

**STAFF REPORT**  
**Lancaster Redevelopment Agency**

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MVB

Date: June 9, 2009

To: Chairman Parris and Agency Board Directors

From: Elizabeth Brubaker, Housing and Neighborhood Revitalization Director

Subject: **Concur with and direct staff to commence with the implementation of the Joshua Neighborhood Master Vision Plan**

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**Recommendation:**

Concur with the vision plan and direct staff to commence with the planning, environmental, and redevelopment processes necessary to implement the Joshua Neighborhood Master Vision Plan.

**Financial Impact:**

None at this time. As individual strategies of various stages of the vision plan are defined and prioritized, the Agency shall approve separate allocations of funding and budget adjustments as needed for anticipated project implementation.

**Background:**

The geographical area located between Division Street and Challenger Way and between Avenues J and K, shall be referred to as the Joshua Neighborhood Vision Plan. The reference to this particular area is because of its central physical location within the urban core of the City and the importance of Joshua Elementary School's facilities as a primary community feature within the neighborhood. A large portion of the westerly half of the Joshua neighborhood was primarily built during the late 1950s as part of the growth pattern of new development within the City's urban core. This growth was heavily influenced by the regional access routes of Sierra Highway and the Southern Pacific Railroad and the juxtaposition that those arterials had on influencing development east of Division Street.

During the first half of twentieth century, development patterns centered mostly around transportation links supported by agricultural uses and the need to get products to market. This pattern of development produced a scattering of several small ranches and farms, bunkhouses, labor camps, individual worker housing, and a few small tracts of homes in areas clustered around transportation and activity centers. The agrarian development pattern would continue to dominate the landscape up through the 1940s and 1950s; however, the area was beginning to see resulting changes in development patterns from a growing aerospace industry that began toward the end of World War II. During the late 1950s, the area was changing to a more industrial and commercial based economy, fueled by a rapidly growing population, increased family wealth due

to a strong economy, and a higher standard of living. This produced a demand for housing and an unprecedented surge in subdividing larger tracts of land into smaller lots for individual home ownership.

As a result, the westerly half of the Joshua vision plan area developed with several tracts of single-family residential homes, with a small group of higher density multi-tenant units being developed off Division Street. The tract homes typically had between 1,000 and 1,500 square feet of living space built on approximate 6,500 to 7,500 square foot lots. To supplement the influx of population, temporary housing and short-term lodging was also being provided through the construction of numerous apartments and motel units along the adjacent high traffic arterial of Sierra Highway, which also tended to serve the subject vision plan neighborhood area as well.

Young families moved into the area in search of jobs as part of the developing aerospace economy creating a market for highly skilled and technical jobs. The nature of this job market produced well-paid technicians and engineers that now had resources to purchase new homes for their families. During this time, the local housing market was extremely strong producing over 6,500 units of single-family homes in an approximate five year period (1955-1960). This increase accounted for better than 80% of the available housing in the market. Most of this growth occurred along key transportation routes adjacent to Sierra Highway and Division Street (north / south streets), and Avenue I, Avenue J, and Avenue K (east / west streets). The development pattern established during this time would continue for several years helping to fuel the development of well over half the land area involved within the Joshua neighborhood.

Today, the neighborhood characteristics in the Joshua area include significant portions of the housing west of the 5<sup>th</sup> Street East with the oldest development being adjacent to Division Street and Avenue J. Higher density apartment buildings and commercial service uses were constructed along Division between Avenue K and Avenue J, with a multi-tenant retail commercial center on the southeast corner of Avenue J and Division Street. Newer construction involving apartment buildings and townhomes along Challenger Way, south of Avenue J-8 and a more recently constructed commercial center were completed in the southeast portion of the vision plan area. Since the mid-1990s, newer single-family tracts have been constructed as part of a sporadic pattern of infill adjacent to Challenger Way with several parcels of land still being vacant for future residential projects.

The subject area is suffering from blight due to deteriorating conditions caused by aging housing, declining commercial areas, changes in development patterns to other areas of the community, and shifts in private investment throughout the City. The pattern of roadway alignments, changes in development requirements for subdivisions over a 60-year period, inconsistent and often substandard road widths in older sections of subdivisions, naturally occurring drainage courses that bisect the area, and poor circulation in portions of the neighborhood have all contributed to a general lack of neighborhood continuity and promotion of potential blight. Much of the commercial develops along Division Street and Avenue J involves older structures with a higher than normal incidence of deterioration and vacancies requiring increased maintenance and rehabilitation. The lack of an infill strategy has resulted in conflicts that occur regarding street patterns and alignments that negatively contribute to future infill possibilities and efficient land use potentially resulting in added blighting conditions for future projects within for the Joshua neighborhood.

The existing problems stem from an overall lack of maintenance, structural deterioration of existing housing, increased criminal activity and drug dealing in areas next to schools and commercial properties, imposed prior patterns of poor traffic circulation, and limited neighborhood access. These negative factors compound the problems and add to the general physical, social, and economic obsolescence of uses throughout the neighborhood requiring a need for a thoughtful multi-faceted approach to correct specific problems, combined with an overall strategy of rehabilitation.

The primary objectives for the Joshua Neighborhood Vision Plan are: 1) to redevelop areas involving inconsistent patterns and densities of multi-family residential uses; 2) to mitigate the conflict of uses between some of the uses (e.g. mostly commercial to residential uses); 3) to develop programs and establish street patterns for the redevelopment and rehabilitation of older commercial and residential properties; 4) to enhance circulation and access, wherever possible; 5) to ensure and facilitate the construction of new infrastructure to support neighborhood growth and future investment; and 6) to create implementation tools and comply with environmental standards in order to realize the potential benefits from the resultant vision plan.

**Discussion:**

The preparation of the vision plan represents only a first step in the revitalization process. Additional actions will be necessary by the Council, Redevelopment Agency and Planning Commission, which will provide opportunities for public input. Future actions necessary to complete the effort include:

- Compliance with environmental review requirements.
- Adoption of any necessary regulatory plans by the Agency.
- Compliance with Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970, as amended and applicable administrative regulations.
- Acquisition of property, specific project and funding approvals by affected parties, the City and Lancaster Redevelopment Agency and other interested parties as necessary to implement the overall plan.

Implementation of the Joshua Neighborhood Master Vision Plan project will require these and other related actions, as well as a commitment of resources by the City, the Agency and various interested parties. Therefore, it is important that the City Council and Agency Board concur with the planning effort to date and direct staff to continue with the actions necessary to finalize and implement the Joshua Neighborhood Master Vision Plan. This concurrence and direction will provide staff and the affected parties with a level of confidence necessary to continue revitalization efforts.

Attachment:

Joshua Neighborhood Master Vision Plan