painted on, stamped or laid with masonry. In slower speed areas they can also include rumble strips to remind motorists that they are in a reduced speed pedestrian-oriented area. They can be as simple as two parallel lines or contain any number of artistic features. They can also contain animation and flashing lights to catch the attention of traffic.

### ***Mid-Block Crossings***

Mid-block pedestrian crossings are generally unexpected by motorists. Particular care should be given to roadways with two or more traffic lanes in one direction as a pedestrian may be hidden from view by a vehicle yielding the right-of-way to the pedestrian.



### *Textured Pavement in Pedestrian Crossings*

In general, stamped concrete and asphalt concrete are preferred over brick or unit pavers when a textured/aesthetic surface treatment is desired. Brick or unit pavers may cause more noise, have a higher initial cost, and in particular, have a potential high cost of maintenance.

### *Sidewalk Bulbouts and Curb Extensions*

Sidewalk bulbouts are extensions of the curb and sidewalk into the roadway, usually at intersections. They often have textured/aesthetic surface treatment and are integrated into the streetscape design, allowing sidewalk widening, placement of street furniture, landscaping, kiosks, statuary, bike racks, bollards and other design features. They provide pedestrians greater visibility when approaching crossings; decrease the distance pedestrians must cross; and give visual cues to slow traffic.

### *Street Lights*

Unique and decorative street lights are major features in town centers and convey a certain look and feel: modern, retro, antique, etc. Main streets should have adequate lighting, in any case, for pedestrians to feel secure at night. Decorative lighting fixtures enhance a downtown's unique sense of place.

### *Street Furnishings*

Street Furnishings include benches, kiosks, bollards, bike racks, planters, etc. Street furnishings provide pedestrians a place to rest and socialize. To enhance pedestrian activity, a main street may include places to sit, such as benches, low walls, planter edges or wide steps. The presence of pedestrian gatherings reminds motorists that streets have other public uses.

### *Street Landscaping*

Street landscaping makes downtowns more livable, beautiful and unique to the town. Quality landscaping along the roadway, close to the highway or in medians can increase driver awareness of the immediate environment and may alter driver behavior, resulting in slower speeds and a safer main street.

A row of trees may calm traffic by making the road appear narrower. Street trees add an attractive canopy over the main street and may increase comfort for pedestrians. They create comfortable spaces and soften lighting. They cool streets in the summer, and provide a windbreak in the winter. Trees can also create distinctive identity and seasonal interest.

### *Banners and Decorations*

Banners, decorations and temporary signage over and within street rights-of-way are common for events sponsored by local agencies and nonprofit organizations. Non-Decorative Banners are intended to convey a message such as the occasion of an event or activity and may be frowned upon. In Los Angeles, there are limitations in the amount of text or advertising that is permitted in proportion to the overall size of a banner.

Decorative Banners are intended to convey brief text or logos identifying local agencies and organizations. Banners are most effective when the graphics and text are simple enough to be viewed and understood in the split second that drivers have to glance at them. Larger creative and more professional graphics can be used to complement the streetscape or set the mood for special events. Text is not always required.



## Gateway Monuments

A gateway monument is any freestanding structure or sign, not integral or otherwise required for the street facilities that communicates the name of a community or area. These are more than just a clue that you are entering a special district or town center. They would use text such as “University Village Welcomes You.”

## Combined Parallel Parking and Angle Parking

It is possible to promote the look and feel of a village by using a careful mix of parking styles. As discussed elsewhere, diagonal parking could be used on one side of the street and parallel on the other, without reducing the total number of traffic lanes.

The parking would vary from side to side by striping the traffic lanes to deflect occasionally, allowing for a more leisurely drive on a meandering street. By interspersing curb extensions, bulbouts, medians, and heavy landscaping, the result is a definite sense that Northridge is a place, and that you have arrived. With parking re-configuration will come the opportunity to extend curbs, widen sidewalks and opportunities to dramatically enhance the streetscape.

## Diagonal Parking

Diagonal parking is a relatively simple and inexpensive modification to change the character of existing streets. Diagonal parking shortens the in-the-line-of traffic

distance for people crossing the street, and it garners support from businesses because it can add up to 40% more parking spaces than parallel.<sup>9</sup>

Transportation agencies have targeted diagonal parking, “removing it from innumerable main streets and commercial districts on the grounds that more room is needed to move traffic ‘safely’, which really translates to ‘speedily’.”<sup>10</sup> An experiment with diagonal parking in San Bernardino, California, doubled pedestrian volumes and increased the number of parked vehicles by 25%. Diagonal parking changed the personality of the street “from a bare, off-putting stretch to an intimate, welcoming urban environment.”<sup>11</sup>

## Reverse Angle Diagonal Parking

With angle parking on both the east and west sides of the business district, additional spaces could be created, while at the same time contributing to the architectural appeal and traffic calming of the district. It normally takes away one to two traffic lanes, which slows traffic, and the overall gateway effect puts visitors on notice that they are in a special part of the road. Most are familiar enough to know that this is a district where pedestrians take the street back from the automobile.

<sup>9</sup> *Streets as Places* at p 37.

<sup>10</sup> *Infra* at p 15

<sup>11</sup> *Infra* at p 62.

“Back-in/head-out diagonal parking is superior to conventional head-in/back-out diagonal parking. Both types of diagonal parking have common dimensions, but the back-in/head-out is superior for safety reasons due to better visibility when leaving. This is particularly important on busy streets or where drivers find their views blocked by large vehicles, tinted windows, etc., in adjacent vehicles in the case of head-in/back-out angled parking. In other words, drivers do not back blindly into an active traffic lane.

The back-in maneuver is simpler than a parallel parking maneuver. Furthermore, with back-in/head-out parking, the open doors of the vehicle block pedestrian access to the travel lane and guide pedestrians to the sidewalk, which is a safety benefit, particularly for children. Further, back-in/head-out parking puts most cargo loading (into trunks, tailgates) on the curb, rather than in the street.”<sup>12</sup>

The growing presence on American streets of sport utility vehicles (SUVs), with their bulky rear ends and (frequently) tinted windows may have spurred the trend toward back-in/head-out angle parking: when using conventional angle parking, drivers increasingly find themselves beside an SUV, with more difficult sightlines.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Kulash, W. M. and Lockwood, I.M. (2003) *Time-saver Standards for Urban Design*, 7.2—5, McGraw-Hill Professional, New York, New York.

<sup>13</sup> See *Back-in/Head-out Angle Parking*, Nelson\Nygaard Consulting Associates, San Francisco, CA, January 2005

## Connecting University Village to CSUN

One of our original goals with the Northridge Vision project is to connect the Central Business District of Northridge with the Cal State University Northridge campus. When driving, walking or cycling down Northridge's main street, Reseda Boulevard, visitors should be aware that there is a world-class university a mere block away.

While it may take some time to see the built environment evolve into a welcoming gateway, the most plausible way to begin the development of gateways is through the use of landscaping. Rather than creating a competitive streetscape and landscape, the best way to make the connection with the University is to coordinate with and adopt the theme already well developed by CSUN. Where implementation budgets are limited, the most cost-effective approach is to use as many of the existing assets as possible.

- Numerous public features and rights-of-way already exist in the form of parkways, sidewalks, streets, medians and street features.
- The public rights-of-way and features are virtually all owned or controlled by the City of Los Angeles, and this unity of control will facilitate efforts to coordinate themes.
- The rights-of-way along the Reseda Boulevard currently have little or no landscape, minimal streetscape or hardscape, and no coordinated theme. This provides us with fresh

opportunities to extend unified themes out into the public spaces.

- Landscaping is not inexpensive, but is one of the least expensive tools to use to develop a unified appearance for a community. Some of the capital ingredients may be obtained at little or no cost. But, it is essential to plan for operations and maintenance on an ongoing basis. There are few things less attractive than deteriorating street features and wilted landscape.
- Landscape and streetscape have the ability to reshape the look and feel of a community almost overnight.



## Envision 2035, California State University Northridge

### 2005 Master Plan Update

While the Central Business District has almost no streetscape or theme, CSUN has a very well developed and mature landscape, and a definite theme, as set forth in its *Landscape Master Plan*.<sup>1</sup> The CSUN *Landscape Master Plan* is focused on demarcating pedestrian pathways, developing tree-lined roadways and creating plazas and courtyards.

Currently, the landscape and its component parts contribute significantly to the aesthetic character of the campus—creating connections between landscape and structures, and producing a comfortable and human-scaled setting for educational activities.

Opportunities abound to tie-in to university themes, such as the Orange Grove, the Botanic Garden, the Rain Forest, and any of the many features or academic identities of CSUN. The University is moving toward improved connections and recognition at its edges, and this is a perfect complement to the community's goals.

In their *Illustrative Landscape Master Plan*, the University has already produced maps showing ways to extend their array of landscape features on four of the westward gateway streets all the way out to intersections with Reseda Boulevard—terminating at the corners with clusters of Canary Island Date Palms. These distinctive palms are more expensive than Southern California's ubiquitous fan palms, but they provide a much more dramatic and distinctive aesthetic, and would do well being interspersed with wide-canopy shade trees.

Date palm bosques are proposed for campus entries on the corners of Prairie Street and Plummer Street where they intersect with Reseda Boulevard. This provides for perfect anchor clusters of this robust variety of palm at key gateways. The secondary streets of Dearborn and Vincennes, which also intersect with Reseda Boulevard are proposed to be less prominent, but would carry through with the theme as well, being lined with signature landscape features.

The entries are also slated to feature campus brick and stone identification monuments, as a visual signal and entry icon. The Canary Island Date Palm was chosen for this role because it is perhaps the most noteworthy “signature” tree on the CSUN campus, currently being used to flank the lawn areas in front of Oviatt Library. At campus edges the bosques will include campus identification markers and will be augmented with low-maintenance and low-water ornamental grasses, shrubs and plantings.<sup>2</sup>

### The University Theme in the Central Business District

Because Los Angeles, and the San Fernando Valley were planned and zoned mostly in shallow strips, any streetscape design will necessarily be long and



<sup>1</sup> *Envision 2035, California State University Northridge 2005 Master Plan Update*, Chapter 5, AC Martin Partners, p. 145

narrow. This fits well with the “long vistas” being developed at CSUN. The gateway streets are narrow residential configurations that present a challenge to any design concept. The CSUN *Master Plan* also envisions the re-invention of the gateway streets to increase width, broaden sidewalks, and increase adjacent setbacks.

A key component of any pedestrian-oriented district is landscaping. This comparatively inexpensive element can make all the difference in the world. The Northridge Central Business District is no exception. The single biggest improvement, streetscaping, street and sidewalk improvements, could be underway well within the five-year planning horizon, giving an immediate lift to the community.

Canary Island Palms are an ideal feature for commercial boulevards. They can be combined with lower profile human scale foliage and creative ground coverings to minimize interference with architecture, themes and signage.

“Reseda Boulevard serves as the primary approach to CSUN from the north and west, but the University lacks a presence along this arterial roadway. The University should work with the local business community to enhance the image of the existing commercial corridor and establish

the Cal State University Northridge identity along the Boulevard.”<sup>3</sup>

Complementary lighting styles can provide additional opportunities for campus-oriented connections to Reseda Boulevard. Banners should be introduced along the roadways and gateway streets as feasible, with signage and accent date palm plantings and bosques at the intersections with Reseda Boulevard.

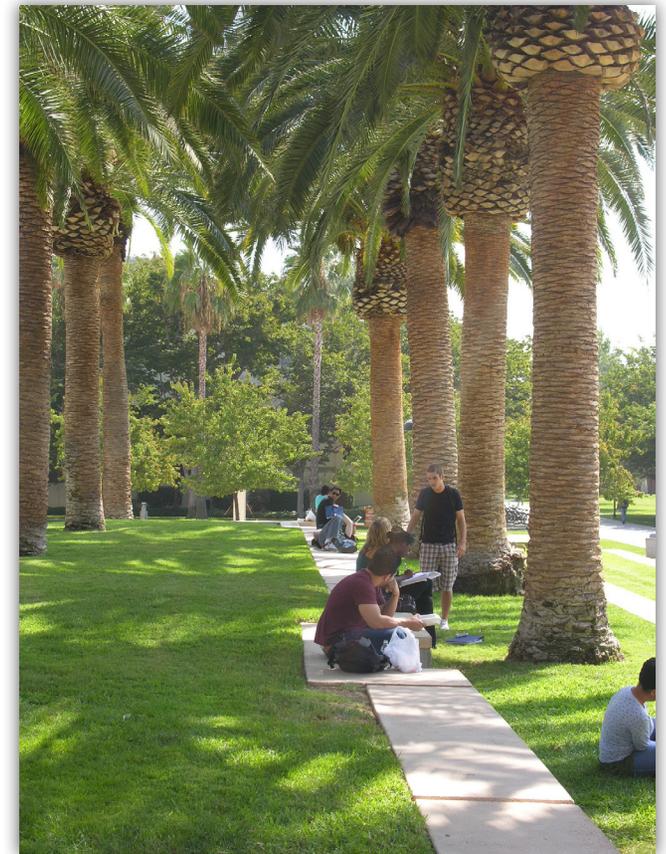
As the sidewalks curbs and medians are enhanced, more space will open for planting, and this presents an opportunity to populate the street scene with canopy trees that will enhance the feeling of lushness, and provide sanctuary from the sometimes searing summer heat and glare of the Valley’s summer sun.

Low shrubs and groundcovers should be planted adjacent to buildings to soften the edges of the structures. Wrought iron gratings and fencing can be placed strategically to protect the shrubs from damage and vandalism, while still allowing for sunlight and irrigation.

Seating areas should be located at key intersections, at curb extensions and bulb-outs and primary building entries, with adjacent trees providing shade and respite from the sun.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *Infra* at p 163

<sup>4</sup> *Infra* at p 163



Canary Island Date Palms on CSUN Campus

### *CSUN Edge Treatment - Visual Connections to the Community*

The recommendations made in the CSUN plan create a harmonious relationship between university facilities and functions at the perimeter of the campus and neighboring land areas. The campus edge landscape addresses each of these areas with specific planting programs which, taken together, create a consistent edge treatment that will enhance the identity of the University, provide views into the campus, and screen unwanted views with landscape.

In order to establish a strong sense of identity, the *Landscape Master Plan* proposals for campus edges makes use of existing plant materials. Along campus edges, existing mature tree plantings will be maintained and reinforced with new trees of similar species. Signature tree species will be combined with campus identification monuments to call attention to the campus entrances and create a similar look for all campus vehicle entries.

Existing plantings will be augmented with trees where necessary to fulfill the purposes of the *Landscape Master Plan*. Landscape will be used to screen unwanted views, while in other areas, trees should be planted and trimmed in ways that allow views into the campus, across open spaces and areas of interest.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *Infra* at p 157

The wisest approach for enhancing the University Village area is to extend the University's theme to the north and south along Reseda Boulevard by adopting a complementary landscape palette. Tying into the CSUN promenades will provide near-seamless pedestrian-oriented pathways and paseos. Leveraging in this fashion is the most efficient way to begin to aesthetically weave the University and CBD together. Hardscape features could also be designed using materials and shapes that capture the feeling of the University's architecture.

- Reinforce a university identity by using an integrated approach to landscape;
- Support the existing pedestrian circulation system and establish pedestrian circulation in areas currently not well-served;
- Establish human scale in the pedestrian environment;
- Respond to climatic considerations by establishing comfortable micro-climates and providing shade along walkways and in outdoor seating and gathering areas;
- Convey both the sense and the actuality of security and safety;

- Minimize the visual and acoustic impacts of automobiles and parking facilities and soften and/or screen undesirable features in the environment; and
- Conserve human and natural resources by recognizing the need for economy and ease of maintenance.<sup>6</sup>

Although the California State University Northridge campus occupies a large land area and is bounded by well-traveled arterial roadways on all sides, the University's identity along its edges is weak. In spite of a new program of campus identification monuments, the campus lacks the strong presence and visual identity appropriate to its size and role within the Northridge community.

This problem is compounded by the fact that the adjacent land uses vary significantly in character from one edge to another and incorporate single- and multi-family residential, institutional and low-rise commercial uses. These facts, in addition to the current placement of surface parking lots at campus edges, particularly along Zelzah Avenue and Darby Avenue, create a nondescript campus boundary that lacks the appearance of a well considered landscape plan.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *Infra* at p 146

<sup>7</sup> *Infra* at p 155

It is notable that there are no significant indicators along Reseda Boulevard that the CSUN campus exists. Similarly, the smaller streets leading east from Reseda Boulevard to the campus reveal almost no sign or signal of the presence of the campus.<sup>8</sup>

The University's most notable landscape characteristic is its tree-lined promenades. These areas provide a strong pedestrian-oriented framework to the campus. The role of trees in providing shade along

<sup>8</sup> *Infra* at p 157



CSUN Orange Grove Arts Walk

walkways and in seating areas is particularly important, given the hot, dry climate of the Northridge area.

The existing landscape approach makes use of signature tree species in some open-space areas and along some pathways. This provides a perfect model and tie-in between community and campus.

CSUN is recommending that “campus edges and informal open spaces be characterized by a more ‘pastoral’ landscape reminiscent of the natural landscape of Southern California. The intent is to provide a more sustainable landscape palette of long-lived, low-maintenance, drought tolerant plants for the campus that also serves to reinforce the University’s identity where the campus meets the community.

Native trees, such as Oaks, Sycamores and Pines should be the primary ‘background’ trees, with select plantings of native accent and flowering plants and shrubs. The ground cover will consist of ‘natural’ grasses, establishing a ‘signature’ landscape for the campus. Select use of native accent ground covers and shrubs are recommended, while the use of turf grass should be avoided in these edge areas and less formal open spaces.”

## PLANNED CAMPUS-COMMUNITY EDGE ENHANCEMENT

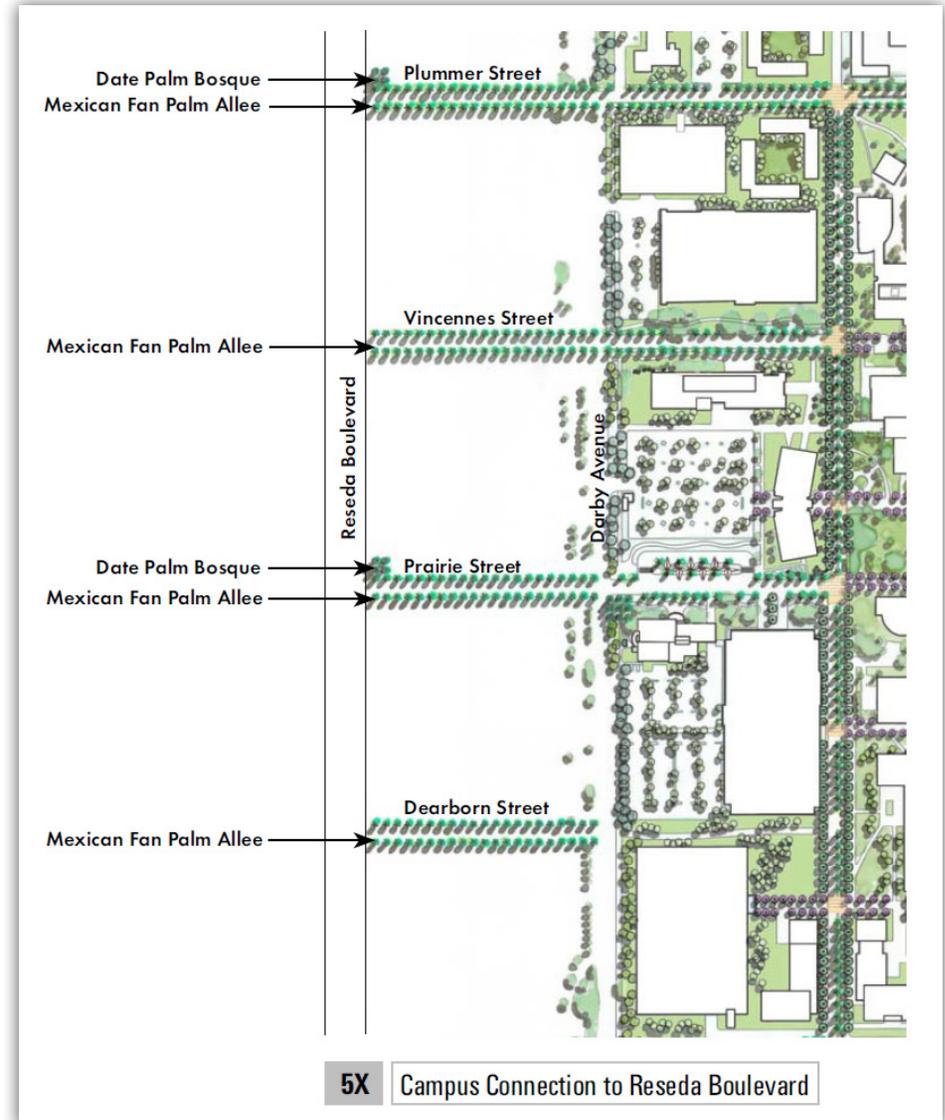
### Nordhoff St.

The parkway along Nordhoff Street is being widened and the Sycamore plantings extended along the entire frontage, using a double row of trees to create an inviting walkway and frame for the campus. In order to develop the more sustainable and natural landscape character proposed for the campus edges, the ground plane planting will consist primarily of “ornamental” grasses, with taller grasses used to screen adjacent parking areas. Existing power lines along Nordhoff Street will be placed underground as part of the development of the Valley Performing Arts Center.

### Zelzah Ave.

The signature identity edge treatment is being extended along Zelzah Avenue,

*CSUN Campus Landscape Plan  
adjacent to Reseda Boulevard*



ending at the new campus entry at Prairie Street. This formal planting of Sycamores along the Zelzah Avenue set-back is being backdropped where necessary by informal drifts of Pines and Sycamores to screen parking structures and any other adjacent uses which do not present a visually pleasing view into the campus.

### **Campus Areas**

The remaining edges of campus will consist primarily of informal drifts of Pines and Sycamores. Parking lots and service areas are being screened with denser plantings of pines, and more open drifts of Sycamores and Pines are being used in key view corridors and open spaces. The proposed signature ornamental grasses are being planted along all campus edges. As feasible, berms and taller grasses should be used to screen parking and service areas.

### **Power Lines**

Removal - Although a costly undertaking, the massive web of overhead power lines ought to be removed. This is an eyesore that shouldn't exist in any community, much less in a pedestrian-oriented district. Over time, local residents develop blind spots for such scars on the landscape. Unfortunately they make an immediate and unfavorable impression on visitors. The beauty of many southern California skies is destroyed by this sort of visual blight.



## **Concept: Transportation Objectives & Strategies**

David Murray,  
AIA Urban Design Assistance Team

### **Overall Goal**

The overall goal is to facilitate safe and convenient vehicular, pedestrian and bicycle circulation and commercial improvements within the Northridge Community. This is important in the vicinity of California State University Northridge and in local commercial and residential areas. In diverting through-traffic, strategies must minimize the adverse impacts and associated traffic volume changes to adjacent arterial routes.

### **Objective 1**

Actively promote the identification and development of both local and regional solutions to improve traffic safety and efficiency. This will lead to commercial expansion in the community. Interaction with CSUN will highlight associated benefits of the campus on the community.

### **Strategies**

1. Encourage participation on the local and regional transportation boards. The community should participate on local and regional transportation boards that seek to develop regional solutions that will reduce the problems of local

community traffic congestion, support the provision and enhancement of public transportation, and provide opportunities for additional funding for transportation projects in the community area.

2. Commence/continue consensus-building with the Los Angeles and San Fernando Valley transportation issues that must be addressed by all jurisdictions for more efficient traffic flow and safety.
3. The community should continue to cooperate in considering various transportation alternatives. Improvements to increase the capacity of arterials in the community area through the San Fernando Valley during peak periods and in emergencies or incidents should be consistent with the urban and state routes that are currently being considered in both a local and regional context.
4. Support projects that promote alternatives to single-occupant vehicles during the peak period on major transportation routes. On appropriate major transportation routes that enter the subject area, mass transit or one-way street systems during peak traffic hours should be considered to the extent that the right-of-way necessary for their renovation or construction does not significantly disturb adjacent established residential neighborhoods.
5. Encourage the connection of existing bus services to other mass transit routes and facilities. The local bus systems should provide a connection to the Metrolink system through the service to a more

appropriately situated Metrolink station than currently exists. Connections to such a station and bus routes to major activity centers such as the local shopping malls, commercial centers, CSUN, CSUN sports facilities, the new CSUN performing arts center, and the Van Nuys airport would significantly enhance the transit service provided to City of Los Angeles, San Fernando Valley residents.

### **Objective 2**

Encourage and accommodate safe vehicular traffic throughout the Northridge community.

#### **Strategies**

1. Ensure the safety of community area streets by incorporating traffic calming measures as needed. Currently there are no apparent safety systems in development. The community area can initiate a successful traffic safety program, taking measures to calm traffic.
2. Pursue new technologies that would improve safety on city streets. As new safety-enhancing transportation technologies are invented, the community should pursue the use of such technologies where applicable and when a significant increase in safety as a result of the implementation of new technologies can be expected. Such technology currently expanding across the US includes the calming effect of roundabouts and traffic circles. Not only does this system dramatically reduce vehicular speed and accident rate while

increasing traffic flow, but these systems increase visibility and accessibility to the commercial zones.

3. The community should initiate a program, with an emphasis placed on responding to local neighborhood public input in combination with the local commercial developers who are relied upon for support.
4. It is necessary for the business community to improve the access to and from the commercial areas that have highly congested entrances and exits and to blend private commercial access and driveways with the calmed traffic zones.
5. Properly designed and assessed connections that feed traffic through collector streets to arterials, and the consolidation of curb cuts are strategies that help improve access to and from businesses on arterial streets.

### **Objective 3**

Promote and accommodate “active transportation,” bicycling and walking as alternative modes of transportation within each area.

#### **Strategies**

1. Examine roadway segments near schools, houses of worship, parks, shopping areas, and neighborhoods to provide safe pedestrian routes. At appropriate locations along the community project street area, the provision of sidewalks, trails, pedestrian signals and crosswalks will help facilitate the safe travel of pedestrians. It is

especially critical to connect residential, commercial and CSUN areas with one another and with public facilities, businesses and services that residents and students need.

2. Develop sidewalks within residential and commercial neighborhoods of the community to promote safety for children, the elderly and the disabled, making neighborhoods and their access the commercial and the CSUN educational zone more pedestrian/ bicycle friendly. Sidewalks should be encouraged in residential areas where they will contribute to a safer pedestrian/ bicycle experience. Sidewalks and bikeways should be constructed in a manner that minimizes disturbance to existing residential, commercial and other existing landscape features. Many sidewalks, path and power line and flood wash trail segments have potential within the community, but are not usable or available for development because they do not connect with key segments. Missing segments should be completed with construction or public funding obtained through the private and public initiatives.
3. Complete an integrated pedestrian and bicycle trail system, with support facilities such as bicycle lockers, covered rest stations and drinking fountains, to encourage bicycling and walking to places of employment, CSUN, schools, shopping centers and neighborhoods. The community should identify specific trail improvement projects that would be

eligible for potential state and federal funding and take the necessary steps to pursue funding. Through the land development process for residential and commercial development, pedestrian and bicycle trail improvements, connections and support facilities should either be constructed by the local private land developers or provided by the City of Los Angeles.

#### **Objective 4**

Develop and present measures to deter cut-through traffic in the Reseda Boulevard area.

#### **Strategies**

1. Diversion and re-direction of existing through-traffic along the University Village section of Reseda Boulevard to other main arterials is necessary. In order for this to occur, it is necessary to improve levels of traffic service at many of the key intersections of arterials surrounding the Village area. The streets traversing the San Fernando Valley in the area of this project (such as Roscoe, Nordhoff, Reseda and Tampa) are congested arterial roads that are all utilizing poorly managed signalized intersections. Proper upgrading of key intersections with appropriate signage, turning lanes, signal phasing and the introduction of roundabouts, will minimize the potential for traffic congestion and will allow re-direction of traffic volume away from the NC traffic calming zone toward other major arterials; thus reducing the overall traffic

flow in the NC area.

2. Support neighborhood efforts to control cut-through traffic in the non-arterial streets. In neighborhoods where a cut-through traffic problem has been identified, traffic control measures such as roundabouts and traffic circles should be considered as a means to discourage speeding and cut-through traffic.

#### **Objective 5**

Encourage the use of public transportation as an alternative to the private automobile.

#### **Strategies**

1. Promote a regional approach to public transportation planning. The use of public transportation helps to conserve energy and provide an efficient, cost-effective alternative to the automobile. The community project should exercise leadership in inter-community efforts to address public transportation issues and ensure appropriate access to Metrolink stations and the Metro Orange Line for San Fernando Valley residents. Methods to encourage ridesharing and transit use on a local basis using methods such as parking code revisions and employer incentive programs should be pursued for the community area. Park and ride centers in suitable locations should be investigated and encouraged.
2. Existing bus services should be improved to maintain current ridership and to encourage new users. The community should strive to make riding the bus a pleasant experience by maintaining

reliable scheduling, providing bus shelters or benches where appropriate, posting real-time information at major stops, and making bus stops more visible. In addition, efforts should be made to encourage new ridership in all segments of the population, with particular attention to the elderly and disabled segments, through marketing campaigns and looking to expand service if fiscally viable.

3. Businesses should encourage employees to use public or other mass transit with subsidies to their employees. Business areas of the community will encourage redevelopment and attract larger employers if there is incentive to employers who provide transit subsidies to their employees.

### **Objective 6**

Obtain funding for transportation improvements from sources other than the existing sources.

#### **Strategies**

1. Participate in the regional process for evaluation and recommendation of projects to be applied for state and federal funding. Working as a group, regional agencies can procure funding for larger projects that can affect individual jurisdictions, especially smaller ones such as the community. Neighborhood Council staff and elected officials should work with LA City and regional agencies to identify projects in which community interests can be included.

2. Encourage the provision of transportation improvements in the LA City planning and development process commensurate with the type and level of development. City officials should vigilantly work to obtain transportation improvements that will mitigate the traffic impacts of new development and redevelopment as much as possible. If possible, revisions to city code designed to guarantee adequate transportation improvements is preferable to relying on negotiations during the planning and development process to obtain the improvements.
3. Explore other funding sources such as grants and public-private partnerships to develop transportation initiatives. Neighborhood Councils and elected officials should constantly be on the lookout for programs or opportunities that could be utilized to bring projects to fruition that otherwise would be difficult to fund using the community's normal sources of revenue.

### **Objective 7**

Design improvement projects to maximize the efficiency of the transportation system.

#### **Strategies**

1. Design roadway improvements to minimize idle time at intersections. The community and all the neighborhood councils should continue efforts to maximize road system efficiency such as synchronization of traffic signals along the arterial streets, limiting left-turn vehicle movements to controlled

intersections and designated lanes, free-flow right-turn lanes at key intersections, bypass routes around the commercial areas, introduction of roundabouts and traffic circles and where feasible, widening of the major arterials.

2. Make the existing bus system more functional and user-friendly. Aid the bus patron with real-time information. Examine local traffic counts and intersection analyses and implement measures to ensure the appropriate balance between efficient traffic flow and pedestrian safety. As the City of Los Angeles proposes to address the problem of traffic congestion on the major arterials with techniques such as signal synchronization, it will also become a priority to ensure that pedestrians are allowed to cross these streets safely. An "intelligent" signalization system that is responsive to "real time" traffic conditions and pedestrian activation of crosswalk signals should be designed to allow the timing of traffic lights to be interrupted and then returned to the set pattern.

### **Objective 8**

Locate clear signage to direct traffic around and through the Northridge Community.

#### **Strategies**

1. Signage efforts must be made to direct through traffic to bypass the commercial zones within the community. It is important that signage inside and outside of the community be designed and located so that motorists are

directed to through routes that are designed for high traffic volumes.

2. Appropriate signage should be provided to direct local traffic to destinations within the “Northridge University Village”. A unique signage program should be developed to clearly identify these limits at entry points along the arterial roadways. This signage program should include traffic signs as well as directional signage for key locations in the community such Shopping areas, CSUN, the PAC and other individual important sites.

### **Objective 9**

Improve the Reseda Boulevard area traffic flow so that it is a safer environment for vehicles and a pedestrian/bicycle-friendly environment for shoppers, students and tourists.

#### **Strategies**

1. Strongly pursue efforts to complete designation of bypass routes that divert through-traffic from the community. To improve the community central project traffic flow and pedestrian safety, steps should be taken to reduce the through-traffic volume in this area. This may be accomplished by the development of effective directional signage, and improvement of designated through-routes within the community.
2. Provide the types of roundabouts and traffic circles as necessary at critical intersections to ensure that pedestrians are able to cross the streets safely and conveniently. Where feasible, sidewalks should be improved to provide better

separation of pedestrians from passing vehicular traffic. Sidewalks should be designed with more barriers between the pedestrian and moving vehicles. Consideration should be given to placing exclusive pedestrian crossing signals at critical intersections to stop or significantly reduce vehicle speed and movement at such intersections, including right turns, and greatly reduce the threat of vehicle-pedestrian conflicts. Improvements to these intersections should also include special pavement crosswalks and stop lights that will emphasize to vehicles the presence of pedestrian crossings.

3. Vehicular and pedestrian travel ways in the community project area should be designed so that they are complementary and have minimal conflict points. In connection with the Reseda Boulevard redevelopment projects, the designers should conduct a circulation analysis to determine the most efficient and safest traffic flow through and around the commercial Reseda Boulevard and CSUN area to minimize undue traffic congestion and conflicting vehicular movements. Sidewalk design should discourage mid-block crossing and driveway entrances should be designed such that drivers are cognizant of pedestrians as well as other vehicles.
4. Alternative plans and transportation methods for the connection of the Reseda Boulevard and CSUN areas to nearby residential areas should be prepared. A system of pedestrian/bicycle

trails, paths and sidewalks should be developed to provide a pleasant and safe route for pedestrians and cyclists to neighborhoods that surround the community project area. These facilities should be clearly and distinctively marked with unique signage, landscape treatments and pedestrian amenities such as benches, drinking fountains and low-level signature lighting to promote evening use.

### **Objective 10**

Develop a process that provides transportation information to the public and provides for feedback from the public.

#### **Strategies**

1. Provide opportunities for public input on transportation improvements. Give residents, civic and business leaders the opportunity to present their ideas on transportation improvements and provide feedback in an expeditious manner.
2. Use all available media to provide transportation information to the public. Such methods as traffic camera feeds into the internet, strategically located dynamic message signs, information signs and banners, maps, brochures on transportation subjects, and use of the website and email for updated information will help to get information to community area residents and businesses in a timely manner and in an understandable format.

# Concept: Smart Multi-Modal Transportation Grid

Nathaniel Wilson, AIA, AICP,  
Architect and Environmental Planner, CSUN

Smart multi-modal transportation grids “balance the needs of through traffic with the need to provide access to local destinations.”<sup>1</sup> Smart grids challenge the conventional wisdom to reduce congestion by increasing speed. They have both transportation nodes and connectors.

- Transportation Nodes
- MTA Light rail Stations
- Transit Centers and Bus Stops
- Parking Structures, Parking Lots, Park and Ride Lots
- Transportation Connectors
- Light Rail Lines and Busways
- Streets and Freeways
- Bike Paths

## *Sidewalks, Crosswalks and Escalators*

The San Fernando Valley already has these—and to a great extent these are individual stand-alone elements. They are run by different agencies and owners for different reasons. They are not “smart” and there is no smart network between them. Residents who own cell phones already have a Global Positioning System (GPS) in the palm of their hand that can host smart transportation demand management application. This is all that is needed to navigate the Transportation Demand Management district.

<sup>1</sup> Booth, *Transforming Suburban Business Districts*, 51

## *Challenges Both Local and Area Wide*

Transportation accounts for a significant amount of GHG emissions. Passenger vehicles and heavy-duty trucks comprise over 90 percent of total transportation-related emissions.<sup>1</sup>

## *Node in the Smart Grid*

The Node looks like a multi-modal menu with simple, easy to understand pricing. It could be a “Park and Ride” at Reseda and the 118 freeway, and could even be built over the existing freeway right-of-way. There is cost and limited parking availability at CSUN, Northridge Hospital and other prospective participating locations. CSUN students are a core group who would provide a ready market for these added services.

The station can function as a local employer and school shuttle stop. Flex Vehicles (rental on demand) can be provided for those who need a vehicle. The facilities can also provide bicycle parking, lockers, restrooms and showers. MTA, DOT and other transit services can provide convenient connections.

## *Considerations*

- 118 Freeway Park and Ride
- 101 Freeway Park and Ride
- CSUN Transit Center on Vincennes
- MTA Line at Parthenia and Reseda
- Northridge Hospital
- Orange Line Busway

<sup>1</sup> Source: California Air Resources Board, 2006 Greenhouse Gas Inventory

## *CSUN Transit Center Node January 2012*

The new CSUN Transit Center located on Vincennes is an example of one node on a Transit Demand Management network serving Northridge, accommodated by a new City stoplight being installed at Vincennes and Reseda. These same benefits could be realized at Northridge Hospital and at other employment centers.

- Increasing Transit Use has a Low Incremental Cost Per Rider.
- Transit Center may eliminate need for more parking structures.
- Increased Transit Use Improves Air Quality and reduces GHGs.
- Grant Funding is Available for Design and Construction.
- Center Will Serve Metro, DOT and other bus services.
- Center Located Close to Vehicle Parking in CSUN B3 and B5 Structures.
- Connections to Pedestrian, bicycle and Campus Tram routes.
- Will Serve Students, Faculty, Staff and Visitors.
- Phase 2 Will Have Bicycle Parking for Intermodal Use.
- Phase 2 will have flex cars in CSUN B5 structure for Intermodal Use.

## *Tools and Strategies for Planning and Design*

- Adoption of a General Land Use Plan that encourages node development.
- Concentration of dense, mixed-use development directly around the Metrolink stations (18-to 20-story residential buildings).
- Lower building heights farther away from the stations.
- Preservation of established neighborhoods and natural areas at the edge.
- Specification of a mix of uses in the General Land Use Plan.
- Requirements that developers, if necessary, build those uses that are not currently in high demand in order to build more of the preferred use.
- Development of sector plans to encourage the area around each train station area to maintain a distinct sense of community.
- Goals for type of land use, open space, infrastructure and design.
- Emphasis on pedestrian access and safety and incorporation of public art, pocket parks, wide sidewalks with restaurants, bike lanes, street trees, traffic calming, and street-level retail.
- Creation and management of an integrated transportation system.
- Fast and efficient rail transit
- Additional local bus service
- A pedestrian-, bicycle-, and transit-friendly network of local streets
- An actively managed parking supply, including higher priced on-street metered parking, adoption of a neighborhood parking sticker program, reduction in parking requirements for new development, and requirements that developers charge market rates for private parking and allow shared use of off-street parking among businesses
- Dedication of road parallel to the rail line to high occupancy vehicles at peak times.
- Assistance to employers in the creation of transportation demand management programs.
- Requirement of transportation management plans for all major commercial and residential developments that go through the site plan review process.
- Establishment of “Commuter Stores” where staff provide transit information, help plan travel and sell fare cards.
- Management of a field sales force that works with hotel, office building, and apartment building managers to provide transit information.
- Maintenance of websites that provide comprehensive commuter information.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Great Corridors, Great Communities* at p 24-25

## Planning Horizons

Some aspects of Northridge Vision may be achievable in the short term, but much of the major work will take some time. Unlike a project where existing resources can be applied, a “visioning” project is intended to “plan beyond the possible.” Equal parts of optimism, enthusiasm and idealism are required to make it work. The group plants the seeds of the Vision, the improvements and innovation for implementation. In the years that follow they need to persistently cultivate the Vision elements and be prepared to respond swiftly when opportunities emerge.

Northridge Vision is a “Concept Plan.” It provides guidelines for a vision, but has to be a living document. Emerging opportunities may not always fit squarely into place. Stakeholders have to stand ready with the ideas and concepts that can be applied to future projects and iterations of plans—and around which we can unify in the evolution and revitalization of the town of Northridge. It is our intent to be ready when opportunities present themselves—to establish guidelines that will give direction, and encourage future investment in this remarkable community.

## Five -Year Horizon Visioning

- Stakeholders have been identified, and coordinating communications have been established.
- The Collaborative Initiative holds regular meetings and has functioning committees; they coordinate and communicate with groups and resources who have a common vision.
- Neighborhood Councils have developed proactive agendas for revitalizing the neighborhoods of Northridge.
- Neighborhood Councils are recognized as promoting patronage and providing support for improvements to the Central Business District.
- A merchants and property owners association has been formed and is actively working to improve Reseda Boulevard as a place to do business.
- There is a succession plan for community leadership, and new stakeholders are being cultivated on a regular basis.
- The City of Los Angeles has completed an update of the Northridge Community Plan.
- The City of Los Angeles has adopted a Community Design Overlay to provide a theme and continuity to the Central Business District.

## Streetscapes

- CSUN has begun to extend its themes, landscaping and programming out to the main streets, business districts, and community of Northridge.
- Coordinated palms, trees, shrubs and plantings are beginning to work their way down the boulevard, starting with the University Village town center; these are an extension of the “gateway” streetscapes leading to CSUN.
- Street and sidewalk improvements are under way.
- Median strips have been improved in all feasible areas along with an entirely new striping and parking plan.
- Parking innovations have begun with landscape features added where curbs are extended.
- Curb extensions, bulbouts, rumble strips, median features, and other hardscape improvements have begun to develop.
- Street fixtures, curb treatments and planters have been repaired.
- Stormwater infusion areas, as landscape features, have been installed among parking areas.
- Attractive setbacks are included in new projects, and faux setbacks are being developed on existing façades to allow for landscaping, outdoor furniture and other uses.

- Property owners are trading setbacks for curb extensions, compounding the effect of adjacent broad sidewalk treatments.
- The visual cues are having an effect on calming of through traffic as visitors are taking more of an interest in Northridge.
- Speed limits are reduced and traffic signals are synchronized to allow for smooth, respectful flow of traffic through the CBD.

## Themes

- University Village and the Central Business District are developing as “places;” signs of change are emerging.
- Various banner campaigns and event themes are becoming regular sights on Reseda Boulevard.
- The community of Northridge is embracing its roots, including the CSUN campus and coordinating with the Valley Performing Arts Center.
- An Arts & Theatre district is beginning to emerge with a regular cluster of park-once businesses and activities.
- Galleries and other cultural venues have begun to emerge.
- The thematic identities of the of the four planning areas of the Central Business District have begun to be established.



- Visitors to Northridge and through-traffic are now fully aware that they are entering or leaving University Village, and also when they are entering the community of Northridge.
- When traveling north and south on Reseda Boulevard, passing by CSUN, travelers have visual cues and themes that make them aware of the University.
- Branding for each of the Concept Areas of the Central Business District is now seeing substantial recognition from the community and investors.

**University Village - Concept Area—**  
The center of Northridge. This cluster focuses on the “college town” ambiance in the general area of the Cal State University Northridge campus. This area features vertical mixed-use form, higher density floor area ratios (FARs) on the east side of Reseda Boulevard, stepping down to somewhat lower intensity on the west side of the boulevard.

**Healthy Living Campus - Concept Area—**Area adjacent to Northridge Hospital, with heavy supportive medical and health-care cluster with mid-rise zoning and floor area ratios (FARs). This cluster is convenient, and even walkable for local residents of mixed-use complexes.

**Historic Old Town Northridge - Concept Area—**Mixed use area with emphasis on senior housing and assisted living facilities. Complementary amenities in proximity to Northridge Hospital and other

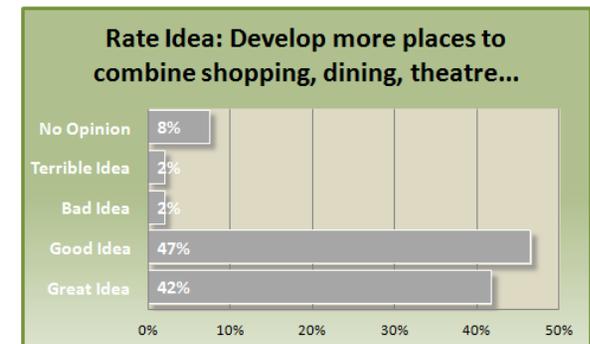
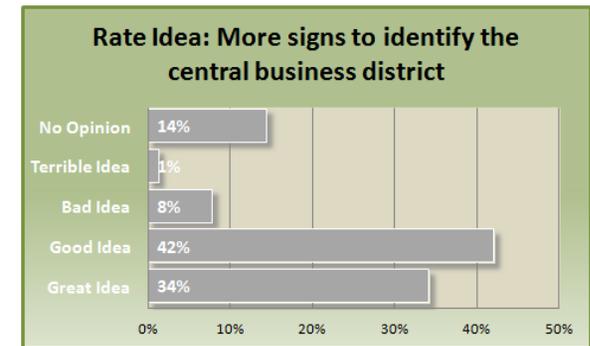
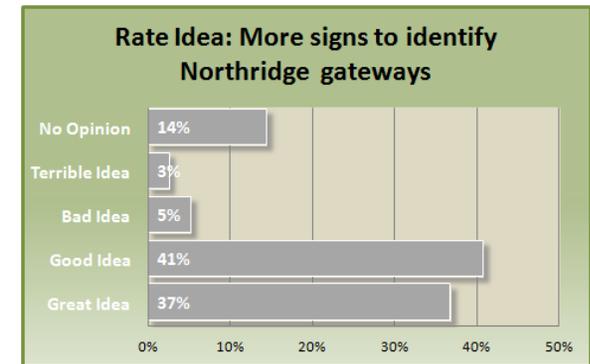
supportive and quality-of-life opportunities for entertainment, recreation, socializing, dining and shopping.

**Uptown Northridge - Concept Area—**  
This lower profile area of Northridge provides a different kind of town center experience—more of a small town atmosphere with a horizontal mix of multi-unit residential buildings interspersed with commercial activity.

### Civic Intervention

- A response team is established to identify “turnover properties” (vacated premises) and to cultivate tenants that fit the Vision mix—businesses that are Vision friendly.
- Existing assets and properties are being improved, which is easier in the short term than development.
- Standing requests have been made to all related public agencies for the necessary clearances for changes to be made in the Central Business District.
- Standing requests have been made to all related public agencies for funding for changes to be made in the Central Business District.
- A façade program is in place, providing design services to businesses at little or no cost to encourage the adoption of Vision-friendly aesthetics, to enhance the community; the program includes low cost loans for tenant improvements

- More unique and eclectic shops and restaurants are opening, complementing one another, moving toward “critical mass” for the development as a park-once district.



- Wayfinding signs now direct visitors to cultural offerings, CSUN and other important sites; kiosks feature current information on special events in the CBD and at CSUN, and also help to regulate parking and traffic during peak activity times.
- Existing cultural and artistic offerings such as murals, statuary and public galleries are expanding, and helping to make Northridge more of a destination.
- Reseda Boulevard is pleasant, clean and well maintained with a beginning of greenery, coordinated themes and color schemes, and a feeling of being the main street of a town.

### Resources

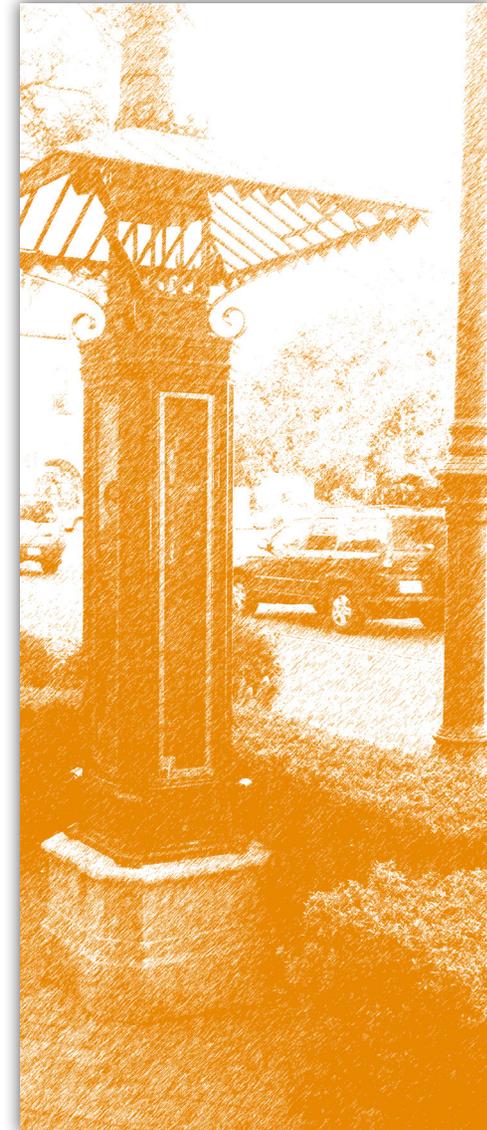
- Businesses and property owners are seeing increased activity and rents.
- Fundraising capacity has been developed to support future implementation through grants, subventions, and obtaining a reasonable return on investment of public resources.
- Resources are being developed to provide elements and materials to enhance the Central Business District, the streetscape and to promote activity in the CBD.
- The existing landscaping and streetscaping have been stabilized and maintenance provided for the foreseeable future.

### Transportation

- The CSUN Transit Center and Metrolink station have taken root in the community and are providing a basis for Transit-Oriented Districts.
- A Transportation Demand Management District has been established.
- A “Smart Multi-Modal Transportation Grid” is beginning to take shape.
- Shuttles to the Metrolink, CSUN Transit Center, and Orange Line Stations run on frequent schedules with extended hours to support nighttime activities in the CBD.

### Opportunities

- Tracking mechanisms are established to preserve industrial lands and cultivate opportunities.
- Industry and commercial clusters have been identified, in which Northridge can take leadership.
- The Healthy Living Campus area has an increased number of professional, health care tenants and the level of service is improved.
- Tracking mechanisms for quality of life assets have been established in Northridge, and enhancement efforts have begun.
- Parks, trails, bikeways and recreational opportunities have increased.
- Changes in the tenant mix have begun to take root.



## Ten-Year Horizon

- Residents, visitors, and commuters are so acquainted with the available transit modes and network that their daily commutes to work are second nature.
- Cars are comfortably distanced from pedestrians and there is an understanding that one person's street is another person's walkway; on any given evening, residents and visitors can enjoy laughter and lively conversation from al fresco diners on the boulevard.
- Trust and collegiality characterize the relationship between CSUN and the surrounding community.
- Business owners notice a marked increase in their commercial property value to the point they are now rehabilitating properties purchased from absentee owners.
- Residents see an increase in their home values, and reinvest in their homes and the community; they make a renewed commitment to not just to curb appeal, but civic stewardship.
- The CSUN campus has become more residential with many students calling the campus "home."
- Students volunteer at local community functions, intern at local nonprofits and businesses, and are becoming more woven into the community fabric.

- Northridge is recognized as one of California's most walkable towns receiving awards and grant funding to further improve infrastructure.

### *Visioning*

- Stakeholders have been identified, and coordinating communications have been established.
- The Collaborative Initiative continues to hold regular meetings, and has functioning committees; they develop necessary coordination with groups dedicated to the common vision.
- Neighborhood Councils have developed proactive agendas for revitalizing the various neighborhoods of Northridge.
- Neighborhood Councils are recognized as promoting patronage and providing support for improvements to the Central Business District.

### *Streetscapes*

- CSUN has fully extended its themes, landscaping and programming out to the main streets, business districts, and community of Northridge.
- Coordinated landscape is becoming quite dense and prolific down most of the boulevard; these are an extension of the "gateway" streetscapes leading to CSUN.
- Street and sidewalk improvements have been completed, completely

changing the feel of the Central Business District.

- Median strips have been improved in all feasible areas.
- Reseda Boulevard in University Village makes several meandering S-curves wending its way through reverse-angle diagonal parking areas that alternate on the two sides of the street.
- Mid-block crossings and rumble strips help to calm traffic and enhance pedestrian orientation.
- The curbs and medians now have a definite design appeal with extensive streetscape; they include fully developed bulbouts, rumble strips, median features, and other hardscape improvements.
- Stormwater infusion areas have been installed extensively among parking areas.
- Attractive setbacks have been included in many new projects, and faux setbacks are extremely popular ways of developing existing façades to allow for landscaping, outdoor furniture and other uses.
- The visual cues have had their effect, and traffic calming has diverted some through traffic to alternate routes, while at the same time vastly improving the quality of visitors whose destination is Northridge—allowing a smooth, respectful flow of traffic through the CBD.

## Themes

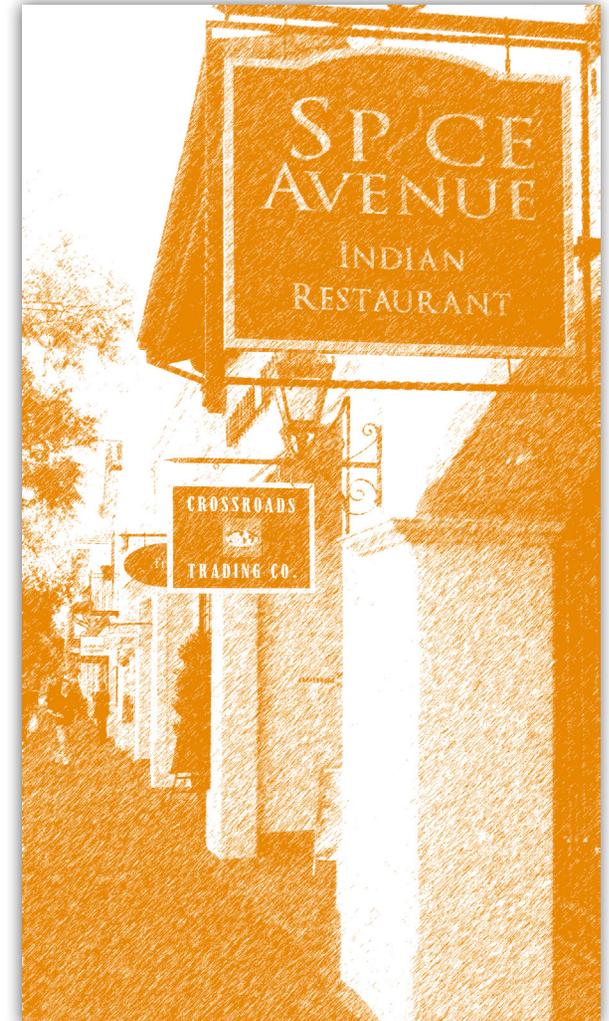
- University Village and the Central Business District have developed as “places.”
- Various banner campaigns and event themes are regular sights on Reseda Boulevard.
- The community of Northridge is known for embracing its roots, including the CSUN campus and the highly-successful Valley Performing Arts Center.
- The Valley Performing Arts Center is increasing traffic from the Los Angeles basin as it takes a leadership position in first-run and premiere programming.
- An Arts & Theatre district has crystallized with a regular cluster of park-once businesses and activities, beginning to rival the Third Street Promenade and Old Town Pasadena.
- Galleries and other cultural venues have now reached critical mass and are garnering regional acclaim.
- The thematic identities of the of the four planning areas of the Central Business District have become well established.
- Northridge is now known regionally as a great place to visit, with visitors being fully aware when they are in Northridge’s University Village.
- Visitors traveling north and south on Reseda Boulevard, can’t miss the fact that they are passing CSUN; the boulevard is an extension of the

campus, and commerce between the two areas abounds.

- Branding for each of the Concept Areas of the Central Business District has fully developed and is well accepted by the community and potential investors.

## Civic Intervention

- The efforts of the response team handling “turnover properties” (vacated premises) has paid great dividends in the Vision mix—businesses that are Vision friendly.
- Relations with public agencies for funding and clearances are excellent, as prior changes to the Central Business District have been extremely successful and popular.
- The façade program providing design services and funding is responsible for the fact that half of all storefronts have been improved.
- University Village has reached “critical mass” as a park-once district with unique and eclectic shops and restaurants opening, complementing one another.
- Existing cultural and artistic offerings such as murals, statuary and public galleries continue expanding, enhancing Northridge as a destination.
- Reseda Boulevard is pleasant, clean and well maintained with lush greenery, coordinated themes and color schemes, and is establishing itself as the main street of a town



## Resources

- Businesses and property owners are seeing remarkable increases in activity, rents, and the quality of tenants.
- Fundraising has been successful in supporting implementation through grants, subventions and other resources.
- Landscaping and streetscaping are continuously and rigorously maintained.

## Transportation

- Transit-Oriented Districts have become a reliable and very effective means of transportation thanks to the Transportation Demand Management District and its “Smart Multi-Modal Transportation Grid.”

## Opportunities

- The location, identification and preservation of industrial lands and opportunities has resulted in several highly-identifiable industry clusters taking hold in the northwest Valley, centered on Northridge.
- As “Green” industries have become more viable, Northridge has been able to transfer its aerospace technologies and capabilities to the fabrication and manufacture of green energy products and the environmental innovation industry.
- The Healthy Living Campus area is a regional center for professional, health care activities and tenants, bringing thousands of jobs and

careers to the area; this has tied-in well to the local biotech and pharmaceutical industries.

- Tracking mechanisms for quality of life assets have resulted in the preservation and increases in the number and size of parks, trails, bikeways and recreational opportunities.
- The look and tenant mix in the Central Business District has changed dramatically in the last ten years.



FSY Architects

## Twenty-Year Horizon

- Northridge has become a destination market for unique shopping, the performing arts, academics, leadership conferences, and educational events.
- Community members frequent CSUN events and CSUN students, staff, and faculty frequent Northridge community events.
- Northridge neighborhoods are revitalized with streets that not only feel safe, but are safe.
- Community events which were formerly difficult to organize have risen to the level of sustained traditions generating revenue that is reinvested in the community.
- Northridge is well-known as the heart of the Valley's intellectual and academic community as a result of its intellectual capital and technological innovation.
- City planners attend an annual International City Planning Symposium hosted by CSUN to gain ideas first-hand on designing and implementing smart development strategies that revitalize neighborhoods.
- Business and property owners continue to watch their commercial property values rise.
- Residents see continued increases in their home values, which in the new economy provides an economic cushion for the future; they continue to take pride in their neighborhoods

- CSUN is a well-established residential campus and home to many students.
- Students are a part of community life, and many aspire to start businesses, establish careers or find jobs in neighboring communities such as Northridge.
- It is possible to live, work, play and learn in Northridge without having to own an automobile; everything one needs is within walking distance, and public transportation is readily accessible.

### Visioning

- The stakeholders have changed but Northridge Vision persists as a living document.
- The Collaborative Initiative continues to hold regular meetings with communication and continuity being key.
- Neighborhood Councils are empowered with funding and authority to continue initiatives revitalizing the various neighborhoods and Central Business District of Northridge.
- The Community Design Overlay has resulted in an extremely attractive aesthetic that is interesting and yet coherent.

### Streetscapes

- Reseda Boulevard in University Village is a popular spot throughout the year with festivals, international

markets, fairs and special events to entertain visitors and shoppers.

### Themes

- The community of Northridge is known for embracing its roots, including the CSUN campus and the highly-successful Valley Performing Arts Center.
- The Valley Performing Arts Center is seeing increasing traffic from the Los Angeles basin as it becomes recognized for first-run and premiere programming.
- Now a regional leader, the Arts & Theatre district continues with its cluster of park-once businesses and activities, rivaling the Third Street Promenade and Old Town Pasadena; these include "Shuttles to Showtimes" from local restaurants and stops in the Village where cross-promotions abound.

### Resources

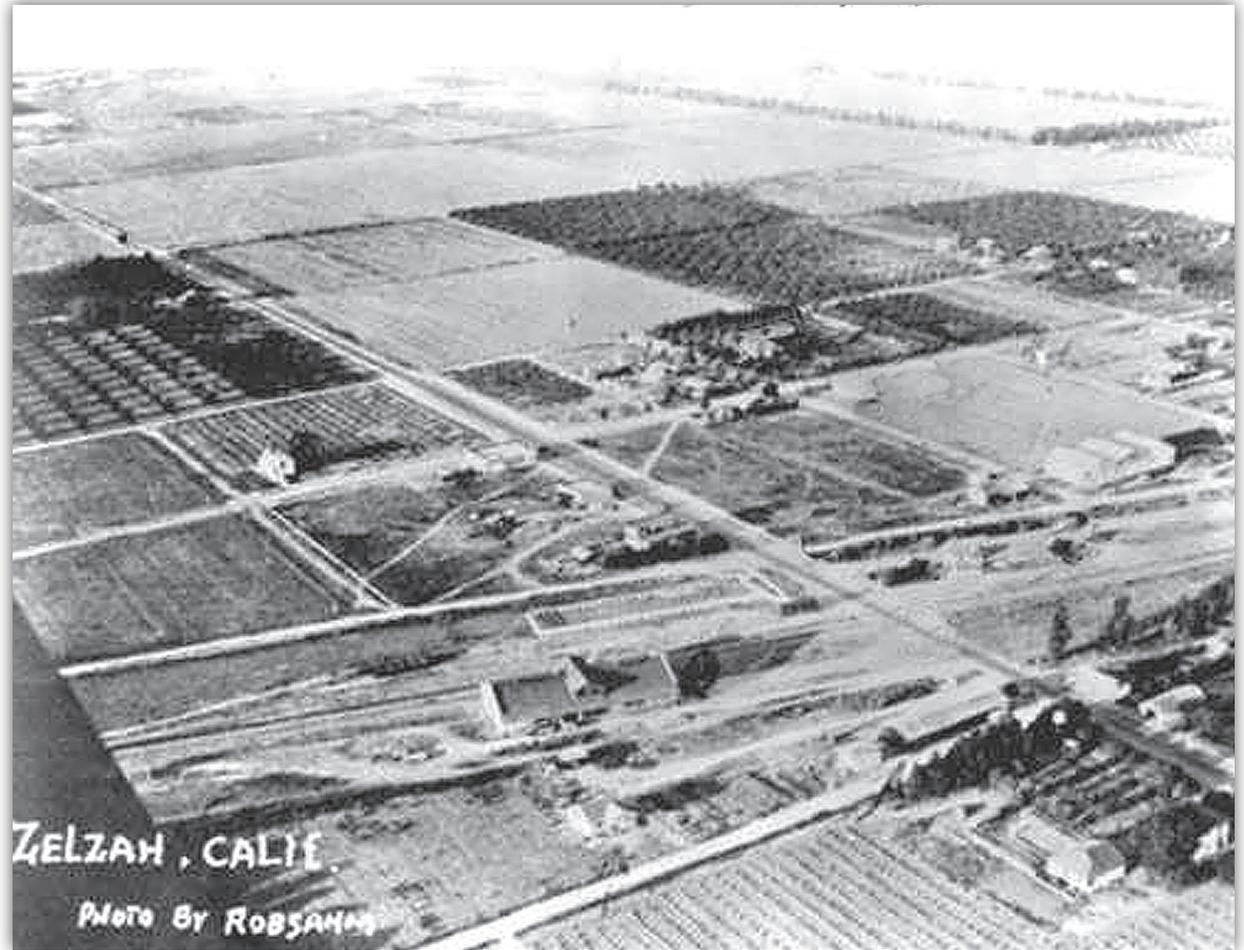
- Businesses and property owners are seeing remarkable increases in activity, rents, and the quality of tenants.
- Landscaping and streetscaping are continuously and rigorously maintained.

### Opportunities

- CSUN is becoming a "grand old campus," garnering national recognition for its schools and

academic contributions to the region; it is fully integrated with the community of Northridge with office spaces, buildings and facilities throughout the community, especially in the Healthy Living Campus area.

- Because of its location on the Pacific Rim, CSUN has evolved into a regional leader in international business affairs, import, export and foreign policy.
- The “California Environment & Energy Center” is a nationally significant research facility situated at the western gateway of CSUN; the University Village landscape is fully mature, and has been augmented to become the nation’s first suburban rainforest, extending earlier CSUN energy and environmental programming.
- Industrial lands and opportunities are being expanded when possible to support several highly-identifiable industry clusters that have taken hold in the northwest Valley.
- The Healthy Living Campus area continues as a regional center for professional, health care activities and tenants, bringing thousands of jobs and careers to the area.
- Tracking mechanisms for quality of life assets continue to preserve and increase in the number and size of parks, trails, bikeways and recreational opportunities.
- Northridge has become known nationally as the quintessential town in which to live, work, play and learn.



Ranches and farms are part of the rich agricultural heritage of the San Fernando Valley, as can be seen in this circa 1918 photo of Northridge—formerly Zelzah, California.

## Brief History of Northridge

Gerald Fecht, Ph.D., President,  
The Museum of the San Fernando Valley

Once, lonely vaqueros watched over half-wild cattle, grazing on the native grasses that grew on the northern ridges of the San Fernando Valley. Lazy streams made their way through reed-lined washes to join the meandering Los Angeles River. (This made the existence of the pueblo of Los Angeles possible.) The place we call Northridge today was to be part of a valley named for San Fernando Rey de España, a medieval Spanish king. It was a dry and windy place, but it wasn't a desert, as some folks believe. The great Mojave Desert begins across mountains just to the north.

Life changed in the San Fernando Valley when self-educated water engineer William Mulholland supervised the bringing of water, by gravity, to Southern California. Mulholland planned to store water from the slopes of the Sierras in the North Valley and to utilize the Los Angeles River to deliver it to his thirsty city. But, land speculators had a better idea; they would purchase Valley land and develop great orchards and water fields to supply new towns on their properties. It was a time to get rich.

In a short time, the little utopian farm village of Zelzah became North Los Angeles. Soon citrus, walnuts and other crops were loaded onto trains, at what was renamed Northridge station in 1938, and were sent on their way to the city and soon across the nation. Northridge was for years a small town that supplied the needs

of farms and ranches long distances apart. Distance meant privacy—a commodity much desired by newly famous celebrities created by the Valley's ever-growing entertainment industry. Performers like Barbara Stanwyck, Robert Taylor, John Wayne, James Cagney and many more, bought or leased horse ranches making Northridge one of the nation's major breeding centers. Pictures of the future President Ronald Reagan and the beloved Lucile Ball and Desi Arnez often had Northridge as a backdrop.

Rural Northridge was to vanish almost overnight! The conclusion of WWII and the Korean War, Bing Crosby's "Going to make the San Fernando Valley my home," and the GI Bill enticed thousands of veterans and new families to seek jobs and homes in the Valley. At first, ranch-style houses began to appear in the walnut orchards; then landowners sold the horse ranch properties for fortunes for the development of housing tracts. Valley schools nearly exploded and thousands of GIs took the opportunity to go to two community colleges, LA Valley and Pierce. Graduates from these schools soon demanded an opportunity for upper division studies in an inexpensive California state college.

Northridge was to become part of a massive city that grew into suburbs with nearly indistinguishable borders. Retail stores grew with little planning. A car-controlled culture needed tires, batteries, lube jobs and

above all gasoline.

Visitors to eastern American or European cities see communities where infrastructures and culture developed over centuries. While commercial areas in Northridge often seem little more than a sea of parking lots, there are pockets of exciting progress; a great new cultural arts center at California State University Northridge, a university community that is beginning to make itself at home in the area, and a magnificent hospital complex. Like San Francisco, Northridge lives with the reality of earthquakes – a cost of living on the Pacific Rim. With its ethnic diversity, college students and population of secure adults, it is filled with possibilities.

# Reasons given for patronizing centers other than Northridge

Prefer another location				More safe and secure				Nicer locale			
Never		6	14%	Never		26	60%	Never		3	7%
Sometimes		13	30%	Sometimes		10	23%	Sometimes		22	51%
Often		21	49%	Often		4	9%	Often		11	26%
Almost Always		3	7%	Almost Always		3	7%	Almost Always		7	16%
Better service				Higher quality				Better brands			
Never		12	28%	Never		4	10%	Never		6	15%
Sometimes		22	51%	Sometimes		14	34%	Sometimes		20	50%
Often		8	19%	Often		14	34%	Often		11	28%
Almost Always		1	2%	Almost Always		9	22%	Almost Always		3	8%
Larger selection				Lower prices				More stores, dining and entertainment one			
Never		7	17%	Never		11	26%	Never		9	22%
Sometimes		18	43%	Sometimes		24	57%	Sometimes		14	34%
Often		11	26%	Often		6	14%	Often		12	29%
Almost Always		6	14%	Almost Always		1	2%	Almost Always		6	15%
Stop on my way to or from work				Closer to activities of interest to me				Another reason			
Never		21	49%	Never		11	28%	Never		11	39%
Sometimes		18	42%	Sometimes		19	48%	Sometimes		14	50%
Often		4	9%	Often		6	15%	Often		2	7%
Almost Always		0	0%	Almost Always		4	10%	Almost Always		1	4%

## GLOSSARY

**Amenities** - Land uses of benefit to the local neighborhood and to “park-once” visitors. Includes: cleaners, salons, barbers, mini-marts, markets, drug stores, hardware stores, fast foods, fitness centers, and other personal goods and services

**Active Transportation** - Non-motorized or human-powered travel; normally by bicycle or walking; as an alternative to the automobile or public transit

**Civic Intervention** - Involvement by volunteers and non-profit organizations in the affairs of government and economics, with a goal of changing outcomes in a positive way

**Balusters** - a vase-shaped post supporting a railing

**Balustrades** - Railing or fencing supported by balusters, use for protective or decorative purposes; Often made from wood or light concrete

**Bioswales** - A landscaped area designed with plants that can absorb and bioremediate many types of waterborne pollutants [BSS]

**Bollards** - Posts for guiding traffic, usually decorative and serving as part of the streetscape

**Bulb-outs or Bulbing** - A curb extension that widens the sidewalk or parkway in certain areas to allow more walking space, planters, furniture or other streetscape features. Most commonly found at intersections and crosswalks, extensions also function to

shorten the distance in pedestrians crossing a street. Also see Bus-bulbs

**Bus Rapid Transit BRT** - The use of buses to approach the service levels of rail, through signal prioritization, lane isolation, station enhancements, express services, specialized vehicles and other benefits to make the mode more attractive to passengers

**Busway/Orange Line Busway** - A part of the Metro (LACMTA) Bus Rapid Transit system that extends from North Hollywood to Woodland Hills. The second phase, due to be completed 2012 will extend to the Chatsworth Metrolink station

**CBD** - Central Business District

**CBD Core** - The heart of business, commercial, financial and administrative district activity

**CBD Fringe** - the area immediately surrounding the Central Business District, usually within 2-3 blocks

**CBD, Outlying Business District** - commercial area generally removed by a mile or more from a Central Business District

**Census County Division** - CCDs and equivalent entities are statistical geographic entities established cooperatively by the Census Bureau and officials of state and local governments for reporting census data for geographic areas that have stable boundaries and recognizable names.

**Change of Mode** - the transfer from one form of transportation to another. A

park and ride lot is an example of a change of mode, where an auto driver parks the vehicle and rides public transportation for the remainder of the trip

**Civic Intervention** - Activities, usually volunteer, on the part of stakeholders and community members, that might otherwise be undertaken by the public or private sector; proactive projects for community improvement

**Community Plan** - In the City of Los Angeles, the General Plan provides the planning “Framework” and 35 individual community plans provide the specifics, including the land use map that illustrates the current zoning designation of parcels in each community plan area. The community plan areas are clearly defined on generalized land use maps and each is subject to periodic updates.

**General Plan** - Mandated by state law, and are required to contain certain “elements” relative to the built environment and future development of each city. Most notable are the land use and circulation (transportation) elements. The land use map illustrates the current zoning designation of parcels in each community plan area.

**Community Design Overlay** - City of Los Angeles; the designation of a specific area, normally a main commercial thoroughfare, and a set of design standards and regulations intended to encourage uniformity and theme development

**Considerate Lighting** - Lighting that is shielded and directed in such a way that

it does not illuminate neighboring residential properties, and also does not generate glare that obscures the view of the night sky

**Cordon Count** - the simultaneous counting of all traffic entering and leaving a given area such as a CBD

**Diagonal Parking** - Parking at a diagonal to the curb and lanes of the street, with the nose of the vehicle pointed inward and the parking stall lines pointing toward the traffic flow

**Diagonal Parking, Reverse-Angle** - Parking at a diagonal to the curb and lanes of the street, with the tail of the vehicle pointed inward and the parking stall lines pointing away from the traffic flow

**Eclectic Complement** - Refers to stores that attract shoppers to a center specifically because of their independent status, off-beat products, or creative ambiance. These stores often contribute more than they receive from situating in a mall

**Entertainment Uses** - Restaurants, Coffee Houses, Sports Bars, Dancing, Night Clubs, Bowling and Arcade, Ice/Roller Skating

**Envelope Entitlements** - A package of permits, variances, conditional use permits, and other entitlements, usually combined with trade-offs; intended to provide flexibility within an “envelope” of criteria, and make a project more profitable to the investor, more appealing to the patron, and more acceptable to the community

**Faux Setbacks** - The setting back of the first floor of a building that otherwise, or

previously extended to the property line or sidewalk, to allow for landscaping, al fresco dining or other open sidewalk activities

**First Cost** - (industrial engineering) Initial expenditures involved in capitalizing a property; often not the wisest consideration in the long term

**Infiltration Basins** - A system to temporarily store runoff until it can be absorbed by soils [BSS]

**Land Assembly Districts** - Theory that when the only justification for assembly is over-fragmentation of land, neighbors should be able to decide collectively whether their land will be assembled. Suggests using property law as a variation on eminent domain, to retrofit communities with a condominium-like structure tailored to land assembly. Michael Heller and Rick Hills, 121 Harv. L. Rev. 1465 (2008)

**Meandering** - Not straight; usually referring to pathways, sidewalks, streets, and to the courses of rivers and streams; used to create interest and ambiance in streetscape and landscape features

**Medians** - The center section of a street or walkway that normally runs parallel to the feature; normally the part of the street or streetscape that is landscaped or involves other distinctive features, surfaces and visual effects

**Mid-Century** - Refers to structures and communities built in the post-WWII circa 1945-1970

**Non-Contributing Tenant** - Business or entity that does not fit a human scale,

does not provide goods, services or amenities normally found in a pedestrian-oriented district—or that otherwise does not support such a district

**Park-Once Districts** - Where a patron can park at one location and visit multiple shops, stores, restaurants, and entertainment venues

**Parking Accumulation** - the total number of vehicles parked in a specific area (usually segregated by type of parking facility) at a specific time

**Parking Volume** - the total number of vehicles that park in a study area during a specific length of time

**Parking Aisle** - the portion of the parking lot devoted to providing immediate access to the parking stalls

**Parking Demand** - the number of vehicles with drivers desiring to park at a specific location or in a general area. It is usually expressed as the number of vehicles during the peak-parking hour

**Parking Duration** - the length of time a vehicle remains in one parking space

**Parking, Long Term** - parking with a duration of three hours or more

**Parking Module** - a complete module is one access aisle, servicing a row of parking on each side of the aisle. Both the access aisle and the parking stalls serviced by that aisle are part of the module

**Parking, Short Term** - parking with a duration of three hours or less

**Parking Space or Stall** - an area large enough to accommodate one parked vehicle with unrestricted access (no blockage by another parked vehicle)

**Parking Stall Length** - The longitudinal dimension of the stall, normally 18.5 feet

**Parking Stall Width** - The width of each parking space as measured crosswise to the vehicle. The most common width is 8.5 to 9.0 feet

**Parking Supply** - the number of spaces available for use, usually classified by on-street curb (metered and unmetered), lot and garage. Further differentiation of the types of parking is useful, such as those available to the general public, and private spaces earmarked for a specific purpose such as loading

**Participation Agreement** - A contract between a property owner/developer and a redevelopment agency to allow for development of property owned by an entity other than the agency, generally the owner/developer [LA/CRA]

**Pocket Parks** - also known as mini-parks

**Proposition C [MTA]** - The Metropolitan Transit Authority's Proposition C sales tax was approved by voters in 1990. It is an additional one-half of 1% tax on retail sales in the County. MTA returns 20% of the Proposition C tax to the cities in the County for transportation purposes [BSS]

**PUDs** - Planned Unit Developments, PUDs can be divided into two broad categories; residential and mixed use. Mixed-use

PUDs blend residential, commercial, and, possibly, industrial uses together within the same tract. Mixed use is used where different uses are not only compatible but where the "blend" of uses will benefit the community as a whole

**Recreational Uses** - Bowling, Ball Fields, Skate Parks, Lakes, Trails, Bike Lanes, Streets [LA]

**Residential Streets** - The local street system comprises all facilities not on one of the higher systems. It serves primarily to provide direct access to abutting land and access to the higher order systems. It offers the lowest level of mobility and usually contains no bus routes. Service to through, traffic movement usually is deliberately discouraged. [LA/BSS]

**Reverse-Flow Lanes** - Lanes that may be used to carry traffic in opposing directions at different times of the day; normally in the direction of greatest demand

**Rumble Strips** - Uneven surfaces and materials used to draw the attention of drivers; usually laid in stripes perpendicular to the roadway, and almost always part of the streetscape design features

**SCAG** - The Southern California Association of Governments, Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the six-county Southern California region—excluding San Diego

**Smart Multi-Modal Transportation Grid** - An area-wide system of combined transportation options carefully coordinated to maximize efficiency

**Stewardship** - Taking responsibility for a community and its assets

**Stewardship, Local** - Active concern and care for a defined and manageable portion of the community

**Streets, Collector Streets** - The collector street system provides both land access service and traffic circulation within residential neighborhoods, commercial and industrial areas. It differs from the arterial system in that facilities on the collector system may penetrate residential neighborhoods, distributing trips from the arterials through the area to the ultimate destination. [LA/BSS]

**Streets, Primary Arterial Streets** - The principal arterial system serves the major centers of activity of a metropolitan area, the highest traffic volume corridors, and the longest trip desires; and carry a high proportion of the total urban area travel on a minimum of mileage. The system should be integrated, both internally and between major urban connections. [LA/BSS]

**Streets, Secondary Arterial Streets** - The minor arterial street system interconnect with and augment the urban principal arterial system and provide service to trips of moderate length at a somewhat lower level of travel mobility than principal arterials. This system also distributes travel to geographic areas smaller than those identified with the Primary Arterial system [LA]

**Streetscape** - The features and configuration of urban and suburban roadways; normally refers to the extended landscape,

furniture, medians, curbs, and features that make up a pedestrian-oriented district or town center

**Technology Transfer** - Transferring and commercializing technology and innovation from governments, universities or other institutions to commercialization or public exploitation

**Tradable Goods and Services** - Locally produced products and services that can be sold domestically or globally on the open market—goods and services that increase local capital, provide local employment and increase the base of local wealth

**Transportation Demand Management (TDM)** - Programming to ease the flow of traffic and relieve congestion; application of strategies that divert travelers from using the roadway by encouraging sharing and increasing the availability of other modes

**Trip Purpose** - The primary reason for the individual's journey to the study area; typical purposes include shopping, working, business, and recreation

**Turning Radius** - The radius of the circle that is traveled by the design vehicle when completing a turn. Large turning radii should be provided. These are a function of the parking angle and end island design, but in general the turning radii should be at least 18 feet

**Turnover** - The number of different vehicles parked at a specific parking space or facility during the study period; parking turnover measures utilization

**UDAT** - Urban Design Assistance Team, concept of the American Institute of Architects where teams of architects engage in a local community visioning process

**Van Accessible** - a parking space that is at least 8 feet wide, with a minimum access aisle of 5 feet along the right side of the parking space

**Vision-Friendly** - Contributing to the Vision Concept Plan; providing economic or aesthetic support to the community; not in conflict with the Plan of interrupting themes or flows of commercial clusters; not impinging significantly on the peace and tranquility of residential neighborhoods

**Visual Cue** - Signage, streetscape, design feature or variation in the street or sidewalk that draws a driver's (or other traveler) attention to where they are; to realize their surroundings as special

*Facilitated, researched and produced by:*

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