

Planning and Design Process

A. Introduction

The Downtown Transit Oriented Development (TOD) Specific Plan was prepared through a participatory process that engaged the community, and informed and involved the decision makers throughout the planning process. In keeping with the goals of the Metro TOD Planning Grant Program, the Specific Plan process also educated the community about the benefits of TOD. The Specific Plan was generated by the expectation that enhancing the Metrolink Station and its relationship to Downtown will not only help meet local and regional transportation goals, but also will work toward fulfilling the City's vision for a revitalized Downtown. Therefore, the planning and design process actively incorporated a discussion of TOD principles through all phases of Specific Plan development.

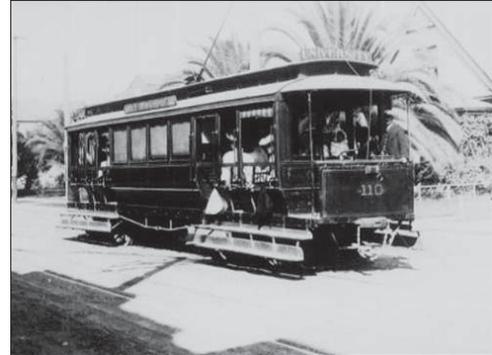
B. Issues and Opportunities

The project was initiated through an intensive data gathering process, which included reviewing and evaluating relevant planning documents, performing an existing physical conditions analysis of the Downtown, preparing baseline studies, and identifying issues and opportunities. This phase of the project provided an initial level of understanding of the Specific Plan area and framed the direction and recommendations of the Specific Plan. The key issues and opportunities are described below.

Downtown Identity

There is currently little unique identity or sense of place in Downtown. With the potential for a significant amount of new development in a mixed use setting, there is an opportunity to create a strong identity for the area through architectural, landscape and open space design features, as well as public art. Two blocks fronting Ramona Boulevard are lined with small pedestrian-oriented shops, which was the predominant development pattern during the time of Red Car Line. There is also a vacant structure on the edge of Downtown that was a former Red Car charging station

The former Red Car charging station building has symbolic value in Baldwin Park and should be placed on the Local Historic Register. This structure could be adaptively reused to house the Baldwin Park Historical Society Museum and/or a café, art gallery, or coffee shop. Preservation of this historic structure through adaptive reuse will add to Downtown's identity and increase local character.



that has historic value for the community. Building upon this traditional downtown fabric will help return Downtown Baldwin Park to being an area that is the identifiable heart of the City.

In addition, Downtown lacks gateway elements at key intersections to signal entry into Downtown. Gateways should engage the viewer from the street and encourage people to enter Downtown and Morgan Park. Gateway elements could include monument signage, increased landscaping, lighting, and/or public art.

Finally, to further establish a strong identity for Downtown, the character and design of Downtown should focus on enhancing its civic status and importance in the community. Downtown Baldwin Park is currently the cultural and civic heart of the City with well-established government and community facilities, and the historic fabric of pedestrian-oriented shops along a portion of Ramona Boulevard. There is opportunity to capitalize on the concentration of community amenities, and enhance connections between them. There is also an opportunity to create additional public and civic gathering spaces, particularly around City Hall, which currently lacks a gracious and highly visible setting.

Downtown is the civic and cultural heart of the community. The character and design of Downtown should focus on enhancing its civic status and importance in the community, as well as building upon traditional downtown fabric.



Ramona Boulevard

Downtown Baldwin Park is divided by Ramona Boulevard, which runs in a southwest/northeast direction through the City and carries large traffic volumes. Ramona Boulevard creates a significant physical, psychological, and visual barrier between the north and south sides of Downtown. The two-sided angled parking fronting Ramona Boulevard on some blocks further exacerbate the problem.

There is a need to reconceptualize the Boulevard right-of-way to be more attractive and provide for pedestrians, bicycles and transit, as well as better link the north and south sides with design and streetscape elements. There is an opportunity to convert some of the right-of-way to expand the pedestrian environment through wider sidewalks, increased landscaping and streetscape amenities to create a grand boulevard in the heart of Downtown Baldwin Park. In addition, with the high traffic volumes, there is a major opportunity to draw travelers from the Boulevard to shop, dine and recreate with well-planned and aesthetically pleasing development and public gathering spaces in the Downtown.



Currently, Ramona Boulevard creates a major barrier between the north and south sides of Downtown and presents little sense of place. With increased streetscape and pedestrian improvements, the Boulevard can contribute greatly to Downtown's identity and become a greater part of the pedestrian circulation system within Downtown.

Pedestrian Environment

Despite the two blocks of pedestrian-oriented shops along Ramona Boulevard, the pedestrian environment in the majority of Downtown Baldwin Park is challenging. There are several segments along Ramona Boulevard and Maine Avenue where the street frontage is primarily parking lots. The area is currently characterized by discontinuity as there is a changing scale of buildings, various street patterns and irregular block sizes.

There is an opportunity to extend the pedestrian-oriented form and character of the historic part of Ramona Boulevard. Over time, strip development should be replaced with unified projects that provide a finer grain of pedestrian-scaled development with relocated parking to the rear of blocks and to central, shared parking locations in the Downtown.

In addition, there is currently a lack of pedestrian linkages between the Metrolink station, City Hall, Morgan Park, and the retailing area of Downtown. There are multiple connection potentials which include improved streetscape environment, continuous sidewalks, improved crosswalks of Ramona Boulevard at major intersections, the addition of a midblock crosswalk, and the creation of an alley walkway system to provide alternative linkages and routes. These can reinforce both the livability of future residential projects and the viability and vibrancy of retail and civic functions.

Building frontages disrupted by driveways and parking lots create an inconsistent pedestrian edge and detract from a sense of place.



Opportunity Sites

There are numerous underutilized properties in Downtown, many of them contiguous, which allow opportunities for unified projects, rather than piecemeal development. There are also a significant number of large parking lots, as well as potentially unused right-of-way. Parking lots and underutilized parcels oftentimes represent an opportunity for new infill development that can serve as catalyst projects in the revitalization of an area. Developing larger, unified projects can reinforce mixed use synergy and offer the possibility for meaningful public open space areas within projects. In addition, these projects can provide higher density housing and employment uses proximate to regional transit.

There is a significant opportunity to encourage infill development on City-owned parcels. The City of Baldwin Park and/or Successor Agency owns several key parcels in the Downtown, which offer the potential for public-private partnerships to generate new development. In addition, existing businesses and new development should be encouraged to share parking when feasible. On underutilized sites with multiple owners, redevelopment tends to be more long-term.



Underutilized and City-owned parcels provide opportunities for infill transit-oriented development that will enhance the activity in Downtown.

C. Community Workshops

Community outreach and participation was conducted for the Specific Plan at milestone stages of the process to ensure that the Plan expresses the vision, goals and ideas of the community as a whole. Input was obtained through a series of public workshops, where stakeholders including property owners, businesses, residents, developers, and interested parties participated through interactive group discussion and feedback on the topics and direction of the Plan. These workshops were very productive in discussing key issues, concerns and preferences, and in generating trust for the planning process and community support for the Specific Plan.

Three public workshops were held at milestone stages of the project to present findings and solicit input from the community. The first workshop presented the background and purpose, existing conditions, and key opportunities for the Downtown, and solicited input from the community on their issues, goals and visions. The second workshop presented the preliminary land use, circulation and urban design plan, and gathered input on the overall land use and design for the Downtown as well as circulation and parking concepts. The third workshop presented and obtained feedback on the Public Review Draft Specific Plan.

Study sessions were also held with the City Council and Planning Commission in order to provide decision-maker continuity and feedback throughout the duration of the project. These study sessions generated significant dialogue and provided valuable direction during the preparation of the Downtown TOD Specific Plan.

D. Specific Plan Principles

Throughout the public participation process, the community recognized that the location of Metrolink Station is a key component of Downtown revitalization. Improving pedestrian linkages between the station and Downtown core, providing Downtown housing opportunities to support transit, and enhancing identity to draw transit users into the Downtown all contribute to creating a vibrant, mixed use urban village. With these objectives in mind, the principles of transit oriented development guide this Specific Plan.

The following are the guiding principles for the Downtown TOD Specific Plan:

- Create vibrant and diverse commercial corridors.
- Design a pedestrian-friendly environment with well-designed buildings, attractive streetscapes, and engaging public spaces.
- Create multi-modal streets accommodate pedestrians, bicyclists, and vehicles.
- Create a mix of uses with residential and employment densities that support transit use.
- Offer a range of housing options proximate to transit.

What is Transit Oriented Development?

Transit oriented development is development that is located within easy walking distance of a major transit stop, generally with a mix of residential, employment, retail, and complementing public uses designed for pedestrians without excluding the auto. Transit oriented development can be new construction or redevelopment of one or more buildings wherein the design and orientation facilitate transit use, and the density is appropriate to the setting. The location, design, configuration, and mix of uses in a transit oriented development provide an alternative to current suburban development trends by emphasizing a pedestrian-oriented environment and reinforcing the use of public transportation. Transit oriented development significantly reduces auto dependency, helps revitalize areas, and offers a new model for managing growth.



Successful TOD projects in Southern California include Del Mar Station in Pasadena, Soco Walk in Fullerton, and Mission Meridian Village in South Pasadena.