

STAFF REPORT
Lancaster Redevelopment Agency

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07/28/09
MVB

Date: July 28, 2009

To: Chairman Parris and Agency Board Directors

From: Elizabeth Brubaker, Housing and Neighborhood Revitalization Director

Subject: **Yucca Neighborhood Master Vision Plan**

Recommendation:

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

Fiscal 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 costs associated with project implementation.

Background:

The geographical area located between Sierra Highway and Division Street and between Avenue I and Avenue K, shall be referred to as the Yucca Neighborhood Vision Plan. This name was selected because of the important early role Yucca Avenue played in the development of the area within the urban core of the City, and because it is a recognized feature common throughout the entire vision plan area.

The vision plan area is broken up into a number of land use districts composed of residential, commercial, industrial and transportation related uses. It is from the strength of these previously established uses that the vision plan will focus on promoting quality redevelopment in some of the older areas, while promoting compatible new development and growth on land suitable for infill projects yet to be developed.

Historically, the largest portion of residential property is in the northerly part of the vision plan area established around activities taking place in the downtown along what is now called Lancaster Boulevard, and the area known as the "Old Herald Tract". Most of these homes pre-date the 1950s and include some of the earliest housing established by pioneering families settling in Lancaster. Growth characteristics have been heavily influenced by the transportation routes created by Sierra Highway and Division Street connecting places north and south of the Lancaster.

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Additionally, this area originally became a focal point for growth resulting from the hub of activity resulting from the transshipment of goods and people by way of Southern Pacific rail line to the depot located adjacent of the intersection of Lancaster Boulevard and Sierra Highway.

In the earliest days of the community's development, Lancaster grew from an agrarian economy, centered mostly around transportation links supported by businesses tied to and serving a variety of agricultural uses. This produced a scattering of several small ranches and farms, bunkhouses, labor camps, individual worker housing, and a few small tracts of homes (e.g. Herald Tract area) clustered around transportation and activity centers. Commercial activity developed in support of the growing population and areas along Lancaster Boulevard and Yucca Avenue became key districts of economic activity.

The rural lifestyle would continue to dominate up through the 1930s and 1940s; 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. The use of the railroad became less of a feature for promoting growth, as the population eventually moved out of the urban core and into the outlying areas. This left many of the older residential and commercial buildings within the vision plan area to deteriorate to the extent that many would be better off "razed" for potential new development. This fate met the original railroad depot that functioned marginally through the early 1960s supporting limited passenger service, but was later destroyed by fire and not rebuilt due to its obsolescence. Although the trend for residential housing was moving away from the earlier transportation center found in the downtown, a modest amount of multiple family housing developed off Avenue I, between Yucca Avenue and Division Street in the late 60s to the early 70s.

In the area between Avenue I and Avenue J a number of smaller industrial and commercial businesses continued to exist and/or were developed in recent years, mostly as a result of influences of Redevelopment Agency activities either through the assemblage of parcels, extension of utilities, code enforcement cases, roadway improvements, or as part of planned City capital improvement projects. Another major change affecting the area occurred along Sierra Highway just south of Lancaster Boulevard following the 1994 Northridge Earthquake, which brought in new commuter rail service and passenger station with the development of regional Metrolink facilities.

The overall area is generally considered to be in a "transitional" development cycle. A large portion of the buildings are at the end of their useful "life-cycle" and are either candidates for renovation or demolition. Many properties display signs of neglect, substandard conditions and severe maintenance issues. The commercial and industrial businesses developed along Division Street, Avenue I, and Avenue J are mostly older structures with a higher than normal incidence of deterioration and vacancies requiring increased maintenance and rehabilitation.

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The current trend in the area between Avenue J and Avenue K has been the development of small pockets of new commercial and industrial. Residential properties do not exist south of Avenue K as the area is zoned primarily for commercial and industrial development. Due to the availability of several large tracts of undeveloped land, the area between Avenue J and Avenue K has the greatest potential for significant economic change to occur through private investment and new redevelopment projects. However, with a lack of a clear infill strategy, conflicts could occur regarding street patterns and alignments and parcel assembly that negatively contributes to any future infill possibilities and efficient use of the land.

The primary objectives for the Yucca Neighborhood Vision Plan are: 1) to eliminate or reduce the number of deteriorating and unmaintained properties; 2) redevelop areas involving inconsistent patterns and densities of multi-family residential uses; 3) to mitigate the conflict between some of the uses (e.g. mostly commercial to residential uses); 4) to develop programs and establish street patterns for the redevelopment and rehabilitation of older commercial and residential properties; 5) to enhance circulation and access, wherever possible; 6) to ensure and facilitate the construction of new infrastructure to support neighborhood growth and future investment; and 7) 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 Yucca 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 Yucca 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:

Yucca Neighborhood Master Vision Plan Maps (3)