

A group of cyclists riding on a city street at night. The scene is illuminated by city lights and neon signs, creating a vibrant urban atmosphere. The cyclists are in motion, and their bicycles are visible in the foreground and middle ground. The background shows a busy city street with various signs and buildings.

# Health

**A city of activity** - The relationship between public health and urban design has its roots in a time when cities tackled the problems of major disease epidemics with a reorganized infrastructure that incorporated access to light and air as prominent features in its design. Today, mental, social and physical health deficits still plague our cities. With physical inactivity and pollution as major contributors to poor health, it is time for urban design to contribute to the improved well-being of Los Angeles and its residents. These Urban Design Principles will address the health of our city at many levels. New and improved parks, playgrounds, trails and plazas provide open space in which people are able to increase their activity levels and interact with one another. The health of neighborhoods is addressed by the recognition of the importance of historic and cultural character. Encouraging sustainability and innovation contributes to the well-being of present and future Angelenos. Overall, a healthier urban environment will be realized for Los Angeles.

# 4

## generate public open space

The creation of public open space is essential to the health of residents and the physical environment. Increasing open space, of which Los Angeles has much less than cities of comparable size, is a fundamental urban design goal. Open space can be created and increased by programming a connected network of physical linkages and creative use of available public rights of way. Streets, alleys, sidewalks and adjacent areas, also offer opportunities for small scale gathering, creative programming, or contemplative parks and plazas with active linkage connections.

**“Open space should be within walking [distance of] the pedestrian shed of every dwelling. The pedestrian shed is the measure of urbanism.”**

- Andres Duany

Research has shown that residents within a three minute walk of open space utilize that space more often than those who live further away. Open space is critical to increased physical activity and a connection to the physical environment. While constructing traditional parks at the recommended 1500 linear feet intervals or 750 foot radius may be difficult, that goal may also be reached by enhancing a nearby sidewalk, converting unused street dedications, creating a community garden from a publicly held vacant lot, or greening a neighborhood alley to enhance the pedestrian, transit rider or bicyclist's experience. Applying a creative definition of open space will challenge designers to examine the potential of utilizing these areas in non-traditional ways. These spaces provide an opportunity for planting, watershed management, art, social interaction, recreation and enjoyment of everyday life.

Active open spaces increases the public's perception of safety. Urban furnishings invite passive and active engagement within public areas. Street furniture, high quality materials, lighting and curb and sidewalk treatments provide important amenities in the public realm. Public art can be an integral and interactive feature that provides a focal point or a facilitator of social interaction in a public space.

Open space is an asset for the community and the economy, especially in a city where the weather provides year-round useability. Great open spaces have the power to attract a diverse group of people on a regular basis and provide a variety of social interaction, programming or amenities and become a destination within the city or neighborhood.

what's out there

## generate public open space



At the intersection of Castro and Market Streets in San Francisco lies the 17th Street "Castro Commons." What started as a pilot project in 2009 to claim excess right of way, has become a permanent plaza that features several seating options and a terra-cotta color to distinguish it from the street and the historic MUNI F-Line Streetcar right of way. The space is mostly used by the Castro Community Benefit District, however the flexible seating allows for a wide variety of uses, from people watching to impromptu music performances.

The High Line, an abandoned railroad track for freight traffic in the 1930s, was turned into a new public space after Friends of the High Line formed in 1999, as New York City threatened to demolish it. In 2002, the project gained the city's support, and in 2006 the park began construction. In 2011, the second phase of the park opened to the public. Section 2 runs from 20th Street to 30th Street and includes scenic vistas, a variety of seating areas, meandering pathways and naturalistic plantings.



Augustus Hawkins Park exists along Compton and Slauson Boulevards in South LA. The open space was once a cement pipe storage yard and it was transformed into an 8.5 acre park. The park contains rolling hills, native plants and several tree species. The park is also home to the Evan Frankel Discovery Center, which provides information about a wide range of environmental issues and an emphasis on children's program.



# 5

## reinforce walkability, bikeability + wellbeing

Design of the urban environment that integrates physical activity into daily life is central to the health of the city. The creation of more opportunities for pedestrians and bicyclists to effortlessly connect public open space reinforces walkability and wellbeing. Today's Los Angeles has less activity choices for residents than those typically found in other urban centers. Increasing walkability and bikeability will increase the opportunity for physical activity.

**“[If a city wants to be a] lively, attractive, safe and sustainable city [it must] be sweet to its pedestrians, sweet to its cyclists.”**

- Jan Gehl

Pedestrian and bike friendly cities improve the quality of life for residents. Walking and biking contribute to a healthier lifestyle and cleaner environment while decreasing our carbon footprint.

There are many mechanisms by which to support pedestrian and bicyclist comfort and movement. Spaces framed by human scaled buildings appeal to pedestrians as do facades with openings along sidewalks. Sidewalk widths should comfortably accommodate pedestrians. Thoroughfares should have adequate buffers from vehicles to accommodate increased pedestrian and bicycle activity safely. Active entrances that minimize driveways and parking access on main streets enhance pedestrian movement and safety for bicycles. Screening parking lots and parking structures or locating parking off the primary roadway

lessens the visual impact of the car. Providing facilities for bicyclists such as secure parking, repairs, showers and a safe travel network, can increase the number of users.

Streets in the City of Los Angeles that are underutilized by automobiles would be better transformed into bike and walking trails that are part of a citywide system. An improved street system of linear park-like open space in the existing fabric of the city that integrates active experiences such as walking, jogging and cycling can be developed as individual projects are implemented. Everyone can engage in physical activity while using the streets for their daily needs, creating a more vibrant and accessible city and a healthier public environment.

what's out there

## reinforce walkability, bikeability + wellbeing



◀ One of the main streets in the San Fernando Valley, Ventura Boulevard, has a rich history. The Sherman Oaks section of the Boulevard boasts new streetscape improvements including landscaped medians, pedestrian lighting and streetscape furniture. The street is closed down for a day every fall for the Sherman Oaks Street Fair, pictured on the left. The Fair includes, food, entertainment and booths for local crafts.

▶ Pearl Street is a four block pedestrian mall located in Downtown Boulder, Colorado. The mall houses both local and nationally recognized businesses as well as the Boulder County Courthouse. Pearl Street was improved thanks to city and federal funds under the Community Housing and Development Act. Free bicycle parking and pedestrian amenities including several public art installations, a children's play area and a fountain contribute to its success as a shopping destination and a public space.



◀ The City of Long Beach has become proactive about making bicycle and pedestrian safety a priority for its citizens. The city has plans to improve traffic for bicyclists and provide education and bike share programs. In terms of infrastructure, the city has started to resurface 20 miles of streets to include bike lanes, and aims for 696 miles of new bikeways. One of the pilot projects includes a green, painted bike lane with sharrows, to raise awareness between cyclists and motorists.

# 6

## bridge the past + the future

New developments that visually and physically connect with adjacent buildings as well as neighboring districts successfully bridge the past and the future. Existing iconic buildings and districts exhibiting unique urban character should be preserved and celebrated for their historical and cultural significance. The integration of new development with the architectural and cultural past helps residents recognize the richness of the past that contributes to the quality of the future.

**“History is one of the most remarkable things in our lives. The mere fact it occurred makes it remarkable.”**

- Anonymous

Bridging the past and the future is critical to strengthening the identity of the city. Los Angeles was established by a grant from the King of Spain as a pueblo in 1781 and incorporated as a city in 1850. More than 200 years later, several of the original buildings and many historical neighborhoods still exist in some form, most retaining significant amounts of their original character.

Today, the original pueblo settlement is commemorated in the historic district of Los Angeles Pueblo Plaza, adjacent to Olvera Street. Abbott Kinney's signature Venice Canals harken back to the early 1900s, reflecting a unique vision of a developer. The neighborhoods of the city are varied with extreme differences in size, geography and demographics. They are distinct in character and range from suburban Chatsworth in the northwestern San Fernando Valley, to the port community of San Pedro in the south, historic Boyle Heights in the eastern part of the city and the college-town feel of Westwood, in West Los Angeles.

While some buildings and neighborhoods have been preserved, there is the potential to commemorate more historic events, in areas that have been largely ignored. Encouraging the refurbishment of historic areas and accommodating uses such as outdoor cafes, plazas and creative programming, creating a liveable rather than static neighborhood. Public art is a vital contributor, by documenting the neighborhood's history, explaining changes to an area or signifying the importance of a site. In addition, special signage and plaques describe the history of an area, even if an original building or street is no longer there. Building facades can highlight a variety of styles representative of different time periods, if they are retained, and can serve as a tangible and visual historical timeline while enriching the urban fabric. Bridging the past and the future can occur on a variety of scales - from the preservation and restoration of one iconic building, to the recognition of a series of streets or neighborhoods. The celebration of the past and integration with the future will help Angelenos recognize their rich heritage.

### what's out there

## bridge the past + the future

Bob's Big Boy Restaurant, located in Burbank, has been in operation since 1949. Since then, the restaurant has turned into both a cultural and architectural institution. It is the oldest Bob's in the country, and was designated as a State Point of Historical Interest in 1993. It was restored in that same year. In addition to enhancing the architectural history of the building, the restaurant has reintroduced the culture of the 1950s, with "Car Hop" service and a classic car show on Friday nights.



The Los Angeles City Council adopted the ordinance creating Historic Preservation Overlay Zones (HPOZ) in 1979. HPOZ create historic districts and range from 50 to over 3,000 properties. Most of the properties are residential with some containing commercial and industrial properties as well. Not all buildings in the areas need qualify, as they are a collection of several cohesive or unique historic resources within a demarcated area. The first HPOZ is in Angelino Heights, one of the oldest neighborhoods of Los Angeles.



The Century Plaza Hotel, in Century City in Los Angeles was built in 1966 and has a rich history. The guests of the hotel have included several presidents and high profile celebrities. However, the building was sold in 2008 and the new owners had plans to demolish the hotel. In 2009, the hotel was added to the National Trust for Historic Preservation list of the 11 most endangered places in America. In 2011, the owners decided to preserve and reuse the hotel instead of demolishing it.

# 7

## nurture neighborhood character

One design approach does not fit all. Los Angeles is made up of a rich fabric of distinct neighborhoods. New projects can contribute, enhance and further define the character of a neighborhood rather than simply alter it. Each potential development or improvement needs to consider the context of its neighborhood or district and work with it.

**“In the Arabic language, the word for ‘neighbourhood’ or quartier, both with purely spatial connotations is hayy, which is the exact same word for ‘alive’, while its plural ahyaa’ is the same word for ‘the living.’”**

-Ayssar Arida

Incremental changes of neighborhoods are to be expected and embraced. Urban environments need the flexibility to be able to change with circumstance and progress. Contributing to a distinct character sustains community by nurturing the identity of the neighborhood.

There are urban design characteristics, however, that are common to many Los Angeles neighborhoods that have seemed to linger over time. Shared features that represent a lack of physical identity (underused surface parking lots, a dearth of architectural design, landscape, signage, or public art that celebrates the history and culture of place) are opportunities for neighborhoods to nurture their neighborhood character. Thus, these are areas of opportunity to nurture neighborhood character.

Parking lots and excess roadway could be used as gathering places and public spaces during off-peak hours. Transit hubs and developments

can spur new opportunities for architecture and landscape that celebrate the uniqueness of a neighborhood. Public art may educate residents about the past and can provide a unique design element that enhances a neighborhood’s character. Street trees are a traditional element used in the urban environment that defines districts by the visual characteristics of a selected species. Street trees can be a city-wide unifying element that links neighborhoods together helping to define the city as a whole, and simultaneously acknowledge the various neighborhoods.

Understanding the history, architecture, geography, environmental scale and cultural characteristics of neighborhoods provides the basis for future development and design that is rooted in the specific culture of a community. The following are a few examples of the distinct Los Angeles neighborhoods. They include Chinatown, Venice Beach, Koreatown, Van Nuys and Boyle Heights, and they provide an introduction to the diversity of the city.



Image: Mark Peacock, 2011

## chinatown

Old Chinatown was originally built in 1852, populated by male Chinese workers in the laundry and produce industries. The Chinese had no control over leasing the land due to the Chinese Exclusion Act, which did not permit Chinese people to own their own businesses. In 1931, the city demolished old Chinatown and built Union Station. The new Chinatown exists directly north of downtown, between Dodger Stadium and the Los Angeles Civic Center. Opened in 1938, it was originally created by Hollywood set designers to make it appealing to tourists.

In the late 1950s, when covenants were lifted to allow Chinese to move to other areas of the city, several of the Chinese immigrants moved to different neighborhoods, mostly in the San Gabriel Valley. New, ethnic immigrants from Vietnam, Cambodia and Thailand started to populate new Chinatown in the 1970s. In the 1980s and 90s, new commercial centers expanded Chinatown past Broadway. Today, Chinese and other ethnic immigrants own almost all of the commercial buildings within new Chinatown.



Chinatown’s urban design character is focused around the public realm, with several pedestrian friendly plazas, markets and shopping arcades. Central Plaza and West Plaza are surrounded by retail. A “Chinese” style influence including pagodas, street lamps and signage is present throughout the neighborhood. Bright colors and signs in Chinese characters also give the neighborhood a unique identity. Two gateways announce the neighborhood, one that faces Central Plaza and another on Cesar Chavez and Broadway Boulevards. Chinatown is easily

accessible by transit and is very pedestrian friendly due to limited vehicle access on certain streets. The streets of Chinatown vary, as it is bordered by several major vehicular thoroughways, but within the neighborhood, small alleys and plazas exist that are designed for the pedestrian. The two- and three-story buildings of the neighborhood are also at a pedestrian scale, making Broadway and other large streets less intimidating for the pedestrian due to the consistent street frontage and vibrant street life.



Image : Bence Zanyi, 2009

## venice beach

In 1905, the tobacco millionaire Abbot Kinney opened Venice, California to the public. He developed the city as a resort town which resembled Venice, Italy in architectural style and urban design. Kinney built a casino in 1907 followed by other amusements, hoping to make Venice the “Coney Island of the Pacific.” In 1925, the City of Los Angeles annexed Venice and started to dismantle the amusements immediately. Oil was discovered in the 1930s, and wells sprouted along some of the canals. By the 1950s and 60s, Venice became a

hotbed for new artistic talent and that still remains. During the same time period, well-known architects came to Venice to create signature single and multi-family dwellings as well as commercial buildings. Today, Venice is home to the Hare Krishna religion and displays a myriad collection of unique architecture, public art and street performers. While the city demolished several of Venice’s amusements and canals in the early 20th century, there are traces of Kinney’s original plan found in today’s neighborhood.



Ocean Front Walk is a vibrant public space that serves as a tourist destination used by pedestrians, cyclists and most famously, roller skaters. A small area of Venice’s original canals still exist and are bordered by Pacific Avenue and Venice Boulevard. Alleys leading off of the main streets into residential neighborhoods are a lush, hidden treasure. The hybrid of architecture that exists in Venice ranges from the design of Marsh and Russell, to the work of Frank Gehry. Abbott Kinney Boulevard, the primary retail street, is a walkable, commercial corridor with

palm trees, consistent street frontage, and two lanes of bidirectional traffic, while larger streets such as Lincoln Boulevard and parts of Venice Boulevard have four lanes of bidirectional traffic and big box development. Overall, the urban design character of Venice makes it one of the most dense and diverse neighborhoods in Los Angeles.



Image : Rebel Sciences “Kwasi B”, 2008

## koreatown



Outside of New York City, Koreatown is one of the densest areas in the country. The neighborhood is organized around an orthogonal street grid, diverting on occasion. With the advent of four Metro stations (two Purple Line and two Red Line), in addition to several bus lines, Koreatown is one of the most transit accessible neighborhoods in the city. Wilshire Boulevard and other large streets have wide sidewalks, street trees, and distinguished crosswalks making it a welcome place for pedestrians. Commercial streets are characterized by four lanes of bidirectional

traffic, with residential streets of two lanes of traffic with parking. The commercial buildings in the neighborhood are some of the tallest in the city, rivaling those downtown. While there are several single family homes, multi-family dwellings are common as well. The neighborhood showcases a hybrid of varying architecture; Wilshire Boulevard is well known for several Art Deco buildings and religious landmarks. New construction is common in this neighborhood, mostly as a result of transit-oriented development.



Housing in the area known as Koreatown/Wilshire Western originated in the early 1900s. The auto-oriented commercial developments in the neighborhood were constructed in the 1920s along Wilshire Boulevard and other large streets such as Western and Vermont. In the 1950s, several of the high rise buildings characteristic of the financial district in this neighborhood were built. Koreans began moving to the neighborhood in the 1960s, where a sizable black and latino population existed. In 1992, the Los Angeles Riot left several of the Korean businesses destroyed, and

some of the Korean population fled to other neighborhoods. Presently, however, the population is largely Korean, with several other nationalities moving to the neighborhood due to reasonably priced housing and proximity to transportation.



Image: Candis Bassett-Smith, 2007

# van nuys

This neighborhood is named for Dutch farmer/banker Isaac Newton Van Nuys. He built the first wood frame house in the San Fernando Valley in 1872. On February 22, 1911, lot sales began in the new town of Van Nuys, California. Since the 1970's, the neighborhood has evolved into a largely Latino neighborhood reflecting the demographics of other neighborhoods in the eastern San Fernando Valley. Today, downtown Van Nuys is one of the largest centers of government outside of the Civic Center.



Van Nuys is a fairly uniform, gridded residential community. The commercial corridors vary, with Van Nuys Boulevard populated with automotive businesses in some areas and small scale retail districts with consistent street frontage in others. The civic center of Van Nuys has several public spaces and is located conveniently near the Metro Orange Line. Van Nuys is located along the Los Angeles River, and a new pedestrian and bike trail was recently created along this section of the river. Architectural character varies from Spanish Revival to

residences designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. A historic preservation overlay was recently enacted in the neighborhood, preserving bungalow style housing near Van Nuys High School. The streets of Van Nuys have large sidewalks with street trees and two lanes of bidirectional traffic in the residential areas, with street parking. The commercial streets have wide sidewalks and four lanes of bidirectional traffic. Van Nuys is home to several significant parks and landmarks including the Sepulveda Dam, the Japanese Garden and the Van Nuys Recreation Center.



Image: Payton Chung, 2009

# boyle heights

Since its origins in the 1880s, Boyle Heights has been known as the neighborhood of immigrants. In its early years, residents were primarily Jewish and Japanese, with Russian and Yugoslav residents as well. During WW II, many Japanese-Americans were sent to relocation camps and non-Latinos started to migrate to western neighborhoods. The current population is largely Latino, which can be observed in the subject matter of many local murals and the Mariachi Plaza.



Boyle Heights is centered around Hollenbeck Park and its lake. In the 1950s, when the Los Angeles freeways were being built, the Golden State Freeway was placed adjacent to Hollenbeck Park, changing the once peaceful urban refuge. Characteristic of Boyle Heights are the murals on several streets including First Street, Soto Street and Atlantic Boulevard, to name a few. Most of the buildings in this neighborhood are one story single family dwellings and two or three story apartment buildings. Architectural character of neighborhood housing varies

from Queen Ann, to Mission Revival, to Bungalow style. Several of the buildings have sizable front yards, most of which are maintained and gated. Residential streets are two-lane, bidirectional with parking on both sides and sizable sidewalks. Commercial streets have similar structure, with two additional bi-directional traffic lanes. While there are some areas of consistent street frontage, surface parking lots and large setbacks are also common. Steps have been take to preserve historic Jewish sites in the neighborhood.