



CHAPTER 3 - A COMMUNITY-BASED VISION FOR DOWNTOWN

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The Downtown Lancaster Specific Plan is a community-based plan, developed with extensive input by Lancaster residents, policy makers, business owners, property owners and other interested members of the public. The Downtown Lancaster planning process offered community members many opportunities to get involved and stay involved every step of the way.

Community members participated in walking tours, community workshops, and a design charrette focused on the future of Downtown. The Downtown Lancaster Vision Plan represents dynamic and flexible concepts developed through this community-based process. The illustrated concepts are intended to represent an ideal rather than a literal direction for the Downtown.

3.2 VISION STATEMENT

The Vision Statement for Downtown Lancaster was created by community members, serving as a Vision Statement Team during the May 2006 design charrette. (See Section 3.3) Using ideas gathered from fellow community members, including visions written on Post-It Notes during the 1st community workshop, the Vision Statement Team crafted the following Vision Statement.



Downtown Lancaster is...

“The cultural, dining, specialty retail, entertainment, civic hub of the Antelope Valley; an authentic place for people to gather.”

“Architecturally pleasing, environmentally sound, pedestrian friendly mixed use area achieved through attractive storefronts, plentiful landscaping, meandering streets and sidewalks.”

“You are able to live, work and play in downtown Lancaster. Downtown offers a variety of housing options for all people within easy access of most necessary services. We offer numerous opportunities for meaningful employment in government, finance and retail. Downtown Lancaster provides many cultural and entertainment activities through our fine and performing arts centers, public art, street fairs, farmers market, street performers, and a variety of family oriented activities. Lancaster has ample parking and is easily accessible to all of Lancaster and the Antelope Valley.”

3.3 COMMUNITY-BASED PLANNING PROCESS

The planning process offered an array of different community involvement opportunities, allowing community members to participate in a variety of ways. Activities included community workshops, Downtown walks, and a design charrette, as described below. The result is a Downtown Vision and Specific Plan that are rooted in local community values, ideas, and priorities.

DOWNTOWN IMMERSION

From May 18-20, 2006, the entire Lancaster community – residents, business owners, property owners, and civic leaders – were invited to participate in an intense 3-day period of community involvement, known as Downtown Immersion. During these 3-days, the project team organized 9 events – ranging from focused meetings to walking tours to a hands-on design charrette – to allow a variety of ways for the community to get involved in the process. As part of these events, a youth activity was organized to allow local youth to share their own visions. Throughout the course of the 3 days, approximately 150 people were involved in one aspect or another.



DOWNTOWN IMMERSION ACTIVITIES

THURSDAY, MAY 18

Downtown Walk

Merchants, property owners, neighborhood residents, and all interested community members were invited to walk through Downtown with the project team. During the walking tour, participants pointed out areas of concern and suggested ideas for improvement. Particular attention was given to unique features of Downtown public spaces, pedestrian patterns, circulation, parking, neighborhood interfaces, and architectural styles. Participants were given walking tour maps to take notes as they saw fit, and each walking tour group was given disposable cameras to share – with a camera marked “likes” and a camera marked “dislikes” – in order to photograph those buildings and Downtown areas that they liked and wanted to see remain and those areas they did not like and would like to see improved. Following the walk, the photographs were developed and displayed on large poster boards at subsequent community workshops during the Downtown Immersion for walk participants and others to see what their fellow community members liked and did not like in the Downtown. Approximately 30 people participated in the Downtown Walk.



Group Introductions



Downtown Walks

Community Workshop: Understanding Downtown Lancaster

This initial community workshop provided an overview of the project and identified opportunities to get involved. Participants also took part in a number of interactive exercises to identify the many assets and opportunities of Downtown. Approximately 30 people attended this workshop.

Downtown Flashlight Walk

Participants were also invited to join the project team and LA County Sheriffs on an evening walk through the Downtown. By walking during the evening, participants were able to identify unique issues and ideas that affect the Downtown during nighttime, such as areas with poor lighting. This walk helped the project team to create a plan that works throughout the day and evening. Approximately 25 people joined the project team on this walk.



Flashlight Walk

FRIDAY, MAY 19

Kick-Off Meeting with Business and Property Owners

To meet and talk with local business owners, a breakfast meeting was held. Business and property owners had the chance to discuss their ideas, issues, and expectations for the Downtown Specific Plan with the project team. Approximately 40 local business and property owners attended this meeting.

Civic Leaders Lunch Reception

In order to understand the ideas and concerns of local civic leaders, a lunch reception was held. This meeting offered an opportunity to discuss project expectations, as well as to identify potential issues and ideas. Approximately 20 local civic leaders attended.

Community Workshop: Main Street 101 and Virtual Tour of Downtowns

This workshop included a presentation on Main Street 101 – The Four Point Approach to Downtown Revitalization: Organization, Economic Restructuring, Promotion, and Design, as well as a fun virtual tour of downtowns and business districts. The virtual tour featured images of five other downtowns/retail areas – Claremont, Monrovia, Fullerton, Montrose, and Ventura – and included an interactive exercise to rate the appropriateness of types of development from these areas for Downtown Lancaster. Approximately 35 people took part in this workshop.



"Favorites" Interactive Exercise

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SATURDAY, MAY 20



Team Collaboration

Downtown Design Charrette

Following a brief presentation of the information gathered during the previous 2 days, this hands-on design workshop provided participants the chance to work in small groups to “design” the future of Downtown and develop specific project ideas. Using maps, markers, and a variety of other design tools, community members developed various land use and design alternatives for Downtown. Project team members and local designers were also on hand to help graphically articulate the community’s ideas. Approximately 60 people participated in this design charrette.

Youth Visioning Activity

As part of the design charrette, local youth were invited to participate in a fun visioning activity to share their visions for the future of Downtown. In addition to an initial visioning brainstorming session about things they wanted to see and did not want to see in their Downtown, local youth also used photographs of existing areas within Downtown Lancaster to draw over with trace paper and “redesign”. A final exercise for the youth included “mapping” out the areas in the Downtown where they would like to see their visions located. Approximately 10 local youth participated in this fun event.



Public Space Design

Open House

Following the design workshop, the concepts and designs created during the design charrette and youth activity participants were on display for community members – those who were able to participate in the design charrette and those who weren’t – to see. Community members viewed these initial concepts and shared ideas with members of the project team. Approximately 10 community members attended the open house.

DOWNTOWN SPECIFIC PLAN INFORMATION CENTERS

Posters and project brochures were available in City Hall, the Chamber of Commerce, and many Downtown storefront windows to display information about the project and opportunities for community participation. These locations allowed community members to stop by and view information related to the project at their leisure.



Outreach Poster

DOWNTOWN SPECIFIC PLAN PROJECT WEBSITE

A new website was created specifically for the Downtown Lancaster Specific Plan to provide 24-hour access to project information. The website (www.celebratedowntownlancaster.info) included information about the planning process, opportunities for involvement, a map of the project area, products and presentations related to the project, and a form for submitting comments related to Downtown.

COMMENT CARDS

Comment cards were utilized to collect ideas, thoughts, and suggestions for the future of Downtown. These cards were included in a mailed brochure that was sent to Lancaster addresses. Questions asked community members to identify assets, challenges, and visions for the future of Downtown Lancaster. These comment cards were also distributed at community workshops and other events during Downtown Immersion. Feedback received from these idea cards was included in the overall community involvement ideas that formed the basis for the vision plan and development of the Specific Plan. Approximately 400 comment cards were completed and returned.

COMMUNITY CONFIRMATION

On July 20, 2006, the draft Vision Plan and materials that were used to articulate the future of Downtown Lancaster were taken back to the community for review, input, and feedback. Three venues for community confirmation of the draft materials were used: a breakfast meeting with local elected and appointed officials, a City staff meeting, and a community open house.

Local Elected and Appointed Official Breakfast Meeting

At this breakfast meeting, Lancaster's elected and appointed officials and other civic leaders were given an opportunity to view and discuss the draft Vision Plan for Downtown. At this meeting, members of the project team provided an overview of the Vision Plan, noted comments, addressed questions and concerns, and received support for moving forward with the Specific Plan. Approximately 20 people participated in this meeting.

City Staff Meeting

A mid-day meeting with City staff allowed the project team to review the draft Vision Plan in detail with staff and address any questions or concerns on locations or details of the draft vision. Approximately 20 City staff members, representing several City departments, participated in this meeting.

Community Open House

The community open house included a presentation on the draft Vision Plan, along with other exhibits, and opportunities for community members to provide comments. These comments served as the basis for the next phase of the planning process, including the development of the Downtown Specific Plan document. Community members generally expressed agreement with key aspects of the draft Vision Plan. Approximately 30 people participated in the July open house.



Reviewing the Draft Vision Poster

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ADDITIONAL COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS

Additional community workshops were held in May and June of 2007. The May 2, 2007 workshop included an introduction of the Form-Based Code to LOTS and the City. The workshop included a presentation on the final vision for Downtown, as well as a chance to review draft concepts of the Downtown Specific Plan. A presentation of the Specific Plan components and interactive exercises allowed community members to provide their comments, which formed the basis for the final revisions of the Downtown Specific Plan document. More than 30 people participated in these workshops.

3.4 KEY COMMUNITY PRIORITIES AND GOALS

Throughout the community participation opportunities, residents, property owners, merchants and others expressed values related to Downtown Lancaster. These community-defined values provide the guiding principles through which the Specific Plan was prepared. Implementation steps for key priorities and goals can be found in the implementation matrix in Chapter 6.



Lancaster Performing Arts Center

Sense of Community

Participants in the community process placed importance on the sense of community in Lancaster and the small town feel of Downtown.

History and Heritage

The rich and varied history is seen as one of the area's greatest resources, and is both respected and highly valued by residents and merchants.

Arts and Culture

Community members feel strongly that the Lancaster Performing Arts Center and the library are assets of Downtown. Galleries, museums, and public art also enjoy support.

Public Institutions

Government institutions such as the post office, Sheriff's station, City Hall, and fire station are valued as Downtown assets.

Services, Shopping and Restaurants

Residents appreciate and patronize the services, retail and dining opportunities provided by Downtown businesses. They value having small and locally owned businesses in Lancaster.

Landscaping and Public Spaces

Community members value landscaping and public spaces in the Downtown and admire the lighted trees currently in Downtown.



Post Office



3.5 A VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF DOWNTOWN LANCASTER

The Vision Plan was developed based on community input. The Vision Plan depicts what the Lancaster community would like to see in the Downtown in the future. These are the ideas – the ideals – that the community has expressed; these are, however, only ideas and not a literal plan for how development will occur in the Downtown. The Vision Plan, along with the Vision Statement (see Section 3.2), serves as the foundation for the remainder of the Specific Plan, including the Regulating Code.

DISTRICT FRAMEWORK

During Downtown Immersion, community members expressed the desire to see their Downtown serve many needs and purposes. These included maintaining commerce and banking activities, expanding opportunities for retail and dining, building on the presence of arts and entertainment, and allowing for mixed use and housing opportunities. Utilizing the design concepts that emerged from the design charrette, the following District Framework emerged that represents the desired uses and character areas for the Downtown. This District Framework guided the development of the more detailed Vision Plan that follows the District Framework, as well as the Regulating Code (Chapter 5). See Figure 3-1 for district boundaries.

Gateway District

The Gateway District serves as a primary gateway to Downtown Lancaster from the west, with a potential roundabout at 10th Street West and Lancaster Boulevard. The District contains a mix of existing and new buildings ranging from one to four stories in height with primarily office and retail uses.

Commerce District

The Commerce District is envisioned as a mix of new and existing office buildings with heights ranging from one to five stories. Buildings built along Lancaster Boulevard would be built to the sidewalk to reinforce the street as a pedestrian-friendly area. Parking would be provided both on the streets and in parking lots located behind buildings. Desired uses in the Commerce District focus on banks, other financial services, professional offices, and supporting retail and residential uses.

Boulevard District

The Boulevard District is the core of Downtown Lancaster, providing a variety of entertainment, retail, service, and residential uses within existing and new buildings that range from one to five stories in height. Along Lancaster Boulevard, the buildings are built to the sidewalk to reinforce the street as a pedestrian friendly area. With the LPAC as the anchor to this district, the area would be enhanced with new buildings, a public parking structure, public plazas, and an outdoor amphitheater near the LPAC. Parking would be provided on the streets and to the rear of the buildings in surface lots and/or parking structures.

Cedar Avenue Arts District

The Cedar Avenue Arts District is envisioned as a system of paseos and public spaces winding through a mix of existing and new buildings. The district would include a community theater, arts classes, retail and offices, and a complimentary mix of artist live/work lofts, studios, and artisan manufacturing buildings ranging in height from one to five stories.

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Transit District

The Transit District serves as a primary gateway to Downtown from the east. In an effort to connect the Downtown with the MetroLink station, a number of enhanced crosswalks and pedestrian paseos, as well as higher density development with mixed-use commercial and residential structures are envisioned. Building heights would range from one to five stories, with parking provided on the streets as well as in parking structures and surface lots behind the buildings.

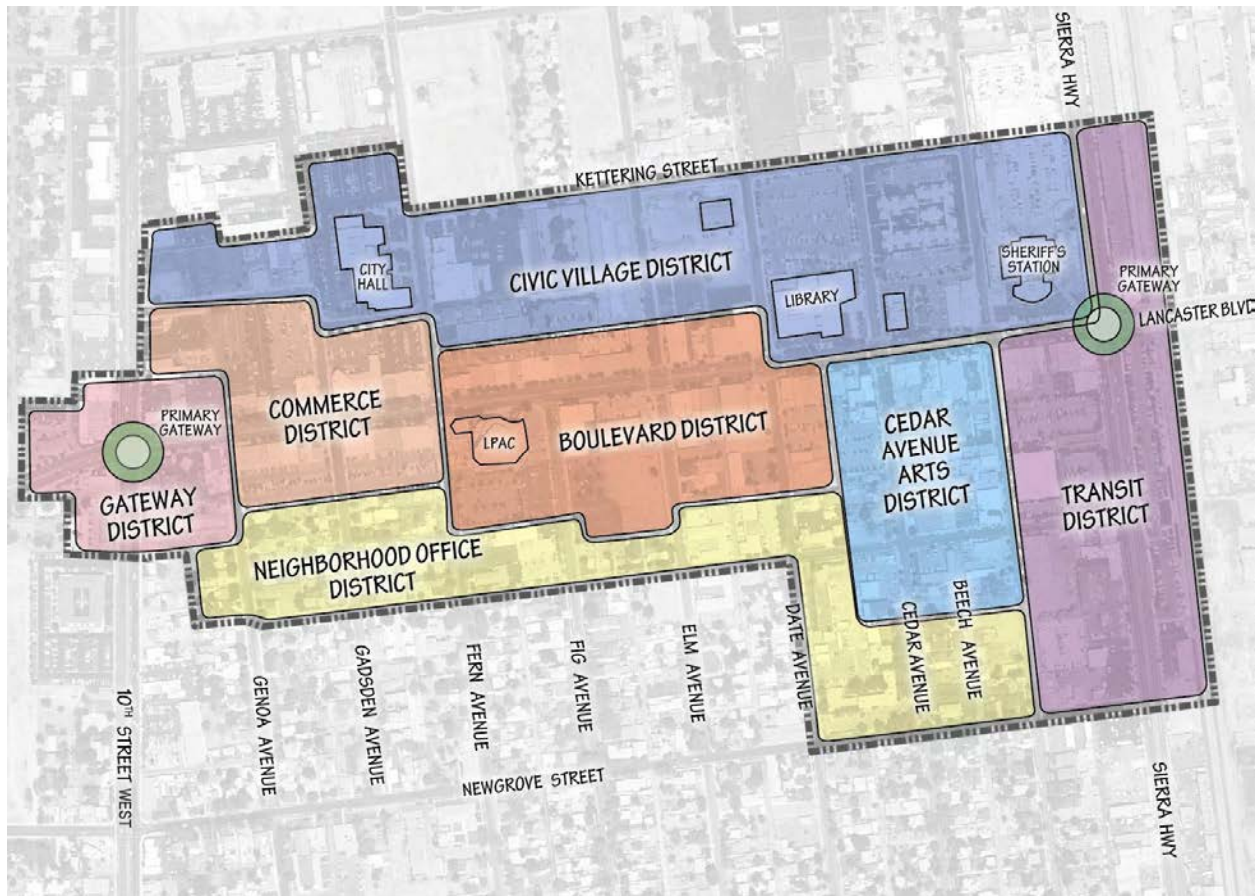


Figure 3-1 District Map

Civic Village District

The Civic Village District is a mix of existing civic/public and residential uses at a village scale. The District is envisioned to have enhanced public plazas, parks, and new residential uses. Building heights would range from one to five stories in this district with parking provided on the streets and in surface lots located behind the buildings. A new parking structure is also envisioned near the library.

Neighborhood Office District

The Neighborhood Office District is largely composed of detached homes and small offices that provide an opportunity to convert single-family homes to commercial uses or a higher density residential building. This district will provide a transition between the downtown core and the neighborhood to the south. Building heights would be mostly one to three stories and parking would be provided on streets and in private lots and driveways to the side or rear of buildings.

VISION PLAN

The Vision Plan identifies twenty key sites noted for redevelopment, enhancement, or expansion. These key areas are listed as follows; the number before each described improvement corresponds to a numbered located on the Vision Plan (see Figure 3-2).

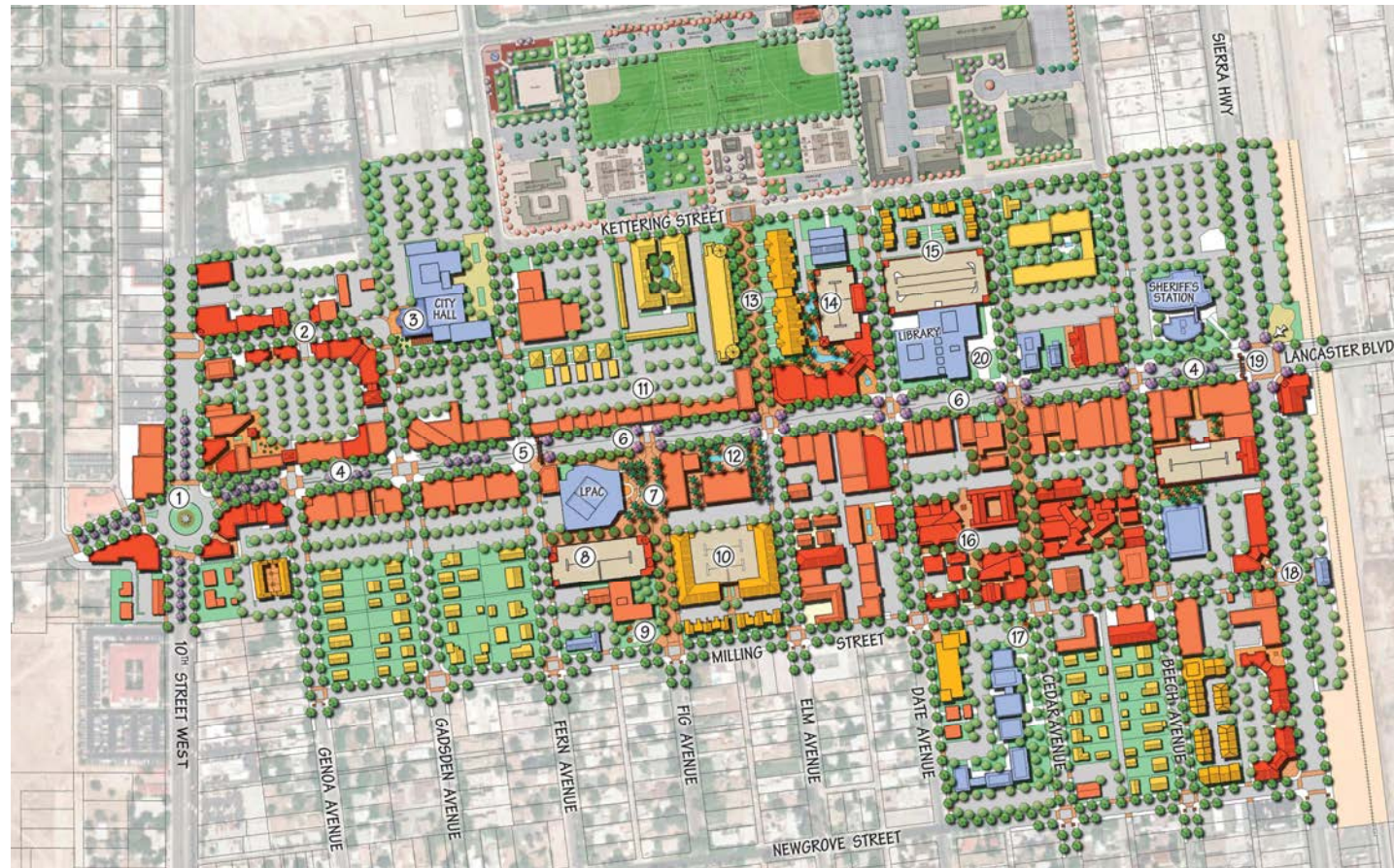


Figure 3-2: Vision Plan

1. Improved intersection with potential roundabout incorporating gateway monument or landscaping (see Fig. 3-3)
2. Street-fronting buildings accommodating parking in rear with improved pedestrian access
3. Potential City Hall expansion and public plaza opportunity



Figure 3-3: Potential Roundabout at Lancaster Blvd. and 10th St.

4. North side angled parking and south side parallel parking for 2 blocks between Genoa Avenue and Fern Avenue and 1 block between Beech Avenue and Sierra Highway
5. Gateway arch to the Boulevard District (see Fig 3-4)
6. Meandering Boulevard with alternating angled and parallel parking between Fern Avenue and Beech Avenue
7. Improved public space, including outdoor amphitheater east of LPAC and enhanced paving on Fig Avenue to function as convertible space during events (see Fig. 3-5)
8. Parking structure with arts-based retail on ground floor
9. Neighborhood park
10. Mixed use building with ground floor retail, parking structure, and townhomes lining Milling Street
11. Enhanced rear building facades and pedestrian access from improved surface parking lots
12. Public plaza with clock tower and fountains
13. Enhanced paving along Elm Avenue to provide a pedestrian connection to the park and to function as convertible space during events (see Fig. 3-6)
14. Central meandering stream and public plaza surrounded by retail, residential, and a parking structure
15. Public parking structure and new residential housing
16. Paseos and alley enhancements among live/work units and art-oriented commercial uses, creating pedestrian linkages through the Cedar Avenue Arts District and to other districts (see Fig. 3-7)
17. Sculpture garden and community theater
18. Transit-oriented development along Sierra Highway including commercial/residential mixed use with new parking structure and enhanced intersection at Milling Street
19. Gateway arch to Lancaster Boulevard from Sierra Highway
20. Enhanced public plaza with pop-up fountain jets



Figure 3-4: East on Lancaster Blvd. at Fern



Figure 3-5: North on Fig Ave. to Lancaster Blvd.



Figure 3-6: North on Elm Ave. from Lancaster Blvd.



Figure 3-7: Alley in Cedar Avenue Arts District

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