San Pedro: A Distinctive Waterfront Community

by Debbie Lawrence - Planning Assistant and Linda Lou - Intern

San Pedro is located at the southernmost portion of the City of Los Angeles on the Palos Verdes Peninsula, with spectacular coastal bluffs and expansive views of the harbor and ocean. It is one of the City’s waterfront communities, along with Pacific Palisades, Playa del Rey, Venice and Wilmington. Adjacent to the Port of Los Angeles, San Pedro has diverse residential neighborhoods, abundant open space, and a growing arts scene. San Pedro has many identifiable landmarks, such as the Vincent Thomas Bridge, the Korean Bell of Friendship, and the Frank Gehry-designed Cabrillo Marine Aquarium.

The community’s maritime roots date back more than 100 years, when fishing, canneries, oil drilling and shipbuilding began emerging in the early 1900s, and became major industries that generated jobs and commerce for San Pedro and the region. Since then, San Pedro has evolved into a major seaport, with its harbor, together with the Port of Long Beach, becoming the busiest port in the nation. (continued on p. 4)
A Message
From the Director

On May 21st the City Council approved the Mayor’s proposed budget for the upcoming Fiscal Year. Along with key measures that aim to streamline city operations and eliminate inefficiencies, the budget includes funding for many important projects of the Department of City Planning.

The budget includes allocations for a variety of efforts that ensure Los Angeles will continue to be a leader among cities. This includes provisions for the re-writing of the City’s zoning code (which was highlighted in the Winter 2012 edition of pLAnning). The budget also helps us to continue to expand our system of transit and cycling infrastructure, and reclaim the City’s streets for people, through updates to the Transportation Element of the General Plan, as well as the Transit-Oriented District program (along with grant support from Metro). Funding is also set aside to support a key update to the City’s Housing Element, and work related to the proposed Downtown Stadium and Events center. Finally the proposed budget ensures continued work on seven Community Plans, including the San Pedro Community Plan highlighted in this issue.

As we move forward into the coming Fiscal Year and embark on many new projects, we look forward to the leadership of our newly appointed Deputy Director of Planning, Lisa Webber. You can read more about her in our Staff Highlight in this issue.

Sincerely,

Michael J. LoGrande
Director of Planning

An Underutilized Street Becomes a Place for People
by Simon Pastucha - City Planner

There has been increased demand in Los Angeles for safer and more welcoming streets for residents to play, walk, run, bicycle and relax. At the same time, City agencies are trying to decrease rates of obesity, improve air quality, create alternative transportation choices, address lack of park space and improve the walkability and accessibility of neighborhoods in Los Angeles. The Streets for People initiative, a collaboration between the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health and the City of Los Angeles Planning Commission, working closely with the Planning Department’s Urban Design Studio, aims to address these needs and goals, and has begun to do so with its first pilot project: Sunset Triangle Plaza.

The Streets for People pilot program offers a cost efficient and time expedient approach to creating public plazas out of underutilized portions of our streets. These demonstration plazas are designed to be temporary (with movable barriers and furniture and easily removable street paint) and dynamic spaces that can become destinations for people of all ages, backgrounds and physical abilities, where a resident can linger, patronizing businesses or engaging with members of their community.

Streets for People opened Sunset Triangle Plaza, Los Angeles’ first pilot pedestrian plaza in March of 2012. Located in the Silver Lake neighborhood of Los Angeles, this one small block of Griffith Park Blvd. adjacent to a city owned triangle of land (between Sunset Blvd., Maltman Ave. and Edgecliffe Dr.) has been converted into a pedestrian area demarcated with bright green paint and filled with planters and welcoming street furniture. So far the project has been a success, as the plaza has been utilized by the local community and the nearby businesses have shown their support. A farmers’ market has also been using the plaza twice a week.

The City is in the process of crafting a permit process and maintenance criteria to make Sunset Triangle and other future plazas successful in the long term. Meanwhile Planning staff and the Department of Transportation are currently looking for additional funding and locations for future pilot projects, which will further the Planning Department’s goals of improved mobility and increased open space.
Los Angeles Successfully Hosts the National Planning Conference
by Kevin Keller - Senior City Planner

Nearly 5000 land use professionals from around the country visited Los Angeles in April as part of the annual American Planning Association’s National Conference. The City last hosted the event in 1986, and there was much to experience from more than 25 years of challenge and progress since then.

Department staff spent many volunteer hours helping to plan and organize the four day event, which took place at the LA Convention Center in the LA Live district. The conference provided a forum to showcase much of the work Los Angeles has taken to move towards revitalizing many neighborhoods and urban centers, including the significant re-investment and transformation of the downtown area. Key speakers, events, and receptions were held throughout downtown, taking planners on foot and on transit to Union Station, to the historic Orpheum Theater on Broadway, and throughout the Figueroa Corridor.

Department staff volunteered to organize panel discussions on topics throughout the city, from discussing the multi modal transformation of the Westside and transit-oriented development in South LA to adaptive reuse in downtown and the re-urbanization of Warner Center in the San Fernando Valley. Over 70 mobile workshops brought planners out of the Convention Center and into the city, to explore food carts in Boyle Heights, equestrian trails in the North Valley, redevelopment plans in Jordan Downs, entertainment districts in Hollywood, and historic districts in West Adams. Two primary orientation tours were also organized to showcase the grand boulevards and hills and valleys of Los Angeles. Nearly all tours sold out and were filled to the brim with eager participants.

Feedback from the conference and from APA has been overwhelmingly positive, and the important work of Los Angeles’ City and County planning efforts did not go unnoticed. Throughout the conference, attendees could be heard saying, “a subway, really?” or “where does that light rail go?” and many were amazed that a car was no longer a necessity for visiting Downtown.

Certainly the city will continue to have its planning challenges in the future, but the conference allowed Planning staff to “Re-Imagine” the work we do for the City of Los Angeles and take stock of some of the important accomplishments in the profession.

Lisa Webber
Deputy Director of Planning

The Department is pleased to welcome our new Deputy Director of Planning, Lisa Webber. Ms. Webber, who will officially join the Department on June 18, 2012, has 17 years of extensive experience in long-range and current planning.

For the past 14 years, she has held various planning positions with the City of Santa Clarita Community Development Department, serving as the Planning Manager for the past seven years. In that role Ms. Webber led large-scale development projects, master plans, annexations, and the creation of a valley-wide General Plan during a period of rapid growth. In fall 2011 she also served as the City of Santa Clarita’s interim Redevelopment Manager, focusing on revitalization of historic downtown Newhall.

Ms. Webber has also served as a planner with Parsons HBA in Pasadena and Planning Resources in Wheaton, Illinois, working on rail transportation projects and the preparation of environmental documents.

A Los Angeles native, Ms. Webber received her undergraduate degree from Loyola Marymount University and Master’s Degree in Urban and Regional Planning from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She is a member of the American Institute of Certified Planners.

Ms. Webber will be joining Alan Bell and Eva Yuan-McDaniel, our two current Deputy Directors, and the rest of the Executive Team.
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This summer, a new draft San Pedro Community Plan will become available for review by the public as a result of a collaborative and public effort between City staff and community stakeholders. The existing plan was completed in 1999, and much has happened since then to warrant the creation of a new plan. This new plan provides goals and policies that comprehensively address community character, expanded mobility options and economic development. Goals include preserving the character of existing residential neighborhoods, as well as protecting commercial services and expanding recreational amenities. Sustainability goals and policies are woven throughout the community plan to help encourage a healthy local economy, protect the environment, and improve the quality of life for all residents.

Many people in the community would like to see the return of the downtown as the “heart” of San Pedro. In response, the new plan seeks to generally direct growth away from existing residential neighborhoods toward commercial corridors and the downtown, which will accommodate much of anticipated population growth. While protecting its historic resources—including the Art-Deco style Warner Grand Theatre, which was designed by B. Marcus Priteca (the same architect who designed the Pantages Theatre in Hollywood), and Williams’ Book Store, founded in 1909 (and recognized as the oldest independent bookstore in the City of Los Angeles)—the downtown will offer an urban lifestyle in a walkable neighborhood with restaurants, entertainment, shopping, an arts district, and waterfront amenities.

The plan will also preserve job opportunities in the northern industrial district, incentivize commercial growth along key corridors, and coordinate with the Port for future growth. The USS Iowa, a World War II era battleship, is anticipated to arrive in June of this year and will be an added destination along the waterfront.

Preparation of the new plan has included establishing a Community Design Overlay (CDO) district in downtown San Pedro, and study and expansion of the Vinegar Hill Historic Preservation Overlay Zone (HPOZ). The CDO provides design guidelines and standards for new development and improvements to existing properties. The Vinegar Hill HPOZ, adopted in 2001, is proposed for expansion to cover several blocks south of downtown San Pedro. Vinegar Hill contains a significant concentration of historic buildings, many built in the real estate boom of the late 1800s. The regulations of HPOZs ensure that renovations respect the historic integrity of the structures and the neighborhood.

Along with welcoming new Council member Joe Buscaino this spring, the Department of City Planning looks forward to the summer release of the draft community plan and helping more people discover the unique features and attractions of San Pedro. The draft plan will be available along with updated information at: https://sites.google.com/site/sanpedrocommunityplan. A community workshop, where the plan will be presented, is planned for the fall.